EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE IN NURTURE GROUPS: USING A REALISTIC EVALUATION FRAMEWORK TO EXPLORE FACTORS AFFECTING PRACTICE AND SUGGEST FUTURE TRAINING DIRECTIONS

by

Oonagh M Davies

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ABSTRACT

Nurture Groups (NGs) are a focused intervention in mainstream schools, which strive to compensate for missed nurturing experiences in the early years through provision of small-group teaching in a home-like environment. This study is fundamentally concerned with understanding how social programmes like NGs work, and draws on Pawson and Tilley's (1997) 'Realistic Evaluation' to provide a methodological and epistemological framework for this inquiry.

Staff practice crucially affects NGs, yet this remains a relatively poorly investigated domain. Within a 'Realistic Evaluation' framework, working collaboratively with NG practitioners as co-researchers, their perspectives on factors which influence practice and support staff development are explored. Pertinent context, mechanism and outcome configurations relating to NGs, staff role and effective training are abstracted.

A realist synthesis of the literature and scrutiny of research findings using qualitative data analysis, revealed practitioners' perspectives on key mechanisms and contexts influencing practice at the community, family, whole school, mainstream class and NG levels, enabling positive outcomes for children attending NGs, and their families.

The findings highlight the complexity of this compensatory psycho-educational initiative. If positive outcomes for children are to be realised and appropriately evaluated, it is important to understand the underpinning causal mechanisms and influential contextual factors, with a contingent need for appropriately designed studies. Furthermore, as traditional assumptions regarding the mechanisms central to the effectiveness of this small group intervention could be at risk of 'internalising deficit', through the established emphasis on compensation for poor early attachment (Boxall, 2002), it is important that factors at Bronfenbrenner's (2005) micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosytemic levels continue to be considered.

Key contexts, mechanisms and outcomes within training and NG staff development were also identified. There was consensus that training models which involve greater opportunities for peer supervision and learning are more likely to facilitate successful practice, and ensure that learning derived from training and good practice are embedded.

To Huw and my family, for all their nurturing

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[1] The pseudonym Coalshire has been used throughout to preserve the anonymity of participants.

CONTENTS

APPENDICES

TABLES AND FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODDUCTION

CHAPTER 2: REALISTIC EVALUATION AND EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY

CHAPTER 3: COMPENSATORY EDCUATION, SMALL GROUP THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS AND NURTURE GROUPS

CHAPTER 4: EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND TRAINING

CHAPTER 5: REALISTIC EVALUATION: HYPOTHESES, METHODOLOGY, METHODS AND STUDY DESIGN

CHAPTER 6: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

ACRONYMS

AT	Attachment Theory
BERA	British Educational Research Association
BMI	Body Mass Index
BP	Boxall Profile
C	Context
CMOC	Context-Mechanism-Outcome Configuration
EBD	Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
EBP	Evidence-Based Policy
EP	Educational Psychologist
FSW	Family Support Worker
GRI	Group Realist Interview
HRS	High Reliability Schools
HS	Head Start
KS	Key Stage
LA	Local Authority
M	Mechanism
MS	Mainstream
NESS	National Evaluation of Sure Start
NG/NGs	Nurture Group/Nurture Groups
NGN	Nurture Group Network
O	Outcome
RCT	Randomised Controlled Trial
RE	Realistic Evaluation
RS	Realist Synthesis
SEAL	Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning
SEBD	Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
SGTI	Small Group Therapeutic Intervention
SR	Systematic Review

SS	Sure Start
SSCC	Sure Start Children's Centres
SSLP	Sure Start Local Programme
TA	Teaching Assistant
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In my second and third year of the Applied Educational and Child Psychology Doctoral Programme at the University of Birmingham, I have been employed by a Midlands Local Authority (LA), 'Coalshire', as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP). This volume of work represents the first volume of a two part thesis, and reports a small-scale, original empirical study commissioned by Coalshire LA, which considers factors influencing effective staff practice in Nurture Groups, using Realistic Evaluation methodology.

1.1 Rationale for the study

Nurture Groups (NGs) were selected as an area of research for four key reasons: Firstly, prior to my training as an Educational Psychologist (EP), I was a secondary school teacher interested in children conceptualised as having Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD). After three years as a Science teacher, as part of my Masters in Psychology of Education research, I investigated Secondary School teachers' perspectives on Attachment Theory, and learned of NGs for the first time. In my fourth year of teaching in a small mainstream high school, managing a unit for pupils excluded from mainstream lessons, I tried to re-establish the unit from a 'sin bin', using a NG approach. My interest in NGs has persisted, and as a TEP I have been involved in supporting the establishment and continuing development of two NGs, concurrently formulating a more critical perspective regarding their use.

Secondly, my employing LA influenced my choice of NGs as a research domain, as the present study was commissioned by a Senior Educational Psychologist, a member of the LA Nurture Group Steering Committee, with responsibility for Nurture Group (NG) provision and development in the LA. The impetus was his interest in how to focus future training for NG staff effectively. He wanted to know what level of knowledge and understanding they needed to ensure best outcomes for children in their care, and whether knowledge of theories such as Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1980 and 1988), could be considered pivotal to good practice. This superordinate, donated research aim formed the basis for exploration, within the current study of 'what influences successful or effective NG staff practice'?

Thirdly, since a more critical perspective on research had been fostered throughout my studies, I was surprised by the nature of the 'evidence' on which major educational policy decisions are based. For example, the significance of the Clackmannanshire study (Johnston and Watson, 2005) on literacy policy in England should not be underestimated. It provided critical evidence for the Government's review of the National Literacy Strategy (Education and Skills Committee, 2005, p23), the Rose review recommendation that, *"all English children be taught to read using systematic synthetic phonics, taught discretely as the prime approach in learning to read"* (Ellis, 2007, p281) and the ensuing 'Letters and Sounds' programme (DfES, 2007). Highly publicised and influential, the claims made from the Clackmannanshire study (although not necessarily made by the authors) were highly contentious, given that some aspects of the study had been "challenged" for not being "undertaken rigorously enough" (DfES, 2006a, p61), with insufficient trials to support generalisable

claims (Torgerson *et al*, 2006), and the fact that three months prior to the Rose Report's (2006) publication, another DfES review (this time a meta-analysis of 20 international Randomised Controlled Trials[2] (RCTs), including the Clackmannanshire study), reporting on reading, stated that: *"no statistically significant difference in effectiveness was found between synthetic phonics instruction and analytic phonics instruction"* (Torgerson *et al*, 2006, p8). It seemed surprising that a study conducted in eight schools, with a sample of only 304 children, and one geographical area in Scotland, could have such a powerful effect on English educational policy.

This controversy highlighted the need for evaluation which is "theory-based" (Sanderson, 2002), has a focus on *process* as well as *outcomes* (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) and which can account more carefully for *why, where/when* and *how* desirable results occur.

Finally, and related to the above point, despite their widespread use there remains "very little formal evaluation" of many of the effects of NGs (Reynolds *et al*, 2009). Arguably, one variable most likely to affect the success of NGs is staff practice, yet this remains a poorly investigated domain. The purpose of my research is to investigate the broad question 'what influences successful or effective NG staff practice'? Moreover, an issue dividing educational researchers is whether studies should focus on producing knowledge about educational practices and institutions or on improving their practice (Hammersely, 2007). This research strives to avoid this

[2] RCTs compare participants with a control, and base 'success' of an intervention on statistical comparison of the means of two groups (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998).

dichotomy by using the methodology of Realistic Evaluation to produce both knowledge and theory regarding NGs, and aims indirectly to improve practice, by informing training for existing and future NG staff.

1.2 Aims of the study

The study aims to use a 'Realistic Evaluation' (RE) framework to consider what factors at the levels of community, family, whole school, mainstream classroom, and NG, impact on practice and affect outcomes for children attending NGs. Despite an emerging evidence base arguing for NG effectiveness, little has been done to try to tease out the varying effects and potential interaction between different variables pertaining to NGs and 'why' they work, if indeed they do. Whilst a limited number of studies has used a control group comparison when evaluating NGs (Gerrard, 2006; Reynolds *et al*, 2009; Sanders, 2007; Scott and Lee, 2009), such studies have not shown whether the identified improved outcomes are 'associated specifically with NGs or with other factors e.g. smaller class sizes' (Howell, 2009); nor have they considered how NGs compare to other small group therapeutic interventions, and thus identify NGs' distinctive contribution.

Numerous studies on effective schools have indicated classroom-level practice as more influential than school-level, with regard to students' performance (e.g. Kyriakides, 2002); consequently the current study is weighted towards a consideration of NG-level factors. By identifying and exploring the potential interaction of some of the key factors affecting NG success, and by investigating

what training/Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities are likely to prove most effective in promoting good practice, I hoped to make an original contribution to knowledge and theory development in targeted, small-group psycho-educational interventions, such as NGs.

1.3 Researcher identity

My identity as a TEP, and my previous teaching experience, gave momentum to the study, affecting its direction and its underlying epistemological position. An additional influence on my epistemological assumptions has been my undergraduate studies in Biological Sciences. My initiation into research involved use of traditional scientific, experimental methodology to research phenomena in animal behaviour. With an indoctrination into RCTs as the 'gold standard', on becoming a social scientist, I initially wrestled with the suggestion that information garnered via non-experimental, more qualitative methodology could be 'valid', yet 'controlling' the complex interplay of many variables operating simultaneously in a social system was surely impossible. Arguably, Realistic Evaluation (RE), a process model concerned with understanding how social programmes work (Pawson and Tilley, 1997), addresses such quandaries, embracing rather than controlling the innumerable variables inherent in social programmes.

I align myself with a critical realist epistemology, believing there to be an objective world, independent of human perception or conception of it (Runes, 1942). I take a 'realistic', but 'critical' stance, which acknowledges the difficulties in affirming reality

objectively, because as humans, our presence as researchers will always influence (directly or indirectly) what we seek to measure (Runes,1942).

1.4 Research questions

Key research questions are shown in Table 1.1 below:

Table 1.1: Research Questions

Research question	Addressed in...
A. What does previous research tell us about NGs and factors affecting staff practice?	Chapter 3, Section 3.5
B. What does extant research tell us about community/family, whole school, mainstream classroom, and NG level factors (contexts and mechanisms) that influence or impact on practice and affect outcomes for children attending NGs?	Chapters 3 and 4
C. What can be learnt from research on other small group psycho-educational interventions and compensatory education?	Chapter 3, Section 3.3 and 3.4
D. What does extant research tell us about 'effective' practice in teachers, and how it can be developed?	Chapter 4
E. What do practitioners consider are the key attributes, skills and experience effective NG practitioners should have?	Chapter 6, Section 6.2
F. What community/family, whole school, mainstream classroom, and NG level factors (contexts and mechanisms) do practitioners consider support or hinder their practice and the outcomes of NGs?	Chapter 6, Section 6.3
G. With regard to NGs and staff practice, what contexts and mechanisms do NG practitioners consider most powerful in influencing outcomes?	Chapter 6, Section 6.4
H. What aspects (contexts and mechanisms) of training/CPD do NG practitioners consider would support their own and others' professional development most effectively?	Chapter 6, Section 6.6
I. With regard to staff development, what contexts and mechanisms do NG practitioners consider most powerful in influencing outcomes?	Chapter 6, Section 6.7

1.5 Research context

NGs have been operational in Coalshire since 2003, following their introduction by a Coalshire EP and Behaviour Support Teacher (BST), aware of the NG model, and keen to promote it locally. NGs were introduced in response to a perceived 'gap' in provision within mainstream schools, for some of Coalshire's emotionally and developmentally most vulnerable children. At the time of the present study, Coalshire had 16 established or newly established NGs in primary or first schools, four NGs in middle schools, and four more newly established NGs in secondary settings. Due to the limited sample size available for study, and greater structural and conceptual variation of NGs in secondary settings, alongside an, at best, embryonic evidence-base for NGs catering for this older age group, this research was focused on primary or first schools. As RE aims to test and refine theory that has informed programme development, and the evidence-base for NGs is not particularly extensive, a focus on the more established Key Stage 1 and 2 NGs was viewed as desirable. The present study aimed to inform future directions for training and NGs in Coalshire.

1.6 Methodological approach

Realistic Evaluation (RE), with its foundation in realist epistemology, was selected for both its theoretical orientation and methodological structure (which facilitates pluralism and flexibility with method choice) (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). By using the framework of RE, programme efficacy, individual responses and context are all considered. Indeed, RE's purpose is explanatory, and central to its remit is the question of: '*what works, for whom, in what circumstances?*' (p86). RE provides a

structure for evaluating social programmes, identifying which outcomes (Os) result from change-inducing mechanisms (Ms) operating within unique contexts (Cs) (Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Sheppard, 2009). Critically with RE, mechanisms are not 'variables' but an *"account of the make-up, behaviour and interrelationships of those processes which are responsible"* for regularities or outcomes (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p68):

> *"A mechanism is thus a theory – a theory which spells out the potential of human resources and reasoning".*

Pawson and Tilley's (1997) RE was originally utilised and developed for programme evaluation in criminology. It is, however, emerging as a framework of choice for many educational researchers (Thistleton, 2008; Sheppard, 2009; Soni, 2010; Thornbery, 2010), although less has been published in peer-reviewed journals (Timmins and Miller, 2007). As with Sheppard (2009), I adopt an RE approach, as NG interventions, like all such initiatives, involve *"the actions of people, and are embedded in social systems"*; thus NGs are shaped by the actions of individuals and the contexts within which they are set (p8). Theory development, rather than generalisation was the goal of this research, to help illuminate what aspects of NGs 'work, for whom and in what circumstances'. A further, practical purpose was to inform future training directions for NG staff in Coalshire, and perhaps more broadly, through sharing this research with colleagues from the national Nurture Group Network (NGN).

1.7 Structure of the study

This study is not an evaluation *per se* but does draw on Pawson and Tilley's (1997)

‘Realistic Evaluation’ (RE) to provide a methodological and epistemological framework for this inquiry. For reviewing research on complex social interventions, Pawson *et al* (2004) advocate the use of ‘Realist Synthesis’: as an alternative to more traditional systematic reviews of the evidence-base, where a *“highly specified and intentionally inflexible methodology”* is followed, to assure high reliability (p v). In contrast, realist syntheses follow a *“more heterogeneous and iterative process...less amenable to prescription”* but still *“equally rigorous”*, to provide an “explanatory analysis” of how and why programmes “work (or don’t work) in particular contexts or settings” (p iv-v). Realist syntheses are underpinned by the understanding that programmes do not just ‘have effects’, they *are* ‘theories’; thus the literature review is essentially theory-synthesis (Pawson *et al*, 2004). The use of a realist synthesis has implications for how the literature is both approached and used. Consequently, to facilitate navigation of the literature review chapters, I present and describe RE and its bedfellow ‘Realist Synthesis’ in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 3 I present a realist synthesis of the literature on compensatory education, small-group therapeutic interventions and NGs, to provide background and rationale for the research, and to address Research Questions A-C (see Table 1.1). Previous studies regarding compensatory education, other small group therapeutic interventions, and NGs are analysed, in order to extract pertinent contexts (Cs), mechanisms (Ms) and outcomes (Os), generate CMO configurations (CMOCs), and develop ‘Programme Theories’. Theories are framed as propositions about *“how mechanisms are fired in contexts to produce outcomes”* (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p85).

In Chapter 4 a further realist synthesis of the literature regarding effective teaching, training and Continued Professional Development (CPD) is carried out, to meet the same end of programme theory development, and to address Research Question D (Table 1.1).

Realist investigation not only relies on *"broad hypotheses culled from the background literature"* but also incorporates *"the 'folk wisdom' of practitioners"* (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p107).

Following Pawson and Tilley (1997), further theory development was derived from a qualitative investigation, where NG staff were individually interviewed to elicit realistic theories on programme mechanisms and contexts. 'Folk theories' generated from interviews, and programme theories extracted from the literature review were 'taught' to participants at a group interview, using the format of a 'Realist Interview' (Pawson and Tilley, 1997).

Chapter 5 describes my hypotheses, methodology and study design. Methods, ethical considerations and data analysis are presented, and challenges to reliability and validity discussed.

In Chapter 6 I present findings in relation to Research Questions E-I (Table 1.1). The Programme Theories which have been refined in light of findings from the empirical study are presented, and used to formulate and present an initial 'Programme Specification' for NGs and one for training NG practitioners (after Timmins and Miller,

2007).

Finally, in Chapter 7 I provide a critique of the methodology, and examine the initial Programme Theories to account for factors which are likely to influence and foster successful NG staff practice. I reflect upon this study and how findings could inform NG practice and focus future training for NG staff locally and perhaps more widely, and discuss the implications for future research and EP practice.

CHAPTER 2: REALISTIC EVALUATION AND EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY

2.1 Introduction

Evaluation research has grown in importance over recent decades (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). In the late 1990s Pawson and Tilley (1997) proposed '*Realistic Evaluation*' (RE) as a 'new evaluation paradigm', with foundations in 'scientific realist philosophy' and 'commitment to the idea that programmes deal with real problems' not just social constructions. Over recent years the nomenclature has changed to *'Realist Evaluation'* (Pawson and Tilley, 2004), but the principles have been maintained, with an emerging evidence-base for the effectiveness of this approach across many disciplines (Kazi, 2003; Byng *et al*, 2005; Tolson *et al*, 2005; Wilson and McCormack, 2006; Timmins and Miller, 2007; Greenhalgh *et al*, 2009).

This chapter introduces RE, and discusses how it can support the development of evidence-based practice and policy in education. In order that the literature review can be appropriately navigated, as a 'Realist Synthesis' has been carried out (described in Sections 1.7 and 2.6), an overview of RE is given in the following sections. Additionally, prior to discussing NGs and their historical and theoretical background, it is important to position NGs within what I consider the wider narrative and context of this thesis: that is, the discourse of compensatory education and the contentious concept of evidence-based policy.

2.2 Realistic Evaluation

2.2.1 Weaknesses in experimental evaluation

> *"It is not enough to indentify that any intervention can be effective. Effectiveness may be quite context-dependent"*
>
> (Davies *et al*, 2000, p50).

Much evaluation research develops social theory using experimentation. Pawson and Tilley challenge this traditional view of 'experimentation' which *"prevails in orthodox evaluation circles"* (Tilley, 2000, p2). They highlight a weakness of experimental evaluation in *"understanding the explanatory import of the social context in which a program operates"* (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p47), arguing evaluation research is far too 'method-driven', with everything *"apportioned as an 'input' or 'output', so that the program itself becomes a 'variable'"* (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p51). With this view of evaluation, they argue, vital factors and causal agents are likely to be missed, dismissed or misunderstood. For example, rather than a strength, the use of unreal 'composite' groups in quasi-experimental research could be a significant weakness;

> *"...since particular communities and their culture and values obviously exert a profound and real influence... [we need to understand]...what it is about given communities which will facilitate the effectiveness of a program... by its very logic, experimental evaluation either ignores these underlying processes, or treats them incorrectly as inputs, outputs or confounding variables, or deals with them in a post hoc and thus arbitrary fashion".*
>
> (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p52-54)

RE differs from more traditional experimental evaluation in a number of ways (Pawson and Tilley, 1997):

- *recognition that crucial data can be lost or ignored by the process of controlling 'variables', as in experimental evaluation;*

- *a focus on process, not just outputs ('why/how does it work?', not just 'does it work?'); and*
- *recognition of the important influence social contexts can have on programmes.*

Arguably, experimental evaluation, with an underlying positivist epistemology, fails to embrace the inherent complexity of social programmes, or provide valuable explanatory information. Furthermore, experimental evaluation views causation as 'external':

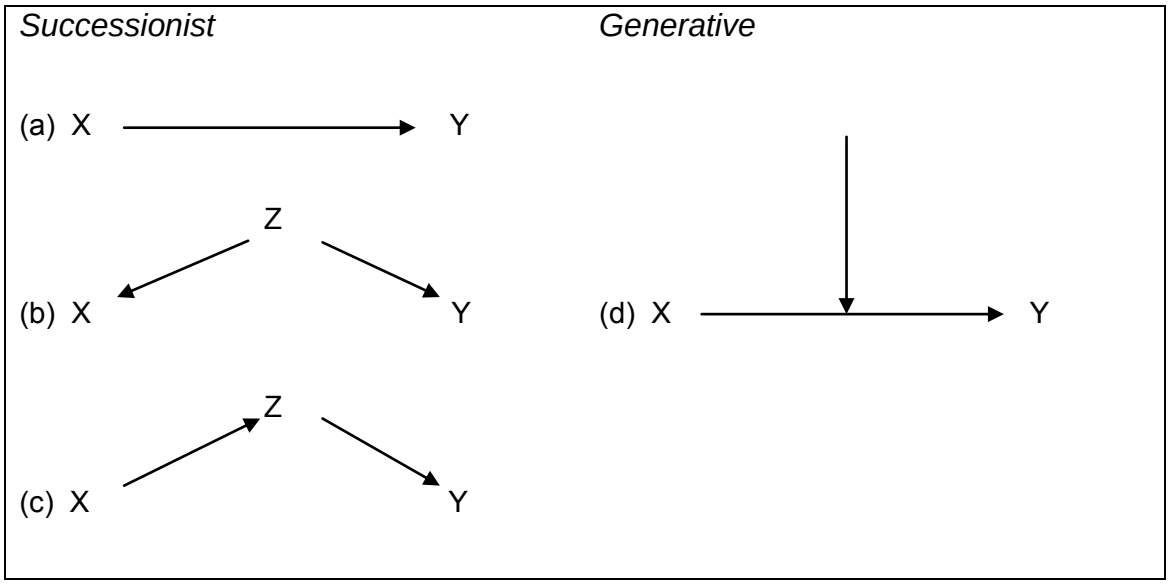
> *"Cause simply describes constant conjunctions between events. The action of billiard balls is archetypally describable in these terms. We can observe regularity of cause and effect as one ball collides with another and forces it to move. The generative conception of causation, built into the scientific realist philosophy, sees the matter of causation 'internally'. Cause describes the transformative potential of phenomena".*
>
> (Pawson and Tilley, 1994, p293).

2.2.2 Generative causation

There are differences between the basic features of social mechanisms and mechanisms used in natural science explanations (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). Sheppard (2009, p48; after Robson, 2002) describes how *"mechanisms are essentially 'reason explanations' in social sciences compared with 'mechanistic explanations' in the natural sciences"*. Pawson and Tilley (1997) assert that by 'calling on different layers of reality in social explanations', a *generative* conception of causality is employed, where instead of identifying 'variables or correlates which associate one with the other', there is an attempt to 'explain how the association *itself* comes about': *"The generative mechanisms thus actually constitute the regularity; they are the regularity"* (p67).

The differences between *generative* and *successionist* views of causation are depicted in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Models of causation



(From: Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p68)

Pawson and Tilley (1997) argue when realists challenge *"the constant conjunction view of one event producing another"* (model 'a'), *"they are not attempting to bring further 'intervening' variables into the picture"* (p68), nor postulating that a further unforeseen event brings about the *"relationship between the original variables"* (model 'b'), nor that *"the original relationship is 'indirect' working through an intervening variable"* (model 'c'); rather, the mechanism *"is responsible for the relationship itself"* (model 'd') (p68).

