THE IDEAL CLASSROOM: PERSPECTIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE ATTENDING A NURTURE GROUP

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to gain the views of a very specific group of eight young people who attended a Nurture Group, within a special school. Through a multiple case study design using semi-structured interviews, and a model-making activity with personal construct psychology (Kelly, 1955), the contrasting poles of ideal and non-ideal classrooms were elicited. The rationale guiding the study was to ensure the views of the students were included in the interior design stage of a purpose built nurture group facility at their school.

Methods included two model-making activities with LEGO® for each participant, with a photograph of each model annotated together, along with a series of nine questions for both models.

Thematic analysis shows that employment and independence are most important as are the opportunities for kinaesthetic learning styles. The nurture group approach to schooling, when compared with overarching themes of the ideal classrooms does reflect the ideal classroom construct of the participants from this study, except in the area of language development.

The implications of the study indicate LEGO and personal construct psychology can be a useful combination in exploring contrasting poles of a theme.

I dedicate this to my late Mum, Julie Dunnett xx

Your kindness and modesty meant you always played down the role you took in me achieving my dreams but without you, this certainly would not have happened. Thank you for encouraging me, even through the tough times, and for always believing that I could achieve what I wished for. It's so unfair that you won't see the end of this journey for me, but it will be to you that I smile first when I do reach it xx

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW: UNDERSTANDING THE PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR NEEDS

CHAPTER 4

LITERATURE REVIEW: NURTURE GROUPS

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF DIAGRAMS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
BERA	British Educational Research Association
BPS	British Psychological Society
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE/E	Department for Education/Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DoH	Department for Health
EP	Educational Psychologist
ILEA	Inner London Educational Authority
OfSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PCP	Personal Construct Psychology
SEBCD	Social Emotional Behavioural Communication Difficulties
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction to the Thesis

This thesis forms part of the assessment requirements for the Doctorate in Applied Educational and Child Psychology and comprises of a study conducted over Years Two and Three of the training. The focus of this study is to gain the views of a very specific group of eight young people who attended a Nurture Group within a special school. A Nurture Group is a school-based intervention to support students who experience social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Nurture groups provide a small group of students with a classroom designed to offer a home-like environment with a holistic curriculum aimed at developing self-esteem and social skills whilst providing positive adult relationships based on trust and understanding.

1.1 Aims and rationale of the study

The aim of my study was to explore the views on life in school, for a group of young people with learning difficulties and autism. I wanted to understand, how, through the use of a model-making method, I may be able to better support the participants' expressions of their life in school. The rationale for the study's extended method using LEGO was based on prior knowledge, through my experience as an art teacher that not all students feel confident in their ability to draw. As a result of this, they feel anxious, when asked to do so. By replacing

drawing with model making I hoped to enhance what the participants wanted to say, whilst reducing anxiety. Of particular significance to this study is that a single LEGO brick can represent anything, which meant that participants would have no limitations placed on their ideas, and they would not have to worry about it looking like the item they intend it to be, as is the case with drawing. Having received training in the LEGO Education Build to Express kit, (LEGO Education, 2013) which contains two hundred items and bricks, aimed at encouraging the creation of models to represent metaphors. Then I was interested to see how this kit could be expanded and used to support pupil voice.

Four of the eight participants had autism, and so it was important to consider that social situations such as in interviews, may feel intense and uncomfortable for them due to the increased level of direct interaction and eye contact (Baron-Cohen et al., 2014). In order to address this, I hoped that by providing a familiar medium such as LEGO, primarily seen as a toy in the UK (Baron-Cohen et al., 2014). I would be providing a tool that could form a physical focus for our interaction, whilst encouraging a fun, relaxed atmosphere.

LEGO model-making enables mistakes to be undone easily with the quick separation of bricks, offering one way of reducing anxiety, which is of particular importance for young people with autism, who can become anxious quickly (Baron-Cohen, 2008). In my experience of teaching art, the process of model-making, appears to provide more time for children and young people to process

their thoughts, and articulate those at the same time, something I had rarely seen with drawing alone.

Furthermore, as LEGO provides a concrete, visual resource that can be manipulated kinaesthetically, offering an opportunity to interact in a learning style that may be familiar and/or preferred by participants with learning difficulties and autism, thus allowing them to provide their views comfortably and confidently.

This approach was adopted to attempt to elicit the genuine views of my participants and to explore whether or not their construct of an ideal classroom matched the particular model of nurture group they all attended. I wanted to explore how the participants used the LEGO to express their views and to establish whether the method of incorporating Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) and LEGO supported their expression of what they would, and would not want, in their classroom environment, and what their constructs of these would be.

The nurture group that the participants attended was set within a school for students with learning difficulties, where the construction of an on-site, purpose-built nurture group facility was in its later stages. The management team and I wanted to ensure the views and wishes, of the pupils attending it, were to be included, and where possible, could influence the interior design of the purpose-built facility. The school was located in the local authority in which I was on placement for my second year of training.

1.2 Research Questions:

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the key themes of an ideal classroom construct for young people attending a nurture group?
2. What are the key themes of a non-ideal classroom construct for young people attending a nurture group?
3. Does the nurture group model of schooling reflect the ideal classroom construct of those attending it?

1.3 The structure of the Thesis

This Volume comprises of eight chapters. The first chapter provides an overview to the thesis and focuses on the structure, content, remit and rationale of the work undertaken. Chapter Two offers an in-depth examination of extant literature pertinent to the techniques used to elicit the views of students in mainstream and special schools. This includes an exploration of a range of extended techniques (methods used in addition to, or instead of, interviews), including drawing, Talking Mats™, Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) and LEGO. Chapters Three and Four aim to offer an understanding of the participants and their needs, along with the context, structure and function of nurture groups. Chapter Five offers an account of the study's research methodology and design, followed by Chapter Six, with findings and discussion. The concluding chapter (Chapter 7), provides a critical reflection on the reflexivity, methodology, and ethical considerations of the study, along with a discussion on limitations and possible future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW:

PUPIL VOICE

2.0 Introduction to the Literature Review

This literature review outlines the relevant areas of theory, research and policy in relation to the focus of the study. 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, studies will be appraised and areas for further research suggested. Therefore, the aim of the literature review is to highlight key themes that inform the development of the study.

There are three main areas to the literature review:

- Policy, research and theoretical practice into the development of the concept of pupil voice and approaches used to elicit it, including Personal Construct Psychology;
- A focus on understanding the needs of the participants of this study including a definition of the terms learning difficulties and autism, along with an exploration of attachment, learning styles and processing;
- Research into the policy, context, function, and structure of nurture group approaches, and the views of students who attend them.

These areas form three chapters of the literature review. A summary of each chapter's content is presented below, in Table 1. These areas were chosen to highlight the policy, research and theoretical practice for the context for the study.

Table 1. Chapter Content

Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4
Pupil Voice • Pupil Voice. • Pupil Voice Techniques. • Extended Methods to elicit pupil views on life in school. • Personal Construct Psychology theory and methods.	**Understanding the Participants and Their Needs** • Learning difficulties: definition and processing. • Young people and Autism: definition. • Young people and attachment: theoretical underpinning of nurture groups.	**Nurture Groups** • Nurture groups. • Views of pupils attending nurture groups.

My role as a researcher will have influenced the selection of papers for the study, and as such must be acknowledged, particularly my interest in humanistic approaches, with the work of Carl Rogers (1961) influencing my thoughts and views.

2.1 Search Strategy

The search strategy involved applying an iterative process during the course of the research, using the electronic databases available to the University of Birmingham. These included the use of a Literature Search engine (Pro Quest) under the sub-group of Social Sciences, Psychinfo (Ovid), Applied Social Science

Index and Abstract (ASSIA), British Education Index (BEI) and Index to EThOS. During this process the literature was broadened and journal articles, books and other publications that the author deemed pertinent were focused on. Once a number of relevant publications, dated from 1990 were found their reference lists were scanned and further articles of interest were selected for analysis. In addition to keyword searches, government reports and acts were accessed which contributed to further cited texts being explored. Key words included for example, Pupil voice, model-making and nurture group. Research papers were critiqued and theory explored internationally. I acknowledge that a literature review provides only one narrative of the many available in gaining an understanding of the areas explored.

2.2 Overview of the Chapter

This study is concerned with eliciting the views of a group of secondary-aged students with learning difficulties (and autism), and exploring the use of an extended method to support this. I begin with the concept of pupil voice and the legislation around this, before exploring the techniques used to support the views of students, attending special schools.

2.3 pupil voice for all children and young people, including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

The term pupil voice, meaning to elicit the views of children and young people, became more frequently used following the 1989, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that children have the right to express their

views freely on all matters which affect them and with regard to their age and maturity, with due weight be given to their views.

The UK's Children Act of 1989 added that it is paramount to hear and consider the views of children when decisions are made about them, and to take into account their wishes and feelings. The UK government adopted this as law in 1991, and in 2004, the Children Act allowed for the creation of a children's commissioner responsible for promoting the views and interests of children in England, in line with the Every Child Matters agenda (DfES, 2004). Most recently, the new Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (2014, 2015) introduced a greater focus on the importance of pupil-voice and incorporated person centred planning in the process on informing and creating Education, Health and Care Plans, which are positively framed, child-centred plans identifying both short and long term goals and needs (in the areas of education, health and social care) for a child or young person.

However, studies by Armstrong et al. (1993) and Rose (2005) show that the voice of the child is often poorly utilised in making key decisions surrounding their education. With regards to children with special educational needs (SEN), Roller (1998) argues that there are clear advantages to involving children in the planning, review and assessment of their needs. This is supported by Noble (2003) whose research found that the voice of young people with SEN is rarely asked for and when it is, is largely ignored. Todd (2003) argues for the value of involving pupils with SEN in the decision-making process in education, in

highlighting the skills and abilities they have, and can allow their views regarding proposed interventions to be heard, and acted upon, so increasing the likelihood of success. This is supported by Rose (2005) who highlights that young people such as those with disabilities are rarely involved in the decision-making processes in education despite the fact that these decisions will have a profound impact on their lives.

For students with special educational needs, educational psychologists are, according to the Educational Psychology Services Report (DfEE, 2000), well placed to ensure that children's views are elicited naturally, and included in plans being proposed for them. However, the genuine involvement of pupils in these processes is only made possible by providing them with the correct tools to do so (Gersch, 1996). Research by Harding and Atkinson (2009) which analysed a focus group of six educational psychologists, identified the use of discussion, questionnaires, self-report scales, and therapeutic-based approaches, which included Personal Construct Psychology, which Roller (1998), and Hobbs et al. (2000), found to be useful. Despite the use of discussion being the most common technique, research by Armstrong (1993) found that children will not answer a question, if they do not know what to say, and that the children often felt educational psychologists did not genuinely attempt to elicit their views.

Techniques used to support pupils with learning and/or communication difficulties vary widely, with materials developed by large children's charities often working in collaboration with academic researchers (Lewis and Porter, 2007). These

materials include general accounts and guidelines, research and materials (Marchant and Cross, 2002). Lewis and Porter (2007) highlight the range of techniques which vary on four dimensions, as shown in Table 2, below.

Table 2 – Dimensions of Pupil Voice Techniques for Pupils with SEN (adapted from Lewis and Porter, 2007)	
1	Degree of support offered, for example, facilitator, puppet, information and communications technology, friend or peer group.
2	Mode of communication to and from the child, for example, varying degrees of reliance on linguistic, receptive and/or expressive, skills; pictorial; symbolic; dramatic; ICT-linked and enactive.
3	Use of concrete referents, for example, materials to manipulate.
4	Degree to which the child sets the agenda and/or pace, for example, those in which the child has a comparatively free rein such as using observation, mapping, photos, drawing; contrasted with those in which the child is primarily responsive to the interviewer/researcher such as prompted interviews.

These techniques, according to Lewis and Porter (2007) are best suited to exploring the views of children with learning difficulties and have a long tradition in the field of psychology, particularly with children with multiple or profound difficulties, supplemented by more recent person centred approaches (Lewis and Porter, 2007). Person centred planning has informed work on eliciting the views of people with learning difficulties, with the use of visual-cue approaches, such as Talking Mats™, mapping, puppets, photographs, and the PATH approach

(Pearpoint, 2002). Individual or small group interviews, narrative accounts and questionnaires have all been used, sometimes supported through a facilitator with the use of cue-card prompts (Lewis, 2004). More creative methods include the use of cameras, video, drawings, and drama, which according to Tozer (2003), Brewster (2004), and Germain (2004), are a growing area of interest in this context and have considerable potential to gain insights into a child's construction of the world that does not rest, just on their language ability.

2.4 Pupil views on life in special schools

The few studies (Kidd and Hornby, 1993; Wade and Moore, 1992) that have explored pupil views on life in special schools, have methodological limits, particularly Wade and Moore (1992) who grouped data from a wide range of ages (seven to sixteen) from three countries (UK, Australian and New Zealand). However their results are similar to those found by Lewis (1995) who reported pupils felt positive about their special school placement, but found playtime difficult.

Lewis (1995), interviewed fifty six, nine to eleven-year olds from two schools for children with learning difficulties. Through content analysis of the interviews she found the most commonly liked elements of the school were the curriculum and resources, particularly the soft-play area, followed by teachers, whom were described as being kind and sympathetic, with a sense of humour. Playtime was identified as something most of the pupils had reservations about (Lewis, 1995). As such, this will need to be considered for inclusion in my study, to further

understand any anxieties and needs of young people within this part of their school life. However, as Lewis (1995) notes, the study did not measure the reliability of the pupils' responses through re-interviews or further assessment of views, additionally, the pupils may have been influenced by their peers reporting on their own discussions (Lewis, 1995).

2.5 Extended Methods to elicit pupil views on life in school

For the purposes of this study I have used the term extended methods to describe methods used in addition, or instead of, interviews. From the literature critiqued for this study, there appears to be a developing range of extended methods used to elicit views on life in school for pupils at both mainstream and special schools. Those that have incorporated more than interviews alone, includes, story writing (Kangas, 2010) and draw, write/tell techniques (Horstman and Bradding, 2002; Angell et al, 2015). The latter of which were developed within the health profession (Driessnack, 2005). These methods, along with the use of Talking Mats™, story writing, LEGO and drawing, form the focus of the following sections.

2.5.1 Talking Mats

Talking Mats are relevant to this study as they offer a changeable, visual, facilitated, conversational tool for children and young people with communication difficulties (Germain, 2004). Originally introduced in 1998 by Joan Murphy, Talking Mats are now widely used with adults and children with a variety of difficulties (Murphy and Cameron, 2008). The process uses picture symbols representing topics, options and emotions. The child or young person places the

pictures in groups, usually under a symbol showing like/dislike/neutral, to make their views understood. The completed Talking Mat is often photographed as a record of the participant's views and wishes for that a particular topic. Cameron and Murphy (2002) identify several benefits to this approach, namely that it is simple to use, whilst providing a focus for both the interviewer and interviewee, often alleviating the intensity of individual interviews. Additionally, the children or young people are more likely to feel in control of the process as they can move the images around, ensuring it is a true representation of their views, whilst going at their own speed (Cameron and Murphy, 2002).

Germain (2004) used Talking Mats and disposable cameras to elicit the views of nine young people aged sixteen, with learning difficulties, on their likes and dislikes of out-of-school activities. The young people used the cameras to photograph their weekly out-of-school activities and then placed these under symbols for like/dislike/neutral. She also included a repetition of the activity, two days after the first, to check for validity of the methods and found them to be robust and effective. However, a study by Coakes (2006) which included six children aged seven to ten, from one special school, did not find Talking Mats to be more effective than individual interviews when a child has only a moderate language delay. However, for children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism and Social Emotional Behavioural Communication Difficulties (SEBCD), her study found Talking Mats increased the elicitation of views and duration of interaction and on-task behaviours. Coakes's study had strong internal validity as she used a blind observer when carrying out the two

conditions of the study: individual interviews and Talking Mats sessions (Coakes, 2006).

2.5.2 Story writing

One study that has used extended methods, is by Kangas (2010), who used ninety three children's stories on their ideal school to develop a theoretical model of the ideal learning environment based on their ideas. Her study used grounded-theory and involved children aged ten to twelve. They participated in the study by writing a story about a school in which they would be happy to study. The findings of the study were organised into four key concepts comprising: (a) physical well-being and environmental comfort; (b) educational and cultural well-being; (c) social and emotional well-being and the joy of learning; and (d) fantasy and innovations. Kangas (2010) reported that, whilst the children enjoyed using their imagination, they were, nonetheless, able to describe the school in a realistic way. She claims her study supports those previously carried out by Kershner and Pointin (2000), and Piispanen (2008), in that the students were able fully to understand what different types of support they needed in their learning environment in order to develop academically. Kangas (2010) acknowledges however, that whilst this study is of relevance, its limitations lie in the fact that it was only carried out in three Finnish mainstream schools and gender-based differences were not analysed.

2.5.3 The Draw and Write and Draw, Write and Tell techniques

The draw and write technique is primarily a qualitative tool for understanding how children explain and construct ideas and concepts and was developed by Williams et al. (1989) during their preliminary research into the health views and perceptions of young children. Since then the draw and write technique has become an increasingly popular method of collecting health-related data from this age group (Gabhainn and Kelleher, 2002).

One such study by Bradding and Horstman (1999, 2002) used draw and write to investigate the perceptions and experiences of children who were chronically ill in hospital. Ninety-nine children aged between six and ten years old were involved in the study, fifty of which were in hospital and forty nine in the community without any illness. Their study involved the use of draw and write activities. The children were asked to consider a scenario where a child, like themselves was in hospital and asked to draw pictures as to what came to mind. This was followed by further drawing to show what the children saw as the ideal hospital (Bradding and Horstman, 1999, 2002). The children's drawings of their ideal hospital showed several key themes including those that focused on the environment, with the children stating they wanted a bright, colourful, cheerful and home-like feel. In contrast the drawings they created to show a child in hospital, like themselves, were stark and impoverished, containing only a hospital bed as the main feature of the drawing. These drawings were added to, with frustration and anger present, expressed in both visual and verbal ways and that although the children were unwell they were nonetheless still able to express their

views, thoughts and feelings, often holding a great insight into their own illness (Bradding and Horstman, 1999). They go on to report that whilst the children did not always draw or write, the use of annotation technique was particularly beneficial in eliciting the children's thoughts and that the use of the draw and write technique could be used to good effect at an individual level (Bradding and Horstman, 1999). Limitations of this study are the lack of clarity around analysis of the data and ethical considerations in terms of discussing difficult themes for the children and what processes were in place to support any distress.

In order to add validity to the draw and write technique, Angell et al. (2015) added a tell component, meaning the child gives a commentary post-drawing/writing which is recoded and coded for themes. Angell et al. (2015) carried this technique out with fifty six children aged five to eleven, on their awareness of infant feeding. However, they do not provide details of analysis or results and given the recent introduction of this technique, more empirical studies are needed to explore its validity.

This study is interested in using model-making activities to support pupil voice and so an extensive search of the literature on this was carried out. Whilst some studies identified the use of photography (Cremin et al., 2010) and sand tray therapy work (Taylor, 2009) only one study (Pimlott-Wilson, 2011) included the use of model-making to aid pupil voice in research.

2.5.4 Model-making as a tool to support pupil voice

The one study that has used model-making to support pupil voice, is that by Pimlott-Wilson (2011), who used LEGO Duplo as an empirical means of data collection with children. Pimlott-Wilson (2011) study included ten children aged four to five, to investigate their perspectives and feelings towards their home life, with a focus on the division of labour at home. LEGO Duplo bricks are designed for children under six and are larger in size, with home related items, accessories and people. The use of LEGO Duplo was considered alongside the use of to two other two-dimensional visual supports (rainbows/clouds boards and mood boards). Although this study did not use any measurements or data analysis Pimlott-Wilson (2011) claims it nonetheless, identifies the advantages and constraints of visual approaches and depth of information that can be elicited with a combination of oral and visual techniques with children. Limitations of the study include missing descriptions of the process and participants, and a control group to compare an interview-only process, against a combination of LEGO and interview.

Despite LEGO being named toy of the century by the Toy Retailers Association of Britain (Wolf, 2014) most studies including its use with children and young people have explored its usefulness as a tool for improving social interaction and communication, such as LEGO Therapy (Legoff et al., 2006) or learning outcomes (Dawson et al., 2010) David Gauntlett (2007) has found innovative ways of using LEGO with adults through the LEGO package Serious Play, which uses LEGO for planning in the field of business and additionally, for exploring

feelings and metaphors. In 2013 LEGO Education brought out the Build to Express package for children and young people, which contains two hundred pieces specifically designed to enable the building of models to explore metaphors. Training is given on the use of this, through LEGO approved trainers (LEGO UK, 2013).

As this study is interested in the use of Personal Construct Psychology it is to this that we now turn.

2.6 Personal Construct Psychology

Of particular importance to this study is the use of Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) first introduced by George Kelly in the 1950's as a theory for understanding personality (Kelly, 1955) and thought to reflect a social constructivist approach (Neimeyer, 2009). Personal Construct Theory (Kelly, 1955) is a theory of personal constructs. It focuses on looking at the constructs an individual uses to make sense of their self, others and their environment. Kelly (1955, p.8-9), describes these constructs as:

> '…transparent patterns or templates which he creates and then attempts to fit over the realities of which the world is composed. The fit is not always good. Yet without such patterns the world appears to be such an undifferentiated homogeneity that man is unable to make nay sense out of it. Even a poorer fit is more helpful to him than nothing at all. Let us give the name constructs to these patterns that are tentatively tried on for size'.

Kelly theorised that a person is a scientist, interpreting the world through thought and experience, where subjective realities are accepted as being wholly legitimate and valid (Kelly, 1955). Procter and Parry (1977) acknowledge the

social origins of personal constructs, but also the contribution of the individual on the social reality in systems. This study stems from this position; acknowledging the influence of the social on the individual but recognising that construing continues in the realms of the individual's private world providing personal meaning to social constructions, and the reciprocity of this process from individual to social. Feixas and Saul (2004) add that personal constructs are not isolated units but are connected to other constructs and make up a hierarchical network as per Kelly's (1955) organisation corollary which orders the constructs.

Personal Construct Psychology theory is underpinned by the philosophical position called constructive alternativism, that there are multiple ways of understanding the world that give reference to different meanings and interpretations (Kelly, 1955). Kelly's constructive alternatism emphasizes 'the creative capacity of the living thing to represent the environment, not merely respond to it' (Kelly, 1955, p.8). He proposed that a single event can be experienced in a wide variety of ways by individual people and that a person's behaviour and approach to life makes sense to that individual, and that this applies as much to a child, as an adult (Kelly, 1955). He theorised that we each have unique constructs, acting as a lens through which we see the world, based upon our own experiences, and that we behave in ways which make sense according to these constructs (Kelly, 1955). The construct network is made up of subsystems with core and superordinate constructs making up the individual's sense of self (Kelly, 1955). He proposed that these constructions are bi-polar, open to revision, forming a fundamental postulate which proposes 'a person's

processes are psychologically channellized by the ways in which he anticipates events' (Kelly, 1955, p.32).

The fundamental postulate of Personal Construct Theory states that people are like scientists who strive to make sense of events, experiences, others and themselves (elements) by detecting repeating themes (constructs) and this enables them to make predictions about their future experiences (Kelly, 1955). If a prediction is validated, the construct system might be preserved, whereas should a prediction be invalidated, the construct system may be modified. Kelly's (1955, p.110) theory postulates that a person's constructs and language systems are separate, that a person has a thought, reflects on it and then brings it to language after the thought has occurred:

> 'It is not possible for one to express the whole of his construction system. Many of one's constructs have no symbols to be used as convenient word handles. They are therefore difficult, not only for others to grasp and subsume within their own systems'.

This has led several theorists, including Peck (2015) to call Kelly's view of language naïve, starting it has taken away the possibility of a person drawing on their inner processes in language to provide an outward look. This is further criticised by Mair (2000, p.342), who adds:

> 'Language has to be regarded as substantial, rather than transparent…words and structures in language shape us more than we shape them'.

Chiari and Nuzzo (2004) additionally criticise Kelly's separation of thought and language. They argue that his theory has not taken argue into account when considering a person's construction of the self and their world. They believe that

language plays a more important role than Kelly has allowed for, and that by placing constructs beyond the reach of language has left the theory with theoretical weaknesses (Chiari and Nuzzo, 2004).

2.7 Personal Construct Psychology Methods

Butler and Green (2007) highlight that a strength of Personal Construct Psychology methods resides in the greater amount of time spent agreeing on an understanding of a participant's constructs and their meanings to them, whilst Burr et al. (2014) highlight that PCP methods have several advantages over other techniques. Firstly, that they are participant-led, but are carried out in collaboration with the researcher. Secondly, that the methods are less reliant on the verbal ability of participants than interviews alone, and that the activities can be completed in a relatively short period of time (Burr et al., 2014).

A literature review search elicited very few criticisms of Personal Construct Psychology but of those that have raised challenges to the theory's methods include Burr et al. (2014) who highlight possible weaknesses within the methods. One of which is that Personal Construct Psychology methods can seem game-like so participants may feel they are not being taken seriously (Burr et al., 2014). Another possible difficulty is the dilemma of deciding how much to get involved in the process of generating constructs, as there is a need for a balance to be achieved, with too much involvement by the researcher possibly causing an undermining of the essential participant-led nature of Personal Construct Psychology methods (Burr et al., 2014).

2.7.1 A Drawing and its Opposite

In the early 1980s Tom Ravenette used personal construct psychology with children with SEN in order to explore the ways that they make sense of their world. He developed a technique known as a drawing and its opposite through the elaboration of a line where a child completes as drawing from a starting point: a line which the adult draws in the middle of the page (three inches long, turning downwards at a forty five degree angle, for a further inch). This, Ravenette (2006) claims, explores a child's construct in the elicitation of their drawings and enables a child to access their lower levels of awareness which may not be achieved through verbal articulation alone. Ravenette (2006) believes that by asking a child to draw two images which are polar opposites, enables them to elicit meanings and possible concerns in relation to their circumstances and environment. He warns however, against viewing these drawings out of the context they are embedded in, as this may encourage the projection of interpretations by the adult (Ravenette, 2006). He states, importance, instead, lies in clarifying the young person's dilemma and promoting their psychological growth (Ravenette, 2006). An extension of this, is a technique developed by Heather Moran, who introduced the Drawing the Ideal Self technique (Moran, 2001).