A generative view of causation recognises the complexity of social programmes, and how they involve a *"continual round of interactions and opportunities and decisions"* (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p38). Of particular relevance for this study, is that in RE

the volition of participants is not ignored, or viewed as 'noise' or a 'confounding variable' (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). Rather there is recognition that a subject's choice will *"frame the extent and nature of change"* (p38). Sheppard (2009) summarises how *"mechanisms are the choices (influenced by their reasoning) and capacities (influenced by their resources and approaches) individuals are able to summon up in a particular context"* (p48; after Pawson and Tilley, 1997). Contexts are the ideal conditions under which these mechanisms can be fired, in order to promote the intended outcomes. Thus causation in the social world is conceptualised with Pawson and Tilley's (1997) *"basic realist formula"* (pgXV):

mechanism + context = outcome

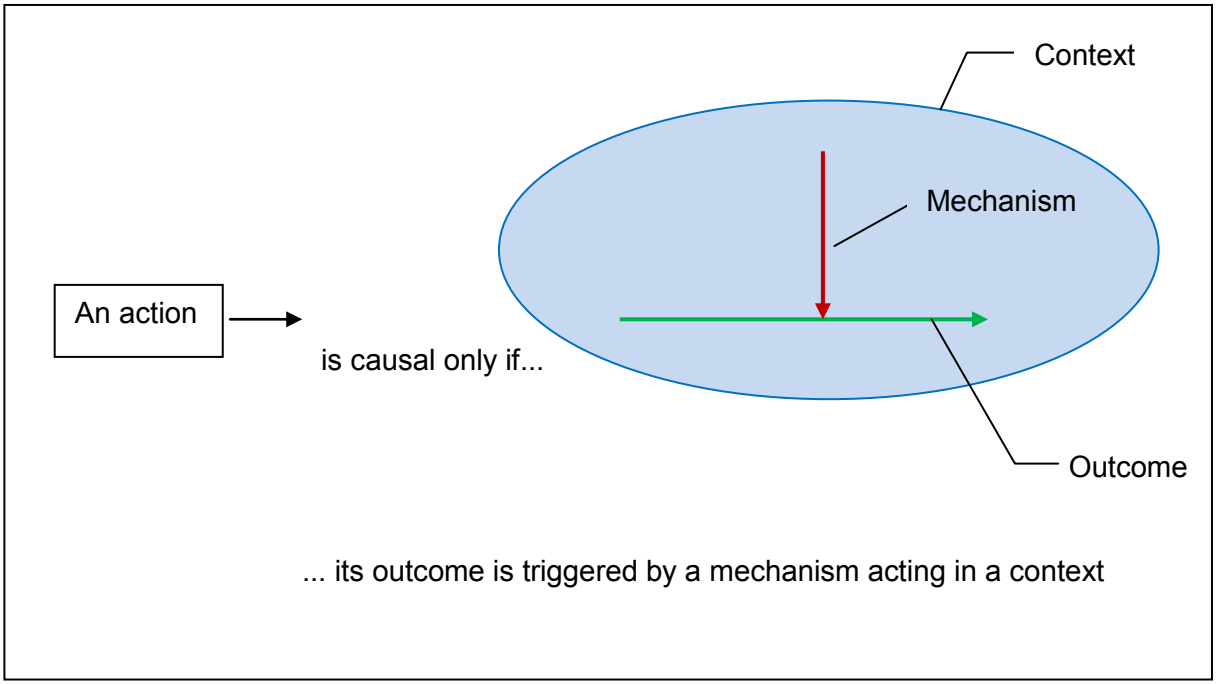
2.2.3 Contexts, Mechanisms and Outcomes

Pawson and Tilley (1997) contend:

> *"Programmes work (have successful 'outcomes') only in so far as they introduce the appropriate ideas and opportunities ('mechanisms') to groups in the appropriate social and cultural conditions ('contexts')"* (p58).

Their proposition is that *"causal outcomes follow from mechanisms acting in contexts"* and that this is the *"axiomatic base upon which all realist explanation builds"* (p58). They base their premise on the generative rather than successionist view of causation (Harré, 1972) (described in Section 2.2.2; illustrated in Figure 2.2 below):

Figure 2.2: 'Generative Causation' - A diagrammatic representation of Pawson and Tilley's formula



(From: Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p58)

Pawson and Tilley (1997, p58) use an analogy of gunpowder to demonstrate their point. Gunpowder does not always ignite in the presence of a flame e.g. if it is damp, or there is insufficient powder. If we want a spark to cause an explosion (the outcome), then we are dependent not only on the chemical composition of the substance which allows the reaction (the mechanism) but also the physical conditions which allow the mechanism to come into operation (the context). Thus the *"internal potential of a system or substance"* needs the right conditions in order to be activated (p57).

To conclude, Pawson and Tilley's (1997) RE provides a framework for the evaluation of social programmes, where *outcomes* (Os) are triggered by *mechanisms* (Ms) acting in specific *contexts* (Cs). This paradigm's explanatory focus is highlighted by

the central purpose of RE: theory development regarding *"what works for whom, in what circumstances and in what respects, and how?"* (Pawson and Tilley, 2004, p2). Pawson and Tilley (2004) highlight *"it is not programmes that work, but rather the resources they offer, to enable their subjects to make them work"* (p5). Crucially, programs are not 'undifferentiated wholes', but rather fire 'multiple mechanisms' *"having different effects on different subjects in different situations, and so produce multiple outcomes*" (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p217). Pawson and Tilley (1997) contend programmes should only be described as 'successful' if it can be demonstrated *"what it is (M) about the program which works, for whom, in what conditions (C)"* (p72).

2.3 The nature of evidence

In social sciences the debate on the nature and value of different types of evidence continues, often polarising opinion. What exactly is meant by 'evidence'? We use 'evidence' everyday, whether intuitively or through our observations, but it is a question of *what* evidence we use to make decisions and the nature of this evidence that is usually challenged (Thomas, 2004). Thomas (2004) argues the *"importance of evidence in shaping and enhancing practice"* is undeniable; the issue *"is not the significance of evidence, but its nature – and its value contingent on that nature"* (p1). Furthermore, all evidence is interpreted in a social context:

> *"There is...similarity in the ways in which the legal and the scientific communities approach the notion of evidence. In each, the ultimate determination of the value of the evidence will rest on the judgement of peers – those peers being twelve ordinary people in the case of the jury, and an expert scientific community (who will replicate, convene, confer, 'peer-review' and judge) in the case of science"*
>
> (Thomas, 2004, p7).

Consequently, the 'objectivity' of 'scientific' evidence can itself be questioned, because of the *"social and interpretative context of evidence"* (Thomas, 2004, p7).

Various narratives surround what comprises 'strong' evidence, generally focusing on scientific evidence as 'right', despite its numerous potential pitfalls (Pring and Thomas, 2004). RE differs from more positivist, experimental approaches which generally utilise RCTs. For clinical trials, Shekelle *et al* (2000) use standard criteria to rank categories of evidence and evaluate the strength of practice implications. 'Evidence from meta-analysis of RCTs' is seen as the highest category of evidence; implications for practice are thought to be strengthened if supported by such an evidence-base (Shekelle *et al*, 2000). However, Pawson and Tilley (1997) contend useful information can be lost when statistical analyses are undertaken.

The individuality of participants' responses and qualitative information which would ensue are not considered in RCTs. Yet this information could have strongly influenced why a programme has or has not worked. As Goldstein (2006, p8) contends, such subtleties *"may be among the most interesting aspects of the data"*. Indeed RCTs, the *"'gold standard' of applied statistical work"*, do not *"necessarily tell us anything about causal mechanisms"*, nor are they necessary to *"draw causal conclusions"* (Goldstein, 2006, p2). Furthermore, 'hard' scientific evidence may meet the strongest criteria for reliability, but cannot provide a 'truth' in which we can be certain:

> *"Certainly within the social sciences there increasingly appears to be an acceptance that the social world and social reality, at least, might not be readily characterised by universally applicable and transcendent laws such as the naïve realism of positivism proposes and that although the world may exist physically independently of people, truth and meaning cannot"*
>
> (Moore, 2005, p106).

2.4 Evidence-based policy

The quest for evidence-based policy (EBP) is rife with hidden and overt challenge, danger and complexity. Some of its greatest proponents even argue *"there is no such thing as evidence-based policy"*; instead 'evidence-informed policy', 'evidence *au fait* policy', 'evidence *enlightened* policy' nay 'The Best We Can Do By Way of Evidence-Based Policy', are all offered as more accurate designations (Pawson, 2006, pviii).

Amidst a changing ideological and political landscape, the rallying cries for EBP have reverberated, and are now seen in the rhetoric of successive governments: Certainly, it is clear in the *Modernising government* White Paper (Cabinet Office, 1999, Section 2.6):

> *"Government should regard policy as a continuous, learning process, not as a series of one-off initiatives. We will improve our use of evidence and research so that we understand better the problems we are trying to address. We will make more use of pilot schemes to encourage innovations and test whether they work".*

The gauntlet has been thrown down to policy makers and the research community alike:

> *"This [New Labour] government expects more of policy makers. More new ideas, more willingness to question inherited ways of doing things, better use of evidence and research in policy making and better focus on policies that will deliver long term goals"*
>
> (Cabinet Office, 1999, Section 2.6).

> *"Social science research evidence is central to development and evaluation of policy…We need to be able to rely on social science and social scientists to tell us what works and why and what types of policy initiatives are likely to be most effective"*
>
> (Blunkett, 2000; cited in BERA, 2000, p21).

Finding out 'what works' has become part of successive governments' agendas, and apparent in a number of policy documents is an intent to use evidence in guiding policy making (Boaz *et al*, 2002). However, governmental moves to embrace and utilise 'evidence' in policy decisions has raised some questions as to whether this was a genuine commitment or simply rhetoric and a means to support policies to which government was already committed (Thomas, 2004).

Despite governmental calls, there is resistance in the ranks. Some policy makers argue that although *"robust research findings must not be ignored"*, they cannot wait for outcomes of long-term research studies; instead decisions are based on the best sources available at the time (DfES, 2006a, p15). In addition to concerns over the length of time research takes, timing is also important. For example, Pawson (2006) explains the failure of evaluation research to inform significantly or successfully the policy process, has been due to timing; such research usually *"occurs after programme design and implementation"* (p8). Systematic reviews, which should provide an exhaustive synthesis of the available evidence-base, were offered as a solution to this problem, as policy-makers could direct reviewers to examine the evidence *"before the leap into policy and practice"* (Pawson, 2006, p8). Crucially, Pawson (2006) highlights that *"systematic review is not intended to displace evaluation research, for the former provides most of the evidence-base for the latter"*, rather it should *"act as the conduit from the evidence to the policy – no more and no*

less" (p12). However, as noted in Section 2.5, systematic reviews (SRs) are themselves not without their limitations.

Part of the problem is that the concepts of 'evidence-base' and 'policy' are from different worlds. The 'evidence-base' comes from a culture where scientific thinking and methodology reign, where researchers must provide evidence to support their assertions, where research is theoretical and often abstract, where collating evidence takes a long time, and where there is much debate about the relative value of different forms of evidence (Lamb, 2010). In contrast, policy makers operate in a paradigm where the media or Minister's views dominate, where a clear explanation of the world is needed, where time frames are short to medium-term, and where evidence is something that should fit the question being asked, or be adapted so it fits (Lamb, 2010). Pawson (2006) highlights this chasm between evidence and policy, and whether this gulf can be bridged, remains to be seen. Pawson (2006) eloquently summarises the relationship;

> *"Evidence-based policy is much like all trysts, in which hope springs eternal and often outweighs expectancy, and for which the future is uncertain as we wait to know whether the partnership will flower or pass as an infatuation" (p1).*

2.5 Systematic Reviews (SRs)

Over recent decades, methodologists and policy makers have become preoccupied with accumulating research findings *"into a robust body of knowledge*" (Davies *et al*, 2000, p7). Pivotal to this preoccupation has been the development of secondary research techniques, which utilise the findings of primary research (Davies *et al*, 2000). SRs are an example of secondary research, which involve uncovering all

studies relevant to a given evaluation question, and then methodological quality is assessed and synthesised (Davies *et al*, 2000). SRs differ from their counterparts (literature reviews, scoping studies, briefing papers, rapid reviews), by their tighter protocol, and 'agreed standards' (Boaz *et al*, 2002). SRs are heralded as a means of passing on the collective wisdom from research derived from previous initiatives, and in this way have "*grabbed the methodological mantle of evidence-based policy*" (Pawson, 2006, p11). The use of SRs is not without controversy. Boaz *et al* (2002) highlight three reasons for scepticism, explored in the following sections.

2.5.1 The broader debate surrounding different research methods

There is disparity in the relative weight afforded to different research methodologies, diversity of research approaches, and the nature of the evidence-base, depending on the policy area under consideration (Boaz *et al*, 2002). For example, in healthcare, the evidence-base focuses on *"obtaining high quality evidence through experimentation"*; with the championing of both RCTs, and the systematic examination of research (Boaz *et al*, 2002, p2). In contrast, in school education, SRs are comparatively rare, and much educational research is considered 'less than robust' (Davies *et al*, 2000). Paradigm wars have raged with *"the epithet 'positivism' attached to any quantitative work"*, claims that 'eclectic methods compete rather than complement', poor understanding of statistical terms (e.g. randomisation), and analysis of large datasets occurring but with relatively little true experimentation (Davies *et al*, 2000).

In healthcare, certainly when it comes to clinical protocols, and despite a growing interest in qualitative methods to give a complementary view (Davies *et al*, 2000), the methodological landscape is pretty flat and homogenous. On the contrary, in education, the terrain is rugged and heterogeneous, and paradigm wars are likely to rage on. Nevertheless, a sea change appeared to have been heralded when in 2000, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) funded the Centre for Evidence Informed Policy and Practice in Education (EPPI-Centre). The EPPI-Centre conducts SRs of research evidence, criticising more traditional literature reviews for their narrow scrutiny of the evidence-base, and for taking the claims of researchers at face value (EPPI-Centre, 2011). Four clear features of EPPI-centre SRs are identified:

a. ***explicit*** and ***transparent*** methods are used;
b. a ***standard*** set of stages is followed;
c. It is ***accountable***, ***replicable*** and ***updateable;*** and
d. there is a requirement of user involvement to ensure reports are ***relevant*** and ***useful.***

(EPPI-Centre, 2011)

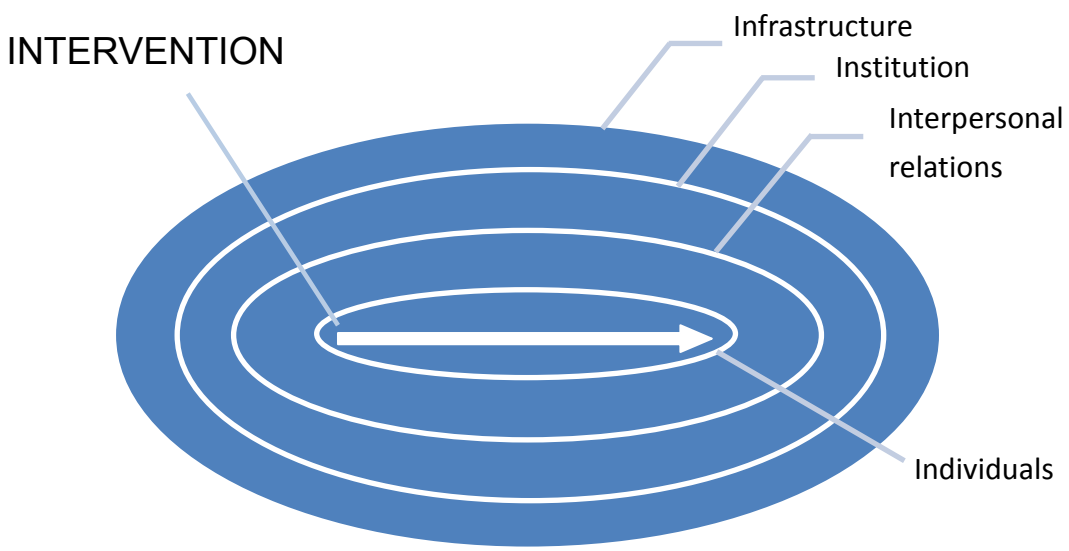
2.5.2 Studies involve complex interventions with multiple outcomes

Criticisms of SRs include their use with 'complex interventions with multiple outcomes' (Boaz *et al*, 2002). SRs are not designed to value and synthesise crucial qualitative data (e.g. participants' views) and contextual data (Boaz *et al*, 2002); thus they can fail to capture the inherent complexity of the social world. Realist research synthesis *"cuts through complexity by focusing on the 'theories' that underlie social interventions"* (Pawson *et al,* 2004 p1), continuously attending to contextual factors.

With RE, contextual data are paramount. Pawson *et al* (2004) argue that when evaluating social programmes, three contextual factors should be considered; *"interpersonal relationships, institutions, and infrastructures through which and in which the intervention is delivered*" (piii). Following Sheppard (2009), I have used Pawson *et al*'s (2004) description of significant contextual factors (illustrated in Figure 2.3 below):

- ***individual*** *capacities (e.g. interest, attitudes, capability, credibility, beliefs and skills of key stakeholders);*
- *group factors and* ***interpersonal relationships*** *(e.g. lines of communication, management, administrative support, professional contracts);*
- *organisational factors/****institutional setting*** *(e.g. organisational culture, charter and ethos of the school, clear and supportive leadership from senior managers); and*
- ***wider infra-structural*** *and welfare system (e.g. political support, funding resources, influential lobbies, legal system).*

Figure 2.3: The intervention as the product of its context



(Source: Pawson *et al*, 2004, p8)

Pawson *et al* (2004) explain how these contextual layers influence programme efficacy and *"represent the single greatest challenge to evidence-based policy"* as

generating *"transferable lessons about interventions will always be difficult because they are never embedded in the same structures"* (p8).

2.5.3 Concern there is no room for theory

The role for theory in SRs is limited, yet many social interventions are *"guided by a theory of change"* (Boaz *et al*, 2002, p8). Approaches like Connell and Kubisch's (1998) 'Theories of Change', and Pawson and Tilley's (1997) 'Realistic Evaluation', have highlighted how change processes can mediate the impact of an intervention (Boaz *et al*, 2002). Theory development is central to RE.

Hansen (2005) describes the various typologies of evaluation models, shown in Table 2.1 below. The focus of programme theory models, like RE, is *"assessing the validity of the programme theory"* which underpins the organisation or intervention (Hansen, 2005, p450). RE uses 'empirical observation' to analyse the causal relations between Cs, Ms, and Os (Hansen, 2005). Where traditional results-based models focus only on outcomes and evaluating results, a programme theory model like RE, *"opens up the underlying black box of the programme theory, uncovers mechanisms and raises the focus to a cluster of interventions or to an organizational field"* (Hansen, 2005, p450), thus focusing on 'families of mechanisms' and producing *"tailored, transferable theory"* (Sanderson, 2002, p15).

Table 2.1: A typology of evaluation models

Evaluation Models	***Questions***	***Criteria for Evaluation***
Result models a. Goal-attainment model b. Effects model	1. To what degree has the goal(s) been realised? 2. Which effects can be uncovered?	a) Derived from goal(s) b) Open, all consequences should be uncovered
Explanatory process model	Is the level of activity satisfactory? Are there implementation problems?	Performance is analysed from idea to decision and implementation and to the reaction of the addressees
System model	How has performance functioned as a whole?	Realised input, process, structure and outcome assessed either in relation to objectives in same dimensions or comparatively
Economic model a. Cost-efficiency b. Cost-effectiveness c. Cost-benefit	a. Is productivity satisfactory? b. Is effectiveness satisfactory? c. Is utility satisfactory?	a. Output measured in relation to expenses b. Effect measured in relation to expenses c. Utility measured in relation to expenses
Actor model a. Client-orientated model b. Stakeholder model c. Peer review model	a. Are clients satisfied? b. Are stakeholders satisfied? c. Is professional quality in order?	a. Formulated by clients b. Formulated by stakeholders c. Formulated by peers
Programme theory model (theory-based evaluation)	What works for whom in what context? Is it possible to ascertain errors in programme theory?	Programme theory is reconstructed and assessed via empirical analysis

(Source: Hansen, 2005, p449)

2.5.4 Alternatives to systematic reviews (SRs)

SRs are certainly an important weapon in our arsenal against irrationality, but Pawson (2006) highlights the need to *"temper ambition with caution, lest the 'synthesizing society' turns out to be the latest false dawn of rationality"* (p12). Being mindful of the policy context and practitioner climate into which evidence is emitted is crucial; recommendations from SRs *"can never match the complexity of the policy systems that will host them"* (Pawson, 2006, p13). Additionally, SRs paint a cumulative picture of the evidence. The *"foundational, meta-analytic models of systematic review use arithmetic methods to pool outcome evidence"* (Pawson, 2006, p13), meaning the evidence from qualitative sources is effectively ignored (as discussed in Sections 2.3 and 2.5.2). Furthermore, traditional SRs follow highly specified and intentionally inflexible methodologies, aiming to assure high reliability, and in their 'hierarchy of evidence' RCTs are king (Pawson *et al*, 2004). As discussed in Section 2.3, the use of RCTs in testing complex interventions is flawed, as matched 'treatment' and 'control' groups are elusive, and RCTs are *"explicitly constructed to wash out the vital explanatory ingredients"* (Pawson *et al*, 2004, p22). In this way SRs risk 'throwing the baby out with the bath water'.

Boaz *et al* (2002) do offer suggestions for how SR methodology can be strengthened: for example, involving users in defining problems and questions, developing methods which encompass a broader range of types of research in reviews (including studies with mixed methods), developing methods for reviewing complex issues, interventions and outcomes, and finally, making SRs more accessible and relevant to more than just the needs of policy makers (p10). Arguably,

Pawson's (2001) '*Realist Synthesis*', a form of realist review, which tackles and addresses some of the criticisms of SRs, offers a more valid framework for reviewing and evaluating research which can be used to inform policy. In the following sections, realist synthesis is described further, and its relevance for this study demonstrated.

2.6 Realist syntheses

Realistic Evaluation provides a structure for interpreting the literature (as discussed in Section 1.7), in the form of realist syntheses, which differ from SRs by lacking deference to traditional hierarchies of reliability and have a more flexible methodology, using a 'heterogeneous and iterative process' (Pawson *et al*, 2004). A realist perspective considers all studies to be inherently porous. Consequently studies are not discarded simply for failing to fulfil strict, positivist criteria. A realist synthesis does not just describe studies, but attempts to abstract from the literature Context-Mechanism-Outcome Configurations (CMOCs). Identification of CMOCs helps form 'Programme Theories' which can then be subjected to testing (my own Programme Theories are presented at the end of Sections 3.3, 3.4, 3.5 and 4.4). Despite numerous strengths, realist review does have notable limitations (Pawson *et al*, 2004), which are discussed in Chapter 7.

Pawson's (2006) commitment to EBP is clear, and his conceptualisation of evidence-based policy demands *"dispassionate, independent and objective evidence to evaluate policy options"* (p7). Such research would differ from emancipatory or participatory research, where exploration is motivated by partisanship or focused on

utilisation and local issues. Pawson (2006) makes it clear that to be *"both partisan and researcher is a bit like having one's cake and eating it"* (p6). My personal experience of NGs, and current practice supporting NG staff, puts me at risk of partisanship. To temper this, a critical stance and reflexivity are needed.