2.7.2 Drawing the Ideal Self

Moran (2001) introduced a technique for use with children and young people that asks them to firstly draw an image of their non-ideal person (a kind of person they would not like to be), then a drawing of their ideal person (the kind of person they would like to be like). A series of questions are asked of each, with answers

drawn, and annotation added by either the young person or adult. The final step is to map development and movement towards the ideal self with a scaled line, upon which ages of the child and views of others can be placed through a series of questions (Moran, 2001). An extension of this technique, Drawing the Ideal School was developed by Williams and Hanke in 2007.

2.7.3 Drawing the Ideal School

A study by Williams and Hanke in 2007 used an adaption of Moran's (2001) Drawing the Ideal Self technique to explore what children with autism, attending mainstream schools within the UK, feel they would like in their ideal school. 15 children carried out two drawings (both annotated by the researchers), each detailing in one what they would like in their ideal school and in the other, what they would not like in their non-ideal school. This was supported by a series of questions in a semi-structured approach, aimed at eliciting the child's thoughts on the school, classroom, children, adults and the child themselves. Williams and Hanke (2007) identified two overarching themes as particularly important to the children from the study, the first being environmental features which had optimal features of:

- Access to natural light;
- Appropriate size of building;
- Classrooms that are not cramped;
- Appropriate amount of good sized, comfortable furniture.

The second overarching theme was qualities and characteristics of staff working at the school. Six of the fifteen children identified a lack of outdoor playground facilities as part of their non-ideal school. Williams and Hanke (2007) claim the combination of drawing, writing and talking enabled the children to express their views comfortably. A criticism of the study by Williams (personal communication: 2013) is that the study did not explore the positive and negative (ideal/non-deal) aspects of play time for the students in the study, and as such, this will be included in my study.

In his 2006 study, Maxwell collected the views of thirteen primary-aged children who were on the special educational needs register within one school. Each child completed two conversational, Personal Construct Psychology style interviews, which included a triadic sort technique (see Fransella and Dalton, 1990) and some pyramiding of how pupils perceived themselves and others through self and other characterisations (see Landfield, 1971), along with four drawings (based on the a drawing and its opposite technique) about their life in school. The study found that for those children interviewed, peer relationships were important, alongside social activities, which were seen as having a greater importance than more formal learning experiences. Through thematic analysis, seven key themes emerged which were:

- interpersonal relationships;
- peer groups;
- friendships;
- peer conflict and resolution;

- problem-solving in relationships;
- flexible thought;
- safety.

Limitations of the study include missing details on the process for each of the three data set processes, and information on the analysis carried out, such as whether a second coder was used.

2.8 Concluding Critique

As highlighted here, the Children Act of 1989 made it legislative practice to include the views of children, when decisions are made about them, and to take into account their wishes and feelings. This is reflected in the revised Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (2014, 2015) which hopefully addresses the challenges raised by Rose (2005) who claims the voice of the child is often poorly utilised in making key decisions surrounding their education. As noted by the Educational Psychology Services Report (DfEE, 2000), Educational Psychologists are well placed to ensure that children's views are elicited naturally, and included in any plans being proposed for them. However, as highlighted by Gersch (1996) this is only achieved through providing them with the correct tools, which according to these studies, Personal Construct Psychology can provide, in addition to extended methods such as Talking Mats™, story writing, drawing, photographs, LEGO and the draw, write/tell techniques. These have allowed children to control the speed and direction of the process, whilst allowing them to represent their views. This is important to my study, as I hope the use of a model-making activity with LEGO will provide more time for the participants to process

their thoughts and articulate their meanings, whilst not feeling uncomfortable in the intermittent interactions. As evidenced here, of upmost importance in meeting the needs of the participants in my study, is how best to present the material in order to minimise their possible anxieties, as shown by Beresford et al., (2004), avoiding a direct face-to-face interaction, through the use of a craft-based activity is beneficial, as is presenting material visually.

In Personal Construct Theory, the underlying philosophy of a constructive alternativism, accepts there are multiple ways of understanding the world which give different meanings and interpretations for individuals. This is important when exploring the views of children and young people as it is their construct of meaning that then inform predictions about their future life experiences, and so forms a valid expression of their thoughts and choices. This is particularly important to my study as my participant's views are considered valid and will be represented as such, in understanding their social worlds. The expanded application of Ravenette's (2006) PCP method, a drawing and its opposite by Moran (2001), Maxwell (2006) and Williams and Hanke (2007) has highlighted some useful visual methods. A combination of drawing, writing and talking has enabled children and young people to express their views comfortably. The range of views which can be elicited with a combination of oral and visual methods is best highlighted by Angell et al., (2015) who found that by adding a tell component to their methods, one can elicit a commentary, post-drawing/writing, which can be recoded and coded for themes, providing rich data.

Whilst Lewis (1995) found that pupils felt positive about their special school placement, she reported that the pupils found playtime difficult. The need for further exploration of positive and negative aspects of playtime is highlighted by Williams and Hanke (2007) and will be included in my study.

The following chapter aims to provide an understanding of the participants and their specific needs when considering how best to elicit their views.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW:

UNDERSTANDING THE PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR NEEDS

3.0 Introduction to the Chapter

As this study is concerned with eliciting the views of a group of eight young people with learning difficulties, with four having an additional diagnosis of autism, it is pertinent that this chapter defines these terms and explores the policy, research and theoretical practice into supporting students with these barriers to learning. All eight participants were identified as having further needs in terms of social, emotional and mental health, and so attended a nurture group. Attachment theory is explored and critiqued, as it influenced Boxall's (2002) development of nurture groups (which form the focus of Chapter 4).

3.1 Young people with learning difficulties: definition and processing

Most recently, the number of children assessed as having learning difficulties was estimated as the largest single group within the population of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN: DCSF, 2007). In 1981, the Education Act introduced SEN as a legally defined term, moving away from a focus on disability to difficulty as recommended by the Warnock Report (DES, 1978). The act identified differing levels of need (DfE, 1981) which corresponded to the mild intellectual disabilities of the then published, Diagnostic Statistical Manual – 4th edition (APA, 2000). For the purposes of this study the definition of learning difficulties has been taken

from the Special Educational Needs 0-25 Code of Practice (2014, 2015, p.97, 6.30). Falling under the umbrella term of Cognition and Learning, learning difficulties are described as:

> '…when children and young people learn at a slower pace than their peers, even with appropriate differentiation. Learning difficulties cover a wide range of needs…'

Processing of information for the participants of this study is an important factor to consider when choosing methods. Weiler et al (2003) compared processing speeds of 205 children, both with and without learning difficulties and found significantly slower processing speeds for children with learning difficulties in both the speed and the capacity of visual and auditory information processing, supporting earlier hypothesises by Duffy et al. (1999) and Miller et al. (2001) who hypothesised that processing speed problems alone account for the difficulties that children with learning difficulties encounter. This is relevant to the present study as I will need to ensure my participants have sufficient time to process any questions asked of them, and in ensuring informed consent, taking guidance where appropriate from material such as Mencap's (2002) accessible language principles with visuals.

3.2 Young people and Autism: definition

Autism is a broad term, used to describe as a complex developmental condition that affects a child or young person's ability to socialise, communicate, and respond to their environment (Willis, 2006). More specifically, the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM5: 2013, p.55), states specific criteria for diagnosis, including:

> '…a persistent deficit in social communication/interaction across multiple contexts, and restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, or activities'.

Subsequently, these difficulties may provoke anxiety in unfamiliar situations and with unfamiliar people, where making inferences about another person's language and intentions may be extremely difficult (Baron-Cohen et al., 2001; Frith and Happe, 1999). In her 2011 (p.92), book, on autism titled, The Passionate Mind: how people with autism learn Wendy Lawson, who has autism herself, identifies that people with autism have:

> '…preferred senses for taking in information… for example, for some of us, the only way to work out where we are in time and space is by touch. For others, everything goes into the mouth; and for others still, understanding the world via smell or auditory input is not unusual'.

3.3 Young people and Autism: Expressing their views

Hermelin and O'Connor (1970) explain that children with autism do not always associate and integrate sensory modalities, thus making it difficult for them to form a whole picture. However, this does allow for accessing parts of a picture in great detail, which Frith (Frith and Happe, 1999) has called central coherence theory. This attention to detail was applied in a study by Beresford et al. (2004) who found two key successful features of their research which included children with autism. Anecdotal findings of their study indicate that anxiety was reduced through the use of a craft-based activity that meant the researcher sat next to, as opposed to opposite, the participant (Beresford et al., 2004). This was done deliberately to minimise the direct face-to-face interaction which can be intense for children with autism. Secondly, visual material was included, such as

photographs, which they report, as a visual resource, were motivating for the participants of their study (Beresford et al., 2004). These findings are of particular importance to my study, and as such, I will adopt some of these strategies to minimise any anxieties for my participants.

Of particular relevance to my study is that Preece (2002) identifies visual methods as being more accessible and less stressful for people with autism than verbal approaches alone. The importance of including the views of participants with autism is highlighted by Charman et al. (2011, p.7):

> 'We need more research to develop and disseminate good practice on accessing the pupil's voice within both mainstream and special schools'.

Several researchers have identified the benefits of using the personal accounts of participants with autism to inform good practice (Bagatell, 2007; Barrett, 2006; Billington, 2006). These studies influenced the recent work of Loyd (2013) who explored the views of ten young people with autism aged sixteen to eighteen on their experiences of Drama classes in their Further Education setting, located within a school for pupils with autism. Her participants had a range of verbal abilities, including four with verbal language, four predominantly non-verbal and two with no spoken language at all (Loyd, 2013). Her study used a range of methods including Talking Mats™, Widgit literacy symbols (Detheridge, 1997), sentence completion tasks and photographs or videos of her participants in their drama lessons. Loyd (2013) notes that anxiety is a common difficulty for participants with autism, with two of her participants experiencing low levels of anxiety in the initial stages of data collection which soon subsided once they were

then all able to express their views and preferences confidently, with the range of tools she had provided. She notes that the findings of her participants' views are comparable to those gained from studies carried out in mainstream settings (loyd, 2013).

3.4 Young people and attachment: theoretical underpinning of nurture groups

Attachment theory was drawn upon by Boxall (2002) in her work on developing nurture groups. The term attachment is used to describe the relationship formed between, in this case, a child and their primary caregiver. John Bowlby (1969), a clinical psychologist, developed attachment theory in the 1960s to investigate both normal and atypical attachment development types, which he claimed were based on a number of innate behavioural tendencies.

In infancy, Bowlby theorised that the function of attachment behaviour is related to the survival of the child but as they grow older they are able to rely less so on their primary caregiver for this need and as such they can form a partnership whereby the caregiver can provide reassurance when needed (Bowlby, 1982). This partnership forms part of a finely balanced system which is reliant on a child-caregiver interaction where the caregiver responds accurately and sensitively to the distress signals of the child (Bowlby, 1988). In doing so the caregiver becomes a secure base from which the child learns to explore their environment, yet can still seek comfort at times of distress (Kobak and Sceery, 1988). However, Rutter (1995) recommends caution in accepting attachment theory as a full explanation of the difficulties experienced by children. He claims firstly, that

children's relationships are complex, involving a range of functions and dimensions, and are therefore, unlikely to be reducible to simple process involving attachment-security. He notes that no satisfactory explanation has been found or tested to provide a tangible understanding of the processes involved in converting early interactions into individual characteristics (Rutter, 1995).

As the child develops, Bowlby proposed that the attachment system modifies to allow for greater separation from caregivers (secure base), because the child has developed an internal working model consisting of internalised beliefs and behaviours of others towards them (Bowlby, 1988). It is the secure base that Boxall (2002) felt nurture groups could provide along with a secure attachment to the key adults working within the group. She hoped that by providing a set of experiences aimed at supporting the development of a positive internal working model this would enable a child to feel confident and independent in their school environment (Boxall, 2002). Of particular relevance to this study is that following an extensive literature review search, no studies were found to have reported on students with learning difficulties attending nurture groups in either mainstream or special schools, and as such, may represent a gap in the literature.

Bowlby's model proposes there are two forms of internal representation model – that of the self and – that of the caregiver (Bowlby, 1980). Behaviour which is met by a supportive attachment figure who provides reliable and responsive care enables a child to develop an internal working model of others as being available, and a life-long model of the self as competent, worthy and lovable (Bowlby, 1980).

However, Rutter (1995) posits that the notion of an internal working model appears plausible, since children are thought to process information and experiences, later bringing them to inform new ones, but that no explanation is available on how discrepancies in qualities of attachment with different caregivers are processed and transformed into an individual characteristic (Rutter, 1995). Additionally, Rothbaum et al. (2000) highlight that attachment theory has been developed based solely on western values and meaning such as measures of sensitivity, competence, and the concept of a secure base, all of which are biased toward Western ways of thinking. They state that in Japan, for example, sensitivity, competence, and a secure base are viewed very differently, calling into question the universality of the fundamental underpinnings of attachment theory (Rothbaum et al., 2000). This is supported by studies by Bornstein et al. (1990) and Miyake et al. (1985), who both found that babies in Japan were more likely to be focused on their mothers when both distressed and happy, whilst babies in America were oriented to their immediate environment in the same circumstances which represents a cultural difference, not an attachment difference (Bornstein et al., 1990; Miyake et al., 1985).

3.5 Concluding Critique

As posited by Weiler et al. (2003), the processing of information for my participants will need to be considered and time given - without pressure, or additional requests – to allow them to process their thoughts and answers. Perhaps a heavier reliance on visual material will appeal to those participants with autism, who according to Frith (Frith and Happe, 1999) have a preference

for attention to detail. Finally, as critiqued here, attachment theory which informs nurture groups may provide one approach to understanding young peoples' developmental attachment experiences, however, as Rothbaum et al, (2000) and Rutter (1995) note, it is a theory that remains un-testable, with limited universality and so therefore can only be considered as informing hypothesis re: causal mechanisms.

CHAPTER 4

LITERATURE REVIEW:

NURTURE GROUPS

4.0 Introduction to the Chapter

As this study is concerned with nurture groups, the policy, research and theoretical practice underpinning these, forms the focus of the chapter. The nurture group from this study was one that Cooper et al. (1999), would identify as a New (Type 2) Variant Nurture Group as it was located in a secondary-age, special school. However, the group incorporated core structural features of a classic nurture group and would be considered a genuine nurture group as identified by Cooper et al. (1999). This is expanded upon in Section 4.2.

4.1 The context of Nurture Groups

Nurture groups were first introduced in the Inner London Educational Authority (ILEA) in 1970 by Marjorie Boxall, an educational psychologist, to meet the needs of the growing number of children who experienced social, emotional and mental health difficulties in mainstream schools, and who were referred to her service in the late 1960s (Seth-Smith et al., 2010). In understanding the needs of the children referred to her, Boxall drew upon Bowlby's 1960s attachment theory (Geddes, 2008). Boxall felt the pupils referred to her were less able to learn in their mainstream classes, when compared to their peers, because they were performing at a social and emotional developmental level acceptable for younger children and therefore considered inappropriate (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998).

Boxall believed that a child's social, emotional and mental health difficulties were dependent on the type of nurturing care received by the child's primary caregiver, and at what age in the child's life these were affected, both positively and negatively (Boxall, 2002). Appropriate nurturing care may have been disrupted by stressful external pressures on families, dysfunctional parenting or a gross mismatch in experiences and behaviour management strategies between home and school (Bennathan, 1997; Boxall, 2002). Although the origin and nature of these difficulties varied between children, Boxall estimated the children were functioning below three years of age in a number of areas of their social and emotional development as they were able to display learning experiences gained up to that age. (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007). Boxall writes (p.1) that nurture groups 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'.

A classic nurture group, according to Cooper et al. (2001) includes two adults working together, modelling positive adult relationships in a structured and predictable environment which fosters trust and learning. The groups aim to support positive social and emotional growth, and cognitive development by responding to the students at a developmentally appropriate level for that individual (Cooper et al., 2001).

Due to their success in reducing the numbers of excluded pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties, over fifty nurture groups were

established within the ILEA in the late 1970s (Ofsted, 2011). However many of these groups closed when the ILEA was re-assigned, as did the funding for the nurture group provisions. Despite their initial demise in the ILEA, nurture groups continued to be developed in mainstream schools in many parts of the country (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007). A recent survey (2008) by the Nurture Group Network (cited in Seth-Smith et al., 2010, p.22) found over one thousand nurture groups, in both primary and secondary, UK schools.

Nurture groups have been cited as good practice, by both The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted, 2011) and the Department for Education and Employment (DfE, 2014). An Ofsted evaluative report (2011) of twenty nine nurture groups across England highlighted that: '…when working well, nurture groups can make a considerable difference…' and that local authorities should 'take into account the substantial value of well-led and well-taught nurture groups when considering policies and guidance…' (Ofsted, 2011: p.7). The Department for Education (DfE, 2014) state that children, who experience social, emotional and mental health difficulties beyond what is expected of their age group, are at increased risk of experiencing mental health disorders and that nurture groups are one possible intervention to address this.

4.2 The function, structure and features of a nurture group

A nurture group provision aims to enable school staff to meet the needs of children at the developmental level they have reached prior to entering the group

and to enable children to develop the personal, social and emotional skills necessary for them to learn more effectively (Bennathan, 1997).

Attendance, progress and departure from, a nurture group is most commonly influenced by a child's social and emotional needs, often measured using the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 2000). This contains two sections: the Diagnostic Profile and the Developmental Strands (each containing thirty four items) and is a subjective measure of a child's behaviours and social/emotional well-being, carried out ideally, by two members of staff together. The measure has been standardised with norms set within one deviation from the mean score, following large scale standardisation of eight hundred and eighty children aged three years, four months to eight years old (Bennathan and Boxall, 2000). However, although the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 2000) has been found to have a high level of concordance with the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ: Goodman, 1998), the subjective nature of the Boxall Profile makes it susceptible to demand effects and lack of validity (Cooper, 2007).

A classic nurture group has ten to twelve students, and two staff: a teacher and a teaching assistant who model a positive relationship with an emphasis on effective discussions and empathy (Cooper, 2007). The students attend the group in the mornings, usually for four out of the five days whilst remaining on the roll for their mainstream class which they join for a brief registration each morning and for their remaining time in school each week (Boxall, 2002). Whilst in the nurture group, students follow a holistic curriculum which is a combination of the

full entitlement curriculum, including core elements of the National Curriculum in England and Wales, augmented by a curriculum which focuses on social and emotional development (Seth-Smith et al., 2010).

A national UK study conducted by Cooper et al. (1999) identified a number of variants to the classic nurture group model. Fundamental aspects of all the four types are shown below, in Table 3. Additionally, a list of the key characteristics of the Boxall classic nurture group, identified by Cooper et al. (2001) can be found in Appendix 1.

Table 4. Four key variants of nurture groups:
Adapted from Cooper et al. (1999)

1) Classic Boxall Nurture Group: Run on the principles introduced by Marjorie Boxall, with nine out of ten, half-day sessions per week, with a teacher and teaching assistant.
2) New Variant Nurture Group: Based on the principles underpinning the classic model but differ in structure and organisation. Examples include reduced time in the group, or the group being based in a special school or covering a cluster of schools.

Types (1) and (2) are seen as genuine nurture groups

3) Groups informed by Nurture Group Principles: These depart radically from the principles of a nurture group, for example, held at lunchtime or act as a retreat, with only one member of staff.
4) Aberrant Nurture Groups: These contravene, undermine or distort the key defining principles of nurture groups as lack the developmental emphasis, instead using control or containment.

The classic Boxall nurture group, described by Bennathan and Boxall (1996) is intended to provide an environment which is secure and stable, to enable young children to re-experience early nurturing experiences, which may previously have been lacking. The structure of a classic nurture group classroom typically includes a friendly and inviting room, with soft furnishings, such as a sofa and an area for more formal work (Seth-Smith et al., 2010). Food is prepared, served and eaten together at a set time every day. The nurture groups aim to incorporate qualities that would normally be associated with the family and home situation within the educational setting in order to recreate the experiences that the pupils would have received in the home environment at a younger age (Boxall, 2002).

A teacher and learning support assistant will have received appropriate training to equip them with the knowledge and understanding which will enable them to focus on skills in assisting pupils to develop self-esteem, social skills and emotional regulation (Pintilei, 2009). This in turn enables pupils to participate in the curriculum and learn more effectively. The adults manage behaviour positively but closely, which scaffolds the development of pupils' own internal controls (Boxall, 2002). Behaviour problems are dealt with in a therapeutic manner as opposed to the coercive strategy normally used in mainstream classes (Cooper, 2007). The interactive relationship between the child and primary carers is modelled (Bennathan, 1997). The emphasis within these groups is on nurturing pupils' growth and on the development of secure and interesting relationships with nurture group staff, and thereby provides children with opportunities to form

attachments to caring and supportive adults, gain approval and experience satisfactory outcomes (Cooper, 2007).

The national curriculum is delivered in line with school policies but at a level suited to the pupils' stage of social and emotional development, with material delivered at a rate that the children can absorb (Cooke et al., 2008). Social learning is promoted where children learn through play and co-operation with each other is fostered. They are able to choose activities from a limited and manageable choice (Colley, 2009). The nurture group staff support the children to enable them to persevere with their learning despite challenges they may experience, in order that a sense of achievement and self-worth may be achieved. They are able to learn the structure of the day and rules for the group, through repetition of daily routines (Colley, 2009). The nurture group staff place greater emphasis on supporting the development of the whole child, including language, cognitive, social and emotional development. Parental involvement is encouraged from the outset (Boxall, 2002). Links with the children's mainstream classes are maintained prior to, and throughout, the intervention, with children normally integrated back into their mainstream classes full time within two or three terms (Seth-Smith et al., 2010).

There has been a wealth of academic research which has explored the effectiveness of nurture groups (Pintilei, 2009). As well as academic research, the effectiveness of nurture groups, as an intervention to meet the needs of children who experience social, emotional and mental health difficulties has been

stated by the Office for Standards, in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted, 2011, p.3), as making 'a considerable difference to the behaviour and the social skills of the pupils who attend them'.

4.3 Pupils' experiences of nurture groups

Several studies have explored the experiences of primary-aged nurture group pupils through the use of mixed-methods (Bishop and Swain, 2000; Cooper et al., 2001; Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005; Sanders, 2007; Shaver and McClatchey, 2013; Syrnyk, 2014 and Griffiths et al., 2014). Only a further four studies (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007; Pintilei, 2009; Garner and Thomas, 2011, and Kourmoulaki, 2013) have focused on secondary-aged nurture groups.

Cooper et al. (2001) included pupil interviews in their control-matched study with two hundred and sixteen primary-aged pupils attending nurture groups across twenty five schools, and reported positive findings, including numerous positive references to:

- The quality of interpersonal relationships in the nurture group, and their fondness for the nurture group staff;
- Opportunities provided in the nurture group for free play and opportunities to choose activities;
- The quietness and calmness of the nurture group environment;
- The pleasant nature of the nurture group environment in terms of its physical attributes;

- The high quality and engaging nature of particular activities that are provided in the nurture group, such as meal and snack times;
- The predictability of the nurture group routine.

However, Cooper et al. (2001) had included two secondary schools in their study but did not differentiate between the age groups for their results, or analyse the data thematically, making their results difficult to explore or compare. Additionally, as the study appears to have been funded by the Department for Education and Employment, this raises considerations around researcher bias.

Cooper and Tiknaz (2007) only briefly note the views of Year Seven to Year Nine (age 11-13) pupils in their study but report the pupils appreciated the individual attention, activities, and the calm and organised environment of the nurture group. Cooper and Tiknaz (2007) do not give information on the number of pupils included, or how these views were obtained which restricts validity. A study with more internal validity due to its robust application of grounded theory methods is Pintilei's 2009 study, which explored the perspectives of eight young people attending a secondary-age nurture group. Through analysis Pintelli (2009, p.159), identified one core category, 'building and experiencing nurturing and rewarding relationships with nurture group staff and peers' with three subcategories:

- Having a safe base;
- Experiencing fun, diverse and engaging activities;
- Facilitated communication.

These results reflect some of those found by Cooper et al. (2001) who highlight the classroom environment and activities as key themes from their interviews with primary-aged pupils.

Garner and Thomas (2011) and Kourmoulaki (2013) both carried out interviews (individual/group) with between, five and fifteen, secondary-aged nurture group pupils in their mixed-methods studies. They both used thematic analysis, with Garner and Thomas (2011) using codes based on the nurture group principles (Nurture Group Network, 2011) as initial codes. Garner and Thomas (2011) claim to have found that the nurture group reflected the Boxall (Bennathan and Boxall, 1996) approach but that key differences lay in the relationships between pupils and staff, in that these were based on mutual respect and equality. Whilst Kourmoulaki (2013) claims her thematic analysis showed themes of:

- Safety;
- Calmness;
- Belonging;
- The development of social skills.

However, as Kourmoulaki notes, the study used group interviews which meant unequal contributions may have affected the quality and breadth of data collected. Additionally there were no further methods of data collected, such as questionnaires which could have improve validity. Garner and Thomas (2011) used initial codes taken from nurture group principles in the analysis of the data,

which may have influenced the outcomes by providing a biased, deductive approach, rather than an inductive approach.

Two more recent studies (published during the data collection phase of this study) include Syrnyk (2014) and Griffiths et al. (2014) who both focused on eliciting the views of primary-aged nurture group pupils. Syrnyk (2014) used a combination of interviews with six individual pupils, and drawings based on the Kinetic Drawing instrument (KFD: Burns and Kaufman, 1972), which were analysed following Kaufman and Wohl's (1992) approach. Syrnyk (2014) found that the pupils expressed a fondness for their nurture group staff which supports the findings from the 2001 study by Cooper et al. Additional qualitative data found comments focused on:

- Play: outdoor play, toy play and choosing time;
- Specialised aspects: food, and school-work;
- New relationships: staff not being strict, being nice/supportive, helpful and understanding;
- Classroom environment: bigger, better, colourful, with a microwave/oven/toaster and less people.

Some of these findings were replicated by Griffiths et al. (2014) who used structured, group sessions (circle time) with a combination of paired discussions and individual contributions. Exploration of the views of their eight primary-aged participants, found four key themes, again, supporting findings from the 2001 study by Cooper et al.:

- Environment;
- Learning;
- Self-regulatory behaviour;
- Relationships.