RE also distances itself from punditry, political alignment or an over-reliance on the pollster's power (Pawson, 2006). Instead EBP is *"based on the brave assumption that the truth will out"* (Pawson, 2006, p7). The nature of 'truth', however, is as contentious as 'evidence'. I am aware no study can uncover the whole 'truth' regarding effective practice in NGs, but hope this study will contribute to building and subsequent testing of theories regarding NGs and staff practice.

2.7 Realistic Evaluation and Education

In Timmins and Miller's (2007, p9) re-examination of two studies from an RE perspective, they suggest RE as a potential framework to *"assess innovation in education"* whilst also promoting collaborative work from researchers and practitioners. Such a framework offers support in providing practitioners with an evidence-base: an ever-increasing demand (Timmins and Miller, 2007) (as argued in Section 2.4). Additionally, it facilitates both the gathering of relevant information and the likely success of any repetitions of successful programmes – recognising evidence from these is likely to be highly context-related (Timmins and Miller, 2007).

> *"Any innovation will depend, for its success or failure, on a range of factors; for example, the relationships between the people involved or the characteristics of the setting in which it is implemented"*
>
> (Timmins and Miller, 2007, p9).

Using an RE framework ensures both individual responses and context are reflected upon.

In conclusion, this study adopted an RE approach to explore links between NG staff practice (M) and positive change for children in NGs (O), and to identify those factors (C) that support or hinder effective practice at the NG level. Mechanisms and contexts affecting NG practice at other levels (e.g. community/family, whole school, and mainstream class) were also considered. An additional inquiry was carried out into what training/CPD for NG staff (M) is desirable for promoting effective NG staff practice (O), and what facilitative contextual factors for such training (C) would comprise.

NGs are a type of compensatory educational intervention. In the next chapter, a realist synthesis of evidence surrounding compensatory initiatives is developed, to highlight the superordinate context within which NGs operate. The evidence-base regarding other small group therapeutic interventions and NGs is then examined. Context, Mechanism, Outcome Configurations (CMOCs) from the literature are abstracted, as part of the realist synthesis, and Programme Theories are presented.

CHAPTER 3: COMPENSATORY EDUCATION, SMALL GROUP THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS AND NURTURE GROUPS

3.1 Aims and objectives

This review aims to provide historical background to Nurture Groups (NGs) and consider critically existing research regarding this small group therapeutic intervention (SGTI). Setting the wider context for NGs, first the broader issue of compensatory education is discussed, and then other SGTIs are considered. Using the framework of RE (introduced in Chapter 2 and discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6), applicable 'Contexts', 'Mechanisms' and 'Outcomes' are identified from the literature on compensatory education, SGTIs, and NGs. Initial Programme Theories are abstracted, presented at the end of Sections 3.3.3, 3.4, 3.5.4 and 4.4, tested against practitioner theories derived from the empirical study described in Chapter 5, and then refined and further developed in Chapters 6 and 7.

3.2 Search strategy/methodology

Table 3.1 shows the databases that were searched, search terms used, and the references produced. The search was carried out in June 2010, in January 2011, and again in July 2011, in order to ensure all contemporary publications within the target domain were identified and considered. From the references below, germane abstracts were read, and sources selected for their particular relevance to this inquiry. The University Library Catalogue and electronic library ('ebrary') were also searched for relevant texts books.

Table 3.1: Search Strategy

Databases	Domain	Search terms[3]	Numbers of References:	
			Identified	Relevant to study
	Nurture Groups	'Nurture and Group'	38	27
		'Nurture and Groups		
Australian		'Nurturing and environment'	16	2
Education Index		'Nurturing environment'	77	3
	Compensatory education	'Compensatory and education'	569 (23 since 2000)	
British Education		'Compensatory and intervention'	10	2
Index		Sure Start	58	0
Education		Head Start	1727 (512 since 2000)	5
Resources		Head Start and evaluation	16	3
	Small Group Therapeutic	'Small group and therapeutic'	9	0
Information Center	Interventions	'Nurturing environment'	77 (since 2000)	1
(ERIC)		'Social and emotional and behavioural and programme'	4	1
	Training	'Effective and teaching'	1422 (732 since 2000)	10
		'Effective and teacher and training'	7438 (20 since 2000)	8

[3] Titles only were searched except for 'Nurturing environment' where titles and abstracts were read.

3.3 Compensatory education

The philosophy of Compensatory Education (CE) is to redress inequality of opportunity. CE is an umbrella term for programmes or services for disadvantaged children at risk of low educational achievement. NGs are one of a wide variety of such initiatives.

3.3.1 Head Start (HS)

Started in 1965[4], the United States' 'Head Start Programme' is arguably the largest scale, most ambitious compensatory initiative for disadvantaged children, designed to *"close the gaps between these children and their more advantaged peers"* (Garces *et al*, 2002, p999). With a 'whole child' philosophy, a range of comprehensive services including preschool education, full health care, nutrition services, and parental support, were all offered under the patronage of HS (US Department of Health and Human Services, DHSS, 2010).

Billions of dollars of public money were invested, yet contentiously, reports on short and longer-term effectiveness remain mixed, with both long-term positive gains (Garces *et al*, 2002), and no lasting effects (Fryer and Levitt, 2004) reported. Furthermore, due to the diffuse nature of the HS design, trying to conclude from an evaluation of a sample of projects whether the HS concept actually 'worked' has proved untenable (Rossi *et al*, 2004). Rossi *et al* (2004) argue the only accurate

[4] As part of President Johnson's arsenal on the 'War on Poverty'.

generalisation was that *"some projects were effective, some were ineffective, and, among the effective ones, some were more effective than others"* (p195). However, latterly, with greater standardisation achieved, recent evaluations may provide more compelling evidence of intervention effectiveness or ineffectiveness (Rossi *et al*, 2004).

The latest HS Impact Study (HSIS, 2010) used RCT methodology and involved a nationally representative sample of approximately 5,000 3-4 year olds, with data collected over a four year period. The HSIS found a range of positive impacts on outcomes for children (e.g. pre-school experiences, school readiness) but few statistically significant differences persisted into longer-term outcomes (HSIS, 2010). The National Forum on Early Childhood Policy and Programs[5] (NFECPP, 2010), succinctly summarises the findings and implications of the HSIS (detailed in Appendix I), highlighting that the HSIS provides 'unconvincing' evidence regarding the success or failure of HS.

It is possible, however, to extrapolate from the NFECPP (2010) report some potential problems with using RCTs in social science: control and treatment groups' experiences may not sufficiently differ; programmes for comparison may serve different populations; to be valid, studies (and their evaluations) may need to be long-term and this is not always achievable. Furthermore, Pawson and Tilley (1997) contend the *'true perils of randomization'* lie not with ethical dilemmas (e.g. for the control group, lack of access to actual or imagined benefits of the experimental condition), nor practical considerations (e.g. truly random allocation could result in

[5] An initiative of the 'Center on the Developing Child' at Harvard University.

highly uncooperative participants), but at the *"fundamental level of the causal"* (p36). Pawson and Tilley remonstrate *"that it is not programs which work, as such, but people co-operating and choosing to make them work"*.

Pertinent for this study, is the acknowledgement of the importance of uncovering causal mechanisms:

> *"It is important to better understand which features of classroom and program quality are important for improving children's outcomes, and to determine what types of initiatives are likely to be effective mechanisms to improve classroom quality in these ways."*
>
> (NFECPP, 2010, p2)

Additionally, it is possible to extract from the NFECPP's (2010) analysis of the HSIS (2010) a number of salient contexts that may be in operation (e.g. children involved were in schools that 'serve low-income children' with 'classmates on free or reduced-price lunches', many 'children were not proficient in reading or maths', children were from families with 'incomes below the federal poverty threshold' or children with 'special needs'). Also identifiable were potential research questions (e.g. 'Which features of classroom and program quality are important for improving children's outcomes?', 'What types of initiatives are likely to afford effective mechanisms to improve classroom quality?'), and areas for future research (e.g. no comparable national study of the effects of public pre-kindergarten has been conducted; randomly assigning HS-eligible children to either HS or pre-kindergarten programs would facilitate direct comparison of effects).

Also relevant to the present study is the NFECPP's (2010, p3) comment that:

> *"...given the large increases in availability of centre-based programs for low-income preschoolers, questions persist about the generalisability of those studies to the more crowded early childhood and preschool field that exists today"*.

Prior to generalisability even being considered, it would seem that significant mechanisms and contexts have yet to be acknowledged, or their interaction examined. Greater theory development would help elucidate the inherent complexity of an intervention like HS; realist synthesis and RE offer a potential methodology with their promising use with similarly complex social interventions (e.g. Health Services in the UK):

> *"With its insistence that context is critical and that agents interact with and adapt to policies and interventions, realist synthesis is sensitive to diversity and change in programme delivery and development. Its fundamental purpose is to improve the thinking that goes into service building. And in doing so, it provides a principled steer away from issuing misleading 'pass/fail' verdicts of entire families of interventions and away from failed 'one-size-fits-all' ways of responding to problems"*
>
> (Pawson *et al*, 2004, piii).

Clearly, the HSIS (2010) demonstrates that a number of significant questions remain unanswered, and the lack of difference between control and experimental groups' experience means any conclusions should be tentative. Furthermore, it appears that the evaluation focused on outcomes, without detailed consideration of which mechanisms trigger these results, and there is a dearth of understanding regarding which features of classroom and program quality are important in improving children's outcomes. Further evaluation is needed, but its nature and content are critical (Zigler and Styfco, 2004).

3.3.2 Sure Start

Welshman (2010) identifies a number of UK responses to HS from the late 1960s e.g. Educational Priority Areas. Welshman (2010) argues, however, that a lack of political will and focus regarding early intervention meant it was not until the 1997 election of the New Labour Government and the subsequent *"sustained effort...to focus on pre-school children",* that the UK equivalent of HS, 'Sure Start' (SS), was born (p92). Introduced in 1998 by the then Chancellor, Gordon Brown, there was recognition that child poverty in the UK by European standards remained high, that psychological problems affecting young people were 'worryingly high', that remedies were needed and there was *"modest evidence that well planned interventions for young children in disadvantaged families can make a worthwhile difference"* (Rutter, 2006, p135).

As a cross-departmental strategy, SS strove to raise the *"physical, social, emotional and intellectual status of young children through improved services"* (Glass, 1999), with the grand aim of eliminating child poverty and social exclusion (Rutter, 2006). SS intended to shape provision design and delivery, and improve services for children under four years old and their parents in the 20% most deprived areas (Melhuish, 2010a). As with HS, the success or failure of SS is widely debated; with some studies highlighting relative successes (Hutchings *et al*, 2007), some emphasising its failings (Omerod, 2005; Clarke, 2006), and others promulgating both (Rutter, 2006).

Initial evaluations (DfES, 2005) asserted:

> *"...identification of apparently 'successful implementation approaches' can only be made on the basis of a number of implementation outputs, rather than as the characteristics of programmes 'categorically known' to be associated with positive 'individual–level outcomes'" (p112).*

Any conclusions were therefore premature, as causal links between the SS programme and positive outcomes for children and parents had yet to be established. It was still conjecture that *'implementation outputs'* (e.g. 'a range of services' and 'flexibility of delivery'), would results in desired Outcomes (O). Sound knowledge and understanding of *'successful implementation approaches'* (M) had yet to be gained. In short, the findings were 'inconclusive' (Rutter, 2006).

The ambitious National Evaluation of the SS project (NESS) examined both the impact of SS Local Programmes (SSLPs) on 5 year olds and their families, and also the quality of group childcare settings used by 3-4 year olds in SSLPs areas and its relationship with child outcomes (DfE 2010a; DfE 2010b). Again, mixed effects were found. In summary, as with the first phase evaluation (NESS, 2005a and 2005b) results were primarily positive, albeit with notable negatives (Appendices II and III outline the main findings).

As effect sizes were 'modest', only tentative conclusions can be drawn; moreover, one crucial intended outcome was not really shown, as *"limited benefits to child functioning were found"* (DfE, 2010a, p40). Furthermore 'methodological challenges' in developing the NESS Impact Study caused limitations in *"its ability to afford strong causal inferences about effects of SSLPs on children and families"* (DfE 2010a, pviii). Arguably, a decade on from its initiation, evaluation findings remain patchy,

ambiguous and inconclusive in their failure to establish strong causal links, often raising more questions than they answer. Regardless, however, of the perspective adopted in regard to its findings, Sure Start's evaluation certainly highlights some of the pitfalls and complexity of evaluating multifaceted community programmes.

3.3.3 Relevance to the present study

Evidence from early interventions with unambiguous protocols was used to justify SSLPs, but SSLPs did not have a prescribed 'protocol' (Melhuish *et al,* 2010b). Along with some other features, this lack of protocol significantly affected SS evaluation. Without a 'prescribed curriculum' (except the perhaps ambiguous requirement to be 'evidence-based'), SSLPs proved highly varied, making comparison across areas problematic (Rutter, 2006, p135). Furthermore, as interventions were not to be too prescriptive or 'manualised', implementers did not need to specify their actions; consequently it was not possible to assess *"the extent to which what was happening in the field showed fidelity to the model of what should be happening"* (Rutter, 2006, p135). The justification for this open-ended approach was a desire to avoid over-mechanised, rigid programme specifications, and a belief that to maintain interventions, those providing services needed 'ownership' of interventions and recipients needed a 'voice' in decision making (Rutter, 2006). This rationale is not particularly contentious, but it is not clear why such factors could not have been addressed within a better defined framework.

Rutter (2006) emphasises this fundamental problem of evaluating SS, namely that *"there is no 'it' that comprises Sure Start"* (p140):

> *"...there is no such thing as Sure Start in the sense of a defined programme with a definable intervention strategy (despite government implying the contrary). Instead, it constitutes a large 'family' of programmes that involve as much diversity as commonality" (p138).*

He asserts;

> *"...programmes that lack an explicit curriculum and that are varied across areas in a non-systematic fashion are impossible to evaluate in a manner that gives answers on what are the key elements that bring benefits" (p141).*

Rutter (2006) argues if *"evaluation is to be informative on how to improve services in the future, it is essential to identify the mechanisms mediating efficacy"* (p140); citing Weersing and Weisz's (2002) research on causal mechanisms in youth psychotherapy to support this assertion.

With regards to the present study, Weersing and Weisz's (2002) and Rutter's (2006) work highlight the importance of defined programme parameters, and that without an analysis of mechanisms ('key elements that bring benefits'), evaluation fails to provide its assumed raison d'être, which is surely to provide evidence which can reliably inform and 'improve future services'. One can discern other potentially influential contexts and mechanisms from Rutter's (2006) paper. Rutter (2006) describes how research shows that for effective interventions to be sustainable *"they must work in a mutually supportive fashion with existing state agencies"* (C) (p140. *"If that is to work, however, there must be clarity and explicitness on what it is that is to be integrated"* (M). Similarly, Melhuish *et al* (2010b, p2) highlight the importance of 'programme implementation' (M), and that *"better service integration across agencies was one of the distinguishing features of more effective programs"* (C).

As discussed, the SS evaluation sought to assess how closely implementation conformed to programme specification, which proved problematic because of lack of programme specificity. Though there may be a more clearly defined protocol for NGs, to paraphrase Rutter (2006), 'the extent to which what is happening in the field shows fidelity to the model of what should be happening' has not been adequately examined. The concrete aspects of a NG programme specification are clear (described in Section 3.5), and although this research does not evaluate them, they would be more straightforward to assess e.g. group size of 8-12 children, two members of staff, children staying for 2-4 terms etc (NGN, 2011). However more subtle aspects of programme specification e.g. child identification and selection, staff delivery, are more problematic to assess.

In conclusion, the literature surrounding CE highlights the need for evaluative research which more adequately addresses the inherent complexity of social interventions, helps build theory which can inform future interventions, and is open to testing. Without adequate analysis of the complex interactions between contextual factors and underlying mechanisms responsible for outcomes, greater understanding or accurate generalisation remain elusive.

Synthesising the literature on compensatory education, tentative Programme Theories, in the form of a CMO configurations (CMOCs) can begin to be built[6] (Timmins and Miller, 2007):

[6] I have followed Timmins and Miller (2007) in presentation of Programme Theories.

Programme Theory for compensatory education initiatives:

A programme which achieves measurable gains across multiple measures for 'disadvantaged' children (O) will operate in a system where there is good service integration and clear frameworks for practice (C) and programme implementers will work within these defined parameters, showing fidelity to suggested models of practice (M).

Programme Theories were generated from the synthesis in the following way:

- search strategy employed to identify key papers (see Section 3.2);
- papers read 2 or 3 times, with relevant data (i.e. Cs, Ms, or Os) highlighted;
- data from each paper entered into a table as a Context, Mechanism or Outcome;
- C, M, O tables were then further refined and developed (see Appendix V for exemplar);
- key Cs, Ms and Os from each table highlighted and collated; and
- collated, salient Cs, Ms, and Os used to form initial Programme Theory.

3.4 Small Group Therapeutic Interventions (SGTIs)

NGs are one of a number of small group therapeutic interventions (SGTIs). For this study it is important to consider what (if anything) is distinct or unique about NGs, and therefore examine the evidence-base for other SGTIs. Furthermore, the context of group-size requires some consideration (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.1). Examination of the literature on SGTIs reveals three studies of particular relevance to the present study, in that they provide a 'nurturing' small group experience; a synopsis is provided in Table 3.2 below.

The studies suggest overwhelmingly positive findings for 'A Quiet Place' (Renwick and Spalding, 2002; Renwick, 2005) and Western school's 'Quiet Room' (King and

Chantler, 2002), but despite strengths there were notable limitations. Whilst Renwick and Spalding (2000) provided good evidence for the efficacy of this approach, detail regarding delivery intervention was difficult to abstract e.g. regarding qualifications/skills/experience of practitioners delivering psychotherapy, and whether it was the same person across schools, as fidelity of intervention could then be an issue.

Table 3.2: Key small group therapeutic intervention studies

Study	Overview	Key findings
Renwick and Spalding (2002) "A Quiet Place" project: an evaluation of early therapeutic intervention within mainstream schools	A short term, school based intervention to support children with Emotional and/or Behavioural Difficulties (EBD). Consisting of a room in the school or community where weekly holistic therapeutic support is provided (professionals provide one hour of outcome-orientated psychotherapy, massage, 'biofeedback-supported' relaxation), in a room where the environment is specifically designed to generate feelings of calm/well-being. Parent(s) and teacher are involved in initial assessment and evaluation of child's progress, and also offered support themselves. Focus on skill acquisition and development of emotional intelligence for children.	Evaluated using action research where monitoring occurred internally, via the treatment protocol, and externally. Pilot study: 'marked' improvements on the Boxall Diagnostic Profile (see Section 3.5.3iii for description), but results not significant. Follow-up study: Internal monitoring - improvements shown in 86% of cases (n=172), plus solely favourable reports from staff and parents ("for more of the same"). Boxall Profile replaced (as completion problematic) with structured teacher, parent and child interviews. External monitoring - Independent samples t test showed statistically significant improvement (increase in positive behaviours and reduction in negative behaviours), with striking improvements in 'interpersonal skills' domain.
Renwick (2005) The 'A Quiet Place' programme: Short-term support for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in mainstream schools	Follow up to Renwick and Spalding (2002), aimed to explore effectiveness and 'theory of change' (underpinning rationale) of 'A Quiet Place' programme using quasi-experimental study. Comparison of treatment with a no-treatment control group (but didn't compare with another already validated therapeutic process e.g. CBT). Reconsidered initial evaluation data (from Renwick and Spalding, 2002 above). Small sample size (initially n=52 falling to n=29 after 1 year).	Results show significant increase in positive behaviours and reduction in undesirable behaviours in classroom behaviour of those who attended compared to those who didn't, maintained over time (change sustained at a significant level over 12 months). Presents the differences observed between the participant and non-participant groups as not due to the effect of variables other than the impact of the programme, and that observed behavioural change is a result of the intervention process. Claims data provides strong evidence of the positive treatment effects of 'A Quiet Place', with effect sizes comparing favourably with more controlled efficacy studies.
King and Chantler (2002) The Western Primary School "Quiet Room" project	A TA run group, created for children needing further emotional support, with time to talk, build relationships and re-establish emotional stability. Objectives were: someone for the children to talk to when needed; assistance with personal care, and physical support; small scale support programmes to address specific issues/difficult period e.g. custody hearing; opportunities for small discussion groups. Responsive in nature (so short/long term provision, children access for 1 hour weekly).	Research involved a small scale action research project. Qualitative data, showed school and pupils responded positively to the intervention and it appeared to partially address a specific need in their school.

Furthermore, gains in positive socialisation behaviours were viewed as resulting from gains in self-esteem, but it is equally possible that support with socialisation skills led to gains in self-esteem i.e. causal direction is likely to be less linear and not necessarily follow the proposed direction. Parents' and teachers' growing awareness of the child's needs could have been a significant mechanism, but no information was given regarding whether proffered support to parents/teachers was taken up, and whether/how this impacted on results. Sample size was also an issue (both groups were small, particularly the younger group sample), and further research is needed around age/gender effects. More study of which aspects (contexts and mechanisms) of the intervention proved most efficacious (i.e. the psychotherapy, massage, room environment, individual attention, skill development, parental or teacher support etc.), would allow greater understanding of *what works*.

King and Chantler's (2002) study, showed positive effects for this SGTI. Of particular relevance to the current study is that they initially considered whether a NG model would be appropriate for their setting. They decided, however, that the underlying rationale of the NG approach did not align with their motivation for establishing the group (see Sections 3.5.3iv and 6.3.5 for further discussion of assumptions of NGs). They viewed NGs as *"specifically for those children who have not experienced an early, nurture-based stage of learning"*, meaning it was not the right approach for their context where their *"children were experiencing behavioural problems not because of a lack of early nurturing, but because of an external factor which had affected their emotional stability"* (e.g. many of the children considered for the group were living in a local women's refuge) (King and Chantler, 2002, p184).

King and Chantler (2002) report positive effects but the study is small scale, and not all measures used were reliable. For example, King and Chantler (2002) describe how they initially used the Boxall Profile[7] but replaced this as it was not *"being used effectively"* (p185) with their own 'Quiet Room' proforma, which is a more simplistic, less informative, non-standardised measure. All other measures appeared fairly anecdotal and superficial in nature too; for example, staff questionnaires consisted of prompts like 'What do you think the quiet room is for?', 'How have the children benefitted though use of the quiet room?', and 'What feedback have you had from the children?'. Staff responded positively, but no probing questions were asked, e.g. 'Were there any perceived costs to this intervention?' or 'How could this intervention be improved?'. Furthermore, whilst pupils reported positives, staff asked for their views orally, which may have affected their responses (i.e. no anonymity). 'The Quiet Place' is an interesting variant of NG provision, and it is notable that this type of intervention was selected over a NG; however, the study was not rigorous or robust.

Regardless of limitations, one can abstract from both projects some potentially influential mechanisms and contexts which may bring about positive outcomes for children, and are thus relevant to the present study in terms of contributing to Programme Theory building. To this end, Humphrey *et al*'s (2009) qualitative study which used five case studies to *"build an implementation process model for social–emotional interventions"* (p219) also proved valuable.

[7] Section 3.5.3iii provides a description and criticisms of this measure.

As in the present study, Humphrey *et al* (2009) found empirical research on *"targeted social-emotional interventions focused almost exclusively on quantifiable outcomes"*; and argued that though useful, such research *"rarely provides any kind of indication about what factors influence the success of an intervention"*, which is crucial when implementing interventions in *"real-life settings"* (p221). Humphrey *et al* (2009) investigated how five schools had implemented small-group Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL). They found successful implementation was dependent upon a range of factors. To highlight relevant contexts and mechanisms I have positioned these accordingly in Table 3.3 below; this also illustrates part of the data abstraction process involved in a realist synthesis (see Section 5.5.5). Of particular relevance for this study was the finding that *"the characteristics of the facilitator were considered to be a crucial component of small group implementation"* in case-study schools (Humphrey *et al*, 2009, p228).

Synthesising the literature on SGTIs, tentative Programme Theories, in the form of a CMO configurations (CMOCs) can again begin to be built (Timmins and Miller, 2007):

Programme Theory for SGTIs:

SGTIs which lead to improved social, emotional and/or behavioural functioning (O) will operate with one or more members of staff (C) supporting a small group of children (C) within a nurturing and facilitative whole school setting (C), and will be delivered by staff with the appropriate skills, experience and characteristics (C), to apply their skills (M) work collaboratively with other colleagues in the mainstream (M) and foster a 'secure, safe and special' atmosphere in the small group setting (M).

Table 3.3: Contexts and Mechanisms abstracted from Humphrey *et al*'s study of the implementation of SEAL small group intervention

Contexts	Mechanisms
A. Groundwork has been done i.e. school is in a state of readiness/appropriate whole school ethos *B. Good staff networks/links with group facilitator i.e. ensure key staff are involved/multi-agency contacts* *C. Availability of an appropriate physical space to conduct the sessions/intervention has a high status/profile within the school and time/space are appropriately allocated* *D. Room environment is welcoming/child-friendly/well resourced* *E. Make up of group* *F. Group facilitators are appropriately and highly skilled and experienced e.g. good level of personal social and emotional skills/acts as a role model/ facilitator's implementation of intervention* *G. Good communication and links between mainstream class and small group intervention* *H. Training* *I. Parental involvement*	*A. Emotionally nurturing atmosphere, facilitates children's generalising of skills, and provides reinforcement opportunities* *B. Triangulated referral of pupils; three or more stakeholders deciding on referral to the group/small group facilitators are supported by class teacher or senior management/multi-agency approach to the operation of small groups* *C. Allocation of time and space e.g. incorporation into weekly timetables* *D. Appropriate child-friendly and welcoming setting, and well resourced, helps create right atmosphere* *E. Group dynamics and balance e.g. balance of genders, presence of role models* *F.* *i. Facilitator provides constant reinforcement of desirable behaviour, reinforces target skills,* *ii. Role modelling of appropriate behaviour* *iii. builds positive relationships with pupils/good rapport/familiarity* *iv. creates a 'secure, safe and special' atmosphere* *v. sets achievable targets for children* *vi. provides opportunities for pupils to verbalise their emotional experiences* *vii. makes learning fun* *viii. demonstrates fidelity to intervention model* *ix. makes sessions participatory by prompting, probing and questioning* *x. promotes autonomy (e.g. setting own rules for the group)* *xi. is responsive to individual needs e.g. bereavement* *xii. makes 'good' resources* *G. Integration of small-group work into class/communication between teachers and group facilitator* *H. Formal training for small group work* *I. Parental participation in the programme*

(Sources: Humphrey *et al*, 2009; Webb, 2011[8])

[8] Webb is a fellow researcher who is concurrently investigating the implementation of SEAL in a primary school, using a Realistic Evaluation framework. We have both used Humphrey *et al*'s 2009 study, so this provided a useful opportunity to check whether my interpretation of Cs, Ms and Os was aligned with other researchers and improve inter-rater reliability (see Section 5.5.4i).

3.5 Nurture Groups (NGs)

The national organisation for NGs, the Nurture Group Network (NGN), describes how NGs strive to provide a *"balance of learning and teaching, affection and routine within a home-like environment"*. In short, NGs are described by Bennathan (2001) as a class in a primary or infant school where two adults, usually a teacher and a teaching assistant (TA), work with 8-12 children who are considered *"unable to respond in a normal class and often at risk of exclusion or special educational placement"* (p31). They provide a carefully structured day and predictable environment (DfEE, 1997), typically with registration and afternoon sessions in mainstream, and NG attendance for the remaining time; Appendix IV shows a typical day (Bishop, 2008).

Children attending NGs are often described as having Social, Emotional and/or Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD). Howell's (2009) systematic review demonstrated the *"contribution that NGs can make to improving outcomes for children who exhibit SEBD behaviours"* (p15), and the effectiveness of NGs in helping children with SEBD remain within mainstream education has also been shown (O'Connor and Colwell, 2002). The following sections will first briefly outline the policy context within which NGs operate as 'mechanisms'; then discuss the background, rationale for and origins of this intervention; finally a critique of the evidence-base and the development of initial Programme Theories is provided.

3.5.1 Policy context for SEBD

Historically, children with SEBD have been described as 'maladjusted', "*reflecting the prevailing view that…behaviors were seen as within-child in origin"* (Visser, 2003,

p10). This terminology was supplanted by the 1981 Education Act's concept of 'special educational needs', with 'EBD' (now SEBD[9]) defined as a type of SEN (Visser, 2003). The formal definition from DES Circular 23/89 perceives pupils with EBD as having *"set up barriers between themselves and their learning environment"* (Cooper *et al,* 1994, p20). However, acquiring the label EBD/SEBD remained 'haphazard' through the 1980s and 1990s, with different schools and LEAs applying varying practices and standards (Visser, 2003). Table 3.4 below provides a chronology of the changing definitions.

The complexities of classifying EBD are emphasised in the DfE Circular 9/94 which states there *"is no absolute definition"*. Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties Association (SEBDA) (2006) describe how SEBD is, *"an imprecise umbrella term, always difficult to define"*. Clearly, the amorphous term of EBD/SEBD encompasses great complexity. The SEN Code of Practice (COP) (DfES, 2001) did go some way to tackle the nebulous nature of SEN and EBD, by identifying five areas of SEN, including SEBD (Table 3.4). Perhaps, this differentiation of SEN into sub-groups partially compensates for the lack of breadth and delineation in prior legal definitions of SEN. The COP (2001) highlights areas where children would require support or 'counselling', hoping such approaches may ameliorate SEBD. NGs are one such source of support.

[9] EBD is now referred to as Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) and is described in the SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2001) shown in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4: Policy context for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

POLICY	DEFINITION
1944 Education Act	• The category of 'maladjusted children' became "legally enshrined" in the 1945 Regulations, which followed the Education Act 1944 (Visser, 2003). • These defined the 'maladjusted' as: 'pupils who show evidence of emotional instability or psychological disturbance and require special education treatment in order to effect their personal, social or educational readjustment' (Ministry of Education, 1953, Part 3,9g, cited in Cole *et al*, 1998).
1981 Education Act	• Education Act's 1944 categorisation supplanted by the 1981 Education Act's concept of 'special educational needs' • EBD defined as a type of SEN (Visser, 2003).
DES Circular 23/89	• Pupils with EBD have "set up barriers between themselves and their learning environment" (Cooper *et al,* 1994, p20).
1993 and 1996 Education Acts	• Explicit in definition of SEN is assumption that for a pupil to have SEN they have a 'learning difficulty'. • Farrel (1995) argued need for wider definition, including difficulties not solely with learning academic subjects but '*learning'* to adapt appropriately to social contexts, '*learning*' to make friends, or '*learning'* to behave appropriately (Farrel, 1995, p8). This latter interpretation of a 'learning difficulty' is echoed in Frederickson and Cline's (2002) account of what is meant by the SEN legislation - pupils with EBD "are considered to be experiencing barriers which cause them to have significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of pupils of their age". The concept of barriers echoes the earlier description of EBD from Circular 23/89. (Frederickson and Cline, 2002, p383). • The interrelationship between learning difficulties and EBD is highlighted, where difficulties with learning can "undermine self-esteem or create frustration and so generate or exacerbate" EBD (Frederickson and Cline, 2002, p383).
Department for Education (DfE) Circular 9/94	• Children with EBD have SEN. • Difficulties are positioned on a "continuum" (DfE, 1994, p4).
SEN Code of Practice 2001	• Five areas of SEN identified - Cognition and Learning, Behavioural, Emotional and Social Development, Communication and Interaction, Sensory and/or Physical Needs and Medical Conditions. Pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) are defined as: 'Children and young people who demonstrate features of emotional and behavioural difficulties, who are withdrawn or isolated, disruptive and disturbing, hyperactive and lack concentration; those with immature social skills; and those presenting challenging behaviours arising from other complex special needs' (p93).

3.5.2 Background, features and rationale of NGs

Originating in the late 1960s, NGs are a focused, small group intervention in mainstream schools, striving to promote positive outcomes for children and compensate for early disadvantage. The general purpose of NGs is to *"relive with the child the missed nurturing experiences of the early years"* (Bennathan, 2001, p31). They are a social programme, targeting children who may have difficulty in mainstream classes, and who may otherwise require alternative special educational placement or be at risk of exclusion.

NGs were first seen in schools in the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) in the early 1970s, and the ILEA's abolition almost ended the NG project (Bailey, 2007; Boxall, 2002). Nevertheless, NGs persisted through these *"very difficult times"* (Boxall, 2002, piii) and they have experienced 'something of a renaissance since the late 1990s', with 'exponential growth' over the past decade (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005; Cooper and Whitebread, 2007).

NGs were the initiative of Marjorie Boxall, an EP whose original East End project in the late 1960s 'spawned this intervention' (Bailey, 2007). Boxall (2002) interpreted increasing levels of learning, 'personality' and behaviour difficulties displayed by children in the 1960s, as originating from a combination of deprivation, 'over-burdened' mothers or carers and insensitive or inappropriate behaviour management. Holmes (1996) argues that from the mid-eighties to nineties, 'several well-intentioned policy changes' (such as 'Shared Care' and varying, flexible day-care arrangements

with high staff turnovers) may have unwittingly contributed to a rise in behaviour difficulties, because of poor stability, continuity and consistency in early childcare. Cooper *et al* (2001) describe how Boxall's analysis of the increasing prevalence of emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD), *"highlighted the importance of attachment theory (AT) in the aetiology of these problems, and it is this theoretical position that underpinned nurture group philosophy"* (p160).

Bowlby's (1980 and 1988) work described how early attachment relationships lay the foundation for later social, emotional and behavioural development. The concepts and research findings of Attachment Theory (AT) can be applied directly to practice, especially in the field of early and preventative intervention (Ziegenhain, 2004). AT posits that, in order to learn, children need to feel secure and able to explore (Greenhalgh, 2001, p17). Greenhalgh (2001) describes how according to Bowlby's (1980 and 1988) work, this is achieved through *"developing attachments to key figures in our lives"* who *"provide a secure base from which to explore and to which to return"* (p17). Greenhalgh (2001) contends that a *"fundamental emotional task of the teacher"* is the *"provision of such a secure base"*. He argues that *"children with EBD need to experience the genuine trust offered by adults if they are to risk self-awareness and change"* (Greenhalgh, 2001, p18).

In their classic form, NGs demonstrate how the concepts and research findings of AT can be applied directly to practice (Bennathan, 2001). 'Grounded' in AT, NGs represent a focused intervention for *"addressing the emotional and behavioural issues*

of children with major difficulties in the development of secure attachments" (Reynolds *et al*, 2009, p209). Whilst the theoretical origin of NGs may be clear, it is not always made explicit to parents, children or teachers. Furthermore, Boxall's (2002) analysis that the increasing prevalence of 'EBD' could be understood as emanating from attachment difficulties, oversimplifies this complex phenomenon (see Table 3.4 and Section 3.5.1).

The theoretical bases for NG provision in AT find some support, in that longitudinal studies indicate that children and young people with SEBD often do have difficult attachment histories (Grossmann and Grossmann, 1991; O'Connor and Rutter, 2000), but this is not universally the case (Farrell, 1995). Boxall's assertion that attachment difficulties are a key factor 'explaining' SEBD is not necessarily incorrect, but 'attachment difficulties' offers one explanatory framework for problems which are likely to have a complex, multifactorial aetiology. Whatever the complex antecedents of children's difficulties, mainstream teachers can go some way to provide a 'secure base' for pupils. However, for young people requiring additional support, 'Nurture Groups' are commended by Bennathan (2001). Their rationale is 'to help children learn' and though established as an *"empirical response to difficult circumstances"* rather than a theoretical abstraction, they draw heavily on Bowlby's concepts of child development (Bennathan, 2001), rather than a wider systemic view (e.g. Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005; Cooper *et al*, 1994).

As discussed, there has been a resurgence of NGs in the last 20 years, with an increasing evidence-base for their effectiveness (Reynolds *et al*, 2009; Howell, 2009).

Similar to Pawson and Tilley's (1997) assertion that the case for 'adult education' in prisons was regularly presented, yet available theory on its rehabilitative potential was negligible, the case for NGs has gained increasing momentum, but available theory regarding why or how they work and their 'rehabilitative potential' is also slender. Furthermore, the evidence-base for NGs remains patchy, with significant methodological weaknesses, limited longer-term evaluation and poor information regarding confounding factors e.g. impact of teacher behaviour (Reynolds *et al*, 2009). Indeed, Reynolds *et al* (2009) argue there remains *"very little formal evaluation"* of many of the effects of NGs.

This study seeks to use a Realistic Evaluation framework to consider the mechanism of NG staff practice, so that theories can be developed about, *'what works, for whom, and in what circumstances'* within NGs (Pawson and Tilley, 1997).

3.5.3 Critique of the evidence-base

NGs are recommended as an effective early intervention by the DfEE (1997), with a growing research base supporting their efficacy (Howell, 2009). For example: pupils in NGs make significant progress in social and emotional development (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005; Sanders, 2007) and academic progress (Cooper *et al,* 2001); NGs support the inclusion of pupils with EBD within the mainstream (O'Connor and Colwell, 2002, 2003); they have a positive impact on the parents of pupils attending the NG and the wider school (Cooper *et al*, 2001); and potentially promote long-term as well as short-term gains for pupils (O'Connor and Colwell, 2002). Though most of the literature is overwhelmingly positive, its foundations are often insecure. The next

sections will review a number of significant evaluative NG studies. Contexts, mechanisms and outcomes extracted from salient studies are shown in Appendix V.

3.5.3i Key NG studies

Over the past three decades, a number of studies have researched the impact of NGs. Iszatt and Wasilewska (1997) focussed on Enfield LA, and considered 308 children from 6 NGs. They found that in less than a year the vast majority of pupils attending NGs (87%) were able to return to mainstream class. Several years later almost all of these pupils (83%) were still in mainstream placements, with the remaining pupils (4%) requiring additional support above their school's normal resources. A matched comparison group of 'children with EBD' who did not receive the NG intervention were three times more likely to require Statutory Assessment, and seven times more likely to be placed in special provision. This research, however, is out of date, as Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) levels and Statement processes have changed dramatically during this time period. Additionally, the narrow geographical area in which the study was conducted, and the relatively small size of the 'matched comparison' group (n=20), mean any conclusions should at best be tentative. Nevertheless, the research does suggest that NGs may facilitate the inclusion of pupils with SEBD in the mainstream (O). Notably, in their national study of NG effects, Cooper *et al* (2001), also found 'NG children with SEBD' more likely to remain in mainstream schools than comparison children.

In their quasi-experimental, longitudinal study (again in Enfield LA), O'Connor and Colwell (2002) used the Boxall Profile to examine whether children's entry scores

improved and whether improvements were maintained over time. Significant short-term improvements were found, although long-term improvements were harder to demonstrate (O'Connor and Colwell, 2002). Again, there were a number of significant limitations with the study, most noted by the authors themselves: the home lives of the children were unexamined; both short-term and long-term sample sizes were limited (n=68 and n=12 respectively); no control groups were used (so improvements may be attributable to other factors e.g. normal development); statistical tools adopted for analysis were open to errors; and only one measure was used (Boxall Profile) which can itself be subject to bias (see Section 3.5.3iii) (Reynolds *et al*, 2009). Given such limitations, O'Connor and Colwell's (2002) call for more in-depth, longitudinal research into NGs seems apt.

Sanders' (2007) pilot study, this time in Hampshire schools, aimed to determine whether NG children:

- *remained in mainstream schools;*
- *made academic and significant SEB gains; and*
- *changed in their perceptions of themselves as learners/friends.*

Sanders (2007) also examined whether NGs impacted on the whole school or on the child's whole school experience. Parents and mainstream school staff's views were considered. Over two terms the study evaluated three schools, with one comparison school similar in size and levels of socio-economic deprivation. A wide range of measures was used, including the Boxall Profile, provision questionnaires, pupil assessment forms, staff questionnaires, termly naturalistic observations, teacher data on social, emotional and academic gains, and interviews with NG children, staff and parents. Results (Outcomes) were generally positive (gains on Boxall profile scores

for NG pupils in one school compared with controls; staff reported academic gains with students more motivated to complete academic tasks and greater independence; greater social engagement; better behaviour management practice, more adaptation of teaching approaches and less likelihood of staff absence and turnover; teachers reported improvements for NG children e.g. fewer permanent exclusions and better attendance; increased parent contact), with some negatives (less marked improvements in playground for NG children; concerns by mainstream school teachers about 'distanced' relationship with NG children). Sanders' (2007) study generates rich and interesting qualitative information, but results should be viewed cautiously for a myriad of reasons:

- it was a short-term study, with a small sample size;
- Boxall profile data were only collected from one school;
- despite achieving shifts in staff perception, participating staff already had a high level of awareness of children's needs;
- validity of comparisons is limited (e.g. numerous factors may affect success of 'control' groups, as they attended a different school and had higher entry scores);
- generalisation is not possible as many of the data gathering tools were designed specifically for Hampshire NGs (although many findings were consistent with other provision studies); and
- there is the possibility of researcher bias e.g. EP who conducted research also involved in supporting groups.

Cooper and Whitebread's (2007) larger-scale study charted pupil progress in 34 schools with NGs across 11 LAs. Overall 359 NG children were compared with 184 children from four control groups. Again, improvements in social, emotional and behavioural functioning were found using Boxall Profile and Goodman's (1997) 'Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire' (SDQ) data, with gains continuing across four school terms. NGs' impact appeared pervasive. For example, Cooper and

Whitebread (2007) reported better outcomes for mainstream pupils with SEBD in schools with NGs, compared with other schools, and argued that their quantitative and qualitative data "*point to the strong possibility that the presence of an effective NG adds value to the work that schools do with the wider population of children with SEBD"* (p187). They suggest the groups contribute to fostering a 'nurturing school'.

Nevertheless, Cooper and Whitebread (2007) recognise the *"complexity of factors involved in promoting the kind of institutional change suggested...is immense"* (p188). For instance there may be unmeasured antecedent conditions at play (e.g. schools with NGs were in a 'state of readiness' to welcome additional provision for children with SEBD, and already had a 'philosophical bias' towards a NG approach), or mainstream classroom practices were influenced indirectly by communication between NG and mainstream staff. To unpick this complexity is challenging. Additionally, there were a number of limitations. Improvements associated with 'cognitive engagement in learning tasks' were reported, but no cognitive/educational measure was used, instead such improvements were from gain scores on Boxall profile strands, a tool of questionable validity (see Section 3.5.3iii): reporting cognitive improvements from a measure with only tenuous links to such domains is contentious. Additionally, no comparisons for children in control groups were made on the Boxall measure of 'organisation of experience' and it is therefore not possible to isolate NG effects from general improvements over time (Reynolds *et al*, 2009). Indeed, this highlights the lack of control over school effects, in terms of prior differences between schools with and without NGs (Reynolds *et al*, 2009).

An important Context, noted by Cooper and Whitebread (2007) is the identification of different models of NGs which have a different structure, but are informed by the same principles as the 'Classic Boxall'[10] model. Again, no study has fully explored this variable, which could raise questions of fidelity of intervention regarding groups which deviate from the 'Classic Boxall' model.

Reynolds *et al* (2009) conducted a large-scale, controlled study of the effects of NGs on development and academic attainment, involving 221 children, in 32 primary schools in Glasgow. They aimed to address the limitations in the evidence-base for NGs (e.g. previously no controlled studies of academic effects using quantitative measures). Control groups were used, whose selection was 'highly formalised'; the study assessed emotional/behavioural changes and effects on academic attainments using quantitative assessment measures. The selection process involved multiple stages and fairly rigorous assessments, with pre- and (after 6 months) post-test measures taken with a wide variety of tools. Reynolds *et al* (2009) found significant gains in academic attainment for NG children (and found one variable, the Boxall Strand of 'unsupported development', the best predictor of educational improvement). There were significant benefits for NG children in comparison with controls on all 5 strands of the Boxall Profile, but no significant difference was found on other tools (although trends were in the right direction). Significant benefits were also found for NG pupils on measures which considered behaviours indicative of self-esteem. Reynolds *et al* (2009) conclude that:

[10] The 'Classic Boxall' model of NGs "presupposes a certain kind of structure and mode of delivery based on original nurture group practice" (NGN, 2011). For the purposes of the NGN's 'Quality Mark Award', however, "some acceptable variations are allowed for in order to take into account changes in educational policy and practice as well as those changes in the wider social environment that have occurred over the years" (NGN, 2011).

> *"This large-scale, controlled study has used quantitative measures not only of emotional/behavioural factors but also of academic attainments to compare the progress of children in nurture groups with a carefully matched sample attending mainstream classes in schools without nurture groups. Its results have provided further evidence of the effectiveness of nurture groups in relation to improvements in emotional and behavioural functioning, with significant gains on almost every measure used. In addition, this study has demonstrated quantitative gains in academic attainments for pupils in nurture groups"*
>
> (Reynolds *et al*, 2009, p208).

The authors also tentatively suggest that statistical analysis of their data indicates the significance of attachment to academic attainment (Reynolds *et al*, 2009).

Reynolds *et al* (2009) argue that NGs provide a theoretical and practical foundation for addressing the emotional/behavioural and academic needs of the most vulnerable children, which may be a pointer to the importance of further research on class-size and the effects of introducing nurturing principles into mainstream classes. The authors highlight many of the methodological limitations of previous studies and need for further research e.g. into effect of class-size, teacher behaviour, operation and structure of NGs, age range/type of difficulties that are best supported by NGs. They also emphasise research has lacked control over school effects (e.g. prior differences between those with and without NGs). They argue the need for random assignment of matched schools and matched children, for studies with greater statistical rigour, greater use of quantitative instruments to measure effects (especially academic), examining the effect of class-size, and the impact of instilling NG principles into mainstream settings.

A notable strength of their research is that Reynolds *et al* (2009) do not dismiss the complexity surrounding NGs. By reducing some of the previous disparities between control and NG groups, they recognise that eliminating all differences is unachievable. For example, schools with NGs may be quite different from those without NGs in subtle ways e.g. more open to new ideas, more inclusive. Furthermore, when socio-economic status is used as a measure, it is acknowledged as a broad category, complex in make-up and measurement.