Criticisms of the two studies are that, firstly, Syrnyk's (2014) participants did not draw any pictures prior to entering the nurture group, or a drawing of them in their mainstream classroom, so a comparison cannot be made, whilst Griffiths et al. (2014) acknowledge that revisiting the pupils with the themes and transcribed data may have elicited richer, and more extended findings. For both studies, generalisability is also a limitation due to the small sample sizes and the individuality of the constructions elicited.

4.4 Concluding Critique

As critiqued here, areas worthy of further exploration include how the experiences and views of young people from nurture groups can inform practice. More research in secondary school nurture groups would be useful, with clearer account of methods and frameworks used to analyse data is needed. Finally, as the studies critiqued here, on the views of nurture group pupils show, there have been a range of techniques developed and used in eliciting the views of pupils attending nurture groups. There appears to be several key themes found across a range of studies including, the classroom environment, communication, staff characteristics, play, safety, and self-regulatory behaviour, all of which will prove useful in critiquing the interpretations of the data from my study.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

5.0 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter illustrates the methodological considerations for the study, and details the aims, methods and epistemological/ontological and researcher positionality underpinning it. A rationale for the use of Personal Construct Psychology (Kelly, 1955) methods is highlighted, along with the relevance of applying this theory for eliciting pupil voice. The chapter concludes with a focus on validity, reliability and ethical factors, which are addressed along with the methods of data analysis.

5.1 Research aims

This study aims to offer an in-depth understanding of the experiences of a group of young people in a nurture group and their constructs of the ideal and non-ideal classrooms. The research considers these constructs in relation to the nurture group model of schooling. Finally, the study hopes to gain an understanding of how young people with learning difficulties and autism express their views on life in school and to illuminate, possible, new ways of supporting pupil voice work, through the combination of PCP and LEGO.

5.1.1 Research questions

1. What are the key themes of an ideal classroom construct for young people attending a nurture group?
2. What are the key themes of a non-ideal classroom construct for young people attending a nurture group?
3. Does the nurture group model of schooling reflect the ideal classroom construct of those attending it?

5.1.2 Research Methodology

Methodology is concerned with the theoretical analysis of methods. Within this context it is important to consider both 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). First I address the ontological perspective underpinning this study.

5.1.3 Ontological Perspective

Cohen et al. (2011) describe ontological assumptions as being concerned with how social reality is perceived. They can be placed on a continuum ranging from nominalist to realist assumptions. 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., 2011).

This study's ontological perspective is interpretative and inductive, with a position that individuals create meaning, and actively construct their own social worlds (Cohen et al., 2011). These social worlds are dynamic and fluid with learning and knowledge created from social situations. Research carried out in this ontological perspective aims to present a representation of an individual, or group of individuals' reality of experience and adopts a multiple world view of reality (Cohen et al., 2011). Crotty (1997) adds that a social constructivist position is achieved by being immersed in the social world from which we derive meaning. The ontological perspective taken by a study influences the epistemological approach, as ontological assumptions give rise to epistemological assumptions. I now focus on the epistemological assumption of the study.

5.1.4 Epistemology

Epistemological assumptions are concerned with the nature and form of knowledge, particularly how it can be acquired and communicated to others (Cohen et al., 2011). Maynard, (1994) proposes that in making decisions on gaining knowledge, epistemology provides a theoretical underpinning for making choices on which kinds of knowledge are possible and legitimate. Depending on the researcher's epistemological assumptions, anti-positivist or positivist methods, can be favoured (Burr, 1995). As this research was aimed at gaining knowledge of the experience and views of a nurture group from the pupils' perspectives, a social constructivist epistemology was used.

Social constructivist epistemological assumptions emphasise the subjective experiences of individuals and are set in the humanistic paradigm, influenced by phenomenology (Burr, 1995). Social constructivists gather multiple perspectives to understand multiple realities (Schwandt, 1994) with reality lying in the perception of the event, rather than the event itself (Porter and Lacey, 2005). However, when research is about exploring meanings and wanting to understand the subjective views of individuals, we need to recognise that in making that exploration, we as researchers, are having an impact on that meaning (Porter and Lacey, 2005). Meaning becomes co-constructed between the researcher and the participant, so proving reliability is therefore not a priority, rather we might seek to demonstrate the credibility of the findings, and that we have, in fact, used active listening and been reflexive in our analysis (Porter and Lacey, 2005). Social constructivism has received some criticism as it is yet to have a universal definition which has lead researchers to adopt a varied range of interpretations (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). Despite this, Burr (1995) identifies four beliefs for social constructivism, as shown in Table 4, below.

Table 4. Beliefs for social constructivism (Burr, 1995)

Belief	Description
A critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge.	Critic the idea that our observations of the world unproblematically yield its nature to us.
Historical and cultural specificity.	Understanding the world depends on where and when in the world we live.
Knowledge is sustained by social processes.	Language is of great importance as it gives a shared knowledge
Knowledge and social action go together.	Negotiated understandings of the world take on a variety of forms and are multiple constructions of the world.

5.1.5 Researcher Positionality

My positionality as an interpretivist researcher needs to be addressed. As an active participant in the study, I must provide information for the reader, on my social values and beliefs in relation to this study and how they may have influenced my interactions I had with my participants, and in turn, my data collection. My positionality must be considered in terms of factors such as my cultural heritage, social-economic status and political values, and how these may have influenced my approach to research.

Firstly, having been fortunate enough to have been born and raised in the UK, I have had several opportunities that many others around the world, would not. An example of this is access to free education and University funding, which, for many counties is a privilege. My cultural heritage is Caucasian although having spent almost ten years living and teaching overseas, in Africa, the Middle East and Far East it's fair to say I have widened my understanding of the world around me. I am sure (and hope) this does influence my approach to research, and perhaps why I prefer a personal construct psychological methodological stance, as I appreciate that a person's interpretation of their experiences is individual to them and may be influenced by their surroundings and as such, a single event can be interpreted in many ways. Perhaps living in cultures very different to my own has encouraged me to accept what others think and feel as truly credible, without my own cultural beliefs influencing my understating of theirs, or at least, taking a less prominent position.

Additionally, I must also acknowledge my social-economic status. Having been raised in what may be called a “middle class” family, with “working class values”, I have benefited from both a wide range of opportunities and an appreciation of valuing what I have in life, through hard work. My political stance would be more towards a socialist stance, with common ownership and equality taking prominence over capitalist approaches.

Finally, as I completed research with a group of young people, it is important to acknowledge that the identities of both them and myself will have influenced the process. Our perceptions of how we perceived each other will have influenced our approach to each other and the research. I acknowledge my role as a researcher, with a self-serving interest in completing the study and in interpreting the data.

As this study is influenced by one theory thought to reside in a social constructivist paradigm: Kelly’s (1955) Personal Construct Psychology theory, it is to this that we now turn.

5.2 Personal Construct Psychology (PCP): Rationale and the Dichotomy Corollary

This study is concerned with the use of a PCP methodological approach which I have chosen due to its logical, structured framework for understanding people’s experiences of their worlds. In PCP, subjective realities are accepted as being wholly legitimate and valid, with people interpreting the world through thought and

experience (Kelly, 1955). This is important for my study as I want to explore how a group of individuals use constructs to make sense of their self and others within their classroom environment. The Dichotomy Corollary is of particular relevance as I feel it offers the process a simple, yet effective framework for understanding a contrast such as ideal and non-ideal. According to Kelly (1955), a single event can be experienced in a wide variety of ways by individual people and that a person's behaviour and approach to life makes sense to that individual, with multiple ways of understanding the world that give reference to different meanings and interpretations, and that this applies as much to a child, as an adult (Kelly, 1955).

Additionally, of equal importance to this study is that PCP methods are participant-led (Burr et al., 2014), but carried out in collaboration with the researcher, which I hope will reduce any anxiety felt by the participants should they feel they are the predominant focus of the research. Additionally, these methods are less reliant on language alone, which Kelly (1955) theorised to be separate to thoughts and so hopefully, the model-making element will enable my participants to elicit their thoughts and constructs easily, without as much language as an interview without model-making. As my method is aimed to be completed in a relatively short period of time, I hope it will minimise any possible cognitive demands for the participants of my study (Burr et al., 2014).

Although Kelly had not intended his theory to be a philosophical paradigm, his theory has been considered as both social constructionist (Shotter, 1993) and as

a constructivist theory (Neimeyer, 2009). Social constructivism and constructionism are related, but distinct concepts, which share a unifying theme at the level of their epistemology. The emphasis is on the social, in social constructivism, with our worlds constructed jointly through language, whereas constructionism perceives our constructions of the world to be at the individual level (Neimeyer, 1987). However, Neimeyer (1987) warns that the idiographic aspects of construing in personal construct therapy are not devoid of the systems within which individuals live. Butt (2011) emphasises the social action component of Personal Construct Theory where behaviour is not seen as an outcome of genetics or personality but in the context of interaction.

As well as the concept of the person as scientist Kelly (1955) also presented eleven corollaries that provide a basis for understanding the construing process: the structure of knowing and the social embeddedness of construing (Neimeyer, 1987). This study has placed particular importance on one of Kelly's corolllaries, the Dichotomy Corollary, with participants identifying their ideal and non-ideal classrooms through Personal Construct Psychology methods. The Dichotomy Corollary, which involves bipolar dimensions of meaning states 'a person's construction system is composed of a finite number of dichotomous constructs', open to revision, forming a fundamental postulate (Kelly, 1955, p.5). He considered meaning to be clarified by discrimination, for example, we grasp an understanding of the term white by our comprehension of black and vice versa. This idea comes from constructive alternativism, with the principle that individuals place labels onto items and categorise events (Caputi et al., 2012). As such,

there is no one truth; but infinite numbers of alternative perspectives that can be imposed onto one experience.

PCP methods, according to Burr et al. (2012), focus on the exploration of the client's world view, and the voice of the participants, focusing on their subjectivity, with importance placed on recording that experience through the actual words, labels and constructs given by them. The participant's perspective remains the priority, rather than answering specific research questions (Burr et al., 2012). Knight et al. (2003) note that qualitative Personal Construct Psychology methods encourage participants to introduce the factors they perceive to be important and relevant, allowing new constructs to emerge that are not constrained by the researcher. This is supported by Burr et al. (2012) who state that Personal Construct Psychology methods, such as triadic elicitation and laddering are effective in eliciting experiences that may be hard to otherwise articulate.

5.3 Case study design

Case study research is an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon in a real life context (Yin, 2009). This study employed a predominantly qualitative design consisting of a method influenced by Personal Construct Psychology (Kelly, 1955) to explore a series of case studies of the subject, in this case, the classroom. The model-making activity enabled exploration of the analytical frame, known as the object (Thomas, 2011), in this case the participants' construing of the ideal and non-ideal. As I am interested in exploring a phenomenon (constructs of classrooms) and the contrasts and connections

between them I have employed an illustrative approach which is of multiple design. This leads to a focus on the analytical framework, in the case of my study, the constructs of ideal and non-ideal. The case study design I have applied is presented in table 5, below.

Table 5. Case Study Design
(Adapted from Thomas, 2011)

	Subject: Classroom (case) **Object (analytical frame): ideal and non-ideal constructs**				
	Subject	**Purpose**	**Approach**	**Process**	**Timing**
Design	Local Knowledge Case	Explanatory And Intrinsic	Drawing a picture (Illustrative) And Interpretative	Multiple	Parallel
Description	An example of something in personal experience – with an interest to find out more.	Potential explanations based on depth of understanding.	To illustrate a phenomenon, enabling connections to be made.	The focus is on the phenomenon of which the case is an example; the focus is on the object: ideal and non-ideal.	All cases are studied at the same time.

Case studies allow for a rich picture to be developed of the phenomenon, however there are criticisms of the design. Thomas (2011) notes that a case study has limited generalisation but has depth, which Denzin (1978) states, can, with the use of a variety of methods, create within-method triangulation. Generalisability is not the main aim of case studies, as they cannot offer generalisation beyond the one case (De Vaus, 2001).

Validity according to Cohen (2011) is the ‘degree to which results can be generalised to the wider population, cases or situations’. Several terms have been suggested for the level of generalisation created by a case study which include theoretical generalisation, which Yin (2009) claims, helps to test and refine theories through replication of methods, whilst an analytical generalisation uses a framework to compare empirical results of one case study, with two or more, and if the findings are the same, replication is found (Yin, 2009). Hammersley (1992, p.69), provides a qualitative perspective:

> ‘An account is valid or true if it represents accurately those features of the phenomena that it is intended to describe, explain or theorise’.

Reliability focuses on the stability of data-collection measures and instruments (Mason, 2006) and is described by LioBiondo-Wood and Haber (2014) as ‘the consistency or constancy of a measuring instrument’. Stability may be established by asking identical questions of a group of participants or one participant, at different times with the aim of producing consistent answers. In my study the lesser approach was adopted, with participants carrying out the same pattern of model-making activities with the same prompt questions ‘What’s that?’ and ‘Why is that important?’ asked. Additionally, the nine questions asked at the end of the model-making sessions were the same for each participant, with only further prompt questions of ‘tell me a little more about that’ and, ‘Why is that important?’ added.

In order to address validity and reliability in case studies Yin (2009) introduced a range of tactics and responses, designed to be used across the development of a case study. I have identified how I addressed these in Table 6, below.

Table 6. Case study tactics and responses (adapted from Yin, 2009 p.45)		
Tests	**Tactic**	**Action taken**
Construct validity identifying correct operational measures for the concepts being studied	• Use multiple sources of evidence • Establish chain of evidence	• Use of interviews supported by an annotated photograph of each LEGO model (one per case). • Interviews recorded and transcribed verbatim.
Internal validity Seeking to establish a causal relationship, whereby certain conditions are believed to lead to other conditions.	• Do pattern matching	• Themes identified across cases
External validity Defining the domain to which a study's findings can be generalised.	• Use replication logic in multiple case studies	• Multiple cases explored using replication logic to give analytical generalisation through convergent evidence.
Reliability Demonstrating that the operations of a study—such as the data collection procedures—can be repeated, with the same results	• Use case study protocol • Develop case study database	• Same process of data collection per case with identical questions asked following model-making session. • Interview transcripts entered into computer analysis software (NVivo) along with references to models.

5.4 Methods

Robson (2011) identifies qualitative methods as important when using a constructivist approach. Qualitative methods match the rationale underpinning this study, to explore an area where little research has been carried out, and to offer a descriptive account of the phenomenon under study: classrooms. The use of PCP methods (contrasting poles of ideal/non-ideal classrooms) enables the constructs, which may differ to adults (Burnham, 2008) to be elicited. Mason (1997) argues that integrating methods enables the exploration of different parts of a process, or phenomenon which, in turn, strengthens the validity of the research. Personal Construct Psychology offers a framework from which to explore the subjective reality of the young people's worlds, with the participants' constructs of the ideal and non-ideal classrooms, being one of the main aims of this research.

Traditionally, methods used to elicit the views of people with learning difficulties have relied on interviews, yet this places significant demands on both linguistic and cognitive capabilities (Porter and Lacey, 2005). In order to address this, I felt it more appropriate to include a model-making element to my research to allow the participants a visual representation of what they have said and what they are conveying to me, which may be useful for reaffirming their verbal expressions. By replacing interviews (or interviews with drawing) with model making I hoped to reduce anxiety, as the participants were told that a single LEGO brick can represent anything, which meant they had no limitations placed on their ideas and didn't have to worry about it looking like the item they intended it to be, as is

the case with drawing. This is an important aspect of the study as Porter and Lacey (2005) note that by providing a model of communicating that emphasises the importance of negotiating and sharing meaning, we recognise the inherent difficulties in exploring the world for many people with learning difficulties through the medium of language.

Relevant to this study is the identification that more research is needed into how best to support the views of people with learning difficulties, ideally, through social and other supports within their environment (Day et al., 2000). This is supported by research carried out by Porter and Lacey, who identified that studies carried out (in 1990/1 and 2000/1) with people with learning difficulties were most likely to be from a positivist paradigm, with quantitative methods such as survey design or experimental/quasi-experimental most predominant.

According to Sigelman et al. (1981), and Finlay and Lyons (2002), there has been a tendency for people with learning difficulties to acquiesce which is supported by case studies by Treece et al. (1999) who found that people with learning difficulties were given very few choice-making opportunities. However, Sigelman et al. (1983) states that people with learning difficulties are quite capable of being interviewed and to comment on their lifestyle.

In order to address this, and in line with previous research that used Talking Mats™, drawings and LEGO (Germain, 2004; Maxwell, 2006; Pimlott-Wilson, 2011; Williams and Hanke, 2007) my study used semi-structured interviews with

two model-making activities. This approach was chosen as it enabled the process to be participant-led, with the model-making activity reducing the need for verbal fluency in my participants. The semi-structured interview consisted of the commentary provided by the participants during the model making sessions and a more structured set of nine questions for each model, once made. These were taken from Kangas (2010) and Williams and Hanke (2007) and were aimed at exploring further, the meaning of what they had made (see Appendix 2).

5.4.1 Semi-Structured interviews

Guidance from Kvale (2007), Rapley (2007) and Charmaz (2006) informed the interviews, with Kvale (2007, p.46), stating '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 a participant's understanding and meaning, describing their experiences and clarifying/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 seek to gain 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 my decision for using interview-based methods for my study. I was mindful of the following advice from Charmaz (2006) which encourages the interviewer to ask the participant to describe and reflect upon his or her

experiences in ways that mean something to them. During the interviews I encouraged the participants to express their views, and encouraged them to lead the interview and discuss issues which they perceived as important. In this way, the interview process advocated eliciting the participant's interpretation of their experiences (Charmaz, 2006). An example of the interview schedule is presented in Appendix 2.

5.4.2 Model-Making Activity

The young people were asked to build models of their ideal and non-ideal classrooms using LEGO from a kit I had amalgamated myself. This included a base kit of 200 pieces LEGO from the Build to Express range (LEGO Education, 2013) and additional items such as mini-figures, food, laptops, school equipment, domestic animals and kitchen equipment. See Appendix 3 for a more detailed inventory.

5.5 Pilot Study

A pilot study was carried out using the full range of methods and LEGO with a student from the school, who did not attend the nurture group. This identified the processes in need of consideration such as how to present the LEGO for ease of use as it became apparent these needed to be in a two larger trays, made of clear plastic, with smaller pieces in one tray and larger pieces in another (See Appendix 3) and how long the process would take as I had underestimated this. Additionally, the volume of equipment needed was considerable as this included

a camera, and printer to be taken along, for printing of the photographs for joint annotation.

5.6 Procedure

Taking guidance from Krayer et al. (2008), rapport was established by spending time in the nurture group beforehand (approximately six hours) which enabled the pupils to get to know me and feel confident to speak with me individually. All of the interviews were carried out individually with the young person, during school hours, at the secondary school they attended. All eight interviews were carried out in a conference/meeting room. The young person and the researcher were present. Taking guidance from Krayer et al. (2008), rapport was established by setting a positive tone, reflecting on what the participants' discussed and ensuring that the interviews ended positively. The interviews varied in length lasting between, fifty and ninety minutes, depending on how much participants wanted to build and share with the researcher. There was a break mid-way through the session and the use of a visual timeline (see Appendix 2), breaking up the session into smaller sections, which we ticked off as we completed them to aide comprehension of the process (Rodgers, 1999). The procedure of the semi-structured interview and model-making process is detailed below, in Table 7.

Table 7. Procedure for Semi-structured interview and model making

Build the ideal Classroom Model whilst researcher asks about items selected and why they are important.
Print photograph of model and annotate where the young person gave labels, descriptions and reasons.
Researcher asks nine questions.

⇩

Ten minute break

⇩

Build the non-ideal Classroom Model whilst researcher asks about items selected.
Print photograph of model and annotate where the young person gave labels, descriptions and reasons.
Researcher asks nine questions.

With the permission of participants (and parents) given, all the interviews were audio taped. According to Rapley (2007) recorded interviews provide a more detailed account of the interview. This allowed the researcher to listen intensively and interact with the young people during the interview. The audio tapes were supplemented by brief notes made during the model making session, and additionally, the two models were photographed and annotated by the young person, by providing labels, descriptions and reasons. I ensured the participants were happy with the final annotations. Each participant got to keep a photograph of both models, as Minkes et al. (1994) and Booth and Booth (2003) both suggest that participants have the right to own their contribution, and to share it.

Participants who took part received a letter thanking them for participating and explaining they will receive a summary of the key, general findings from the study. This was in a child-friendly format, following Mencap's (2002) accessible language principles with visuals (see appendix 4). Feedback on the study

findings as a whole (not individual), will be given to participants and parents/carers in written format, following two open sessions at the school, already carried out.

5.7 Participants

Eight participants (four boys/four girls), took part. At the time of interview all participants were aged thirteen to fourteen and had been attending the nurture group together, for two, half days a week, over one term (twelve weeks). All eight participants had learning difficulties with four, also having a diagnosis of autism. Their first language was English and they were predominantly of Caucasian heritage as shown in Table 8, below.

Table 8. Demographic data of the participants.

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Cultural Heritage	First Language	Diagnosis
Poppy	13	Female	Asian	English	MLD
Aston	14	Male	Caucasian	English	MLD, Autism
Clive	14	Male	Caucasian	English	MLD, Autism
Brian	13	Male	Caucasian	English	MLD, Autism
Helen	13	Female	Afro-Caribbean	English	MLD
Natalie	14	Female	Caucasian	English	MLD
Chyanne	14	Female	Caucasian	English	MLD
Leo	13	Male	Caucasian	English	MLD, Autism, Pathological Demand Avoidance

5.7.1 Introducing my participants

Poppy is a bubbly, chatty young person who joined the school in the year before. She has two close friends in school (not in the research group) and states she thoroughly enjoys being at the school. She enjoys cooking and learning about

languages as she likes holidays in the sun. She was very keen to join my research group and worked really hard to share her views.

Aston is an energetic young person who loves football and planes. He joined the school three years ago and benefited from the visual timeline, and enjoyed ticking off each step as we went through them all. He took his time to think carefully about what he liked at school but stated playtime was his favourite thing. He was thrilled to be able to listen to his favourite song on repeat during our break time.

Clive is a calm, deep thinking young person who enjoyed the creative aspect of the model-making session. He joined the school two years ago and used his sense of humour throughout and made his dislike of reading very clear. He was particularly proud of his models.

Brian is a happy, friendly young person who enjoys time on his IPad and trains. He joined the school four years ago and was happy to share his ideas with me, particularly enjoyed making his non-ideal classroom model, making it his preferred model of the two.

Helen is a bubbly, gentle young person who is good friends with Chyanne and Natalie. She joined the school four years ago and expressed her wish for “girly” things in her classroom. She loved designing her arts and crafts areas in her ideal classroom model.

Chyanne is a happy, approachable young person who joined the school a year ago. She was happy to share her view on life in school and noted how she had been bullied in her mainstream school so this featured in her non-ideal classroom. She shared with me how happy she is in this school with two good friends: Helen and Natalie.

Leo is an enthusiastic, keen LEGO fan who was delighted to take part in the study. He joined the school three years ago and spent considerable time creating both his models, going into great detail about each part. He was most proud of his ideal classroom model so happily took a photo of this away with him.

5.8 Key Ethical Considerations

A pertinent issue in regards to this research was that the interview sample comprised, in the main, vulnerable young people. I 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 British Psychology Society (BPS, 2010), the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) and the University of Birmingham's ethical guidelines (See Appendix 9 for more detail).

Key ethical considerations included ensuring informed consent, addressing possible power balances in interviews and the raising of emotive issues. A summary of Key Ethical Considerations is presented in Table 9, below.

Table 9. Key Ethical Considerations	
Ethical Consideration	**Action taken**
Informed Consent Rapley (2007) explains that people should be aware they are taking part in research, know what it is for, and consent to taking part, whilst Cameron and Murphy (2002) highlight the importance of accessible versions of consent forms for people with learning difficulties and that they may need more time to process the content of these, and in turn, give consent.	• All parents of the pupils and the pupils themselves were approached to participate in the research, with an information sheet and consent form (see Appendix 5/6). • The purpose of the research was explained to all participants, as were the research processes and what the information would be used for. This involved a familiar member of staff going through the information sheet consent form on an individual basis, at a pace appropriate to the pupil. Both these forms used Mencap's (2002) accessible language principles whilst confirming participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any point without needing to provide a reason (see Appendix 7/8). All eight nurture group students gave their consent in this manner but as there was a delay between gaining consent and the data collection phase, this was repeated on the day of the interview (with all eight pupils confirming consent and participation).
Power imbalances in interviews Power imbalances may influence what is shared during an interview. The interviewee may consciously or subconsciously share what they believe the interviewer wants to hear (Kvale, 2007).	• To combat power imbalances, I followed advice from Eder and Fingerson (2002) by trying to ensure participants realised I was not searching for a 'right answer'. • Taking on board guidance from Kvale (2007), age appropriate questions were used but I often followed the young person's line of conversation, particularly during the model-making session. Moreover, because the young people understood the research aim, gained through the process of acquiring informed consent, threats to credibility were reduced.
Raising emotive issues. It is possible that through discussing classroom life the participants may become distressed.	• Participants had a visual stop sign they could use if they felt it was becoming distressing for them (see appendix 2). • In addition the school has a designated member of staff (Deputy Head Teacher) who will be informed of any sensitive issues that have arisen so as to provide ongoing support. This process was explained to the participants as part of the Introduction (see appendix 2).

5.9 Data analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was used on the transcribed interviews as it provides an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data devoid of any epistemological position (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p77). Additionally, it is commonly used in research with people with learning difficulties (Bond and Hurst, 2010; Brown and Guvenir, 2008).

However, Robson (2011) highlights the challenges in analysing qualitative data with interpretation led by the researcher. To attempt to address this, I checked my interpretations with the participants at three main points: the model-making stage, annotation stage (where the young person gave labels/descriptions and reasons) and at the point of answering each of the nine questions for both models.

Braun and Clarke (2006) claim thematic analysis provides rich, complex and detailed insights into the data for 'identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes)'. The process of analysing the data involved four stages which are identified below, in figure 1.