Reynolds *et al*'s (2009) selection for control schools was more rigorous than previous studies. The 'audit of need', however, was a subjective, non-standardised measure developed by the researchers, and there was limited explanation of who implemented this and what some of the issues regarding its use were. Indeed, there was limited critique of the reliability and validity of any measures. Another potential weakness was the dearth of qualitative data reported. Additionally, there was potential controversy regarding their statistical analysis[11]. Reynolds *et al* (2009) acknowledge other limitations:

- *it had not been feasible to conduct a RCT;*
- *there were complex reasons influencing the Council's choice of whether or not NGs were established in a school – the researchers had to find matched controls for schools the Council had selected;*
- *blind assessment procedures were not possible, and selected assessment procedures often required teacher judgements;*
- *there was marked attrition rate;*
- *only short-term conclusions could be drawn;*

[11] Due to the number of variables that were being compared they used the 'Bonferroni adjustment' (see Brown, 2008) to reduce Type I errors (false positives), as with multiple t tests some significant differences can occur from chance alone. However there was no discussion of some of the associated problems of this adjustment (Brown, 2008); for example it brings an increased likelihood of Type II errors, so truly important differences are deemed non-significant (Perneger, 1998).

- *it was not possible to elucidate which variables are associated with NG's success e.g. small class size or differences in teacher behaviour between NG and MS classes; and*
- *no triangulation with structured teacher or pupil feedback was included (although this is the aim of follow-up studies).*

3.5.3ii Disentangling the contribution of contexts and mechanisms on the impact of NGs

Parsons (2005) describes how research investigating strategies of low-excluding Local Authorities showed how in conjunction with a range of other interventions, NGs were identified as contributing to minimising exclusions. However, in Parsons' example, it would be very difficult to disentangle and measure the distinctive contribution of NGs from other successful interventions mentioned. Reynolds *et al's* (2009) study also highlights the difficultly in elucidating which factors are responsible for the success of the NGs.

The present study cannot seek to achieve this, but does aim to contribute to building theory regarding what may indeed be salient variables, which could then be subjected to empirical testing.

Difficulties isolating the specific contribution of NGs are apparent in other research. A reported benefit of NGs is staff's increased awareness of children's social and emotional development (Sanders, 2007). However Sanders (2007) describes how staff in schools with NGs, already have a high awareness of the factors that impact on children's social and emotional development, with schools which are keen to

adopt this intervention already placing importance on this area. Cooper and Tiknaz (2007) highlight a similar difficulty, reporting schools with NG*s "achieve significantly higher gains for students with SEBD (both in the nurture group and in the mainstream)"* than schools without NGs (p96). They argue this is primarily as a result of good communication between NG and mainstream staff, facilitating the development and adoption of a more nurturing approach in the mainstream setting (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007). However, the causal effect and direction of this impact is unlikely to be linear, unidirectional or exclusive. The NG itself does not necessarily cause the adoption of nurturing approaches at the whole school level; rather *"nurture groups are often adopted by schools which already profess a commitment to nurturing approaches"* (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, p96). NGs may *"enhance"* rather than *"create"* opportunities for a nurturing environment (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, p96). Consequently, the direct/precise impact of the NG itself (M), on changing staff perceptions and approaches (O) is difficult to unpick or measure.

3.5.3iii The Boxall Profile

The Boxall Profile (BP) (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998) is a diagnostic and evaluative tool used by many NG professionals and researchers investigating NG efficacy (Cooper *et al*, 2001; O'Connor and Colwell, 2002; Sanders 2007; Cooke *et al*, 2008; Reynolds *et al*, 2009). The BP is described as providing a method for *"assessing need, planning intervention and measuring progress"* (Cooke *et al*, 2008, p299). It comprises a two-part questionnaire including 'Developmental Strands' and a 'Diagnostic Profile', each part including a 'list of 34 descriptive items and a histogram'.

The BP is completed by staff who 'best know the child' (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998, p7).

The objectivity of this measure is questionable. Observation by familiar staff could affect the child's behaviour during the surveillance period (O'Connor and Colwell, 2002). Another issue is one of subjectivity, noted by King and Chantler (2002) and O'Connor and Colwell (2002). O'Connor and Colwell (2002) highlight bias and *"scope for subjective interpretation"* and the *"different positions and aims of the person administering the profile"* (p99). Crucial criteria relevant to the appropriate use of the BP relate to standardisation, reliability and validity, highlighted below:

Table 3.5: Reliability and validity of the Boxall Profile

Area of concern	Implication
Standardised in 1984	As the measure is over 27 years old, its validity is questionable
Representativeness of sample, 880 children between 3 to 8 years old (442 from primary school NGs, 307 and 101 from primary and nursery mainstream classes respectively) all from the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), a distinctive metropolis.	As over half the sample was from children in NGs this would impact on the representativeness of the standardisation population. Additionally, as data were collected from a narrow geographical area, its use with populations from smaller conurbations or rural areas is questionable.
Statistical rigour - little information is given regarding statistical analysis other than *"cluster analysis was carried out"* revealing *"underlying connections among items"* (p45).	Thorough scrutiny of the processes involved with validation of this measure is problematic due to lack of information. The authors claim BP results 'accord well' with those of the more recently standardised Goodman's (1997) Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) but do not explain how the results 'accord well', thus they appear to attempt to gain validity by association rather than merit.

In conclusion, given its pervasive use for identification of suitable children, assessment and intervention planning, and as the core measure used in NG evaluation impact studies, the BP's lack of reliability and validity is of some concern.

3.5.3iv Assumptions and criticisms of NGs

Many studies make claims for the influence of NGs, despite the likelihood of systemic factors at home and other ecological levels strongly influencing outcomes. Studies claim NG children experience difficult home lives (O'Connor and Colwell, 2002; Sanders, 2007), but O'Connor and Colwell (2002) note researchers have rarely investigated the background of the children involved. This raises some ethical considerations about assumptions that staff may be making about children's home lives, whether or not there is anecdotal evidence for these assumptions (e.g. child reports, parental confidences, teacher observations).

Bailey[12] (2007) strongly criticises many of the assumptions rife in the NG discourse. He asserts *"far from effecting the compassion and healing which its instantiaters no doubt desire",* a focus on a child's 'self-esteem' and 'attachment - *"two fuzzy, ill defined concepts"* - *"shifts attention from the systems and structures, which limit and define, to the emotional deficit of the individual which is deemed fit for further manipulation"* (p16). Bailey (2007) (citing Ecclestone (2004)), argues these 'introspective narratives' are *"inscribed within a discourse about emotional vulnerability, rather than potential for agency"* which *"can only further the 'downward spirals' which they claim to be alleviating"* (p17). Bailey (2007) baulks against the supposition of compensatory education or 'nurturing theory' i.e. *"that social change produces dysfunctions of community and family which can be read in the overt behaviour of children",* and *"that therapeutic individualism is required to mould these*

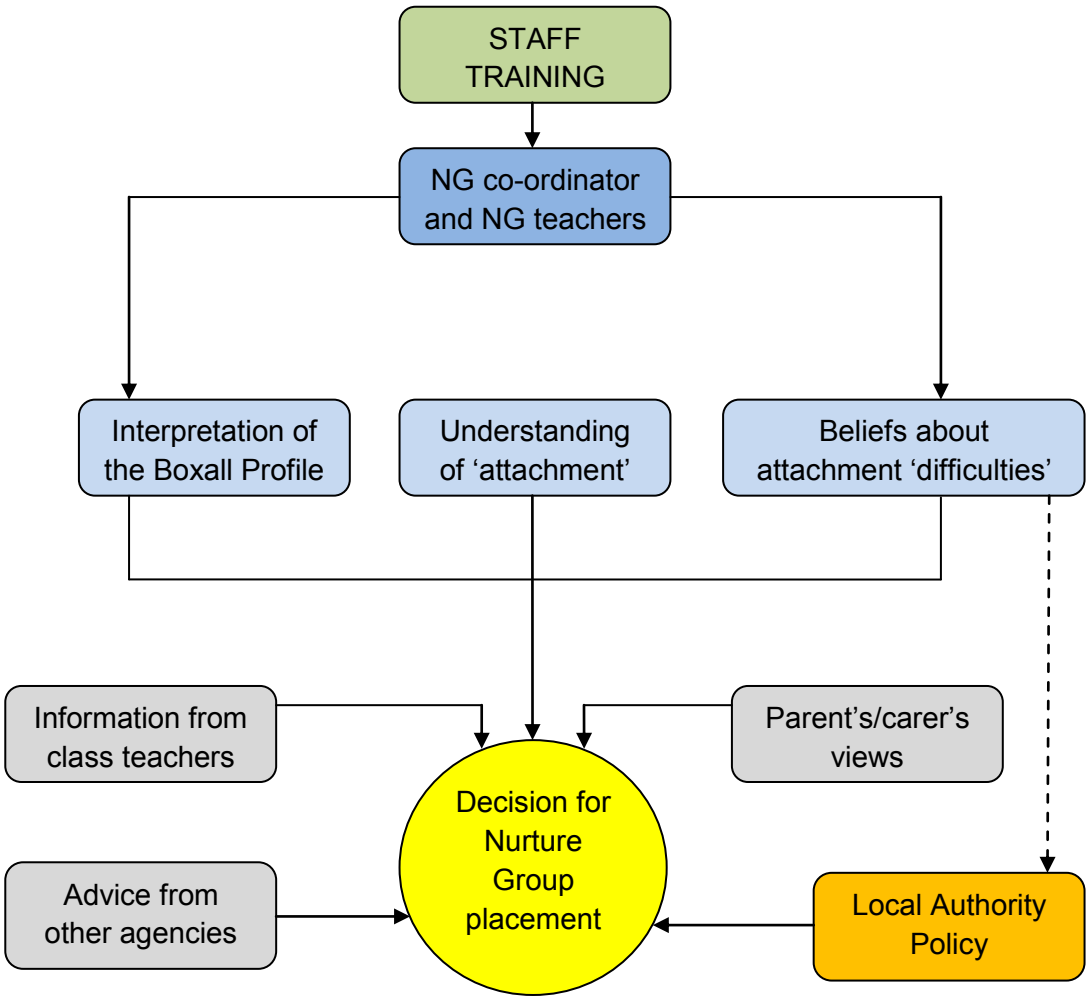
[12] A sociologist who has studied the behavioural discourses of early childhood surrounding and 'producing' ADHD.

children into the new order of school and society", asserting the accompanying discourse of *"a language of individual vulnerability, furthers that vulnerability"* (p16). The 'evidence-base', however, from which Bailey's (2007) condemnation appears to spring, is far from secure. He collected ethnographic data using a very small-scale study, which does not appear to have been subjected to peer-review. Reliability/dependability, validity/credibility and the potential for researcher bias get but a fleeting acknowledgement e.g. *"I would be foolish to discount the effects of the research process in distributing some vulnerability of its own"* (Bailey, 2007, p4).

Assumptions are also made regarding the nature of NG children's attachment status and relationships. Social and child-care policy have been influenced by the explanatory power of Attachment Theory (AT), and the philosophy and practice of NGs has *"acquired theoretical credibility"* through its links with this theory (Leggett, 2007, p11). The BP itself includes nine measures directly relating to 'attachment' (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998). Leggett (2007) suggests AT may influence NG placement at three levels; training, NG co-ordinator/teacher, and other agencies (via views and opinions), depicted in Figure 3.1 below.

Leggett (2007) found NG staff's *"understanding of attachment and beliefs about attachment 'difficulties'"* strongly influenced children's placement in NGs (p206). Additionally, interpretation of BP scores (even where these appeared to indicate inappropriate placement) *"was highly influential in determining a child's entry into the NG"* (Leggett, 2007, p206), although Leggett (2007) does concede that NG staff may have also been *"influenced by other sources of information e.g. books, other professionals' opinions not otherwise specified"* (p207).

Figure 3.1: Influences on NG placement



(Source: Leggett, 2007, p206)

Whilst Leggett's (2007) study was 'very small' and recognises it *"cannot necessarily generalize to all NGs"* (p203), it does draw attention to the strong influence of NG staff's underlying beliefs (C) and their interpretation of BP data (M) as important in determining decisions regarding NG placement (O). This highlights the complexity of decision-making concerning NG placement, supporting the case for research which can accommodate this complexity.

This dearth of research on home influences and parental involvement highlights how the influence of crucial contexts and mechanisms has not been sufficiently

considered. Given that working with parents (M) is claimed as an important component of NG work (Bennathan and Boxall, 1996; O'Connor and Colwell, 2002; Bishop, 2008) the scarcity of research into the influence of this domain is surprising. Though perhaps unlikely, it is conceivable that all improvements in outcomes for children are solely due to changes in circumstance or practices at the home level. Although changes in practice at the home level (O) could be brought about by the sharing of skills/knowledge and interaction between NG staff and parents (M), without adequate exploration, any such claims are insecure. Furthermore, evaluations devoid of consideration of influential microsystemic or mesosystemic factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979 and 2005) would always be questionable. RE, with its focus on context as well as causal mechanisms, again provides a framework to examine such complexity.

3.5.3v Control group comparison

Another criticism of the reliability of research about NGs, is the paucity of adequate control group comparisons. Firstly, perhaps it is not the actual 'Nurture' aspect of the group or two members of staff that is important, but just forming a small group, outside the mainstream environment with a high ratio of staff to pupils. It is not evident in the literature that any 'true' controls have been used (i.e. with variables controlled so the only difference is a 'nurturing approach' or two staff modelling positive relationships), though Reynolds *et al* (2009) do call for RCTs.

To date, a systematic review of the literature on NGs by Howell (2009), highlights that only quasi-experimental designs have been adopted, and studies using control

groups (e.g. Gerrard, 2006; Sanders, 2007), have *"particular weaknesses with the matching of control groups with intervention groups"* (Howell, 2009, p1). Consequently, despite numerous positive outcomes being highlighted by all studies included in Howell's (2009) review, *"not one study received an overall (category D) 'high' weighting",* thus, *"none of the five studies provided rigorous enough research that adequately indicates the improved outcomes that NGs can have for children who exhibit SEBD behaviours"* (p15-16).

If improvements are to be claimed when using a comparison group, the group needs an intervention that is matched, except for the 'nurturing approach' and any other variables we seek to illuminate. Moreover, finding a reliably 'matched' control group is complex: on some measures pupils may look similar, but under closer examination, other variables such as life histories will be disparate. This was a reported difficulty in previous research on NGs (Bozic, 2008). Naturally, evaluating interventions involving people is intrinsically complex. Again, the use of RE in this study seeks to untangle some of such complexity.

3.5.3vi Subjectivity and bias

Anecdotally, school staff, carers and crucially the children themselves, usually 'think' that positive changes in pupils' functioning in school have been achieved by their participation in NGs (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, p85). However, Cooper and Tiknaz highlight that in order to develop a *"stronger picture"* of NG efficacy and effectively test the validity of participants' *"subjective perceptions"*, the evidence gathered must

be less subjective and from a wider range of sources, including studies from those who have worked without support from the NGN (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007). Arguably, removing the influence and potential bias of the NGN or sympathetic LA commissioners is crucial, if more objective, rigorous analyses are to be made. A dilemma emerges since without such national and local advocacy, NG interventions are less likely to arise, so researching NGs without some form of NGN or LA contact is unlikely.

3.5.3vii Differential impact

Whilst selection for NGs is primarily targeted at pupils with SEBD, this provision is more effective for some pupils than others (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007). In Sanders' (2007) research, staff reported the 'greatest gains' for pupils who were 'initially quiet and withdrawn'. For those with externalising behavioural difficulties, the NG was *"described as the only place where they were able to experience success"* and *"changes seemed to take longer"* (Sanders, 2007, p55).

Cooper and Tiknaz's (2007) findings, however, contrast with this. For both pupils with internalising and pupils with acting-out behaviour patterns, there were 'impressive' gains in the NG setting, but it was the students exhibiting acting-out behaviours who were more successful in generalising their improvements to the mainstream setting (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007). They argue that NGs equip children who 'lack self-regulatory strategies' with necessary skills. However if children's difficulties are due to *"unresolved emotional difficulties, or in the form of congenital problems with impulse control"* (p95) then, whilst it may be possible to address such needs in a NG setting

(and therefore pupils progress), when they are returned to a mainstream setting with less attention and more stimulation, those needs may go unmet and 'dysfunctional' behaviours be stimulated (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007). This demonstrates the interaction between NG and mainstream level factors and their influence on children's outcomes. This, and the general finding that NGs are more or less successful depending on the nature of the difficulties a child may be experiencing, again highlights the need for sophisticated research.

Whereas many established NGs strive to follow Boxall's 'Classic' model, variation is inevitable. This is acknowledged by the accreditors of 'The Marjorie Boxall Quality Mark Award':

> *"...whilst it is recognised that there are inevitable differences in how the model is applied in different settings the importance of close adherence to the key underlying principles remains the same."*
>
> (NGN, 2011, p2).

If the set-up and context for NGs is variable and their shared objectives are achieved in subtly different ways, then what is unique about NGs, and what makes them different from other SGTIs? Evidently, 'what is to be evaluated' needs to be more clearly specified.

3.5.4 Implications for the present study

The DfES (2005) Sure Start evaluation argued research has focused on programme outcomes, rather than identifying "characteristics of successful implementation" (p111). The authors contend that;

> *"while we know, for example, about the importance of adult-child interaction that is responsive, affectionate and readily available and well-trained staff committed to work with the children, fewer insights are available about how services get to that point".*

The DfES (2005) report cites Moran;

> *"...there is surprisingly little robust research on what makes for effective implementation, and very few properly–designed experiments have been conducted, and those only in the United States" (Moran et al., 2004, p95).*

The DfES (2005) evaluation also stressed *"work is still in progress to identify the characteristics of effective programmes, i.e. effective in the sense of child and parent level outcomes"* (p111).

With reference to the effects of NGs on children, teachers and schools, Reynolds *et al* (2009) highlight the lack of formal evaluation, despite several studies reporting positive findings. Beneficial effects demonstrated by numerous studies do give a 'basis for optimism'; however as discussed in the preceding sections, some significant limitations remain (see Table 3.6 below) (Reynolds *et al*, 2009, p206).

Table 3.6: Limitations of NG research

Study Design	Limitations
Methodological weaknesses	Studies are frequently characterised by small samples, lack of control group or appropriately matched controls, no 'attention placebo' for controls, poor sample selection, high attrition rates and absence of quantitative measures of change. Lack of adequate triangulation of data. Measures used often lack reliability e.g. Boxall Profile.
Limited longer-term evaluation of outcomes	Findings suggest that while many initial benefits are maintained, the groups may not benefit all children and there is sometimes evidence of relapse in areas of social and emotional functioning.
Poor information regarding confounding factors	Impact of class size and teacher behaviour not investigated yet are areas known to have impact.

(Sources: O'Connor and Colwell, 2002; Reynolds *et al*, 2009, p206; Howell, 2009)

Clearly, thorough evaluation of NGs is paramount, both to check their appropriateness and effectiveness for some of our most vulnerable children, but also because their establishment has *"significant implications in terms of resources and staff training"* (Reynolds, *et al*, 2009, p206).

Salient to the present study, the crucial component of NG staff's characteristics (Humphrey *et al*, 2009) and behaviour, has received little investigation, gaining only passing reference (Colwell and O'Connor, 2003). Newman (2004) found that *"good and mutually trusting relationships"* with teachers (p3), hold the most promise for developing relationships with children (Bani, 2011, p50). Recent research shows that positive interactions between NG staff and children are likely to enhance pupils' self-esteem of pupils (Bani, 2011). Rogers' (1967) seminal work on the 'interpersonal relationship in the facilitation of learning' highlights a number of important qualities and attitudes for educators (Smith, 1997, 2004):

- ***'Realness or genuineness'**: "When the facilitator is a real person...entering into a relationship with the learner without presenting a front or a façade...It means coming into a direct personal encounter with the learner, meeting her on a person-to-person basis. It means that she is being herself, not denying herself".*
- ***'Prizing, acceptance, trust'**: "...prizing the learner, prizing her feelings, her opinions, her person. It is a caring for the learner, but a non-possessive caring. It is an acceptance of this other individual as a separate person, having worth in her own right. It is a basic trust - a belief that this other person is somehow fundamentally trustworthy… What we are describing is a prizing of the learner as an imperfect human being with many feelings, many potentialities".*
- ***'Empathetic understanding':** "When the teacher has the ability to understand the student's reactions from the inside, has a sensitive awareness of the way the process of education and learning seems to the student, then again the likelihood of significant learning is increased…. when they are simply understood – not evaluated, not judged, simply understood from their own point of view, not the teacher's".*

(Source: Rogers, 1967, p304-311).

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy's (BACP) ethical framework describes how personal qualities need to be *"deeply rooted in the person concerned and developed out of personal commitment rather than the requirement of an external authority"* (BACP, 2007).

Evaluating empirically the efficacy of NG provision is complex, as not only the multifaceted intervention itself, but staff's behaviour and 'deep-rooted', personal qualities are likely to be crucial to NG success. It would be very difficult to design an evaluation of these personal qualities which could separate the effect of individual staff's input and qualities from other aspects of the intervention. Nevertheless, comparisons between mainstream and NG staff can be made, and research comparing verbal and non-verbal communication has found NG staff were more positive, and thus more likely to enhance the self-esteem of pupils (Colwell and O'Connor, 2003). However, this research had a very limited sample, comparing only one NG teacher with one mainstream teacher. It also noted *"many differences between NG and normal classrooms, each of which is a potential cause of effectiveness in NGs"* (e.g. differences in group size, teacher characteristics, and between the children themselves) (Colwell and O'Connor, 2003, p123).

3.5.5 Conclusions

The present study explores some of the complexity surrounding NGs, to generate testable theory. This study seeks to add to the evidence-base for NGs by investigating the variable of 'NG staff practice', to generate (but not test) testable

theories regarding their effectiveness and factors which inhibit or support staff endeavours to ensure positive outcomes for children and young people, thus seeking to make an original contribution to knowledge and theory development.

The literature summarised within this chapter regarding NGs can be used to construct Programme Theory, which relates to how an effective NG provision might work (after Timmins and Miller, 2007). Aspects of this Programme Theory which are further attended to in Chapter 4 are underlined:

Programme Theory for NGs:

A NG which achieves successful inclusion and measurable gains in social, emotional and behavioural functioning for NG children (O) will operate with two members of staff supporting a small group of children, within a whole school setting with an inclusive and nurturing ethos, where all staff value children's social and emotional development (C) <u>and NG staff will have the personal qualities and necessary skills to form positive relationships with the children</u>, sensitively providing them with opportunities to 'relive' missed nurturing experiences, and <u>are able to work collaboratively with mainstream staff, parents and external agencies</u> (M).

The next chapter will consider what is meant by 'effective teaching' and the implications of this for the present study.

CHAPTER 4: EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND TRAINING

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, in order to identify Cs, Ms and Os applicable to the present study the evidence-base for effective teaching[13] is considered. Additionally, consideration is given to literature regarding effective Continuing Professional Development (CPD), specifically training for staff, so that NG practitioners can consider the evidence-base and decide what aspects apply best to their developmental needs. Numerous studies on effective schools indicate that classroom level factors are more influential than school level for students' performance (Kyriakides, 2002). While school quality is an important determinant of student achievement, the single most important school-related factor is generally accepted as 'teacher quality' (Rice, 2003).

4.2 Effective teaching

4.2.1 Changing conceptualisations of effective teaching

Brophy and Good (1986) argue research on effective teaching developed slowly because of historical influences on the conceptualisation and measurement of effectiveness. Different periods of teacher effectiveness research have identified a variety of characteristics of effective teachers (see Table 4.1 below).

[13] In this study I am not looking at any role differentiation between teacher and TA, or teacher and TA- led groups; consequently 'teacher' and 'teaching' will refer to all NG staff who are mediating children's learning and development within NGs.

Table 4.1. The main factors associated with effective teachers examined by successive phases of research into teacher effectiveness

Studies	Factors examined
Presage-product studies	**Psychological characteristics** A) Personality characteristics (e.g. permissiveness, dogmatism, directness) B) Attitude (e.g. motivation to teach, empathy toward children, and commitment) C) Experience (e.g. years of teaching, experience in age level taught) D) Aptitude/Achievement (e.g. professional recommendations, student teaching evaluations).
Process-product model	**Teacher Behaviour** A) Quantity of Academic Activity • Quantity and pacing of instruction: Effective teachers prioritise academic instruction, maximising curriculum covered but moving in such steps that each new objective is learnt readily and without frustration. • Classroom management: Effective teachers organise and manage classroom environment as an efficient learning environment and thereby engagement rates are maximised. • Actual teaching process: Students should spend most of their time being taught or supervised by their teachers rather than working alone and most of teacher talk should be academic rather than managerial or procedural. B) Quality of Teacher's Organised Lessons • Giving information: Examined variables referred to structure/clarity • Asking questions: Variables which were examined referred to cognitive level of question, type of question (i.e., product vs. process questions), clarity of question, and length of pause following questions. • Providing feedback: Examined variables referred to the way teachers monitor students' responses and how they react to correct, partly correct, or incorrect answers. • Providing practice and application opportunities C) Classroom Climate Businesslike and supportive environment
Beyond classroom behaviour Model	A) Subject knowledge B) Knowledge of pedagogy C) Teacher's beliefs D) Teacher's self-efficacy

(Source: Kyriakides *et al*, 2002, p293)

Presage-product studies (described in Table 4.1) developed from early concern with teachers' personal traits and an attempt to identify the psychological characteristics of an effective teacher (Kyriakides *et al*, 2002). Kyriakides *et al* (2002) describe how the 1950s and 1960s brought concern about the importance of classroom climate and teaching competencies involved in producing student achievement. This led to an emphasis on measuring teacher behaviour through systematic observation demonstrating that certain teacher behaviours were consistently correlated with student achievement (Kyriakides *et al*, 2002).

Much literature surrounding teacher effectiveness appears to focus on students' academic achievement as the primary measure of teachers' success. Students' academic outcomes may be viewed as central for defining the quality of education (Creemers, 1994, in Kyriakides *et al*, 2002), but academic outcomes represent only one, albeit significant, measure of educational quality. My experience of teaching is that measures which encompass the school's 'ethos' (e.g. 'value-added' measures; 'incidences of bullying'; 'numbers of exclusions'; and reports from pupils and parents alike) might reflect more accurately the 'quality' of any education. A school where pupils attain academically but leave unhappy and stressed, or with poor social and emotional skills, presumably cannot still be considered 'quality education' (although such affective factors may, of course, correlate with and/or contribute to attainment outcomes).

Similarly, Kyriakides *et al* (2002) stress that the measure of students' academic outcomes is a 'one-sided quantitative approach for defining the characteristics of the

effective teacher' which disregards their role in school improvement or development of national educational policy, and also ignores aspects of their behaviour and performance which contribute to students' development and progress across multiple dimensions (p299). Given the wide range of functions teachers are now expected to provide, the *"traditional conception of teacher effectiveness focused exclusively or mainly on the teaching performance of individual teachers in the classrooms, has its limitations and cannot meet the needs of the school as a whole"* (p299). A 'multimodel conception' of teacher effectiveness is needed (Cheng and Tsui, 1999), which identifies the criteria and characteristics that distinguish 'effective teachers' and which recognises the complexity of teachers' roles in educational systems (Kyriakides *et al*, 2002).

4.2.2 Current frameworks for characterising effective teachers

Hay/McBer Management Consultants were commissioned by the DfEE to help take forward proposals in the Green Paper *'Teachers: meeting the challenge of change'*, by providing a framework which described effective teaching (Hay/McBer, 2000), drawing evidence from a variety of sources, to illuminate the question of 'What do effective teachers do?'. Using a representative sample of schools and a broad range of teachers, they drew on the expertise of numerous professionals, experts and stakeholders, alongside data indicating the 'value added' results of those teachers for that year. They utilised a number of complementary data-collection techniques from different research traditions, analysing the career history and qualifications of the teachers, their teaching skills, their professional characteristics and the climate in

their classrooms (Hay/McBer, 2000). Their methods included classroom observation, in-depth interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, as well as the collection of personal and school data. Concurrently, in a separate project Reynolds (Teddie and Reynolds, 2000), collected and analysed pupil progress data, taking account of school context. Hay/McBer's model is shown below:

Figure 4.1: Hay/McBer's (2000) model of the measures of teacher effectiveness

Whilst the use of management consultants rather than educational researchers is certainly questionable, as are the methodological rigour and findings of the study (Gorard, 2001; 2002), the study provides a useful framework for considering the characteristics of 'effective teachers' and the interaction with their teaching skills *per se*. Figure 4.1 illustrates the interrelatedness of the three proposed components. For example, Hay/McBer describe how professional characteristics and teaching skills both relate to what the teacher brings to the job, and that classroom climate is an

outcome of the interaction between these two components:

> *"...professional characteristics are the ongoing patterns of behaviour that combine to drive the things we typically do. Amongst those things are the "micro-behaviours" covered by teaching skills. Whilst teaching skills can be learned, sustaining these behaviours over the course of a career will depend on the deeper seated nature of professional characteristics. Classroom climate...is an output measure"*
>
> (Hay/McBer, 2000, p6).

Depending on how it is viewed, a positive classroom climate could be both a mechanism and an outcome, thus 'professional characteristics' and 'teaching skills' could be classified as both a context and mechanism. Details of Hay/McBer's (2000) identified 'Teaching Skills' and 'Professional Characteristics' (shown in Appendix VI) were used to generate Cs, Ms, Os for testing. An important outcome, pertinent for the current study, is also highlighted:

> *"...the highly effective teacher is able to create an environment in which all pupils can learn by employing direct means of pupil management to ensure that disruption to pupil learning is minimised and pupils feel safe and secure"*
>
> (Hay/McBer, 2000, p14).

Exactly what defines a 'quality teacher' remains debatable (Rice, 2003). In her review of the literature, Rice (2003) argues there are five measurable, policy-relevant teacher characteristics that reflect teacher quality, shown in Table 4.1 below. Rice (2003) argues such teacher characteristics are good predictors of teacher performance or effectiveness (in this instance 'effectiveness' appears to be conceptualised as teachers who produce the best outcomes for their pupils), and this information can help inform policy in investing in teacher quality/training.

Table 4.2: Teacher characteristics which reflect teacher quality

Characteristic	Impact
Experience	Positive effect on teacher effectiveness
Prestige of the institution attended by a teacher	Positive effect on student achievement
Teachers who are certified in a specific discipline, teaching that discipline e.g. mathematics	Positive impact on student achievement
Use of coursework for teachers in both their specific subject area (primarily for secondary teachers) and in pedagogy	Contributes to positive education outcomes, with pedagogical coursework contributing positively regardless of the age range taught
Tests that assess teachers' literacy levels or verbal abilities	Associated with higher levels of student achievement

Source: Rice (2003, p vi)

Rice (2003) stresses that important personal characteristics are not measured in the studies she reviewed. This is because her focus is on aspects of teacher background that can be *"translated into policy recommendations and incorporated into teaching practice"* (Rice, 2003, p v). Such a narrow focus omits much rich, even crucial information. For example classroom climate is *"one of the most important factors to affect student achievement"*, and *"the most important aspect of classroom climate is the relationship between teacher and students"* (Muijs and Reynolds, 2003, p58-59). Surely 'prestige of the institution attended' or 'teachers' literacy levels' are less likely than their personal characteristics to affect their relationships with pupils? Furthermore, factors such as 'prestige of institution' are complex; perhaps it is the 'quality' or rigour of the course attended that is the influential mechanism.

Hay/McBer (2000) found biometric data (i.e. age and teaching experience, qualifications, career history etc.) did not predict teacher effectiveness. This appears to contrast with Rice's (2003) assertions that professional qualifications and experience do correlate with effective teaching. Furthermore, Hay/McBer's (2000) data did not show that school context could be used to predict pupil progress:

> *"Effective and outstanding teachers teach in all kinds of schools and school contexts. This means that using biometric data to predict a teacher's effectiveness could well lead to the exclusion of some potentially outstanding teachers. This finding is also consistent with the notion that pupil progress outcomes are affected more by a teacher's skills and professional characteristics than by factors such as their sex, qualifications or experience" (p7)*

Notwithstanding the limitations of their study, Hay/McBer's (2000) research demonstrates *"the criticality of the teacher in the pupil learning process"* (p10). Furthermore, given the 'deep-seated' nature of professional characteristics, and import of 'relating to others' amongst these, they are likely to align well with the Rogerian (1967) qualities outlined in Section 3.5.4.

More recent research by Hanushek and Rivkin (2006) also highlights the complexity of evaluating 'teacher quality'; *"observed schooling situations represent the outcomes of several interrelated choices...those of parents, teachers, administrators and policymakers...making it difficult to separate the various influences reliably",* however, *"growth in interest in questions of teacher quality is being met by an explosion of new data and analytical possibilities... married with increased interest in new strategies to separate true causal effects from associations due to selection and omitted variables"* (p23-24). Again, RE offers one potential route to meet this end.

4.3 The importance of context

4.3.1 Group size effects

A context requiring serious consideration is group size. Blatchford (2003) dedicates an entire book to this issue. Small class size *per se*, perhaps counter-intuitively, does not always lead to improved outcomes for children. Blatchford *et al* (2005) showed that in small classes there were more *"individualized task-related contacts between teacher and pupils and a more active role for pupils"* but *"against expectation, class size did not affect pupil on-task behaviour or peer interaction"* (p454). Viewing Blatchford's (2003) review of the evidence through the lens of RE, arguably in the context of smaller class sizes, the mechanism of effective teaching can be fired:

> *"Overall, results suggest that while small classes will not make a bad teacher better, they can allow teachers to be more effective; conversely large classes inevitably present teachers with difficulties and the need for compromises. Small classes can offer opportunities for teachers to teach better...or....create facilitating conditions for teachers to teach and students to learn..."*
>
> (Blatchford, 2009, p3).

In the NG literature there appeared little discussion of group size, except for the setting of an upper and lower limit (although there was marginally more discussion available regarding group composition and dynamics e.g. Bennathan and Boxall, 1996, p41-42; Bishop, 2008). NGs rationalise their group size of approximately 12 children, as a *"viable number to offer a broad enough range of opportunities for making relationships"* (Boxall and Lucas, 2010, p17). Boxall and Lucas (2010, p17) describe the importance of group work in developing social skills, increasing self-directing behaviour, and learning to respect the needs and attitudes of other children.

4.3.2 Other contextual factors

Kyriakides *et al* (2002), highlight what they consider to be two conceptual problems in the literature surrounding teacher effectiveness:

1. the limited conceptions of 'teaching'; and
2. disconnection from teachers' professional development.

Arguably, effective teachers are more likely to be found in schools where their personal and professional development is nurtured.

The 'High Reliability Schools' (HRS) project, an initiative which emerged in the mid-1990s, was founded by 'leaders in the field of school effectiveness', Professors Reynolds, Stringfield and Schaffer from UK and USA institutions (HRS, 2011). The project is based on the premise that highly reliable schools promote positive outcomes for students through support, feedback and evaluation (HRS, 2011). The project uses well-grounded research, adding to the evidence-base for seven key research areas:

1. *Teacher effectiveness*
2. *School effectiveness*
3. *Middle management effectiveness*
4. *Teachers' professional development and enquiry*
5. *Data and information richness*
6. *Effective specific interventions*
7. *School improvement.*

Whilst all of the above are addressed in the HRS project, given most variation in school effectiveness is driven by classroom rather than school level factors (HRS, 2011), the role of teachers is likely to be paramount. However, though examining what makes an effective teacher may be crucial, effective teaching methods are

context-specific (HRS, 2011). Thus what is needed for a teacher to be effective can vary according to contextual variables (HRS, 2011).

Studies which have explored bases for differences between schools which regularly generate unexpectedly high levels of student learning and those with typical student learning, have shown the former schools to be 'self-renewing' (Bruce *et al*, 1999). Initiatives to improve students' achievement in academic, personal, and social fields are created, and these are founded on ongoing, disciplined inquiry, centred on the continuous study of student learning (Bruce *et al*, 1999). Such schools have altered their typical workplace protocols to include study time for teachers, investment in continuous staff development, and a governance structure which actively includes staff, parents, community agencies, business partners, and local district/education authority personnel (Bruce *et al*, 1999). Clearly, contextual factors have a significant impact on teacher effectiveness. Of particular significance for this study, is the context of staff development. Using the HRS (2011) literature or 'bodies of knowledge' surrounding teachers' professional development, and the Training and Development Agency for Schools' (TDA, 2007) report regarding 'what does good CPD look like?', I extracted relevant Cs, Ms, and Os (presented in Appendix VII) for consideration and discussion with NG practitioners. Amongst these, the most salient to the current study appeared to be that CPD is carefully planned and sustained, collaborative, incorporates evaluation of impact, is directly relevant to participants/'bespoke', is evidence-based, is well-resourced, and involves peer observation and modelling.

4.4 Conclusions

Applying an RE framework to teacher effectiveness, the teacher characteristics described in Table 4.1 may be key mechanisms, but context is also crucial. Caldwell and Spinks (1993; cited in Kyriakides, 2002, p292) highlight how the *"organisational aspects of schools provide the necessary preconditions for effective teaching"*. Nevertheless, what still ultimately determines student progress is the quality of teacher-student interactions (Caldwell and Spinks, 1993). The literature regarding effective teaching and teacher training, can be used to construct Programme Theory regarding effective teaching which has significance for this study:

Programme Theory for effective teaching:

Teachers who enable their students to make good progress (O) will operate within a school with facilitative organisational aspects, where teachers receive on-going, well focused training (C) and teachers will have the necessary skills, professional characteristics and experience (C) to apply subject knowledge and teaching methods successfully, and to create a positive classroom climates and structured learning environment with high quality teacher-student interactions (M).

CHAPTER 5

REALISTIC EVALUATION: HYPOTHESES, METHODOLOGY, METHODS AND STUDY DESIGN

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a rationale for the methodological approach chosen for this study, building on the overview of RE given in Chapter 2. Inherent in RE's methodological orientation is a contribution to theory development. Indeed it is 'theory-driven', rather than method-driven (Pawson and Tilley, 2008). RE indubitably contrasts with Scriven's (1991, p360) view of theory as a 'luxury for the evaluator', instead viewing theory as essential; *"empirical work in program evaluation can only be as good as the theory which underpins it"* (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p83).

Pawson and Tilley (1997) assert, *"realism has a unique way of understanding the constituents of theory"* (p84). Theories are generated by the evaluator from available evidence or literature. They are *"framed in terms of propositions about how mechanisms are fired in contexts to produce outcomes"* – with all else in the inquiry following from this (p85). So hypotheses are generated when programs are deconstructed to identify;

- *what it is about the measure which might produce change;*
- *which individuals, subgroups and locations might benefit most readily from the program; and*
- *which social and cultural resources are necessary to sustain the changes*

(Source: Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p85).

This is the start of realist evaluation, where the researcher posits possible processes by which a programme works, prior to testing them (Pawson and Tilley, 2004, p6): a process initiated within the realist syntheses of published literature presented in Chapters 3 and 4.

This study is not an evaluation *per se*, but could be described as 'illuminative' (Timmins and Miller, 2007). It is primarily concerned with developing theory regarding staff practice in NGs, and informing future practitioners' training. Firstly, the study aims and hypotheses are presented. Secondly, the methodological framework (RE) (discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2) is described further, and its use justified. Thirdly, ethical requirements are considered. Finally, procedures involved in designing the study, and collecting and analysing the data are presented and discussed.

5.2 Aims, hypotheses and research questions

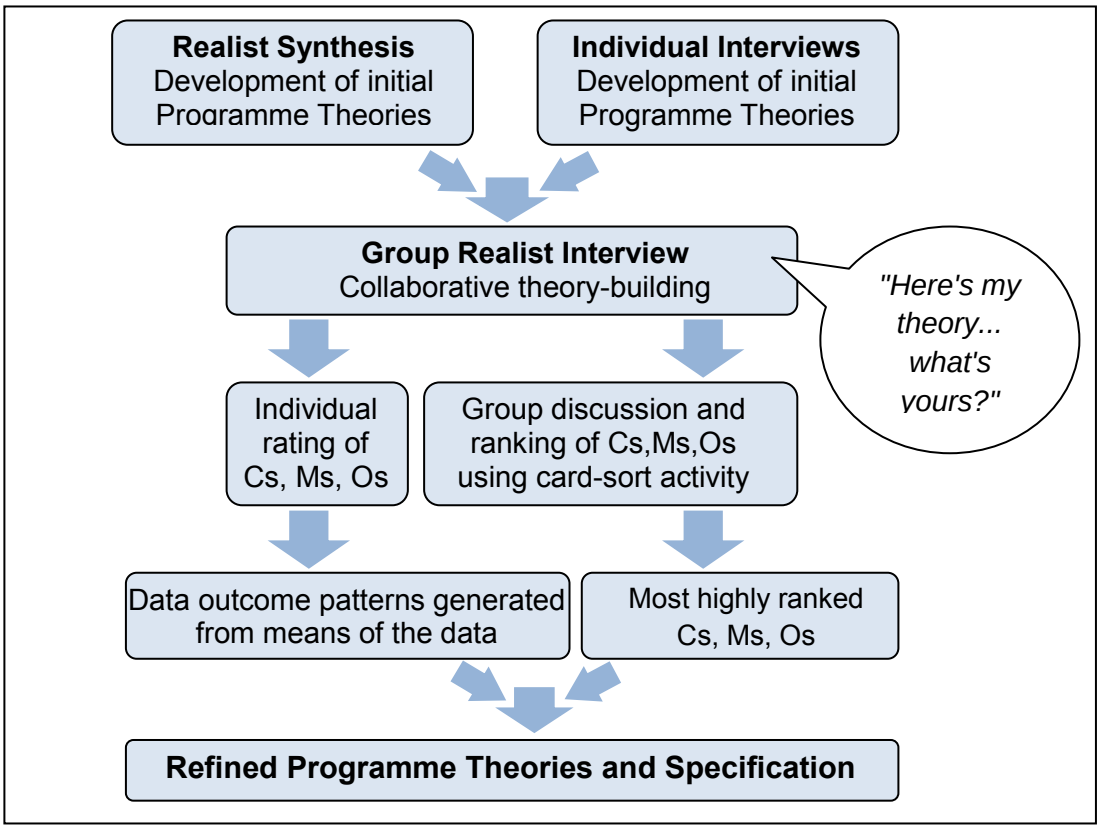
RE is an evaluation methodology used to assess social programmes (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) (as discussed in Section 2.2). Fundamentally, it is concerned with evaluating and developing theory. Chapter 3 demonstrated that, to date, most NG studies have employed quasi-experimental designs, yielding findings of questionable reliability. The research on compensatory initiatives such as NGs (discussed in Section 1.1 and Chapter 3), has generally been outcome-focused, utilising 'Results' or 'Actor' evaluation models (Hansen, 2005; see Table 2.1). The causal mechanisms

and contextual factors responsible for positive effects have been under-researched, and the role/import of theory has been underemphasised.

An RE framework was used to contribute to theory development regarding NGs, staff practice and effective training. Investigating the social programme of NGs the principal aim of this study was to identify practitioners' perspectives regarding effective practice and how it can be fostered. To meet this aim a realist synthesis of the literature on NGs and other SGTIs was carried out, within the wider context of compensatory education, in order to build up 'families of configurations' (discussed further in Section 5.3.2). Additionally, 'effective teaching' and 'training' were also reviewed. Theories from the literature were abstracted, as were NG staff's 'folk theories', consequently, the Realist Synthesis in Chapter 3 was itself part of the data collection and analysis process. A small-scale empirical study was also carried out.

The study structure is shown in Figure 5.1 below. It demonstrates how Programme Theories, in the form of CMO configurations, were proposed, developed and refined. Programme Theories were then used to develop Programme Specifications (i.e. an account of 'what works, for whom, in what circumstances'), in order to contribute to theory development in this domain, and make evidence-based recommendations regarding future training for NG staff.

Figure 5.1: Research design



The following research questions were investigated:

Table 5.1: Research Questions

Research question	Addressed in...	Data from
A. What does previous research tell us about NGs and factors affecting staff practice?	Chapter 3, Section 3.5	Realist synthesis
B. What does extant research tell us about community/family, whole school, mainstream classroom, and NG level factors (contexts and mechanisms) that influence or impact on practice and affect outcomes for children attending NGs?	Chapters 3 and 4	
C. What can be learnt from research on other small group psycho-educational interventions and compensatory education?	Chapter 3, Section 3.3 and 3.4	
D. What does extant research tell us about 'effective' practice in teachers, and how it can be developed?	Chapter 4	

E. What do practitioners consider are the key attributes, skills and experience effective NG practitioners should have?	Chapter 6, Section 6.2	Individual interviews and Data Outcome Patterns[14]
F. What community/family, whole school, mainstream classroom, and NG level factors (contexts and mechanisms) do practitioners consider support or hinder their practice and the outcomes of NGs?	Chapter 6, Section 6.3	Realist synthesis, individual interviews, Data Outcome Patterns and group realist interview
G. With regard to NGs and staff practice, what contexts and mechanisms do NG practitioners consider most powerful in influencing outcomes?	Chapter 6, Section 6.4	
H. What aspects (contexts and mechanisms) of training/CPD do NG practitioners consider would support their own and others' professional development most effectively?	Chapter 6, Section 6.6	
I. With regard to staff development, what contexts and mechanisms do NG practitioners consider most powerful in influencing outcomes?	Chapter 6, Section 6.7	

Questions 'E' to 'I' were addressed through an empirical study, which is the focus of Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis.

5.3 Conceptualisation and design of the empirical study

5.3.1 Realist evaluation cycle

Pawson and Tilley (1997) explain how research designs for RE studies are underpinned by the same 'basic logic of inquiry' as any other social or indeed natural science; they follow an abridged 'wheel of science', described as a 'realist evaluation cycle' (Figures 5.2 and 5.3 below) (p84):

[14] Refer to Section 5.5.5iii for explanation of how Data Outcome Patterns are generated. The Data Outcome Patterns generated for this study are discussed in Sections 6.4 and 6.7.