Figure 1. Analysis of Data Process

Ideal Classroom data

	Whole Group	**Individual**
1)	Coded and themed the model-making session transcripts (NVivo)(See Figure 2) ⇨	Isolated themes per individual. (NVivo)
2)	Coded and themed the transcripts of the 9 questions answered by each participant (NVivo) (See Figure 3, 4) ⇨	Isolated themes per individual. (NVivo/by hand)
3)	Merged (1) and (2) for overall themes (NVivo/by hand) (See Figure 5)	Merged (1) and (2) for overall themes (NVivo/by hand) Summary of annotated photograph of model.

This process was repeated for the **Non-Ideal Classroom** data.

For the purposes of the current study, inductive analysis was carried out following the six stages identified by Braun and Clarke (2006). This included familiarising myself with the data, through reading and re-reading the transcripts, with initial ideas generated. This was followed by generating codes through examination of quotes and re-reading cross-checking for any further or wrongly identified codes (See Figures 2-4). This part of the process was carried out systematically, using a computer software package, called QSR NUD*IST Vivo (NVivo) which allows for the management and analysis of data. It allows for the coding of data into nodes, whilst still providing opportunities for editing and the creation of charts, graphs (See Figure 4) and word clouds (Richards, 1999). NVivo supports two types of coding nodes, free and tree nodes (Yearworth and White, 2013). Free nodes were used in this study, in the early latent coding stage to develop categories without initial thought to their relationships. However, during the

process of coding it became possible to link categories together i.e. categories and sub-categories and relationships start to become evident

Themes were generated at the latent level (Braun and Clarke, 2006), followed by identifying how the codes (nodes) could be allocated to themes, which was done by hand (see Figure 5). These were then checked (quotes and data sets) to generate thematic maps for each code (node). These were further refined and amended with a final cross check against the research questions. A second coder (Trainee Educational Psychologist) was used to ensure fidelity by reducing possible researcher bias. The themes were reviewed, and merged where appropriate, with a change of name to reflect the essence of the data included, and a report written up with vivid quotes (see chapter six).

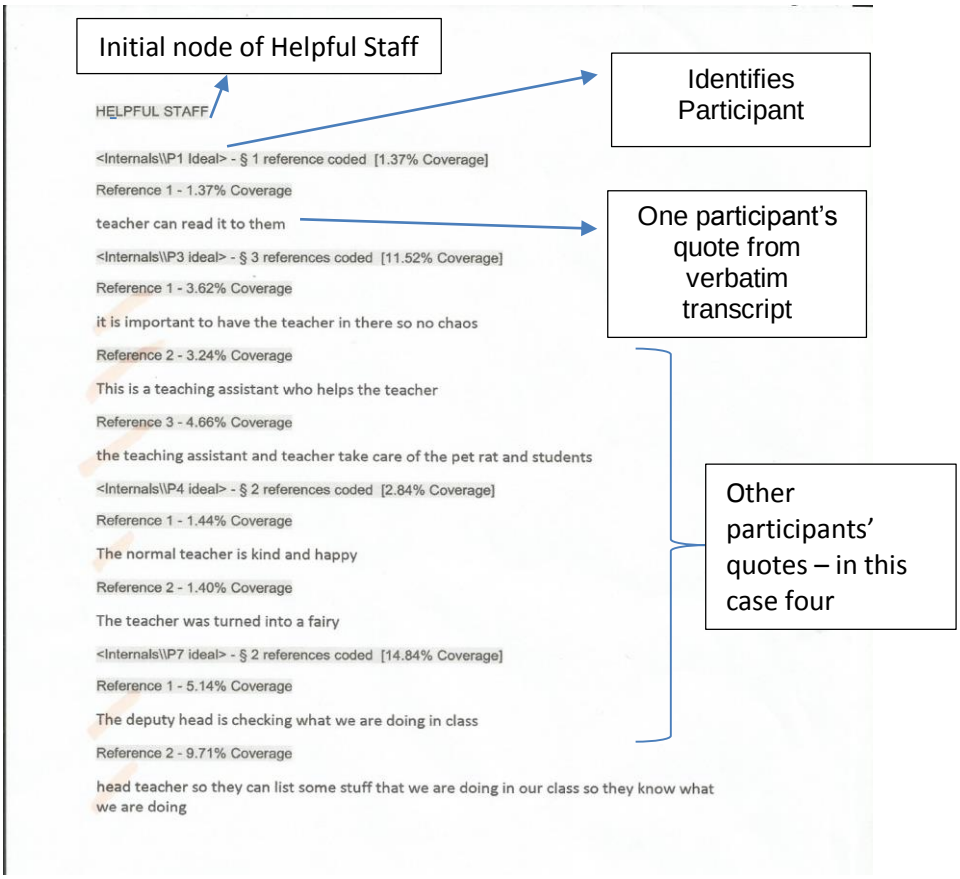

Figure 2. QSR NVivo 10: Verbatim quotes identified for Ideal Classroom: Helpful Staff node (code)

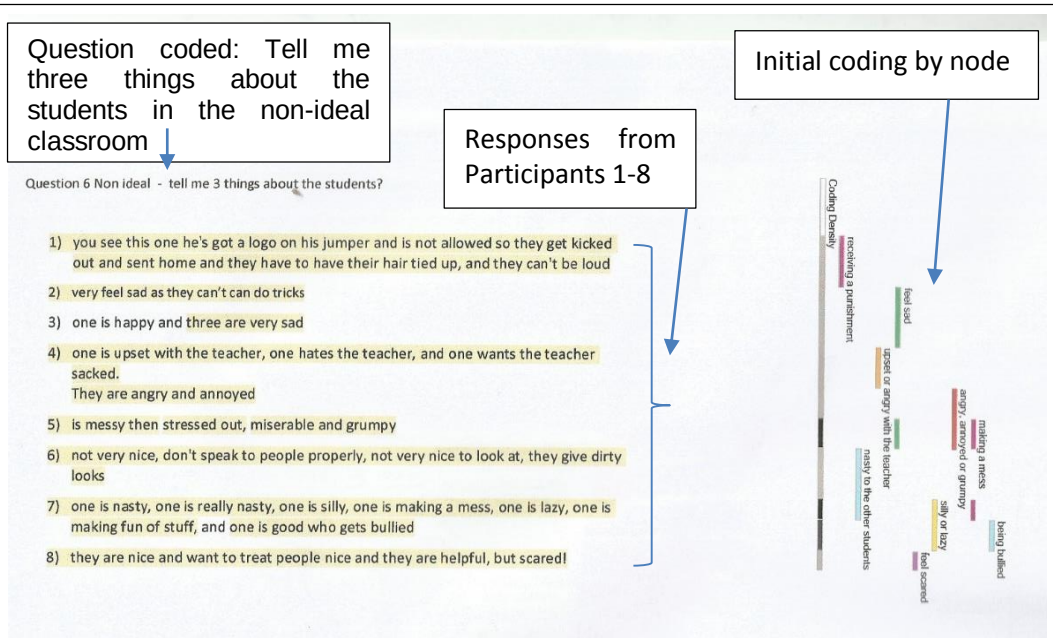

Figure 3. QSR NVivo 10: Verbatim quotes for Question 6, Non-Ideal Classroom, "Tell me three things about the students" showing nodes (codes). (NB: some colours not visible).

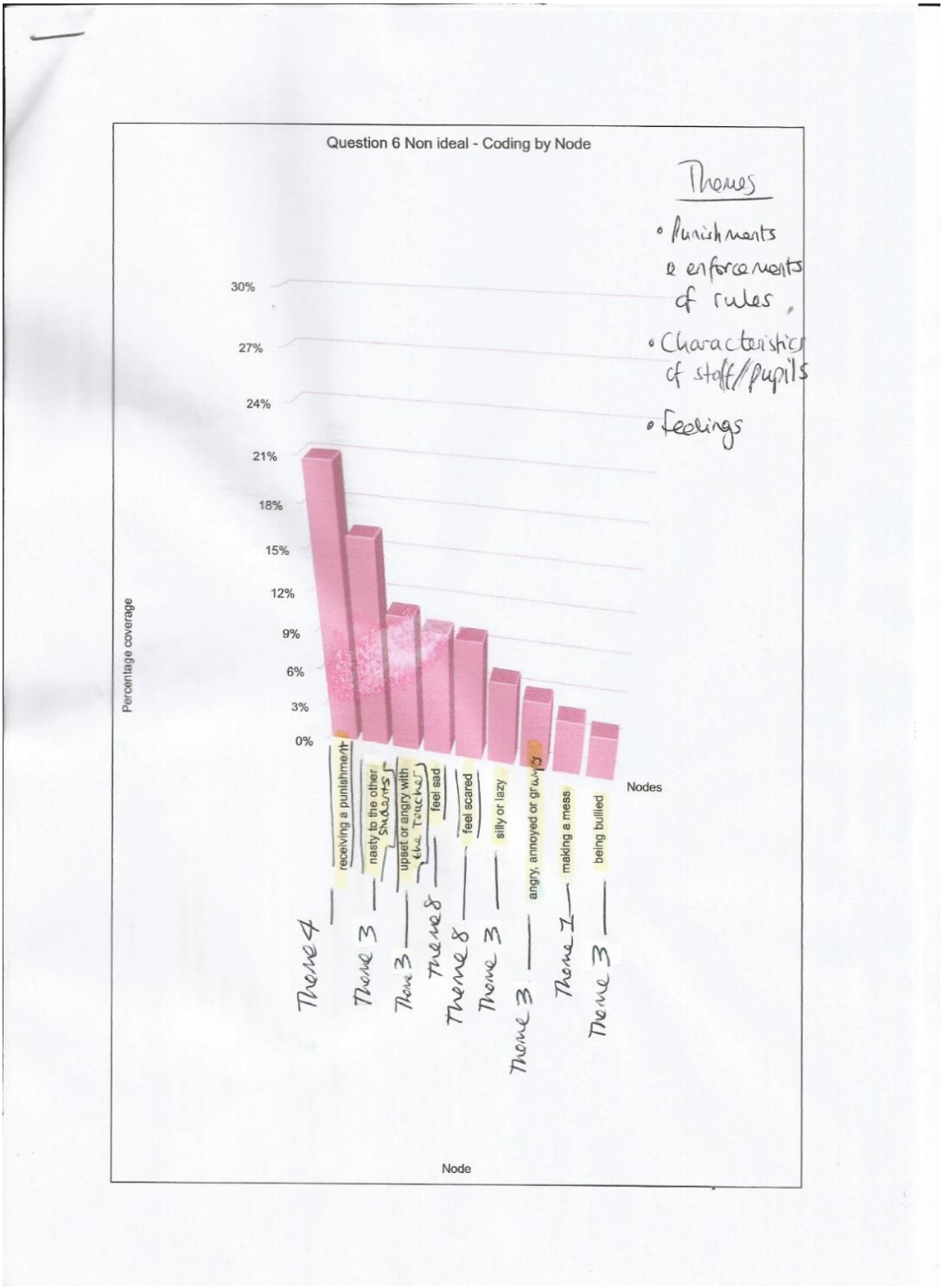

Figure 4. QSR NVivo 10: Bar Graph showing most frequently occurring nodes for Question 6 Non-Ideal Classroom, "Tell me three things about the students" – additionally showing corresponding themes and three most frequent themes identified (by hand). (Themes were generated by hand looking at all data for Non-ideal classroom, see Figure 5).

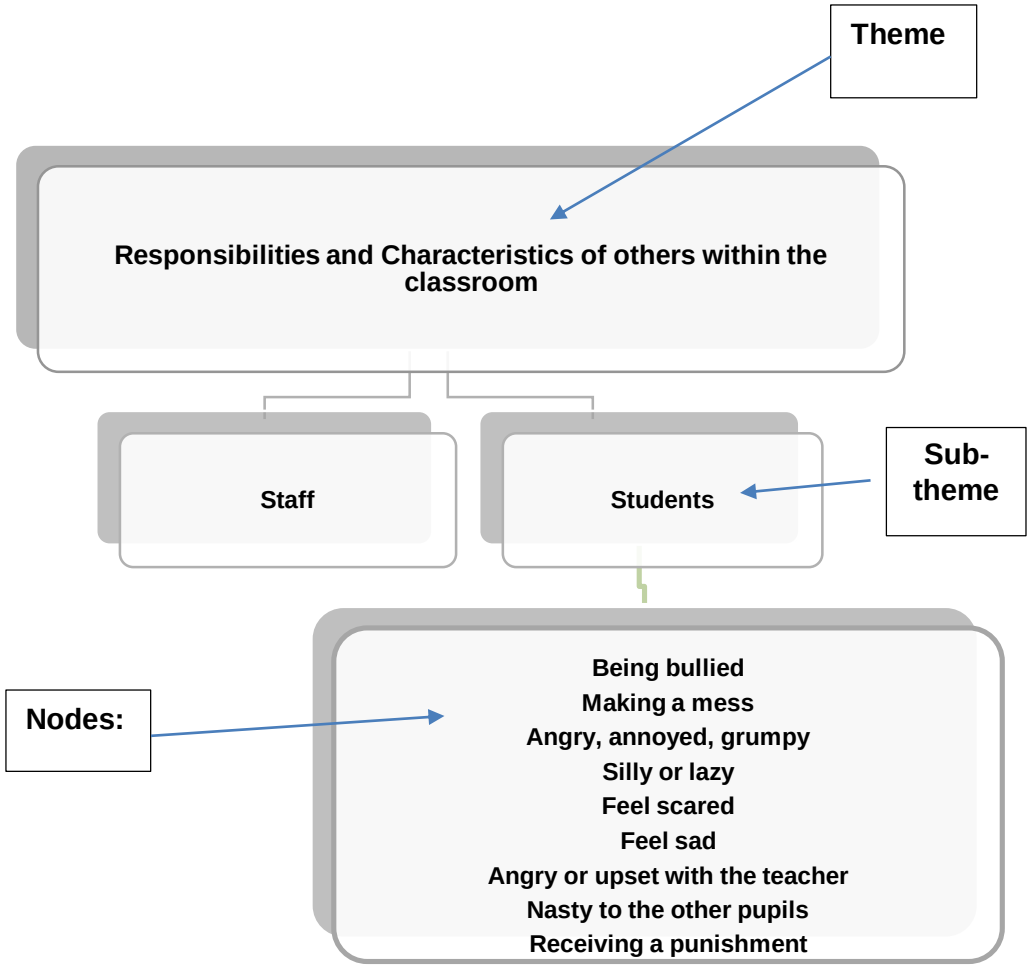

Figure 5. Hand coding of nodes for Theme: Responsibilities and Characteristics of others within the classroom

(Themes were generated by hand looking at all data for Non-ideal classroom)

5.10 Chapter summary

This chapter identified the methodology and design of the current study. It highlighted the social constructivist epistemological positioning of the study and gave a rationale for the choices made, which have influenced the course of the research. This included the use of a PCP methodological approach and its methods, along with the case study design. An overview of the ethical considerations was identified along with all the precautions taken to reduce possible distress for my participants. The procedure and model-making methods

were detailed along with a summary of the data analysis approach and limits to validity and reliability for the study.

The proceeding chapter reports of the research results along with a discussion of the themes identified through analysis, with reference to the research questions, highlighted by participant quotes.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

6.0 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter presents the results from the data collection stage of the study and discusses these in relation to the extant literature detailed in Chapters Two to Four, and how the study offers an original contribution to the field.

The contents of the chapter are presented in light of the three research questions, which were:

1. What are the key themes of an ideal classroom construct for young people attending a nurture group?
2. What are the key themes of a non-ideal classroom construct for young people attending a nurture group?
3. Does the nurture group model of schooling reflect the ideal classroom construct of those attending it?

These research questions are answered with a series of data sets as described below.

6.1 Data

The data used to answer the three research questions consisted of a combination of themes from the interview transcripts and the nine questions asked of each participant, along with annotated photographs of the models, as presented in Table 9 below.

Table 9. Results for each research question

Research Question and number		Results Format	Section
1	What are the key themes of an ideal classroom construct for young people attending a nurture group?	Themes with supporting quotes	6.3
2	What are the key themes of a non- ideal classroom construct for young people attending a nurture group?	Themes with supporting quotes	6.4
1/2	Participants models – individual case studies	Illustrations with summary.	6.5
3	Does the nurture group model of schooling reflect the ideal classroom perception of those attending it?	ideal classroom themes compared to Nurture group Characteristics (adapted from Cooper et al., 2001)	6.6

6.2 Themes

A total of eleven overarching themes emerged: six for the ideal classroom and five for the non-ideal classroom. In order to answer research questions one and two, I will firstly, present the themes for each, using a thematic map, showing both overarching and sub-themes and then highlight these with verbatim quotes from

the interviews (using pseudonyms for participants, with any identifying references changed in order to maintain anonymity).

6.3 Research Question 1:

What are the key themes of an ideal classroom construct for young people attending a nurture group?

The purpose of this question was to explore what the participants would want in their ideal classroom. Within the extant literature, several studies have identified positive aspects of existing mainstream nurture groups, special schools, and preferences for ideal schools in mainstream settings for students with special educational needs. This study carried out research with students from a nurture group, set within a special school and is therefore original.

A total of six overarching themes emerged for the ideal classroom, as presented in Diagram 1, which shows a thematic map, identifying both overarching and sub-themes. Diagram 2 shows a word cloud of the most frequently cited words for the ideal classroom. Themes are discussed with relevance to the extant literature detailed in Chapters Two to Four with verbatim quotes highlighted from the interviews.

Diagram1. Key themes of an ideal classroom construct for young people attending a nurture group.

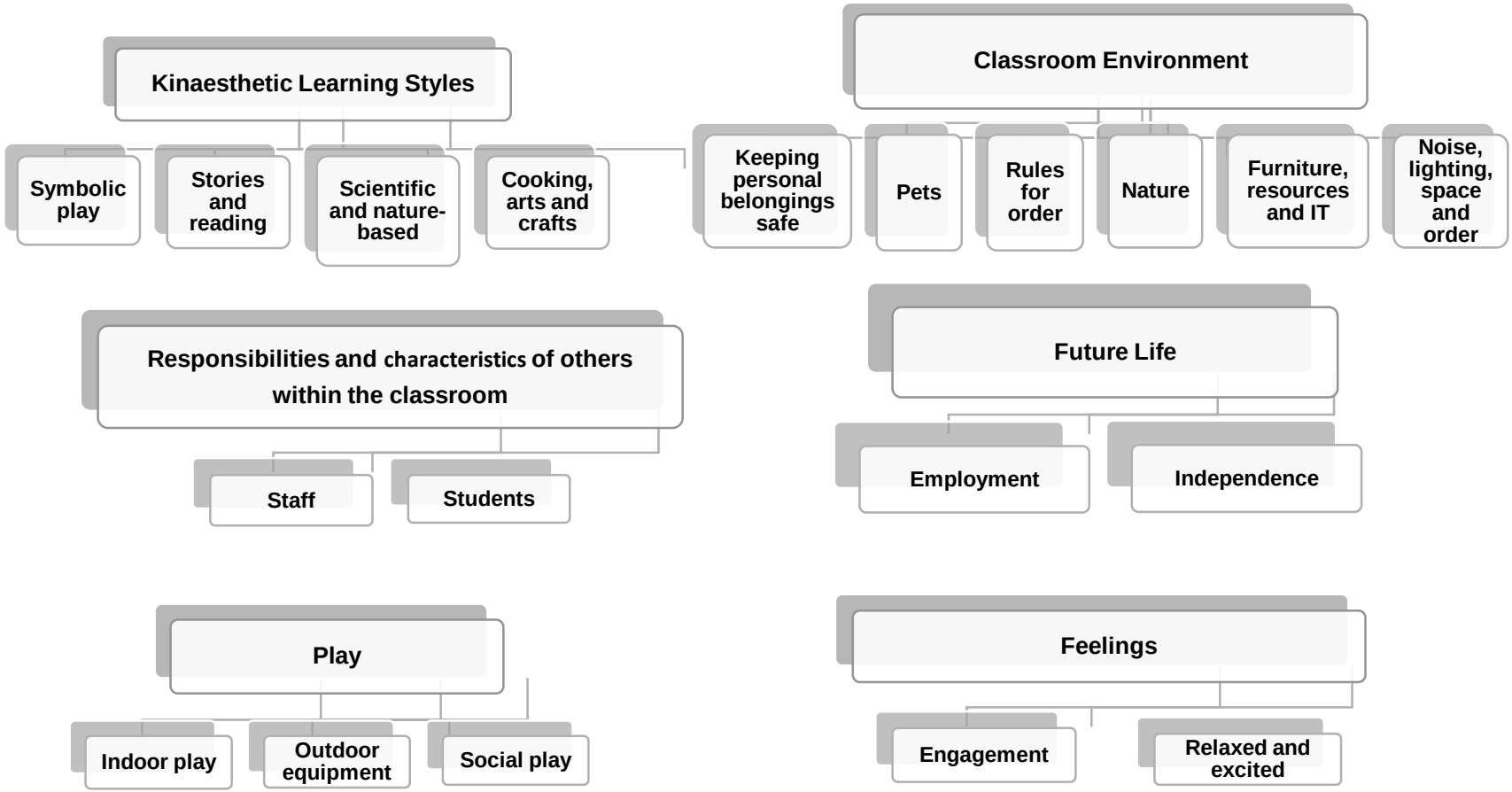

Diagram 2. Word cloud of most frequently cited words for ideal classroom.

As shown in Diagram 2, thematic analysis of the findings from this study highlight the young people wanted, amongst other features: pets and a range of kinaesthetic learning activities, including symbolic play, cooking, and arts and crafts.

6.3.1 Theme 1: Kinaesthetic Learning Styles

This was the most frequently occurring theme, with reference to this evident in seven of the eight model-making transcripts. Within this, the sub-themes of Symbolic play, Stories and Reading, Cooking, arts and crafts, Science and Nature based learning opportunities emerged. This reflects the classic nurture group approach of providing a limited and manageable range of activities during which pupils learn to play and co-operate together (Colley, 2009). The participants identified that their ideal classroom would have a range of symbolic play equipment including items for dressing up and tea parties. This was clearly stated by Helen: we need arts and crafts for free time, and Poppy, “Because kids like to play dress up, and they can have tea parties…can do their hair”. A further four participants from my study expressed a preference for their ideal classroom to have a range of scientific and nature-based learning

opportunities, with Brian stating: “There is the skeleton for learning about our bodies and an owl for learning about birds” whilst Leo expressed a desire for: “…a planet to teach about planets and a spanner for fixing things”. This represents a need for a type of play considered more appropriate for a younger child, but one that is not discouraged within nurture groups, as Boxall’s (2002) nurture group model encourages children’s needs to be met from their social and emotional developmental stage, not chronological age (Cooke et al., 2008). This finding reflects several nurture group studies (Cooper et al., 2001; Pintilei, 2009; Syrnyk, 2014) which report both primary and secondary-aged, nurture group members enjoy having opportunities for free-play and fun, diverse activities, including those centred around food and toy play.

Five of the participants from my study identified that their ideal classroom would have a range of cooking and art/craft activities, including Aston: “I would have an oven in my classroom, so we can cook our food”. This directly reflects Boxall’s (2002) nurture group model of schooling where food is prepared and eaten together and was highlighted by Cooper et al. (2001) as a positive feature of their participants’ experiences of nurture groups.

Finally, four of the participants from my study identified a preference for a range of stories and reading activities. This was most clearly stated by Poppy: “Because they might get bored and want to have a story read to them or if they can't read”. This represents an understanding that, for some students, reading may be difficult and so they may need help, whilst other students may need support at unstructured times when they get bored. This element of structure and routine is a key feature of Boxall’s

(2002) nurture group approach, with this level of routine highlighted by Cooper et al. (2001) as a positive feature for his nurture group participants.

6.3.2 Theme 2: Classroom environment

This theme was evident in all eight model-making transcripts. Within this, the sub-themes of Noise, lighting, space and order, Rules for order, Nature, Pets, Furniture and resources, including IT and keeping personal belongings safe, emerged.

Lighting and space were particularly important to two participants; Brian: “There are controls to make it day or night which the students like” and Helen: “Space is important… there is a nice big working area as we always need more space to spread out with our laptops”. Space was also particularly important to the participants of Syrnyk (2014) and Williams and Hanke’s (2007) studies, with their participants expressing a wish for more space. This may represent a need for a greater amount of personal space for young people with learning difficulties, and/or autism so that they do not feel overwhelmed with sensory input from their immediate environment, and may reflect that children with autism do not always associate and integrate sensory modalities, making it difficult for them to process sensory input (Hermelin and O’Connor, 1970).

One further participant, Chyanne also expressed a wish for a quiet classroom: “…it's nice and quiet in this classroom …my favourite thing is everybody is quiet”. This supports the findings of several studies (Cooper et al., 2001; Kourmoulaki, 2013; Griffiths et al., 2014; and Syrnyk, 2014) which identified the quiet and calm atmosphere of nurture group classrooms as a positive feature.

The participants of my study identified that their ideal classroom would have rules to keep order in place, with several providing very clear examples. Clive focused on managing discussions and peer relations: "…hands up so the teacher knows who wants to speak to them so doesn't get mixed up and no fighting - if you fight you have no friends", whilst Helen was concerned with peers taking turns: "Take turns when using equipment and stuff". These reflect the findings of Cooper et al. (2001) who found their participants referred to the order and predictability of the nurture group routine positively.

Further to this, four participants of my study identified the desire for a facility to keep their personal belongings safe. This included Aston and Natalie who both wanted a safe place to keep their belongings. Natalie stated: "they can have their own drawer to keep their things safely inside" whilst Aston expressed a wish for: "…a locker in my classroom for keeping my things in". Another participant, Leo just wanted a place to keep his money safe: "It was a key for the cupboard where our money is kept safe". This is an original finding and may represent a need for ownership of items to give a sense of security and safety in their secure base. Similar findings were reported by Pintilei (2009) and Kourmoulaki (2013) who found themes of having a safe base and safety/belonging, respectively.

Natural elements were also important features of the ideal classroom for four of the participants from my study. Natalie and Chyanne explained: "Students have planted some trees and take care of them…there are flowers outside for the children to enjoy when they go outside which they can do anytime" (Natalie) and "The plant is to decorate the room, to help them feel relaxed" (Chyanne). This reflects Williams and

Hanke's (2007) study which found their participants wanted a well maintained green school with access to natural light and may indicate a need for some young people with learning difficulties and/or autism to take time away from their classrooms in a more natural environment, perhaps with less sensory stimulus.

An original finding of my study is the desire to have classroom pets. This was particularly important to five of my participants, including; Brian: "there is a dog in the classroom who we can stroke anytime", Natalie: "Animals like a fish that doesn't disturb the lesson. It's nice to have the fish", and Clive: "This is a class pet, a pet rat, and there is a frog in the cabinet and is alive, and is for playing with". This is an interesting finding as the school that the participants attended had introduced weekly dog therapy sessions, so the inclusion of pets, particularly dogs that they can stroke and enjoy anytime is very positive as it reflects the dog therapy approach.

Finally, five of the participants from my study identified that their ideal classroom would have a range of furniture, with Poppy keen to include a big massage chair. Whilst others were more interested in IT equipment, with three participants stating there would be enough computers and laptops for each student. Brian clearly stated this: "The students have laptops, one for each kid, so they can work and play on games" whilst Helen and Natalie both wanted to use IT in their free time: "The iPad is for free time, because now we just chat" (Helen) and "The TV is good for watching TV on, at free time" (Natalie). This may reflect a need for more structured activities during free time and again, ownership of resources within the nurture group. It may also present a desire for not having to wait for a turn on a piece of equipment, which perhaps, may

be difficult for young people with learning difficulties and/or autism. This appears to have not been noted in previous studies so may represent a gap in the literature.

6.3.3 Theme 3: Responsibilities and characteristics of others within the classroom

The participants from my study identified that the others in their ideal classrooms would have particular types of responsibilities and characteristics. Within this, the sub-themes of staff and students emerged.

The responsibilities of the staff in the participants' ideal classrooms was of importance. Two participants, Helen and Clive described clear defining roles for the adults in their classrooms; Helen: "It is important to have the teacher in there, so no chaos" and Clive: "the teacher is nice… and the teaching assistant is busy looking after animals as she puts everyone first because she is nice". Similarly, Brian and Chyanne both expressed what they needed from their classroom staff: "One is happy, but one is angry with the children being naughty so gives a warning card first which is important as it is fair. If they don't listen she tells them off or sends them outside" (Brian) and "The Head Teacher can list some stuff that we are doing in our class so they know what we are doing" (Chyanne). These support findings by several studies including those by Lewis (1995), Williams and Hanke (2007) and Syrnyk (2014) whose participants expressed a need for organised, supportive and kind staff and reflect Boxall's (2002) nurture group model, where the adults and pupils develop an interactive, secure and interesting relationship (Bennathan, 1997; Cooper, 2007).

In terms of the characteristics of fellow students in the participants' ideal classrooms, thematic analysis identified a preference for those who are trustworthy: "It's important

to trust your friends, because if they have a problem they can talk about it" (Chyanne) and "those who are: friendly, taking turns, saying nice things to each other so that they don't get angry" (Helen). Clive also identified particular responsibilities his fellow students would carry out: "They are watering plants, taking care of the pet frog, brushing and helping to keep the classroom clean". This may suggest that peer relationships are important to the participants of my study and that team work, combined with joint responsibilities may be a beneficial to the smooth running or a nurture group. This supports research by Pintilei (2009), Griffiths et al. (2014) and Maxwell (2006) whose participants reported rewarding peer relationships as a positive feature of their nurture group or special school.

6.3.4 Theme 4: Future Life

An original finding of my study is the focus that seven of the eight participants placed on their future life, especially on independence and employment. This was the most frequent theme in response to the question, what are the most important things in this ideal classroom?

The participants identified that their ideal classroom would provide a range of opportunities to support their future employment and is highlighted by Helen stating "It's important to have the nail salon as I want to do that as a job" and Natalie identifying: "there are real babies in the classroom which we take care of so that when we grow up we can get a job taking care of babies". Clive and Leo also identified this as an important element of their ideal classroom; "The student is watering the plants, as he wants to do this for a job in the future" (Clive) and "There is an oven for students to do cooking on which is important as they want to do this work when old" (Leo). This

theme may be more prevalent for the participants of my study than others, as they were all aged slightly older (thirteen to fourteen years) than most previous research participants, and additionally, their school had vocational learning opportunities on-site such as carpentry, beauty and horticulture which may have influenced their ideal classroom choices.

To add to this, the participants from my study identified that their ideal classroom would include a focus on supporting them to become more independent: The most important things are either the learning or the cooking. “Cooking is important because when you get older and you buy a house you need to know how to cook” (Poppy) and “Languages so if you go to different countries you know how to speak to the people” (Chyanne). Leo and Brian however, were keen to establish independence through learning to drive; “This thing teaches us how to drive so when we grow up we can drive” (Leo) and “They can pretend they are driving a car so that when they grow up and drive a car they don't crash!” (Brian).

6.3.5 Theme 5: Play

Seven participants from my study identified their ideal classroom would provide a range of opportunities for all types of play. Within this, the sub-themes of indoor play, outside play with equipment and social play emerged.

In response to the question, “what happens at playtime for the students of this ideal classroom?” the participants responses focused on indoor play, outdoor play with equipment and opportunities for social play. This included responses by Poppy: “If stuck inside because it's raining you can complete the stuff in the classroom” and Leo: “They can go on the computers, practice their driving on the simulator”. Should outdoor

play be possible, Natalie and Helen identified key features; “They are playing on the swings, trampoline and in the swimming pool” (Natalie) and “They might want to stay outside as there is more stuff on the playground like a trampoline and swing” (Helen).

Social play was particularly important to both Aston: “Have their snack and play with friends” and Brian: “Sometimes they push each other over, but sometimes they play together as friends like good students”. These findings reflect Syrnyk’s (2014) study which also found outdoor play to be of importance. Play was included in this study as Jane Williams highlighted it as an area in need of further exploration, following her study (personal communication: 2013).

6.3.6 Theme 6: Feelings

The final theme to emerge was that of feelings with participants identifying how the ideal classroom would make them feel as students within it: The sub-themes of engagement and relaxed and happy emerged. Poppy identified that her ideal classroom would encourage her to engage in learning: “it is the kind of classroom where we don't get bored any time” whilst Chyanne stated: “There's lots of things to do and you have got everything in here”. The participants additionally identified that their ideal classroom would give them a particular set of feelings, aptly described by both Brian and Helen; “Shocked but in a good way, as we are excited, like to be in space, like Zero-G!” (Brian) and “Really happy, as fun stuff, excited!” (Helen).

6.4 Research Question 2:

What are the key themes of the non-ideal classroom construct for young people attending a nurture group?

The purpose of this question was to explore what the participants would expect to find in their non-ideal classroom. Within the extant literature, it appears only one study (Williams and Hanke, 2007) has identified negative aspects of existing mainstream schooling for young people with special educational needs (autism). This study carried out research with students from a nurture group, set within a special school, and is therefore original.

A total of five overarching themes emerged for the non-ideal classroom, as presented in Diagram 3, which shows a thematic map, identifying both overarching and sub-themes. Diagram 4 shows a word cloud of the most frequently cited words across the data set. Themes are discussed with relevance to the extant literature detailed in Chapters Two to Four, with verbatim quotes highlighted from the interviews.

Diagram 3. Key themes of the non-ideal classroom construct for young people attending a nurture group.

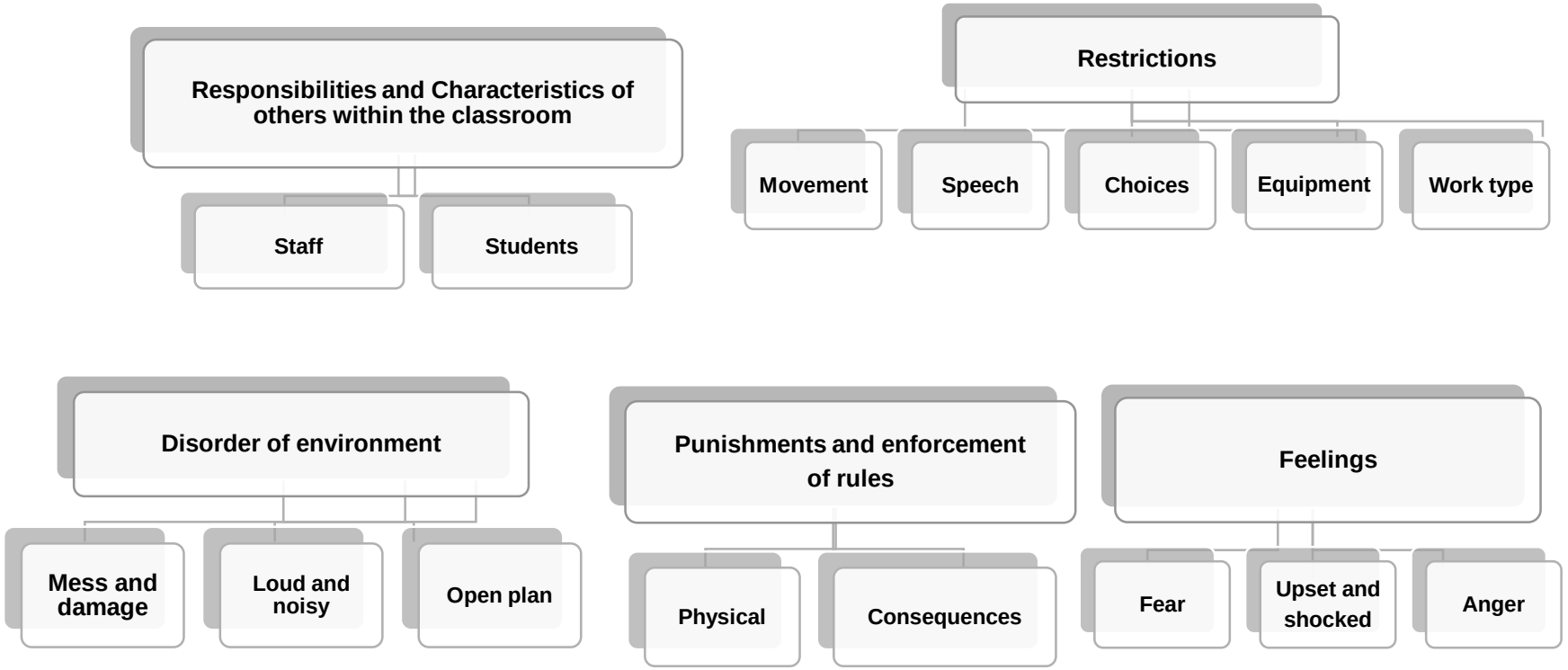

Diagram 4. Word cloud of most frequently cited words for the non-ideal classroom.

As shown in Diagram 4, thematic analysis of the findings from this study highlight the young people did not want, amongst other features: fearful items and pets or restrictions on resources, movement and choices.

6.4.1 Theme 1: Responsibilities and characteristics of others within the classroom

This theme was evident in six of the eight model-making transcripts and includes the sub-themes of staff and students. The participants identified that the staff and students of the non-ideal classroom would have particular types of responsibilities and characteristics.

Within their non-ideal classrooms the participants of my study identified that the staff would primarily be there to provide punishments and enforce any rules, and was the main theme in response to the question, what are the most important

things in this non-ideal classroom? This was stated by Clive: “The teacher is really mean and tells you to read your story books all the time and likes to be far away from the students” and Poppy: “They’re strict and they can say what they like to the children, they're always negative not positive”. This supports findings by Williams and Hanke (2007) whose participants felt their non-ideal school teachers would describe the pupils as awful and boring and does not reflect Boxall’s (2002) nurture group approach which encourages positive, supportive relationships with staff (Colley, 2009).

The participants identified that the students of their non-ideal classroom would have particular types of characteristics, such as “One student is bullying the lad…One is nasty, one is really nasty, one is silly, one is making a mess, one is lazy, one is making fun of stuff, and one is good who gets bullied” (Chyanne) and “Not very nice, don't speak to people properly, not very nice to look at, they give dirty looks” (Natalie). The characteristics described here by my participants support those identified by Williams and Hanke’s (2007) study that found bullying a feature of their participants’ non-ideal schools.

6.4.2 Theme 2: Restrictions

Six participants from my study identified their non-ideal classroom would include a range of restrictions. Within this theme, the sub-themes of work type, equipment, and movement and speech emerged. The participants identified very different approaches to learning in their non-ideal classrooms, with restrictions on the choice, and type of work provided, for example, Clive stated: “students are

just reading quietly, they are only allowed to read and do their work, and there are more books in the cabinet!," whilst Brian stated: "The students are forced to cook for the parents and teachers". This may indicate that more structured forms, non-kinaesthetic styles of learning may not suit all students, and may present an original finding as no other studies appear to have reported on this aspect of unwanted classroom life.

The participants also identified that they would experience restrictions on the volume and type of equipment made available to them, as highlighted by Leo: "There are no drawers for keeping your stuff safe so the students don't like it. The students are only allowed a very small piece of bread each" and Poppy: "There is only one book for reading time. There is only a laptop for the teacher and the children want to go on the laptop". Furthermore, the participants' non-ideal classrooms featured additional restrictions on movement and speech, with two participants stating: "The students are not allowed to talk. If the students don't sit down and keep looking at each other and talking to each other they get sent to the dungeon" (Leo) and "If they finish their water in their bottle then they are not allowed to get up to get any more water...they have to keep the bottle of drink on the desk and if they finish they have to wait until the next lesson to refill it" (Poppy). The theme of restrictions on movement and speech was most prominent in response to the question, "what happens at playtime for the students of this non-ideal classroom?" with responses given by; Poppy: "They are still learning at playtime, still sitting at their desks" and Aston: "They have a snack but they have

to stay inside, not outside" and may present an original finding as previous studies appear not to have identified this element of unwanted school life.

6.4.3 Theme 3: Disorder of environment

Four participants from my study identified their non-ideal classroom would include a wide range of disordered environments, including damage, noise and open plan classrooms. This overarching theme includes sub-themes of mess and damage, loud and noisy and open plan classrooms.

Three participants from my study identified that their non-ideal classroom would include a level of mess and damage, with Chyanne vividly stating: "The naughty girl has kicked the ball with all the salad in, onto the floor and now she's lying down on the pizza oven. These computers are being kicked off the desk…the new student then joins in and pushes the board over and then pushes the plant over too". Brian and Helen also identified disorder as a feature of their non-ideal classrooms; "One student took a drawer out and threw it because they were angry and upset" (Brian) and "it's all about what they have done, the ice cream machine is destroyed and the classroom and work area too" (Helen). This is in contrast to Cooper et al. (2001) findings of the quietness and calmness their participants enjoyed within their nurture group classrooms.

Additionally open plan and noisy classrooms featured in Poppy, Helen and Chyanne's non-ideal classrooms; "This classroom is loud and noisy" (Chyanne); "it's too loud so it disturbs some people from working" (Helen) and "There's

another lesson going on the same time at the back of the room…as it's a shared classroom…it's too loud…so they get up and walk off" (Poppy). This may present an original finding as previous studies appear not to have highlighted these elements of a non-ideal classroom, although Williams and Hanke (2007) identified cramped environments as features of their participants' non-ideal schools.

6.4.4 Theme 4: Punishments and enforcements of rules

Six participants from my study identified their non-ideal classroom would include a range of punishments and the enforcement of rules. Within this theme, the sub-themes of physical and consequences emerged.

Leo identified that his non-ideal classroom would include the use of physical punishments: "The students get water hosed on them if they look at each other" whilst Poppy described one non-ideal classroom consequence: "there is a naughty corner and if the children get out of their chairs or look around they go to the naughty corner".

This was also evident in Clive's non-ideal classroom: "Read books or detention!" and is in contrast to Syrnyk's (2014) findings that show nurture group members want staff who are not being strict and Griffiths et al. (2014) findings of positive references to self-regulatory behaviour as a nurture group theme. Additionally, this finding is in contrast to Boxall's (2002) nurture group approach which encourages the development of a young person's own emotional regulation

through adult scaffolding and the use of therapeutic approaches to managing behaviour as opposed to coercive strategies (Cooper, 2007; Pintilei, 2009).

6.4.5 Theme 5: Feelings

Six participants from my study identified that their non-ideal classroom would generate a range of feelings including fear, upset/shocked and anger. Certain classroom events, according to Brian and Natalie would give rise to feelings of fear; “The students hide under the desks as the teacher is scary and the classroom makes the students want to run out” (Brian) and “…scary animals and nasty kids, there is a scary snake, cat, rat, dogs and spiders” (Natalie). Other participants shared that their non-ideal classroom would make them feel upset or shocked;” …shocked, and worried, because I don't want to get shouted at” (Poppy) and “It is messy so they can't do any work as they are shocked, then they get stressed out, miserable and grumpy” (Helen). Additionally, Aston, Brian and Natalie each described how their non-ideal classroom would make them feel angry; “I feel okay but when I have to do hard work I feel angry and I kick off” (Aston),” …one wants the teacher sacked, so they are angry and annoyed” (Brian) and “…some talk to me badly which makes me feel sad and angry” (Natalie). These findings support William and Hanke’s (2007) study that reported identical feelings expressed by their participants when asked to describe how they would feel in their non-ideal school. This is in contrast to the Boxall’s (2002) nurture group approach which aims to provide a secure base and a sense of achievement and self-worth by encouraging a young person’s social and emotional development (Colley, 2009). It is in contrast to studies by Maxwell

(2006) and Kourmoulaki (2013) who both found safety as a positive feature of their participants' nurture groups and Pintelli's (2009) core category of building and experiencing nurturing and rewarding relationships with nurture group staff and peers.

6.5 Participants models – individual case studies

In order to provide a richer picture of the participants constructs and quotes, annotated pictures of both their models are presented with summaries of each.

6.5.1 Poppy

Poppy's ideal classroom (Illustration 1) showed an emphasis on kinaesthetic learning styles, with symbolic and physical play prominent. The classroom allowed for the keeping of pets, whilst facilitating the learning of science and reading stories. She wanted her classroom to offer her a safe place to keep her belongings. In contrast, her non-ideal classroom (Illustration 2) is of open plan design, with desks in rows, which causes distress and distraction. It represented a restriction on speech and movement, with a lack of resources. There were strict rules, instilled by several punishments. Poppy's models are presented on the following two pages.

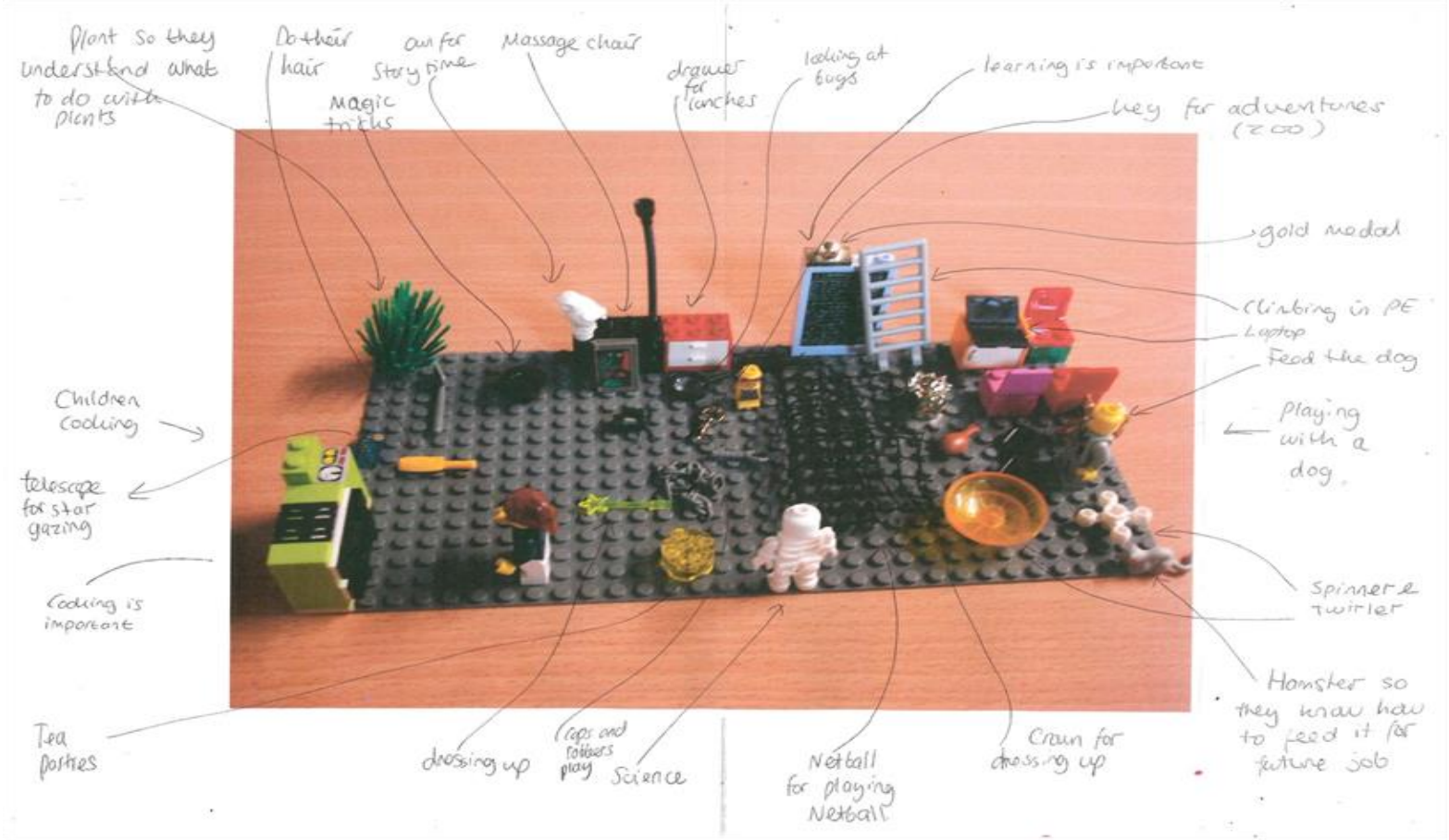

Illustration 1: Poppy's Ideal classroom

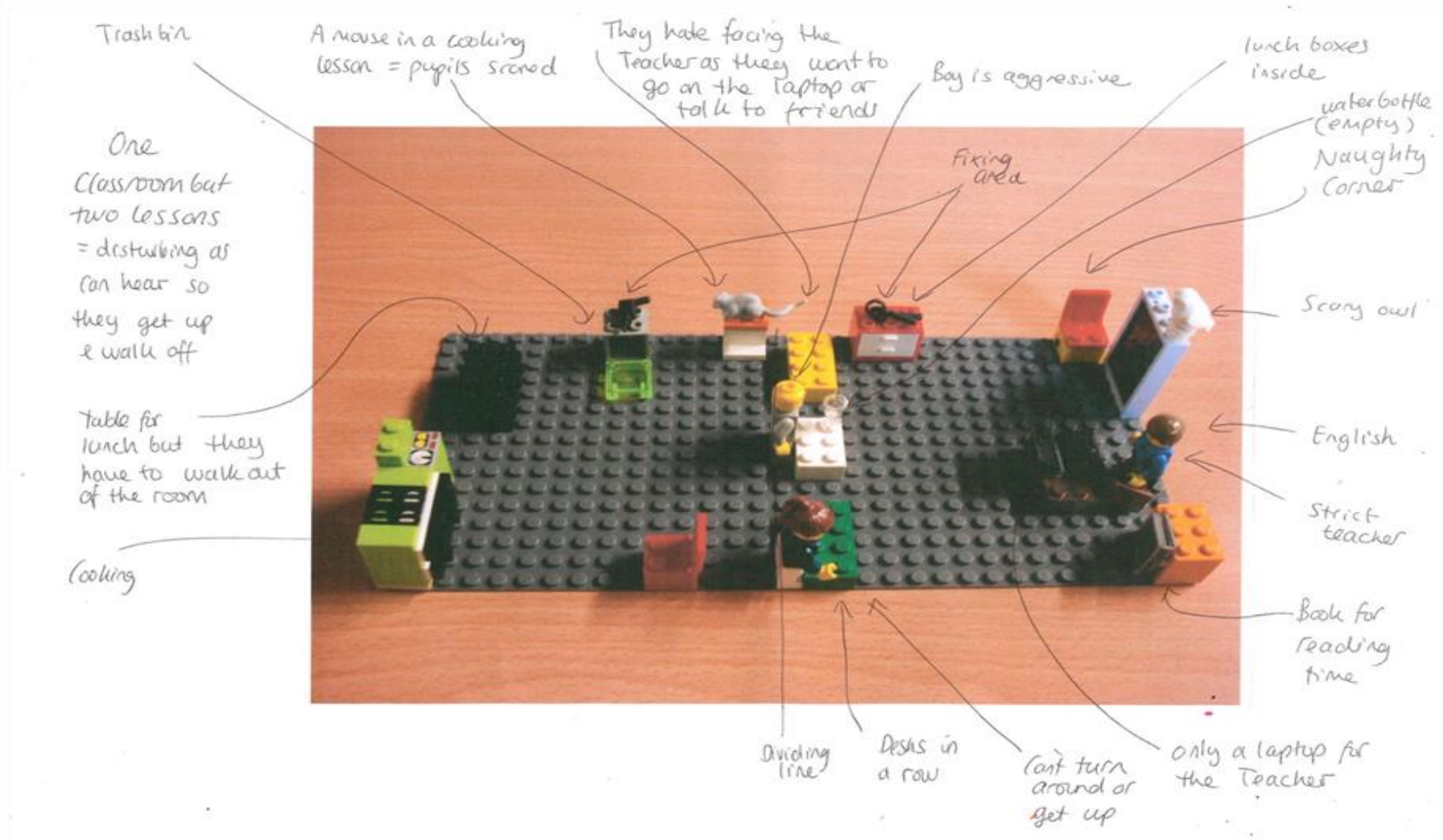

Illustration 2: Poppy's Non-ideal classroom

6.5.2 Aston

Aston's ideal classroom (Illustration 3) showed a preference for kinaesthetic learning and areas to keep his things safe. He included a box of toys and toy car. His love of food and music came through, with a music machine and plenty of snacks included. In contrast, his non-ideal classroom (Illustration 4) shows very little content, with a focus on restrictions as the students are all lined up, unable to move. The teacher is strict and makes the students fix things and clean up the classroom. Aston's models are presented on the following two pages.