Figure 5.2: The wheel of science (after Wallace, 1971)

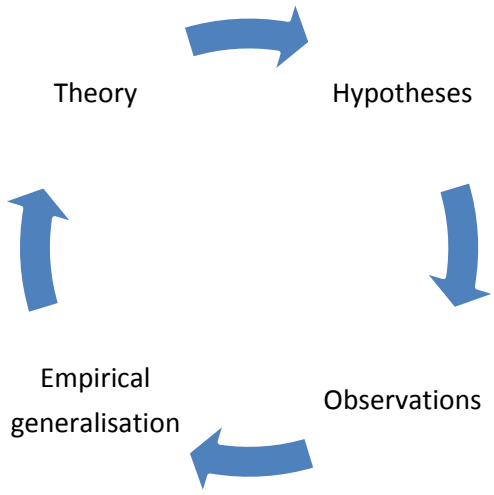
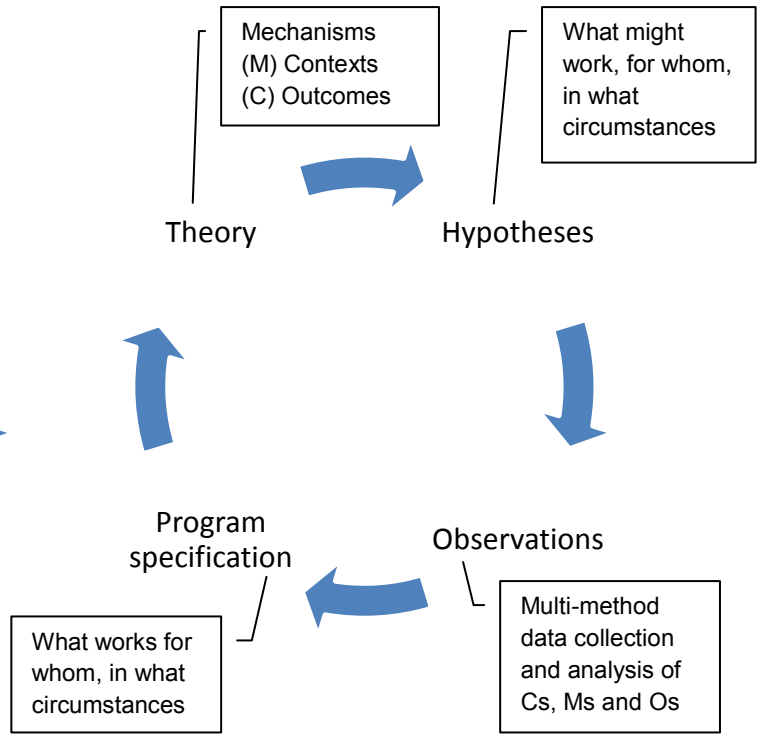


Figure 5.3: The realist evaluation cycle



(From: Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p84-85)

Typical research designs follow the pattern summarised in Figure 5.2, comprising:

- *Theories: framed in abstract terms and concerned with identifying and explaining regularities;*
- *Hypotheses: derived from theories, which state where and when regularities should be found;*
- *Observations: used to test hypotheses; and*
- *Generalisations: informed by observations. These may or may not conform to those expected from a theory (if they do not, interpretations typically suggest either some critical weaknesses in the research design intended to test the theory, or the theory itself is in need of revision).*

(Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p84)

Realist designs follow a similar cycle, and are distinctive in content rather than form (Pawson and Tilley, 1997).

5.3.2 Specification, generalisation and cumulation

Pawson and Tilley (1997) highlight RE's difference from Wallace's Wheel of Science, with RE's goal of 'specification' rather than *"unqualified or unconditional 'generalisation'"* (p86). Pawson and Tilley's (1997) argument may be biased here however, as only poor scientific inquiry would actually make generalisations that were unqualified or unconditional. Nevertheless, Pawson and Tilley (1997) argue generalisation implies a *"sort of universal statement"*, something which scientific realism contests (p86). Moreover, they argue, research findings are transient;

> *"...evaluation and social science generally only ever come to temporary resting places...'findings' take the form of specifying those 'regularities' or 'outcome patterns' which the present state of our understanding of 'mechanisms' and 'contexts' is able to sustain"*
>
> (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p86).

With such flux, generalisations may at best be unhelpful, and at worst misleading, whereas specification allows greater consideration of temporal factors, and revisions of CMOs can be made over time.

Knowledge is accumulated by the process of moving from a specific empirical case to a general theory, and back again (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). It is 'ideas' rather than 'lumps of data' which are transferred between cases:

> *"the process works through the development of a body of theory which provides an* ***organising framework*** *which 'abstracts' from a program a set of essential conditions which make sense of one case after another"*
>
> (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p120).

Researchers in evaluation can appear polarised between experimental camps (searching for program uniformities and generalisation), and constructivist schools (whose appreciation of the uniqueness of any programme, commits them to specification) (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). Instead of involving itself in the *"perpetual play-off of specification versus generalisation"*, RE seeks to win the *"cumulation prize"* (Pawson and Tilley, p118):

> *"Realists know that science does not arrive at laws inductively and, therefore, search for cumulation beyond the thicket of specification".*
>
> (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p119)

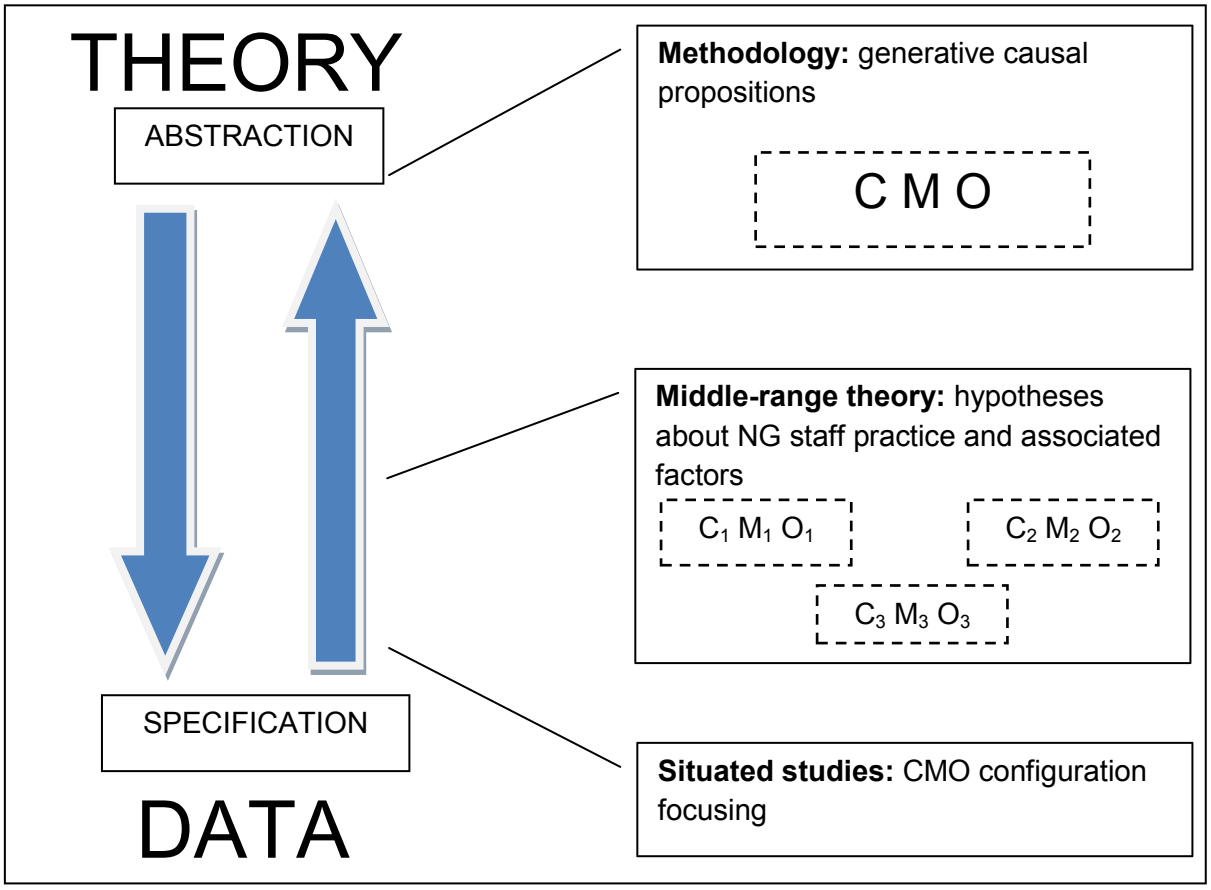
'Theories' are shaped as 'generative causal propositions' or CMO configurations. As we move from data to theory and back again, a contribution to the production of transferable, cumulative knowledge is made; this contribution *"consists in filling out our knowledge of CMO configurations"* (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p121). Figure 5.4 below, illustrates the point.

RE data collection and analysis centres around testing, refining and adjudicating the 'middle-range theories', shown in Figure 5.4 and described as:

> *"Theories that lie between the minor but necessary working hypotheses that evolve in abundance during day-to-day research and the all-inclusive systematic efforts to develop a unified theory that will explain all the observed uniformities of social behaviour, social organisation, and social change."*
>
> (Merton, 1968, p39)

From a nucleus of ideas, one can develop a *"wide range of testable propositions"*, building up *"families of configurations"* (i.e. clusters of dashed boxes in Figure 5.4) (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p123).

Figure 5.4: The elements of realist cumulation



(Adapted from: Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p121-123)

'Configuration focusing' occurs when evaluations (situated or 'case' studies) within the problem area are carried out to refine our understanding of the range of CMOs that may apply in that domain (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). Different studies may draw different answers to the question of 'what works for whom in what circumstances', which would send the researcher back to the 'theory drawing-board' to search for refinement of the mechanisms, facilitating separation and interpretation of the different outcomes, and *"prompting a range of supplementary hypotheses"* for testing (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p129).

By using the framework of RE, programme efficacy, individual responses and context are all considered. Indeed, as noted previously, the questions of 'what works, for whom, and in what context' are at the heart of RE.

Whilst a range of potential methodologies was considered for the current study (e.g. 'Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis' (Smith and Osborn, 2003), 'action research' (Stenhouse, 1985; Zambo, 2007) and 'grounded theory' (Strauss and Corbin, 2008)) RE was selected, as it is primarily concerned with developing a theory of programmes in their specific context, and as it is most closely aligned with my epistemological position, discussed in the following sections.

5.4 Epistemology and Methodology

All researchers have *"commitments to particular versions of the world (ontology) and ways of knowing that world (epistemology)"* (Usher, 1996, p13). The way researchers view or construct 'reality' rests on these assumptions. Essentially, there are two ways of conceiving social reality, subjectivism or objectivism, both underpinned by explicit and implicit assumptions (Cohen *et al*, 2007). Cohen *et al* (2007) report Burrell and Morgan's (1979) analysis of these assumptions, which fall into four categories: ontological, epistemological, human and methodological (see Table 5.2). Depending on the epistemological assumptions held, researchers are described as subscribing to a *positivist* or *anti-positivist* approach (Burrell and Morgan 1979; in Cohen *et al*, 2007).

Table 5.2: A scheme for analysing assumptions about the nature of social science

*The **subjectivist** approach to social science*				*The **objectivist** approach to social science*
Nominalism	←	Ontology	→	Realism
Anti-Positivism	←	Epistemology	→	Positivism
Voluntarism	←	Human Nature	→	Determinism
Idiographic	←	Methodology	→	Nomothetic

(Source: Cohen *et al*, 2007, p9; adapted from Burrell and Morgan, 1979)

Broadly speaking those taking a positivist stance view the nature of knowledge as tangible and observable, as claimed in the traditional scientific paradigm. Those taking an anti-positivist position, view the world through a more subjective lens. The former primarily, though not solely, utilise quantitative methodology, the latter qualitative.

Despite the clear differences in these epistemological and methodological paradigms, they share commonalities. Camic *et al* (2003) describe how they both develop theories of how knowledge is created through investigation, using representational devices for modelling the world, through numbers, words and/or images. Whilst qualitative research attempts to understand social phenomena, and quantitative research strives to 'determine relationships, effects and causes' (Wiersma, 1991, p.14), both adopt a systematic approach to investigation of the social world. Quantitative and qualitative research may have unique characteristics, but when

applied to educational research they can be viewed as belonging to a ‘continuum’ rather than a ‘dichotomy’ (Wiersma, 1991).

On this continuum of subjectivity/objectivity, anti-positivism/positivism, qualitative/quantitative methodology, realism sits comfortably at a mid-point. Following Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), Thistleton (2008, p49) uses the generic term ‘interpretivism’ to include anti-positivist approaches (e.g. phenomenology, relativism and constructivism), and provides a neat synopsis of how realism ‘fits’ between positivism and interpretivism on the spectrum of conceptions of social reality (Table 5.3).

Essentially, interpretivism and positivism adopt differing positions regarding the relationship between the knowledge ‘in our minds’ and ‘objects of knowledge’. Where interpretivism views ‘real’ objects and our knowledge of these objects as intimately related, inseparable even, positivism positions ‘object’ and ‘idea’ as wholly different things. ‘Critical Realism’ recognises both the interconnectedness and separateness of internal and external worlds, believing there to be an objective world, independent of human perception or conception of it, hence ‘realistic’, but ‘critical’ in acknowledgment of the difficulties in affirming this reality objectively, because as humans our presence as researchers will always influence (directly or indirectly) what we seek to measure (Runes, 1942).

Table 5.3: A comparison of conceptions of social reality

Dimensions of comparison	*Ontology and Epistemology*	*The role of social science*	*Research*	*Human behaviour*	*Research Methods*
Positivism	The world exists and is knowable as it really is. This conflates ontology and epistemology and ignores epistemology *Ontology* is flat since what is observed is all that exists	Discovering universal laws of human behaviour and of society	Experimental or quasi-experimental validation of theory	Social Scientist is an observer of social reality. Respondents are treated as objects, informants or producers of data	Quantitative methods
Realism	Realism holds that reality exists independent of social actors and observers There is a distinction between: • the intransitive dimension (the objects of science) *and* • the transitive dimension (the understanding of the intransitive dimension, including theories of science) Because our understanding of the world may change this does not mean that the world itself changes *Ontology* is stratified and the world is characterised by emergence	Inventing theories to explain the real world and testing these theories by rational criteria	Explanation is concerned with how Mechanisms produce events and in what circumstances	Observable human behaviour is characterised by underlying intention and choice. Understanding this is part of the research process	Mixed methods. The researcher chooses the method which best fits the investigation
Interpretivism	There is no objective reality since reality can only be constructed through a conceptual system This conflates ontology and epistemology and ignores ontology	Discovering how different people interpret the world in which they live	The search for meaningful relationships and the discovery of their consequences for action	The importance of viewing the meaning of experience and behaviour in its full complexity is stressed	Qualitative methods

(Sources: Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007); adapted by Thistleton (2008, p49))

How to conduct empirical and theoretical research from a critical realist perspective is neatly addressed by Layder (1993):

> *"Put very simply, a central feature of realism is its attempt to preserve a 'scientific' attitude towards social analysis at the same time as recognizing the importance of actors' meanings and in some way incorporating them in research. As such, a key aspect of the realistic project is a concern with causality and the identification of causal mechanisms in social phenomena in a manner quite unlike the traditional positivist search for causal generalizations".*

Layder's (1993) assertion of the focus on identifying causal mechanisms, demonstrates RE's alignment with this epistemology. Indeed, RE's underlying epistemology is "a theory of *causal explanation* based on *generative* principles", and its underlying ontology is "that *regularities* in the patterning of social activities are brought about by the *underlying mechanism* constituted by people's reasoning and the resources they are able to summon in a *particular context"* (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p220).

This study adopts a critical realist epistemology. By subscribing to this epistemology, and in line with Table 5.3 above, the purpose of this study was to 'invent Programme Theories to explain aspects of NGs and 'test' these theories by rational criteria'. By working in a collaborative way, with NG staff positioned as co-researchers, this research sought to explain how Mechanisms related to NG practice produce positive Outcomes for children, and identify facilitative Contexts.

5.5 Methods

5.5.1 Ethical considerations

I was aware, throughout this research, of ethical challenges inherent in conducting research with human subjects. Issues regarding recruitment of participants, consent, feedback, withdrawal, confidentiality, data storage and handling, benefits and risks were all considered carefully. A comprehensive account of the study's ethical considerations is shown in Appendix VIII, with consent forms for the interview and focus group included as Appendices IX and X; the next paragraphs address some of the major ethical challenges.

The time cost of participation was a major consideration (discussed in Appendix VIII). Weiss (1990) highlights the futility of conducting evaluative research but not responding to or acting on its results. Undertaking evaluations without any intention to utilise results or promote reflexivity wastes people's time and causes frustration. Ultimately it is unethical (BERA, 2004). Pawson and Tilley (1997) take up the challenge of making evaluation 'realistic', arguing that informing the thinking of stakeholders is paramount, and if research does not extend their knowledge, it has failed. Certainly, this research, though not an evaluation as such, aspired to empower the NG staff, by asking them their views in order to develop theory which would add to the evidence-base regarding effective NG staff practice. Furthermore, it was hoped that time-costs would be counter-balanced by the benefits of involvement, as practitioners were given the opportunity to inform current practice and identify future

professional development requirements and training directions intended to support and enhance their own practice.

The research commissioner had initially wanted me to recruit NG practitioners who he considered exhibited ‘good practice’. I considered this raised ethical challenges regarding the identification and selection of such participants, which could have a potentially deleterious impact on those practitioners not selected. I raised my concerns with the commissioner, and suggested that an alternative method of participant selection, ‘purposive sampling’ (described in Section 5.5.2), would be more appropriate.

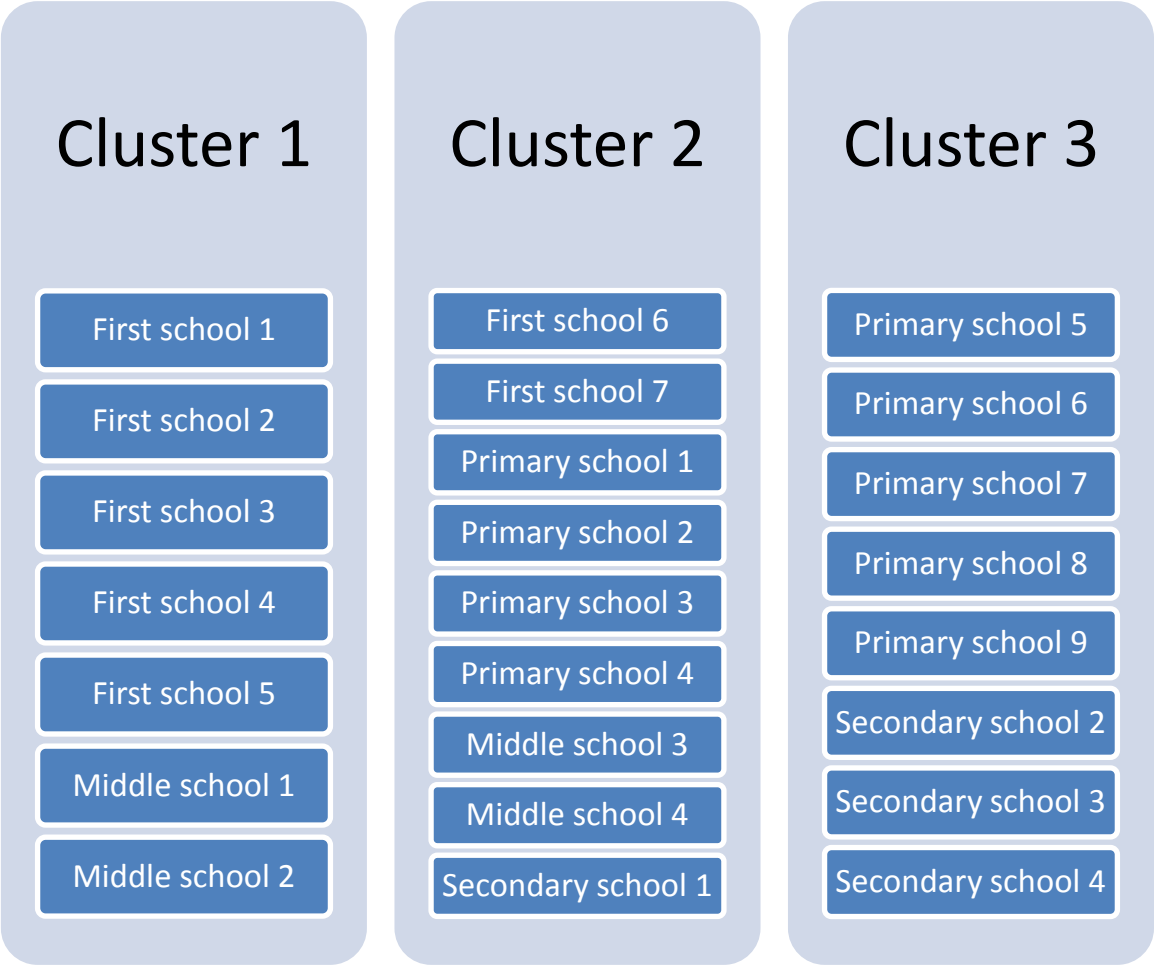
Finally, my dual role as researcher and practitioner needed consideration, as part of my TEP role was to support the implementation and development of NGs in Coalshire schools. One of the recruited participants was a teacher with whom I worked. Consequently, there were risks of partisanship (see Section 2.6). It was crucial therefore that I maintained a critical stance, and ensured reflexivity. I also carefully discussed consent with participants (Appendices IX and X), and had a plan for how to tackle any disclosures (see Appendix VIII, Sections 15-20).

5.5.2 Sample

My target population was NG practitioners in Coalshire. At the time of study, there were in total 24 NGs (16 in primary or first schools, four in middle schools, and four in

secondary settings), in three different areas or clusters within the LA, illustrated in Figure 5.5. Across these settings there were forty-eight NG practitioners in the region.