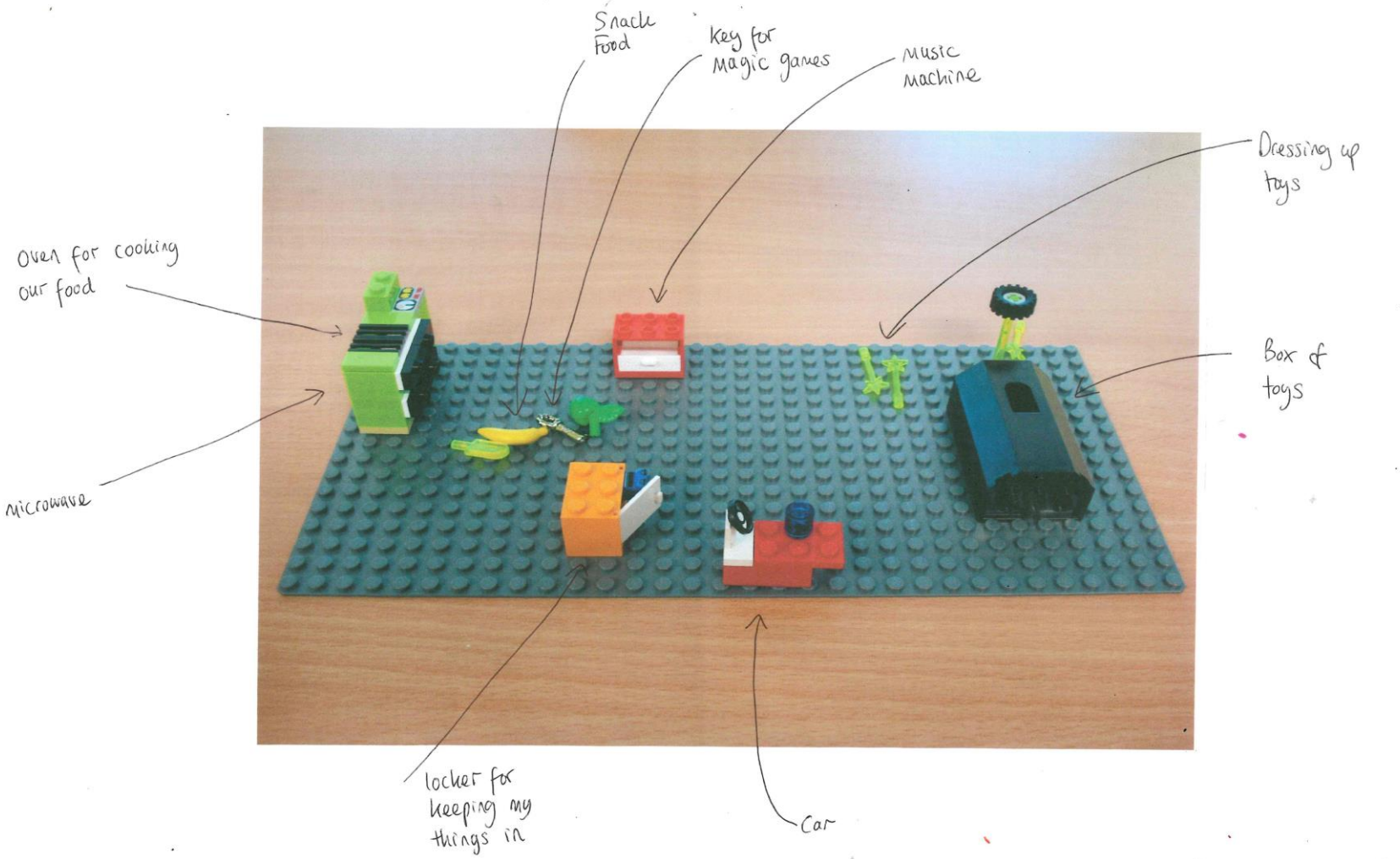

Illustration 3: Aston's Ideal classroom

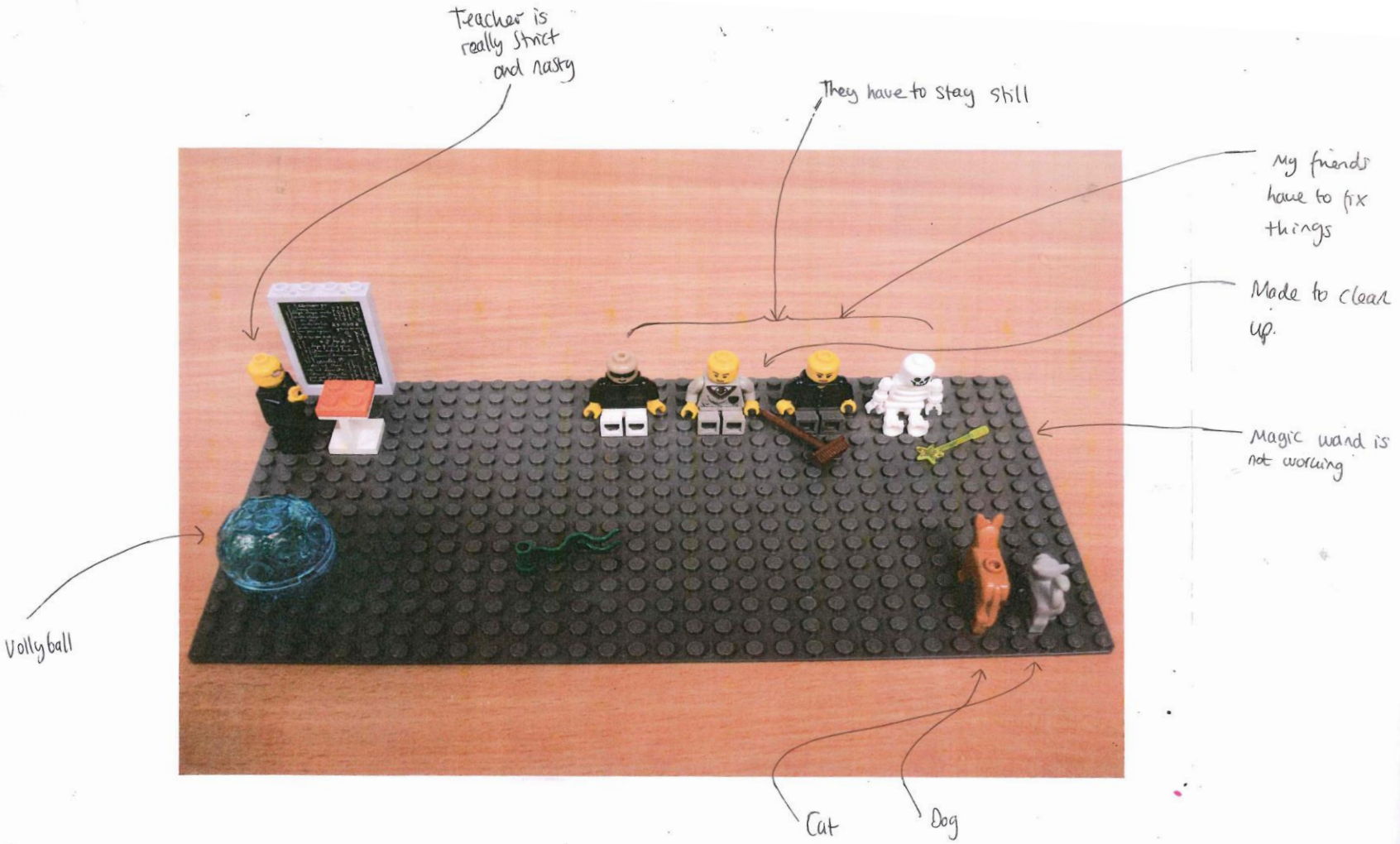

Illustration 4: Aston's Non-Ideal classroom

6.5.3 Clive

Clive's ideal classroom (Illustration 6) contained an emphasis on nature and pets, along with the care of these. He included helpful staff and resources that would support him to prepare for adult life such as employment. He identified several kinaesthetic learning styles and a teaching assistant, talking care of a pet frog. In contrast, his non-ideal classroom (Illustration 7) included a heavy focus on reading, with students seated in rows, only allowed to read. The staff members were strict and re-enforced the emphasis on reading. He explained the students would not have the freedom to move around or access further resources, beyond reading books. Clive's models are presented on the following two pages.

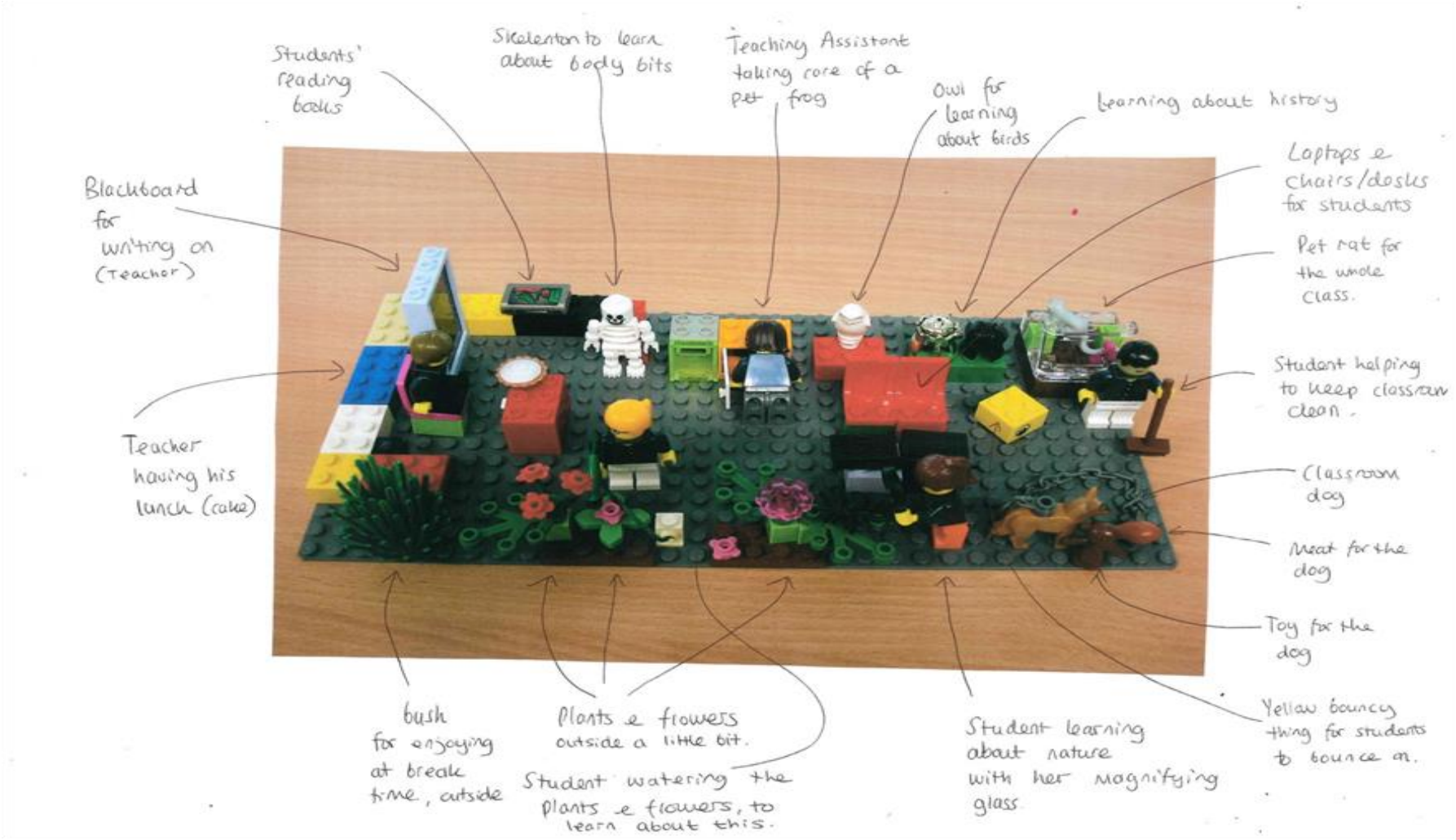

Illustration 5: Clive's Ideal classroom

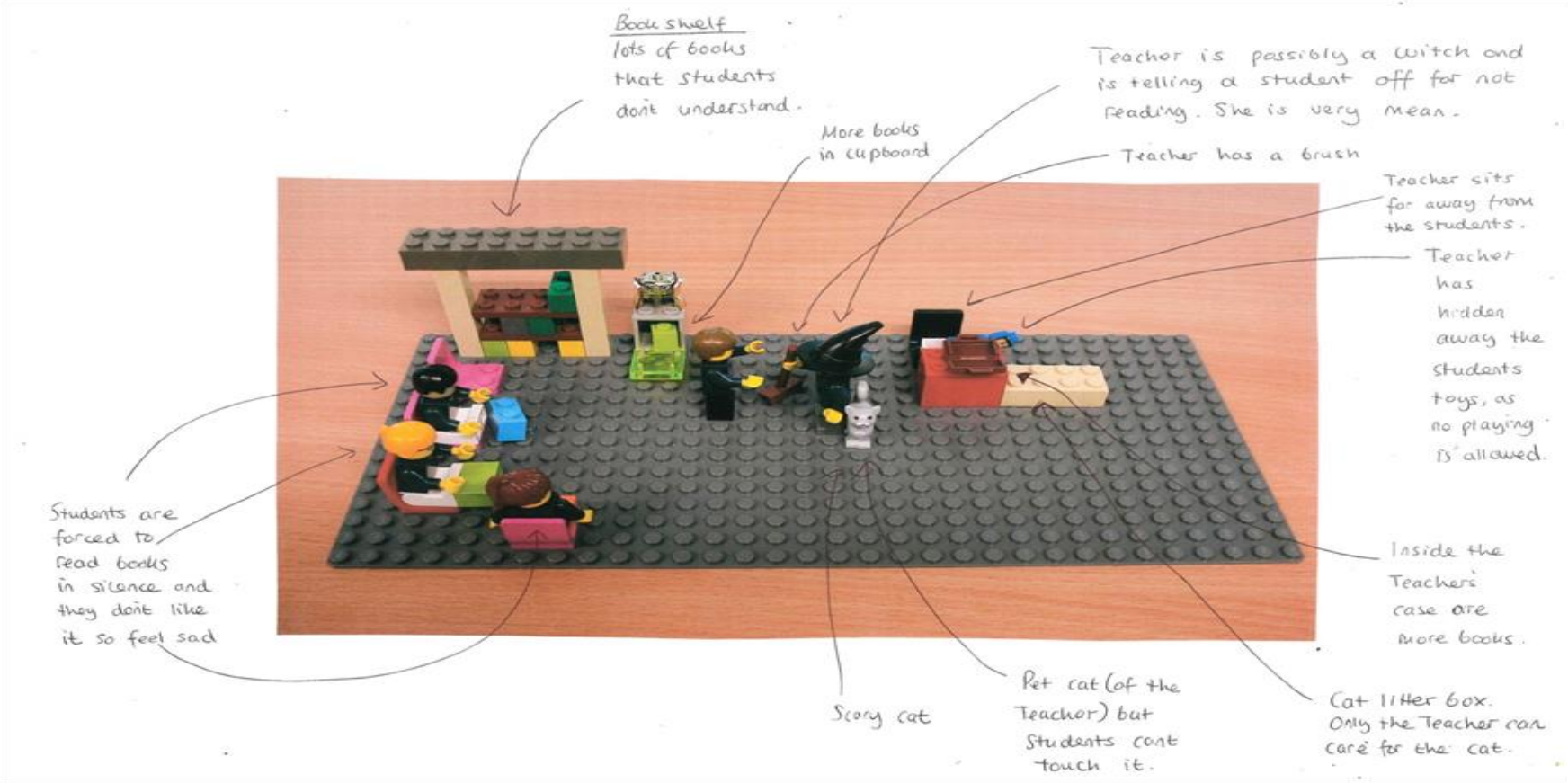

Illustration 6: Clive's Non-ideal classroom

6.5.4 Brian

Brian's ideal classroom (Illustration 7) showed an emphasis on kinaesthetic learning with busy, defined areas for particular activities. He included a white board for the teacher and natural elements such as plants and weds. He was most excited about including a dog and was very keen to ensure the "bad person" in the classroom was sent to "jail". In contrast his non-ideal classroom (Illustration 8) showed a heavy focus on disorder and aggression. The students have caused destruction to the room and the teacher is wrongly accusing pupils. They are scared of the teacher and are not interested in learning. Brian's models are presented on the following two pages.

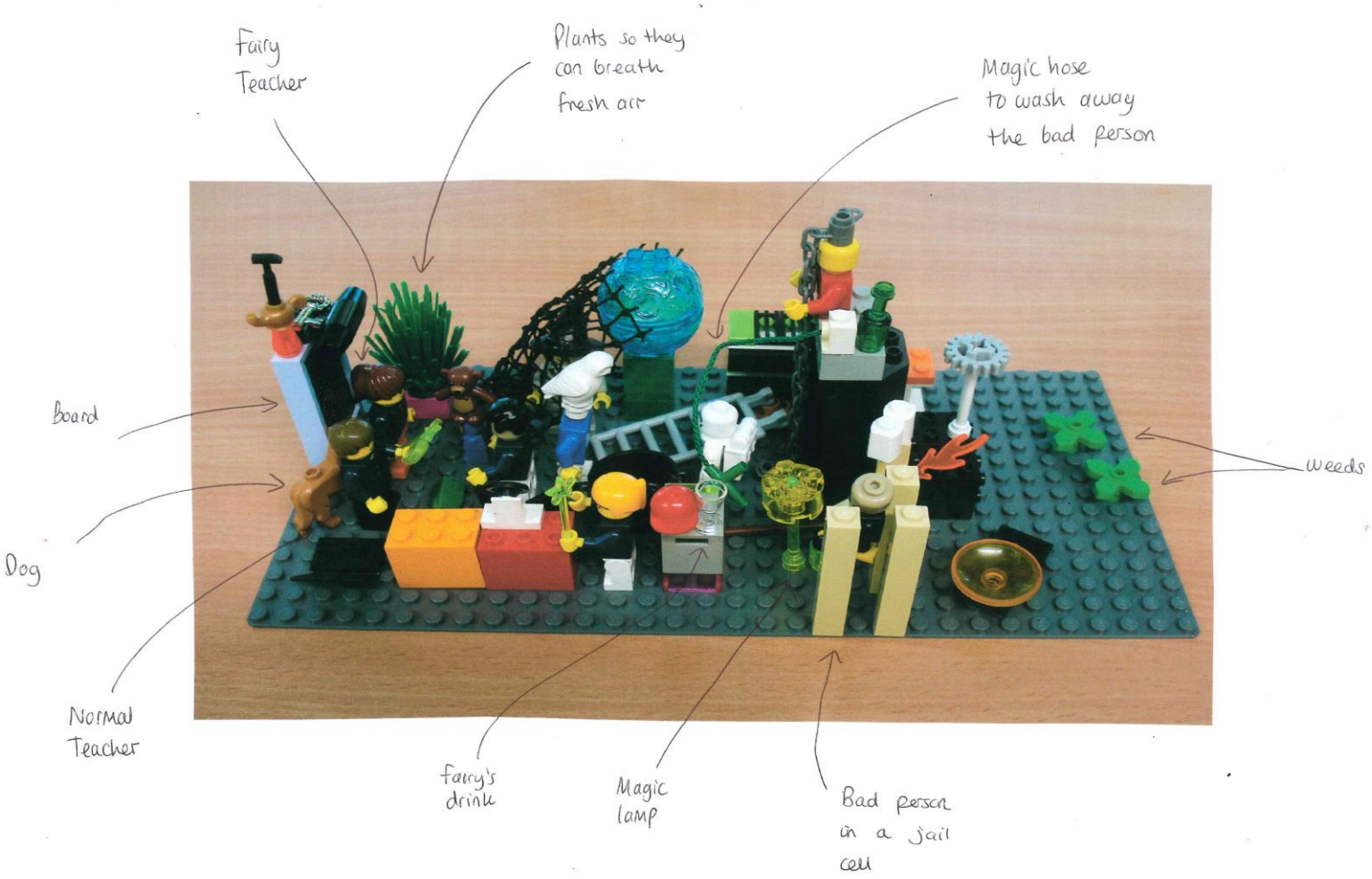

Illustration 7: Brian's Ideal classroom

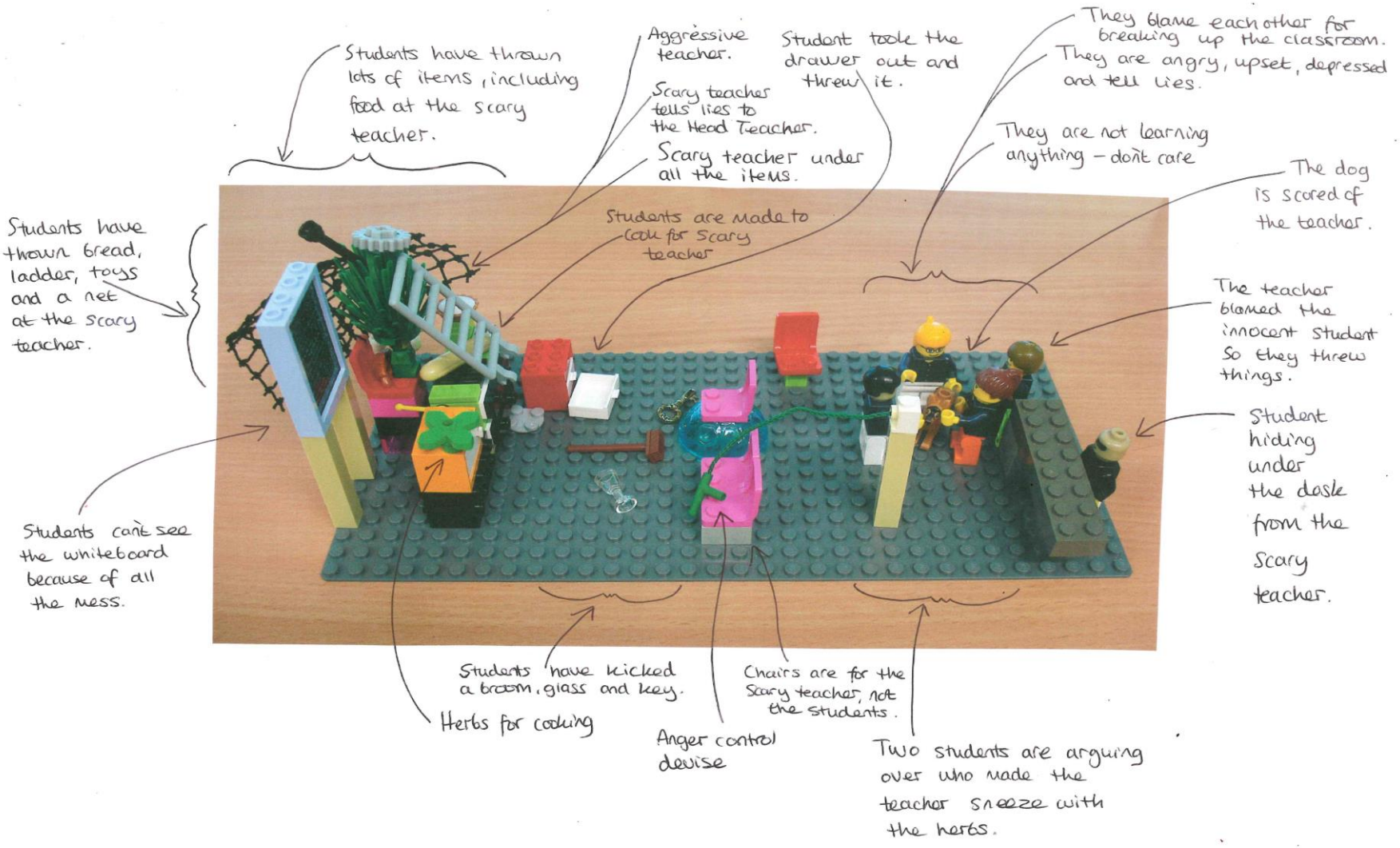

Illustration 8: Brian's Non-ideal classroom

6.5.5 Helen

Helen's ideal classroom (Illustration 9) emphasised the need to keep her things safe, with enough IT equipment for all the students. She expressed a preference for kinaesthetic learning styles such as arts and crafts, along with the keeping, and care of pets. She wanted a classroom that would give her enough space to work in, and offer support to achieve her future employment hopes. In contrast her non-ideal classroom (Illustration 10) included a heavy focus on disorder, with students having destroyed or displaced equipment throughout the classroom, causing distress. She indicated that any resources that were not destroyed, were restricted or locked away. Helen's models are presented on the following two pages.

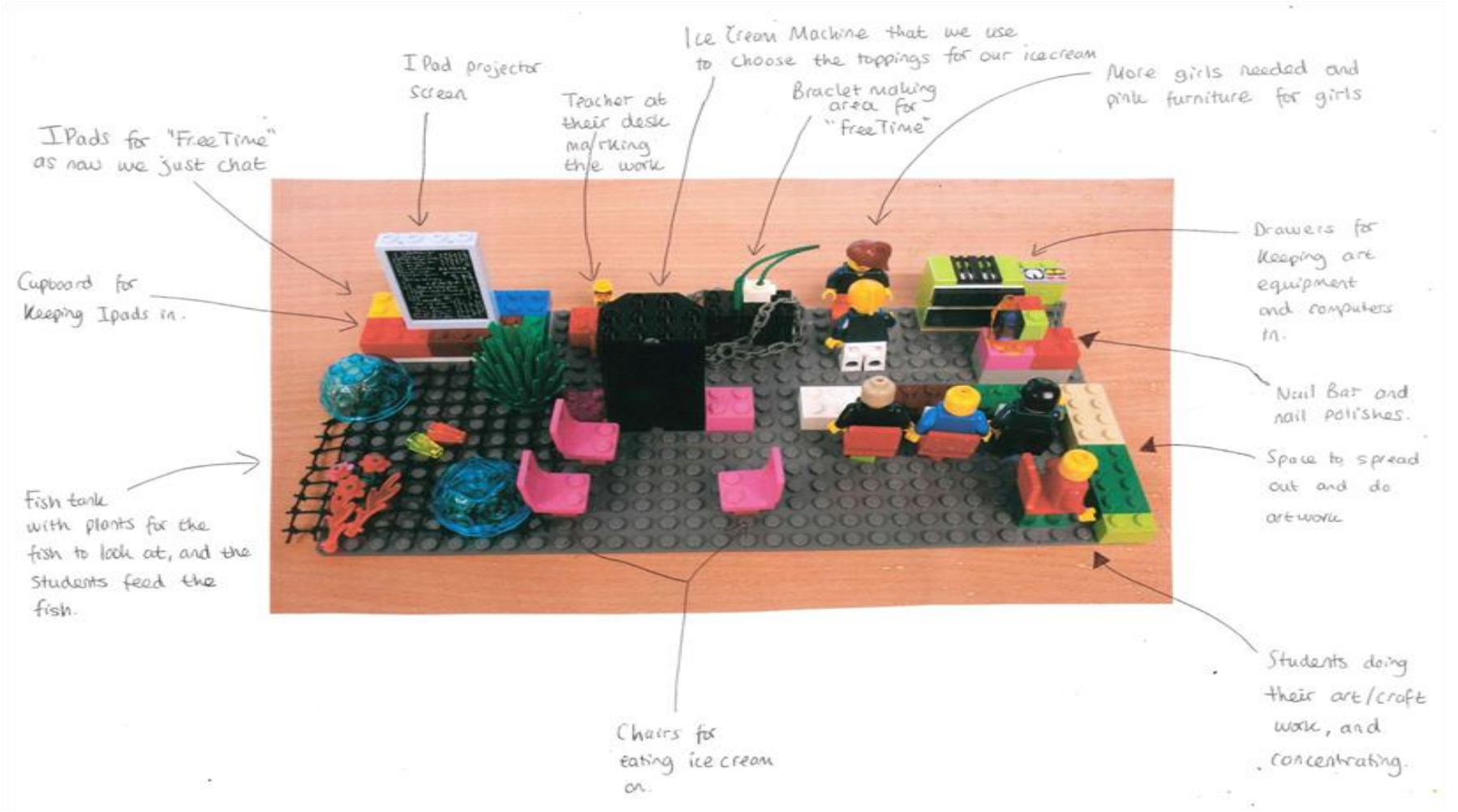

Illustration 9: Helen's Ideal classroom

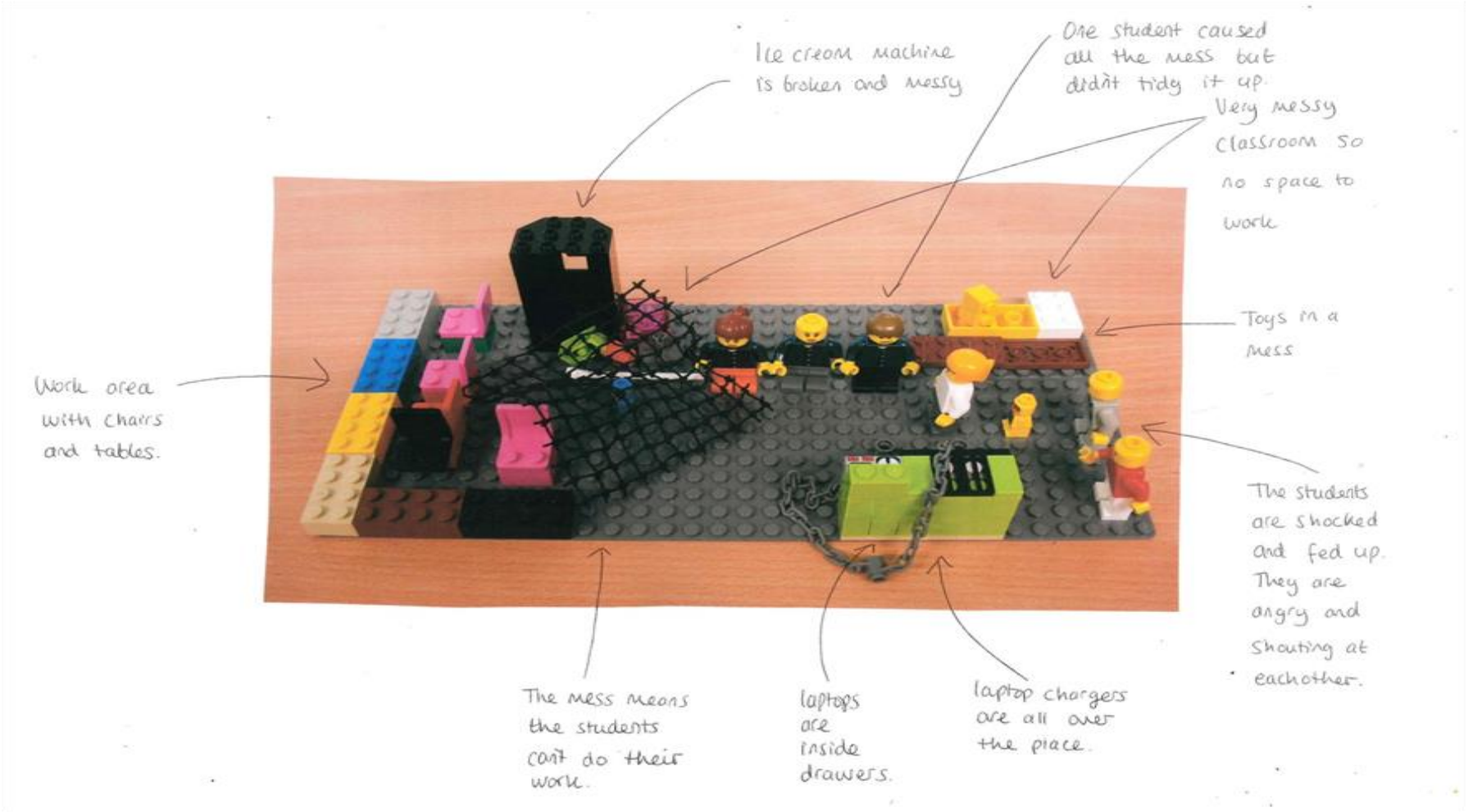

Illustration 10: Helen's Non-ideal classroom

6.5.6 Natalie

Natalie's ideal classroom (Illustration 11) shows a focus on "caring" activities with babies that need looking after (as she wants to do this as a job) and plants and animals needing caring for too. She was keen to ensure that all the pupils had enough equipment each and some exercise equipment too. In contrast, her non-ideal classroom (Illustration 12) is stark, with only a few items present. The students are lined up and give her "dirty looks" which is added to, by the scary animals that she doesn't like. Natalie's models are presented on the following two pages.

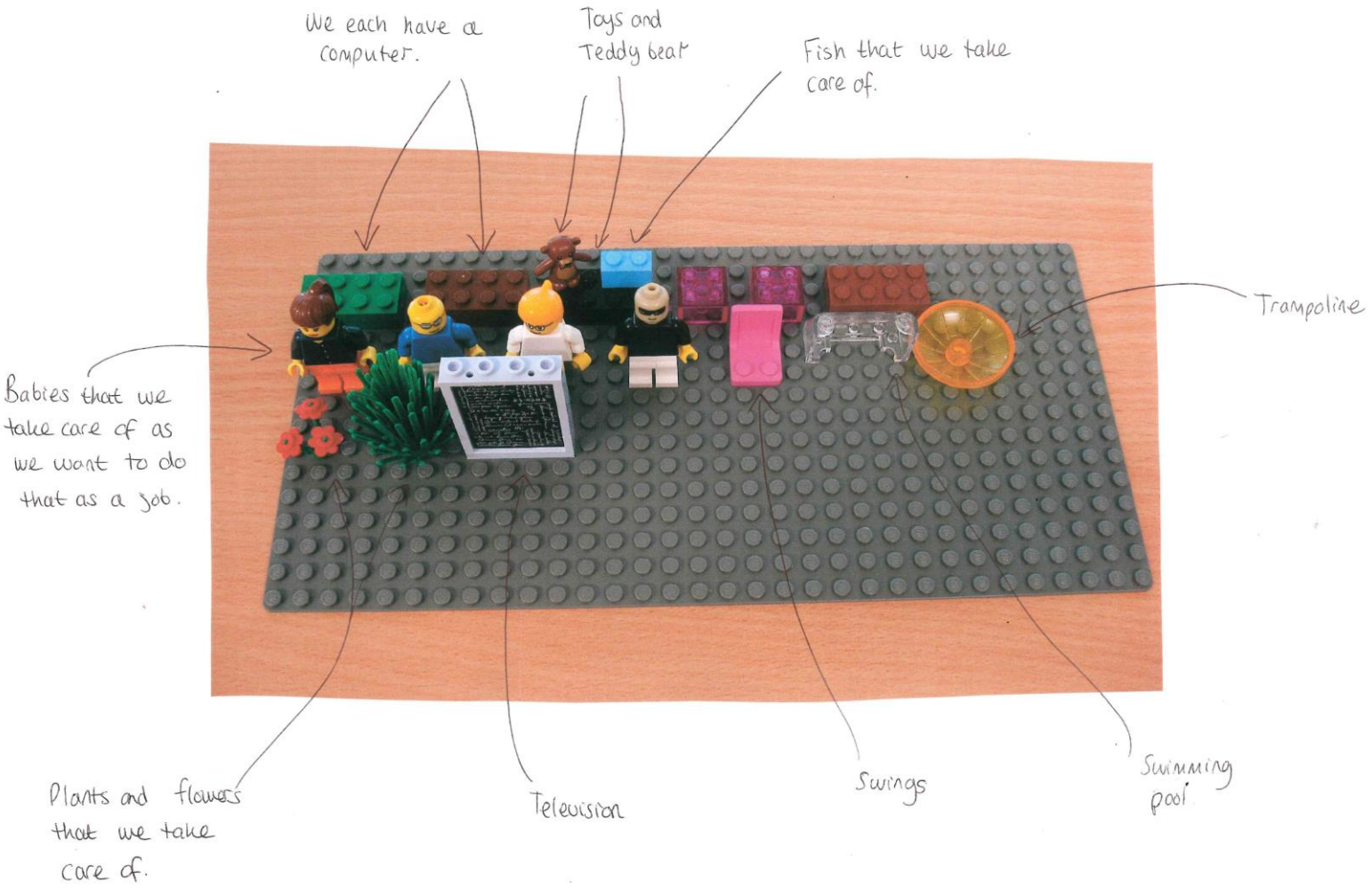

Illustration 11: Natalie's Ideal classroom

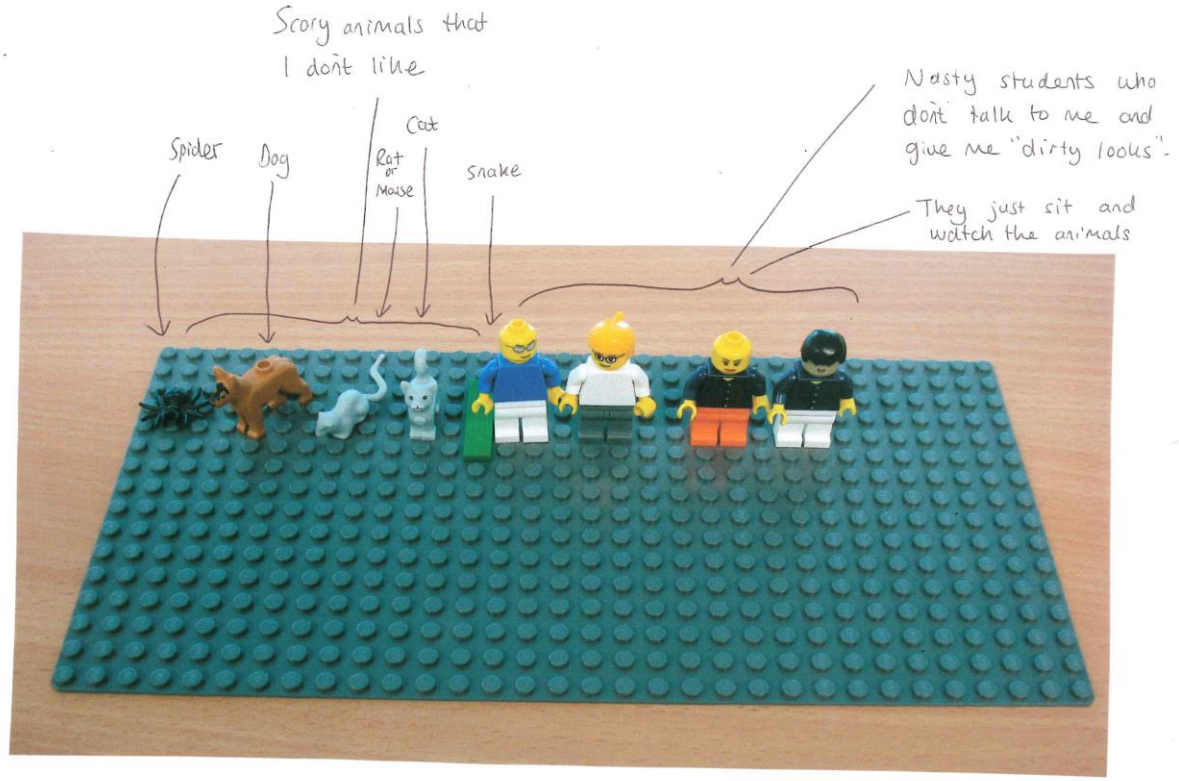

Illustration 12: Natalie's Non-ideal classroom

6.5.7 Chyanne

Chyanne's ideal classroom (Illustration 13) highlighted her preference for order within the classroom environment, with assigned areas for different learning activities. She indicated a preference for kinaesthetic learning styles such as cooking and wanted helpful staff to support her. In contrast her non-ideal classroom (Illustration 14) included a high level or disorder, with students having destroyed the fixtures, fittings and resources, causing distress and shock to both students and staff. In addition there were students carrying out bullying and high levels of aggression to others. Chyanne's models are presented on the following two pages.

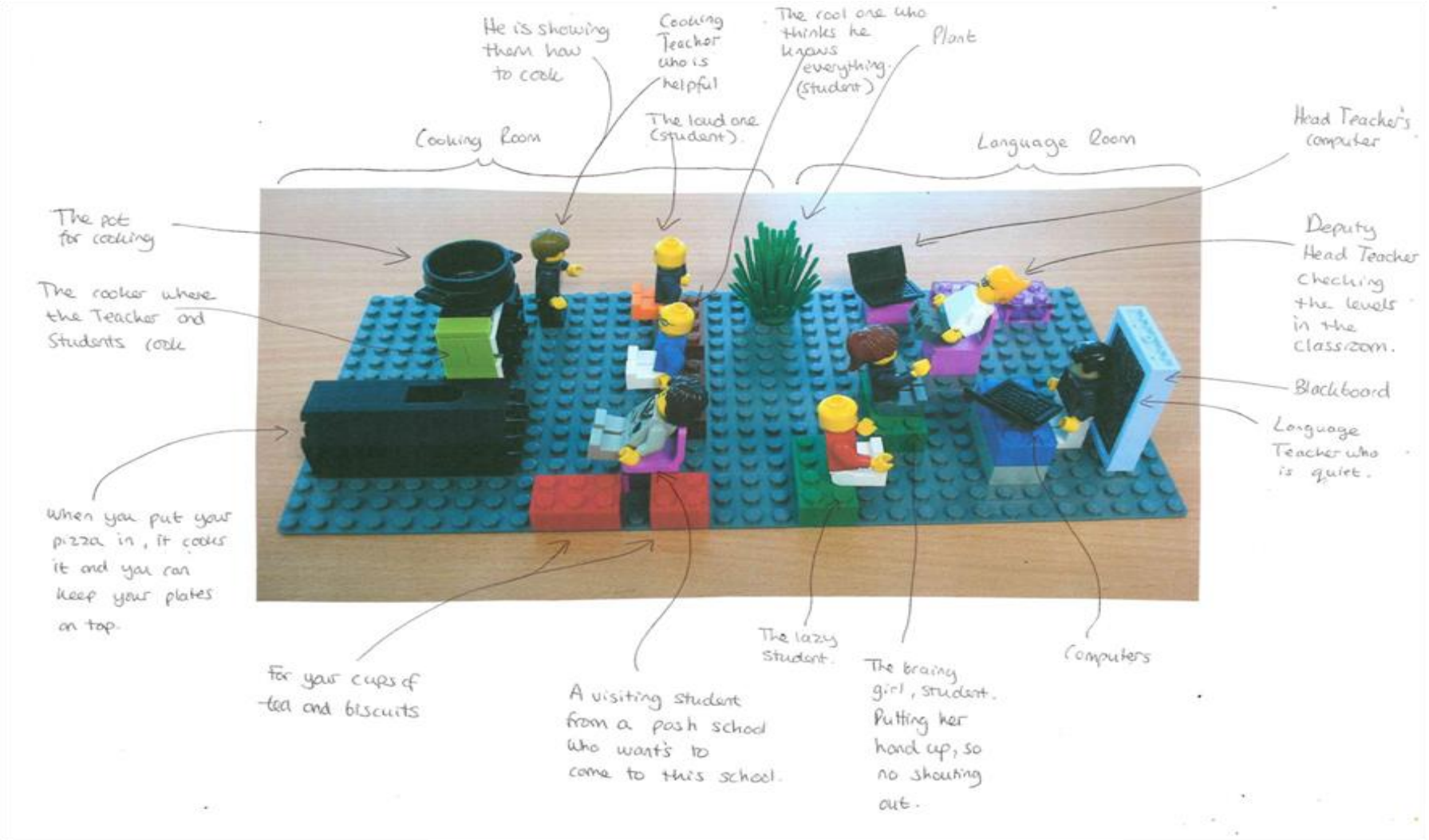

Illustration 13: Chyanne's Ideal classroom

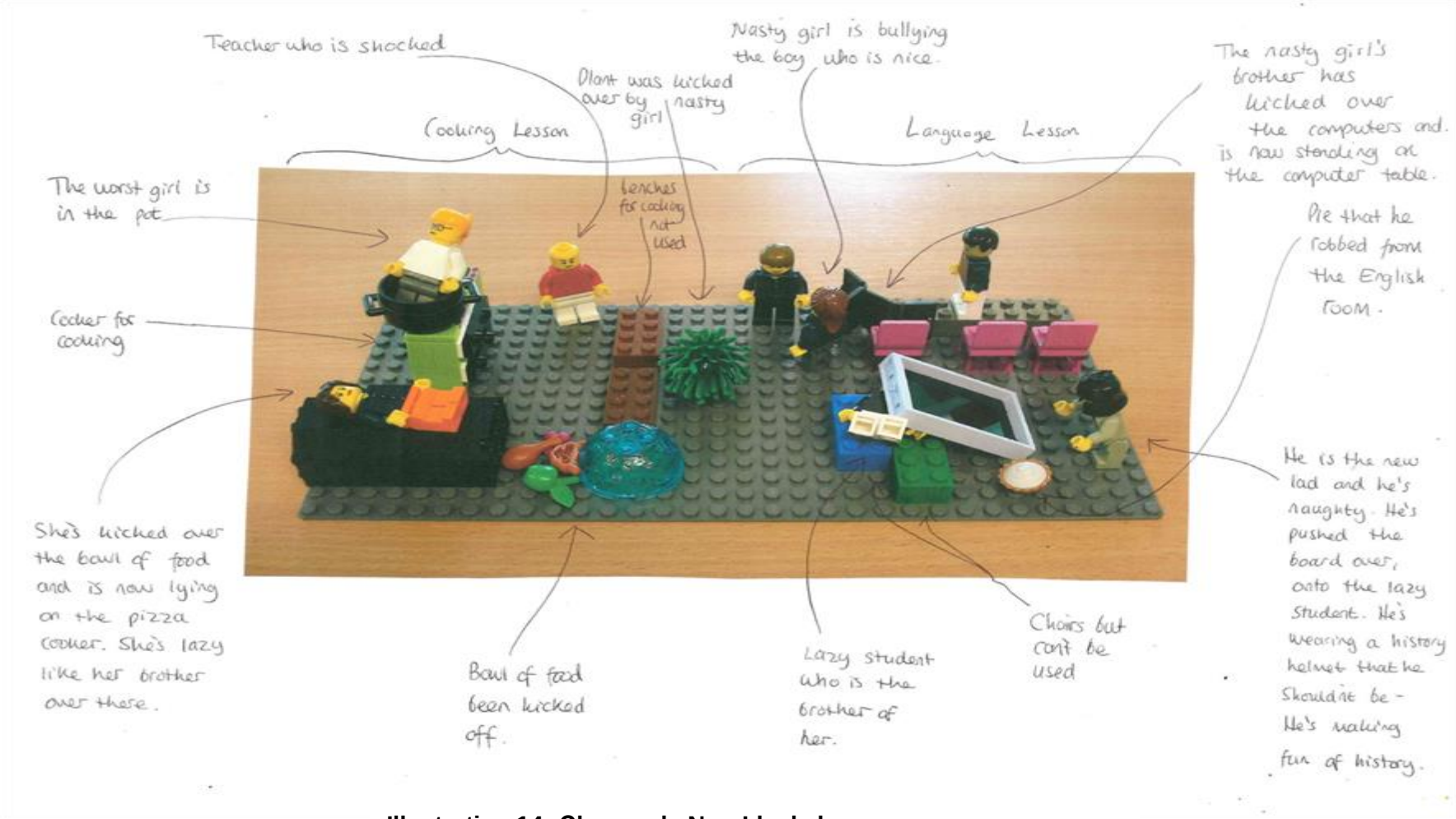

Illustration 14: Chyanne's Non-Ideal classroom

6.5.8 Leo

Leo's ideal classroom (Illustration 15) shows a busy room full of numerous activities to enjoy. He included a safe place to keep his belongings and pets for the students to take care of. He added plants that the students water and cooking facilities too. He also included a "Trophy for being good for a year". In contrast, his non-ideal classroom (Illustration 16) showed a focus on restrictions, with students put into corners, facing the walls, unable to speak. He included physical consequences for not following the rules such as being hosed with water or made to drink poison. The students also had nowhere to keep their belongings. Leo's models are presented on the following two pages.

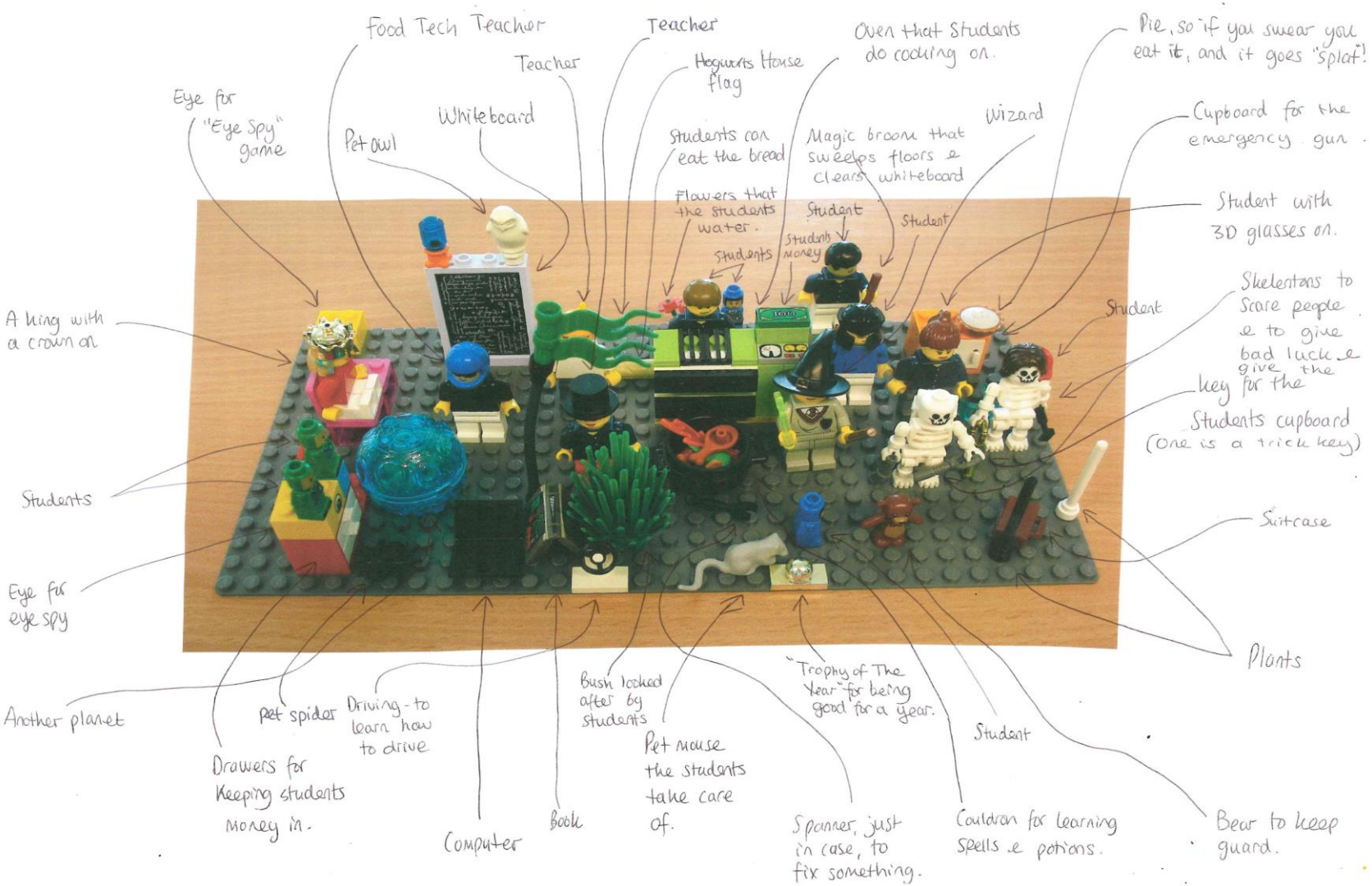

Illustration 16: Leo's Ideal classroom

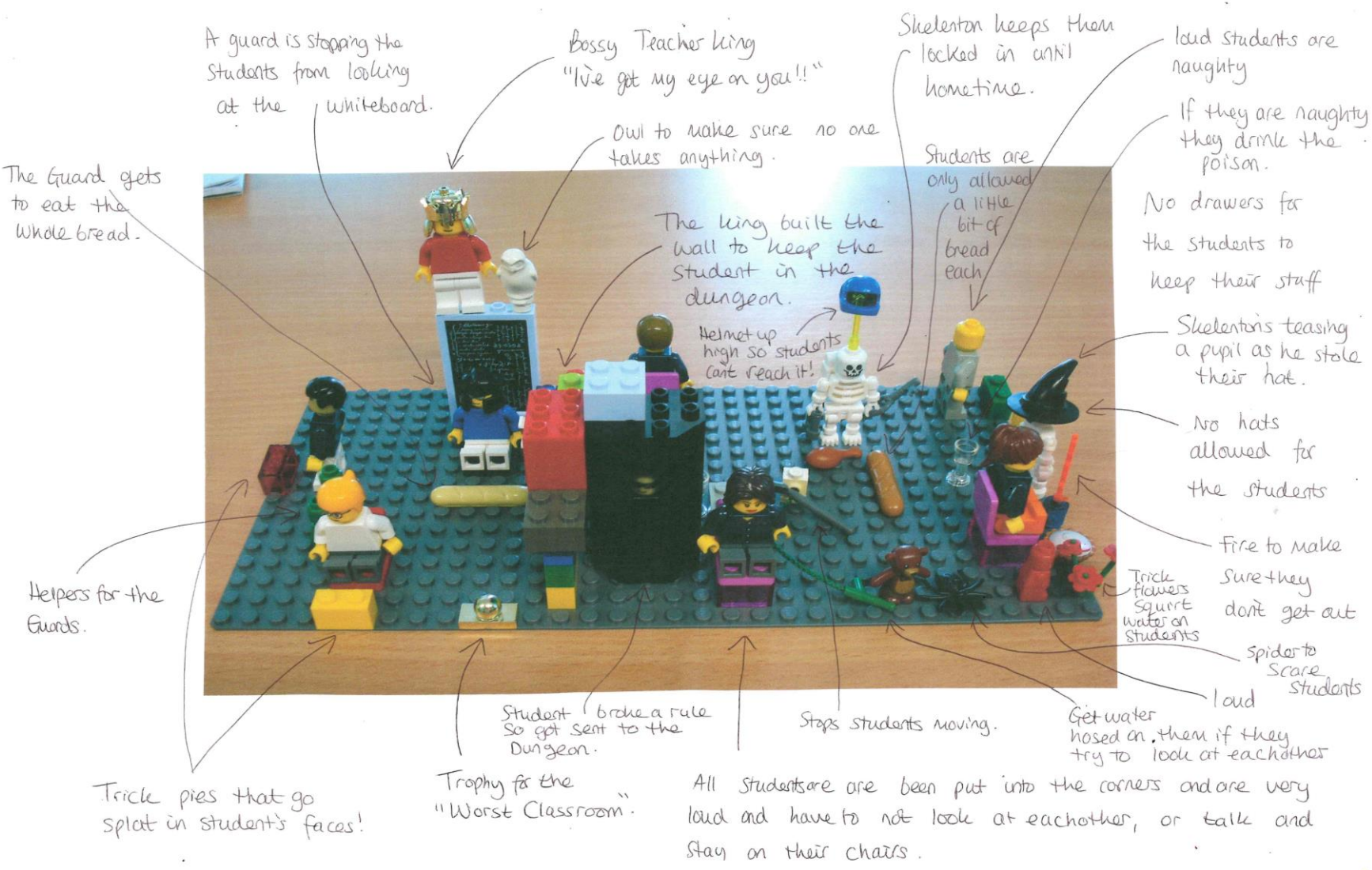

Illustration 16: Leo's Non-Ideal classroom

6.6 Research Question 3:

Does the nurture group model of schooling reflect the ideal classroom construct of those attending it?

The purpose of this question was to explore whether the nurture group approach to schooling corresponds with what the participants of my study feel, would make their ideal classroom. This question is best answered by comparing some of the characteristics of the nurture group approach, which the participants experienced at their school, with key themes of their ideal classroom constructs, as shown in Table 10, below.

Table 10. Comparison of the participants' ideal classroom construct themes and the nurture group model of schooling they received.

Nurture group Characteristic (adapted from Cooper et al., 2001)	**Themes of the participants' ideal classroom constructs**
Two adults work together and model good adult relationships in a structured and predictable environment which fosters trust and learning.	• Responsibilities of others within the classroom. • Classroom environment. • Feelings.
A setting where missing or insufficiently internalised early learning experiences are provided.	• Kinaesthetic learning styles. • Play.
The group is created with social learning through co-operation and play being a central theme.	• Responsibilities of others within the classroom. • Play.

Language development through intensive interaction with an adult is emphasised.	• None found.
Supports positive, social/ emotional growth and cognitive development by responding to the child at a developmentally appropriate level for the individual child.	• Kinaesthetic learning styles. • Play

As presented above there are several themes of the participants' ideal classroom constructs that reflect characteristics of the nurture group model they received. The overarching themes of Play and Kinaesthetic learning styles reflect the approach taken by nurture groups in responding to nurture group members at developmentally appropriate levels whilst providing missing or insufficiently internalised early learning experiences (Cooper et al., 2001). The four overarching themes of Responsibilities of others within the classroom, Play, Classroom environment and Feelings all reflect the nurture group approach of modelling positive adult relationships in a structured and predictable environment which fosters trust and learning and social learning through co-operation and play (Cooper et al., 2001).

In terms of the classroom environment, several of the participants included in their ideal classroom, home-like items that are typically found in nurture group classrooms, such as cooking equipment, toys, food items and soft furnishings which according to Boxall (2002) recreate the experiences that the students had

in earlier life experiences. Additionally, some participants included separate, defined areas for work and socialising/eating which directly reflects the nurture group approach (Seth-Smith et al., 2010). Elements that were missing in all the participants' ideal classroom models were a retreat for students when distressed, and a mirror, which are both commonly found in nurture groups (Cooper, 2007).

The participants of this study did not include examples or preferences that reflect the nurture group approach of developing language through intensive interaction with an adult (Cooper et al., 2001). This may be because this is an abstract concept so the participants will experience this but perhaps not consciously be aware of it. This may have been different had the nurture group staff members been interviewed, but as this study was interested only in the voice of the students, this was not elicited. Interestingly, of all the extant literature on experiences of nurture groups, only Pintilei (2011) identified an overarching theme from her research with secondary-aged nurture group participants of facilitated communication and as such, this may represent a gap in the literature.

Within the extant literature, only one study (Garner and Thomas, 2011) has incorporated nurture group approaches in the analysis stage of their research and this was only to identify codes for themes, within the data, which explored experiences of mainstream nurture group members. My study explores - although not extensively - the nurture group approach in relation to a collective view of the ideal classroom provided by a group of participants, and as such, has used an original approach.

Only one study (Williams and Hanke, 2007) appears to have used personal construct psychology to explore the constructs of an ideal and non-ideal school for students with special educational needs attending mainstream settings. As this study carried out research using personal construct psychology to explore ideal and non-ideal classroom (not school) constructs with students from a nurture group, set within a special school, it provides a new perspective.

6.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the findings of my study in relation to the three research questions, through overarching themes, sub-themes and quotes from the participants. Discussion has focused on the relevance of the findings to the extant literature detailed in Chapters 2-4, highlighting key and original findings. Chapter Seven explores the limitations and links between the findings of this study and conclusions to be drawn from it, along with an opportunity to consider how the findings of this study could contribute to the development of research for young people with learning difficulties and autism, and practice in the educational psychology field.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND FUTURE RESEARCH

7.0 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter provides a conclusion to the study and includes an examination of some of the implications for educational psychology practice, along with further examination of possible future research areas arising from the development and results of this study. Further discussion will critique the appropriateness of the methods used and identification of any limitations

7.1 Limitations of the study

There are numerous limitations to this study. The primary one being the possible donation of themes in the model-making element of the data collection. An example of this is the frequent selection of pets and food by my participants. This may have been due to the numerous types of pets and food provided in the selection of LEGO given to them. Only half of the participants used a plain LEGO brick to represent something different, despite being told in the process that a single brick could represent anything they wanted. However, in contrast, some of the more concrete items such as the cooker and tower were used for other purposes by the participants such as a pizza oven and set of drawers (a full, photographic inventory of the LEGO provided, is detailed in Appendix 3).

Unfortunately, this study did not have the capacity to compare the model-making technique with another method, such as draw, write and tell (Williams et al., 1989) or with just plain LEGO bricks only. Should it have done so, it may have told us whether the same results would have been elicited, without the concrete LEGO items, however, this leaves some capacity for interesting, future research.

A further limitation of the study is that the data collection phase was carried out over two months and as such, meant that the participants had time to discuss their models and interviews with each other. Additionally, each participant was allowed to take away a photograph of their ideal classroom model to encourage ownership of the process, which again, may have been shared with their peers. This may have led to participants being influenced by their peers reporting on their own models and discussions, and therefore causing similar themes within the data.

This study used Personal Construct Psychology (Kelly, 1955) as a theoretical underpinning, and in the type of data collection methods used. Although it provided a logical, clear framework from which to base the study, it may have been to the detriment of further information. Through my use of only one corollary (Dichotomy Corollary: Kelly, 1955) I may have narrowed the participants' ability to share their experiences, by reducing their sharing of classroom life to only bipolar opposites. I may have elicited richer data by removing such restrictions on what I asked of them, by providing a much looser framework.

Another limitation of the study is the difficulty in gaining informed consent, as the participants had moderate learning difficulties. Although the participant information sheets and consent forms were written following Mencap's (2002) accessible language principles with visuals (see Appendix 7-8) and gone through individually with myself and a nurture group staff member, I cannot completely guarantee that the participants fully understood the wider concept of the study and further implications of its publication.

Finally, in the data analysis stage of the study, I used a computer software package (QSR NUD*IST Vivo) which allowed me to code the data at the initial stage. Whilst this allowed for easy manipulation and grouping of the data it may have removed me as a researcher from my data. If I had used a hand-coding method throughout the analysis stage I may have been more connected to the results, and better able to tell a story as the process developed.

7.2 Critique of methodology

This study shows how Personal Construct Psychology and LEGO can be used effectively by young people to create a shared meaning of a construct. Traditionally, methods used to elicit the views of people with learning difficulties have relied on interviews, yet this places significant demands on both linguistic and cognitive capabilities (Porter and Lacey, 2005). As PCP methods are participant-led, they appeared to not feel any pressure to get it right and as the model provided a concrete reference of their experience it allowed for articulation of their construing in a concrete way, through visual imagery. By placing

importance on recording the exact words and terms used by my participants during the joint annotation process, I ensured that the interpretative process remained in their control. By agreeing labels, and their meanings, with the participants, it meant their perspective always remained a priority.

Kelly (1955) theorised, that construing is not synonymous with words and so by allowing my participants time to have a thought, reflect on it, and 'bring it to language' they appear to have articulated their views confidently, and without anxiety. By providing a familiar toy rather than other model-making material such as clay or wood, they appear to have felt able to engage with the activity, without concern for their skills. The use of model-making methods could be extended to include LEGO Duplo for younger children (under six years of age).

The use of a material that could be manipulated, enabled the participants to construe their ideal/non-ideal classrooms in a concrete and visual way. This appeared to allow the participants time to process their thoughts and provided them with an adjustable, visual reminder of what they had said, which could be checked at various points throughout the session. This would not have been possible in a verbal interview only. The rich data collected from the combined interview and model-making activity has elicited a wide range of themes.

The small sample within this study limits the generalisability of the findings, but this was not the aim of the study. A further limitation is the lack of triangulation within the study, which would have been addressed, had the nurture group staff members, or parents' views been included. As Griffiths et al. (2014)

acknowledges, revisiting the pupils with the themes and transcribed data may have elicited richer, and more extended findings.

A limitation of the interpretative approach is that the methods used can lead to confirmation bias as the researcher cannot fully withdraw myself from an interpretative framework which may have influenced the interpretations and analysis of the results.

7.3 Implications for future practice

My technique of using LEGO and PCP to elicit pupils' views on their life in school has been shared with several Trainee Educational Psychologists and Educational Psychologists across the United Kingdom. Several are now regularly using this approach in their practice. It is my understanding that one Local Authority, Educational Psychology Service has introduced this technique across one of their teams. I hope that further application of this technique, in the future, will add to the efficacy of the approach and lead to further refinement of the technique.

New and original findings from this study can provide some implications for future practice. These include the restrictions on choice, and type of work provided, which may indicate more structured forms of teaching may not suit all students who attend nurture groups. The format of a nurture group may allow for a less structured approach to teaching, with reduced student numbers and higher ratios of staff to students an advantage. As nurture group students follow a holistic curriculum, with a combination National Curriculum content, augmented with a

focus on social and emotional development (Seth-Smith et al., 2010), this may be more feasible than in a mainstream classroom.

The results of this study indicated that the nurture group members would not like classrooms which included damage, noise, disorder and open plan designs. These factors can be taken into account when introducing a nurture group to a school, with consideration given to the location of the room, perhaps within a quieter part of the school, where disruption can be kept to a minimum. The unwanted elements of noise and damage are harder to plan for, or prevent, and as such, may fall to the nurture group staff and student members themselves to monitor and manage.

Further original themes included the restriction on movement, speech and equipment and was the key theme for playtime activities in the non-ideal classrooms. This may indicate that enough equipment, for one each, such as laptops (mentioned by the participants) would be more beneficial in nurture groups. Additionally, the participants expressed a preference for a place to keep their belongings safe, which may indicate a need for a more physical continuity and belonging within a nurture group classroom. This was found by Pintilei (2009) and Kourmoulaki (2013) in their themes of having a safe base and belonging, respectively.

The inclusion of a range of pets in many of the participants ideal classrooms may indicate the need for more animal-based interventions, perhaps of a therapeutic

nature. Many of the participants indicated they would look after these pets and as such this could be used to encourage independence and turn-taking with fellow nurture group members.

Of particular relevance to this study is the inclusion of the future life theme in the participants' ideal classrooms which identified a desire for independence and employment as adults. This is particularly relevant as the new Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (2014, 2015) introduced a greater focus on the importance of transition to adulthood, with pupil-voice and person centred planning informing the process of creating Education, Health and Care Plans.

7.4 Implications for future research

The main implication as a result of this study, is for future research to explore a wider range of extended methods for eliciting the views of young people with moderate learning difficulties and autism. This study explored the use of LEGO and a semi-structured interview and has considerable limitations in terms of possible donated themes. Future research could explore more organic, model-making materials without concrete themes such as pets and food. Additionally, future studies could compare the LEGO model-making technique with another method, such as draw, write and tell (Williams et al., 1989) or with just plain LEGO bricks only.

7.5 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the use of a model-making activity with LEGO and personal construct psychology to elicit the views of a group of young people attending a nurture group within a school for pupils with learning difficulties.

The combination of personal construct psychology with a model-making activity provided a clear, logical framework from which to explore the participants' experiences of classroom life. The use of LEGO provided a familiar, fun material that the participants seemed happy to use and meant that any mistakes could be easily undone, with the separation of bricks, causing no anxiety. This is important as Preece (2002) identifies visual methods as being more accessible and less stressful for people with autism, than verbal approaches alone. None of the participants appeared distressed and did not end the sessions early, indicating the activity had kept them engaged and motived. For all the participants, especially those with autism, the model appeared to act as a focus for what would otherwise have been an intense interaction. The models provided a visual focus for both the participants and myself and encouraged a participant-led approach, whilst creating a fun, relaxed atmosphere. The process of making a model appeared to give the participants time to process their thoughts, and articulate these, whilst creating their models. Several participants additionally used the plain LEGO bricks to represent other items.

The rationale for this study was to inform the later design stage of a purpose-built, on-site nurture provision at the participants'' school. The views of my participants

will be to be taken into account, with the school particularly keen to provide the following:

- Enough equipment for each young person;
- Kinaesthetic learning styles:
- Opportunities for work experience;
- Lessons aimed at developing adult independence;
- Lockers to keep personal belongings safe;
- Spacious, quiet rooms;
- Opportunities to grow fruit and vegetables in the adjoining garden;
- Continued use of dog therapy at the school.
- Additional pets for the classroom.

Findings from the study show that the nurture group model of schooling provided by the school does reflect the ideal classroom construct of the participants of my study, except in the area of language development. The participants particularly wanted a focus on their future life, kinaesthetic learning styles and play, whilst valuing the classroom environment and responsibilities of others within it. The overarching theme of the classroom environment reflects the work of Kourmoulaki, (2013), Griffiths et al. (2014), Syrnyk (2014) and Williams and Hanke (2007), with a focus on furniture, noise, space, lighting and order. In contrast they did not want a disordered environment with severe restrictions and punishments/consequences, and were clear on the characteristics of others, they would not want, in their classroom.

Findings from this study support previous research into the views of young people attending nurture groups. The findings have added to the work of Cooper (2001) and Pintilei (2009) by widening the understanding of the range of kinaesthetic learning activities the students want to engage in. The overarching theme which identified the preferred characteristics and responsibilities of staff/students reflects the work of several previous studies (Lewis, 1995; Maxwell, 2006; Pintilei, 2009; Griffiths et al., 2014 and Syrnyk, 2014) with Williams and Hanke (2007), additionally identifying as did, this study, the unwanted characteristics of nurture group staff.

Playtime activities were included in this study, as an identified area in need of further exploration (Williams: personal communication, 2013). The participants indicated they wanted a wider range of outdoor equipment including trampolines and spinning things which supports recent research by Syrnyk (2014). The results of this study have generated new knowledge because the views of nurture group students attending a special school, have not previously been explored.

The findings of my study have illuminated the strengths this group of young people with learning difficulties and autism have, in expressing themselves clearly and concisely. It confirms the importance of listening to their views and engaging with them in research, using research methodologies that incorporate pupil voice approaches. Research has found that very often, the views of young people with special educational needs are not sought (Noble, 2003) and when they are, they are discounted (Todd, 2003). This study has shown, as highlighted

by Rose (2005) that young people with learning difficulties can take an active role in decision making processes, especially over matters concerning their everyday lives such as classroom environments, and planning for adult life. Finally, it appears that when provided with methods matched to their strengths, whilst taking in account their needs, there is considerable potential to gain insights into young peoples' constructs of the worlds around them.

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APPENDIX

CONTENTS

Appendix 1: Key characteristics of the Boxall "classic" nurture group (Adapted from Cooper et al. 2001)

1. A nurture group 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 nurture group 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 nurture group 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 nurture group 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.

Appendix 2: One-to-One Interview & Model-Making Session Structure with Visual Time Line and Stop Sign

1) Introduction and reminder of right to withdraw (emotive situations) and anonymity – go through Information/Consent Forms and sign.
2) Warm up activity – with both participant and researcher each building a tower with the Lego® - 5mins
3) Building the Non-Ideal Classroom model- 25-40 mins
4) Mini-break – time to play on the I-Pad – 5-10 mins
5) Building the Ideal Classroom model – 25-40 mins
6) Session Summary end, debrief.

The questions asked of the participants during part (2) and (4) will follow Williams et al (2007) study script with a further 3 questions influenced by Kangas study (2010) as follows:

1) Tell me three things about this school & outside area/classroom
2) What kind of school is this?
3) What are the children doing?
4) Tell me three things about these children
5) What are the adults doing?
6) Tell me three things about the adults
7) Tell me three things about the way you feel about this school.
8) What happens at playtime in this school?
9) What would the three rules of this school be?
10) What would be your favourite/worst thing about this school?

It is expected that the whole process will take no longer than one to one and a half hours, including a mid-way break of five-ten minutes.

Appendix 2 Continued

Visual Time Line and Stop Sign

Appendix 3: Inventory of Lego® content

- **Lego® Build to Express Kit 45110 which includes a 16 x 32 stud baseplate.**
- **Lego® minifigures x 5.**
- **Lego® minifigures accessories: domestic animals, food, laptops x2, kitchen equipment, school equipment.**

Appendix 3 continued…

Appendix 4: Student Feedback Sheet

Student Feedback Sheet

(You can keep this)

Dear ……

I am writing to say a big thank you for helping me with my project 

I came to your school and we spent some time together

You were brilliant and made some Lego® models. 

It really helped me to understand what you want in your classroom – and what you don't want too!

I have finished writing my project book now so other adults can read it.

But don't worry – I didn't put your name in (because I'm not allowed), just photos of your great models.

I cant wait for the other adults to see all your fantastic ideas! 

YOU ARE A SUPERSTAR
THANK YOU VERY, VERY MUCH!

From Faye

Appendix 5: Parent/Carer Information Sheet

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
Tel: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Dear Parent/Carer,

RE: Research Study "Nurture Groups: Building the Ideal Classroom with Personal Construct Psychology and Lego ®"

I am writing to ask if you would give consent for your son/daughter to take part in a research study. I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist assigned to xxxxxxxxxxx Nurture Group, "The xxxxxxxxxxxx".

xxxxxxxxxxxx Deputy Head Teacher, Miss xxxxxxxxxxxx has identified your son/daughter as being a member of the Nurture Group and so has sent you this information. I have not had access to any school pupil records.

Taking part in this study is not compulsory for your son/daughter and not taking part will not have a detrimental effect on the quality of education they receive at the school.

The Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of what students in Nurture Groups feel they need in terms of school design, classroom structure and type of interactions with adults and fellow peers.

Model Making

- **Through the use of Lego® your son/daughter will make 2 models** to show what the "Ideal/Non-ideal Classroom" would look like.
- This will be supported by approximately 9 key questions (from Personal Construct Psychology) such as "What will the children be doing?" to explore elements of their models.
- A photograph of the two Lego® models only, will be taken (no photographs of students to be taken).

Withdrawing from the Study

- At any point up to, and including, the one-to-one model building session with myself, your son/daughter can withdraw from the exercise and study. Just let Miss xxxxxxx at the school or myself know (contact details above).

Appendix 5 continued…

- Following the model making session your son/daughter can withdraw from the study – up until the 1st of July 2014. Just let Miss xxxxxxxxxx at the school or myself know (contact details above).

Data from the Study

- This study has been approved by the University of Birmingham Ethics Board.
- Your son/daughter will not be named in any part of the published research – they will be simply identified as "P1, P2…"etc...and anything that could identify them will not be included.
- The encrypted memory stick with photographs of the models and hand-written notes from the model building session will be kept in a locked filing cabinet (along with consent forms) in line with xxxx Children's Services data protection policy and kept for ten years at which point they will be destroyed/shredded. During those ten years only myself, the University Course Director and external examiners can access them.

Results of the Study

- The study will be written up as a thesis for a Doctorate in Applied Educational & Child Psychology with a hard copy held at the University. This will include photographs of the models and details of key themes from all the data collected. Neither of these will make your son/daughter identifiable to others although they may be able to identify their own model from the photographs (You can opt out of this on the consent form).
- I will be summarizing my findings for both the school and parent/carers. Should you wish to receive a copy of these please indicate on the enclosed parent consent form.

Further Information

Further information on this study can be sought from either Miss xxxxxxxxx at school, myself at the address above or should you wish to discuss the study with my Supervising University Tutor the contact details are: Dr. xxxxxxxx School of Education, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston Campus, Birmingham, B15 2TT, xxxxxxxxx,

Please find enclosed 2 consent forms to complete – yours and your son/daughter's, along with a SAE. Alternatively, should it be easier for you to pass the forms onto your son/daughter's school please feel free to do so as they can pass them onto me.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this request.
Yours sincerely,
Faye Morgan-Rose
BA (HONS), PGCE, Dip Psych, MA

Appendix 6: Parent/Carer Consent Form

Parent/Carer Consent Form

Research Study Nurture Groups: Building the Ideal Classroom with Personal Construct Psychology and Lego ®"

Parent/Carer's Name:_____

Your Child's Name:_____

Your Child's Age_____

Today's Date: ____/____/2014

Your Signature_____

Please tick the boxes that apply:

Consent

I **give consent** for my son/daughter to take part in the above named study. I understand that my son/daughter cannot withdraw from the study after the 1st of July 2014. ☐

I **do not** give consent for my son/daughter to take part in the above named study ☐

Photographs of the Lego® Models

I do not give consent for the photographs of my son's/daughter's Lego ® models to be included in the results and summaries of the study. ☐

Results

I would like to receive a summary of the findings by post. ☐
I would also like to attend an open session at the school to hear the results ☐
I would not like to receive a summary of the findings from the study. ☐

Please find enclosed a SAE for your convenience for return of the two consent forms. Alternatively, should it be easier for you to pass the forms onto your son/daughter's school please feel free to do so, as they can pass them onto me.

Thank you for supporting this study

Appendix 7: Student Information Sheet

Student Information Sheet

(You can keep this)

Dear ……

Can you help me with my project please 

I need students from the Nurture Group to make some Lego® models. 

- I would like you to make 2 small Lego® models about your ideas for an "ideal classroom" and "non-ideal classroom" so I can understand better what you need and want in school.
- I will come to your school and we will be together in a room for approximately one hour where you can make your 2 Lego® models.
- You will get a mini-break after making 2 Lego® models.
- In the mini-break you can play games on my I-Pad.
- This will happen in either May or June 2014.
- You don't have to do this – it is your choice.

There is no right or wrong way of making the models as it's all your own ideas. I will ask you about 20 easy questions about your 2 models. There are no right or wrong answers as it's all your own ideas.

- I will take photographs of your 2 models for my project. 
- If you don't want the photographs of your models to go into my project that's OK.
- I will not take photographs of you.
- I will type up, for my project, what we say about the models but I won't type your name as I'm not allowed to.

Appendix 7 continued…

- When I finish writing up my project into a book. Other people can read my project book but it won't have your name or school name in it, as I'm not allowed to put that in.
- The original photographs of your 2 models and my hand-written notes from
- our time together will be kept safely in a locked cupboard at my University for ten years. Only me and my university tutor/examiners can see them.
- If you have any questions before or after making the models you can ask Miss xxxx at school, as she knows everything about this project.
- If you don't want to do it anymore after saying yes, that's OK until the 1st of July, 2014.

The next page is the page you use to tell me if you want to do this.

Appendix 8: Student Consent Form

Student Consent Form

Would you like to help me with my project and make the 2 small models with Lego®?

Yes ☐ **No** ☐

(Please tick one box)

Student Name: ……

Please tick one box

It is <u>OK</u> for photographs of my models to go into your project book ☐

I <u>don't want</u> photographs of my models to go into your project book ☐

- **You can say "yes"**
- **You can say "no" and that is OK.**
- **You can say "Yes" now and change your answer to "no" later on, before the model-making. That's OK. (tell Miss xxxxxxx)**
- **You can say "Yes" now, make the models and then say "no" later.**
- **That is OK. The last day you can do that is the 1st of July, 2014 (tell Miss xxxx).**

Your parent/carer will send this form back to me. Thank you! From Faye

Appendix 9: Ethical Approval Form