Figure 5.5: Nurture groups in Coalshire



Sampling was purposive (Robson, 2002):

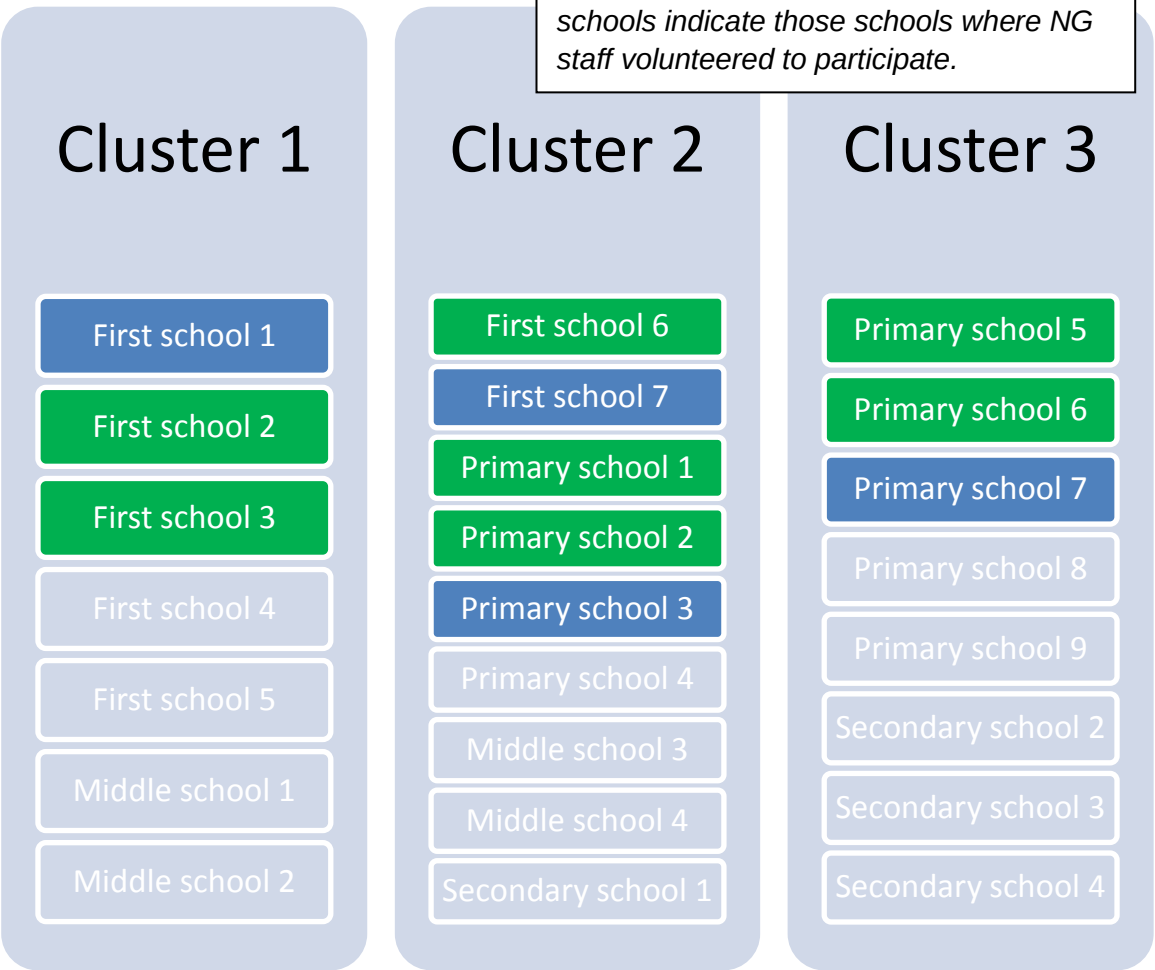
> *"In purposive sample…researchers hand pick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis on their judgments of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought"*
>
> (Cohen *et al*, 2007, p.114-115).

Only practitioners in first or primary schools were considered, due to the very different nature of middle and secondary schools settings and a desire to focus the research accordingly. Furthermore, practitioners with more than two years experience of NG work were sought, as I wanted staff who could reflect on a few years of experience, and who would have knowledge of the potential difficulties of not only establishing NGs, but maintaining them, and developing practice. Additionally, in my experience, starting up a NG or starting a new job in a NG is stressful. I did not want to add to the demands already placed on new practitioners, so decided to exclude these practitioners from the sample.

The Senior EP (SEP) who commissioned this research sits on Coalshire's NG Steering Committee. In discussion with him, ten NG settings were identified as having staff who met the sampling criteria. All were contacted by letters to the head teacher and to NG staff (Appendix IX). The Head of one setting declined the invitation for her staff to be involved, as the school was going through a challenging time. For another setting, the NG teacher initially wanted to be involved but found herself too busy with her post-graduate studies. Two other potential settings did not respond to the request. This left seven settings, and in total nine staff volunteered to be involved (in two settings both the NG teacher and TA volunteered). Figure 5.6 below illustrates the sample schools available following purposive sampling, with those schools highlighted in green indicating the final sample. This shows that the spread of participating schools was fairly even across the clusters, and that the majority of NG staff who were asked to participate, did so.

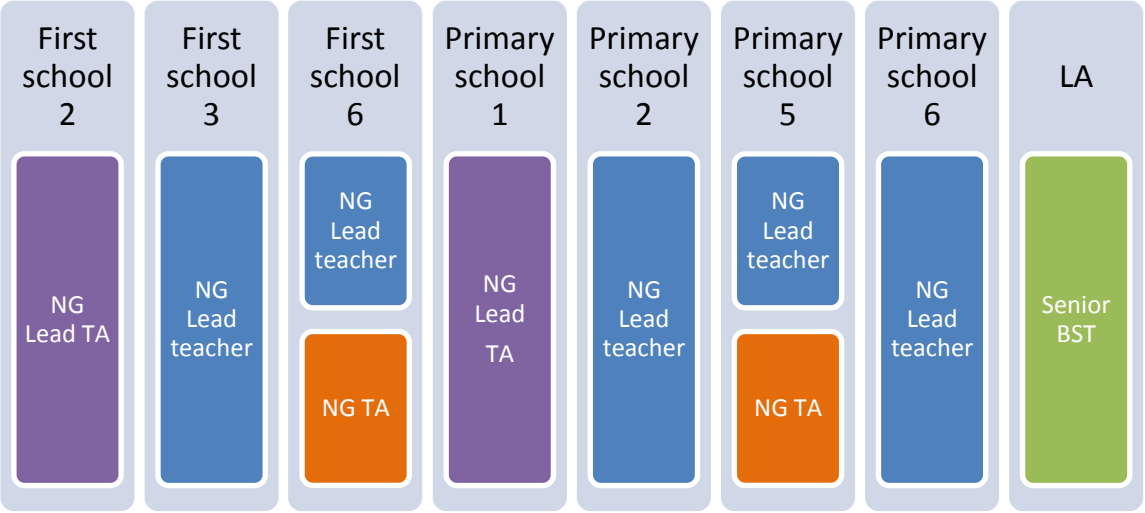
Figure 5.6 Available study sample

KEY: Dark blue indicates settings who were invited to participate following purposive sampling, but declined. Green schools indicate those schools where NG staff volunteered to participate.



The final sample included a senior Behaviour Support Teacher (also recruited by letter, and invited to participate because of her extensive involvement with NGs in Coalshire since their inception). Consequently, there were ten participants in total (see Figure 5.7 below for characteristics of the final sample). All participants were female, and of White British ethnic origin. Participants ranged in age from early thirties to early sixties, and their 'years of NG experience' ranged from 3 to 8 years. Five of the participants were teachers who led a NG, two were TAs who supported a NG, and two were TAs who led a NG.

Figure 5.7: Final study sample



5.5.3 Instruments

> *"Only where we know what precisely it is that we are studying can we reach into the toolkit for the appropriate instrument"*
>
> *(Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p159).*

The overall Research Design was depicted in Figure 5.1. As previously discussed (Sections 1.6 and 2.6), RE facilitates pluralism and flexibility of method choice, but Pawson and Tilley (1997) give the caveat this should be "carefully tailored" to the research purposes (p85). Furthermore, they rally against being 'pluralist for pluralism's sake', advocating a *"commitment to marrying the appropriate method to the appropriate research task"* (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p158).

Figure 5.1 showed data were collected in three ways:

1. *the Realist Synthesis (RS) (summarised in Chapters 3 and 4);*
2. *ten individual interviews; and*
3. *a group realist interview.*

An RS was used to generate theory from the literature. The rationale for the use of a RS was provided in Section 1.7 and Chapter 2, and the RS itself was presented in Chapters 3 and 4. As previously described, realist syntheses involve a 'heterogeneous and iterative process' (Pawson *et al*, 2004), whereby C, M, Os are abstracted from the literature, and presented as CMO configurations, or Programme Theories (shown in Sections 3.3.3, 3.4, 3.4.5 and 4.4). The RS addressed research questions A-D. Theory was also generated from the individual interviews. Theories abstracted from the literature and interviews were then the subject matter of the group realist interview, where the role of participants was to *"confirm, to falsify and, above all, to refine the theory"* (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p155).

Research instruments are described in the following sections, while reliability and validity are discussed in Section 5.5.4.

5.5.3i Interviews

As described in Section 5.5.2, participation in the study was sought by contacting NG staff and their head teachers by letter. The letter sought freely-given, informed consent and provided a brief introduction to the research (e.g. what involvement would entail, that interviews would be recorded, and expectations surrounding confidentiality) (Appendix IX).

For the interview design, Robson's (2002) 'commonly used question sequence' was followed, to provide the initial framework. At the start of the individual interviews participants' consent was sought again and I reiterated what participation in the

research would involve (see Appendix XI). Open, non-directive questions were used in the initial stages, to help build rapport and encourage reflection. The 'main body of interview' questions was designed to answer Research Questions E-I (see Table 5.1) (Robson, 2002) (Appendix XI shows an annotated interview structure to illustrate). The purpose of subsequent questions was to elicit potential Cs, Ms, Os and practitioners' 'theories' regarding effective NG practice, including factors which inhibited or facilitated this. Additionally, a number of questions sought to elicit staff views regarding training, again with a view to identifying C, M, Os. With the exception of one scaling question[15](Robson, 2002) - used to ascertain the relative weighting participants gave the mechanism of their own practice - only open-ended questions were used, as I wanted participants to be able to respond freely and provide detailed information (Kumar, 1999). Furthermore, open-ended questions were likely to facilitate greater investigation of practitioners' views, and enable clarification in case of misunderstanding (Robson, 2002).

Additionally, an activity was included where participants were asked to 'design a job specification' for a NG practitioner, by listing on post-its the qualities, skills and experience they would seek, then ranking these in order of importance. The purpose of this activity was three-fold:

i. *participants could share their views on the most important factors affecting practice, enabling elicitation of relevant Contexts and Mechanisms;*
ii. *I considered an indirect approach appropriate for what could potentially be a sensitive question (Kumar, 1999); and*
iii. *the activity was intended to be 'fun', facilitating discussion.*

[15] "How central/peripheral do you consider the role/skills of NG staff are regarding creating effective practice and outcomes – for example where would you position the importance of the practice of NG staff in creating positive outcomes for NG children, on a scale of 1- 10, where 1 is 'unimportant', and 10 is 'critical'?"

Interviews were planned to last approximately one hour. The interview format was first trialled with the BST (who had worked extensively with NG staff, and had experience of running one herself); however, no significant changes were suggested or made to the original interview schedule following this pilot (consequently the results from this interview were included with the rest of the data set). Interviews were then conducted with the remaining NG practitioners. Therefore, in total ten interviews were carried out; seven with NG lead practitioners (two TAs and five teachers), two with NG support staff (both TAs), and one with the BST. Interviews were carried out through November and December 2010. Each interview was recorded on digital Dictaphone and later transcribed (see Appendix XII) to enable my engagement *"in an interpretive relationship with the transcript"* (Smith and Osborn, 2003, p64). Data from the interviews were analysed and combined with data generated from the realist synthesis (described in Section 5.5.5[16]). Collated data were then brought to the 'group realist interview' described below.

5.5.3ii Group *realist* interview (GRI)

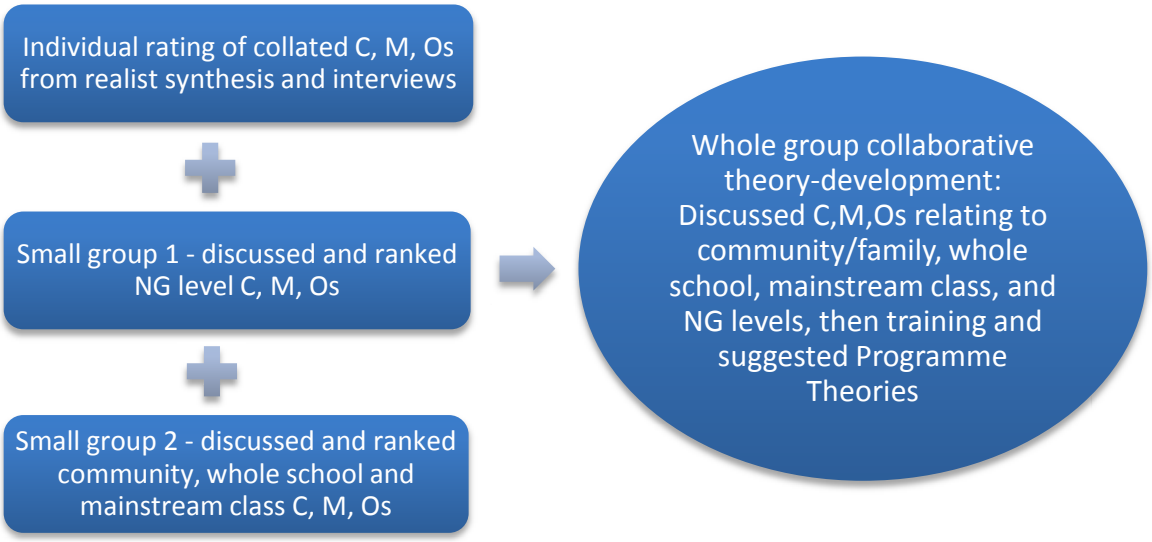
Following the individual interviews, all participants were invited to attend a collaborative theory-building session in March 2011, described as a 'Focus Group' (FG) in the initial letter (Appendix IX) and subsequent emails. Technically, the format of this group session was a 'group *realist* interview', but as the terminology 'FG' is

[16] For the GRI, collated interview and realist synthesis data were combined as I did not want staff to consider their own data more or less valid than those derived from the literature, and for this to affect their responses. Additionally, as there were significant overlaps between Cs, Ms, and Os noted by participants and those from the literature, this facilitated efficient synthesis of data. The same process was used for the analysis of Cs, Ms, and Os derived from the literature and interview responses relating to priorities for effective CPD/training (Appendix XIV).

now in common parlance I decided this was a more useful descriptor (i.e. to help participants anticipate fairly accurately what would be expected of them). FGs are a form of group research interview which confer a number of potential advantages: they are less time-consuming than would be a series of individual interviews; they facilitate the collection of a range of views relatively quickly; and allow more authentic responses as participants only contribute if they want to (Robson, 2002). They can, however, also present disadvantages (discussed in Section 5.5.4ii).

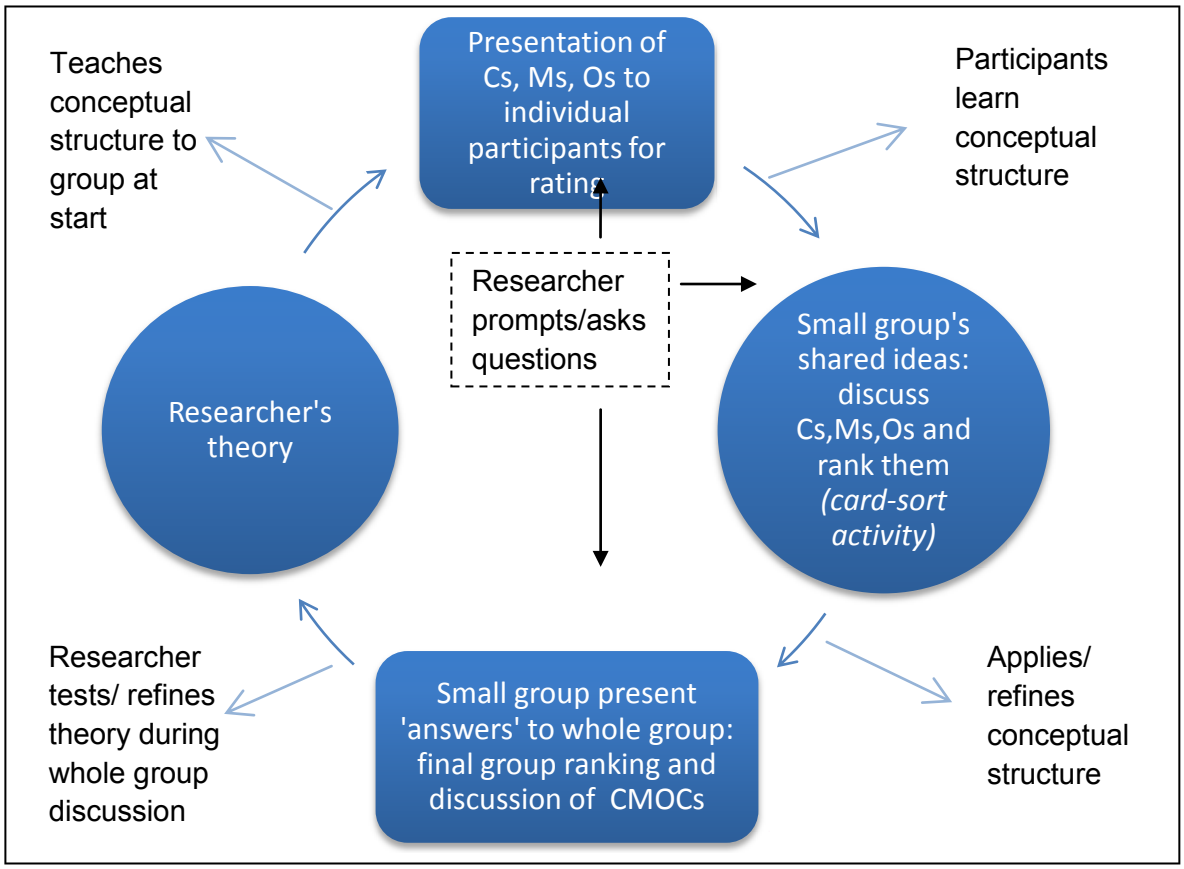
Similarly to the individual interviews, a semi-structured format was followed (Robson, 2002). The group interview was designed to enable discussion of findings from the interviews and realist synthesis, to generate further data to facilitate Programme Theory refinement, and to address Research Questions E-I (Robson, 2002). An outline of the process is shown in Figure 5.8 below:

Figure 5.8 Group realist interview structure



Consent was sought again from the participants (Appendix X), and the session structure was presented to the participants using a PowerPoint presentation (Appendix XV). I used an adapted version of Pawson and Tilley's (1997) 'realist(ic) interview', shown in Figure 5.9 below. The format for this group session was more structured than a typical FG, where the researcher generally takes a more background role, gently facilitating rather than asking specific questions (Kreuger, 1994). Nevertheless, much of the group interview involved a 'focus group approach' (Robson, 2002). For example, after the teaching of the conceptual structure at the start of the session (see Appendix XV), I observed the participants discussing the issues, and took a more background, facilitative role, as with a more traditional FG (Kreugar, 1994), occasionally prompting and asking questions.

Figure 5.9: Group realist interview



(Adapted from: Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p165)

As discussed, collated data from the realist synthesis and individual interviews (see Appendices XIII and XIV) were brought to the group.

Having discussed the proposed content of this interview with a colleague, following her feedback, to maximise the time available, I decided for the first half of the session to split the group into two smaller groups, one looking at NG level aspects, the other considering community/family, whole school and mainstream class level factors. Each group carried out a card-sort activity (using cards with Cs, Ms or Os on, derived from the realist synthesis and interviews i.e. adapted from Appendix XIII). The groups then rejoined to discuss their findings and the whole group made appropriate amendments to the outcomes of the card-sort activities. Finally, everyone participated in a group card-sort activity and discussion regarding Cs, Ms, and Os relating to training (using cards adapted from Appendix XIV). The whole process was recorded and transcribed (see Section 5.5.5iii for discussion and Appendix XVI for transcription).

5.5.4 Reliability and validity

Robson (2002) argues that, to ensure reliability of methods and practices, researchers must be thorough, careful and honest, and provide an ‘audit trail’ for the procedures followed (p174).

Robson (2002) also suggests a number of strategies to deal with potential threats to validity. This study has sought to reduce potential threats to validity: for example by data triangulation (the use of more than one method of data collection); by providing an audit trail (e.g. of raw data and details of coding and analysis); and by encouraging member checking at the GRI stage (Robson, 2002). Nevertheless, reliability and validity cannot be guaranteed (Robson, 2002), and each of the methods used raises its own potential threats, considered in the following sections.

5.5.4i Realist synthesis

The process of abstraction of Cs, Ms and Os is inherently subjective, since it involves the researcher identifying potential factors and then interpreting whether each constitutes a context, mechanism or outcome. Furthermore, it can be difficult to distinguish Cs and Ms (Timmins and Miller, 2007). Ideally, to promote inter-rater reliability (Cohen *et al*, 2007), more than one researcher would read the literature to abstract C, M, Os and co-construct Programme Theories. This was not practicable for this study[17].

Another challenge arises from a lack of detail and focus in the reporting of much research (Timmins and Miller, 2007). This hinders the *"process of learning about effective programme design and... replicability"* and affects accuracy (Timmins and Miller, 2007):

[17] A limited amount of cross-checking was done, with my supervisor and with a Coalshire colleague who had been using RE for her own research (Webb, 2011). We had both used Humphrey *et al*'s (2009) study, allowing us to check whether our interpretation of Cs, Ms and Os appeared aligned, and to improve inter-rater reliability (Cohen *et al*, 2007)

> *"...the Programme Specification derived from the literature may not be altogether accurate. Whether it is or not will depend upon the quality of the literature in the area...."*

Conversely:

> *"...the value of Realistic Evaluation in this respect is that it encourages Programme Specification...whatever the state of the knowledge base. In this way it supports the testing of hypotheses. The outcome of...research provides information that may lead to the reformulation of the original Programme Specification, with an increased understanding of how a programme actually works" (p12).*

Building on Timmins and Miller's (2007) assertion, the CMOs abstracted from the literature, though not perfect, represent a *"'good enough' starting point for inquiry"* (p12).

5.5.4ii Interviews: individual and group

Interviews give depth to research, by enabling participants to respond with 'richness and spontaneity' (Oppenheim, 2004, p.81). This format means the interviewer can be responsive to verbal and non-verbal communication e.g. how tone of voice can affect the meaning of responses (Robson, 2002). Interviews, however, can be 'biased and unreliable' (Oppenheim, 2004). I was also mindful, that as a Coalshire employee myself, there were additional risks of researcher bias (Robson, 2002). Whilst interviews may be susceptible to subjectivity and bias on the part of the interviewer, partially structuring the interview can reduce this tendency (Cohen *et al*, 2007), so the interview was purposefully structured. Additionally, to promote reliability 'member checking' was used (Robson, 2002), as some abstraction of possible C, M, Os was done *during* the interview, and discussed with the NG practitioner to check how accurate my interpretation was (see annotations in Appendix XI). This also promoted

interpretative validity[18] (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999). Such 'checking' was also an adaptation of Pawson and Tilley's (1997) 'realist interview' where the exchange of ideas between the researcher and the participant is driven by the researcher's theory:

> *"The true test of data is whether they capture correctly those aspects of the subject's understanding which are relevant to the researcher's theory". (p164)*

During the group interview process, the spontaneity of the interaction between participants, and relative lack of control by the researcher increased the validity of data collected (Osborne and Collins, 2001). As in life, the participants interact and influence each other, so creating a more natural environment (Krueger and Casey, 2000), arguably improving validity in comparison to individual interview data. The group dynamic itself, however, does raise threats. For example, if dominant individuals 'take over', there may be 'conformity effects' (Sherif, 1936; Kelman, 1958), which would affect the trustworthiness of responses. Using both individual and group interviews (data triangulation) (Robson, 2002), and being aware that sensitive 'management' of the group was necessary, I endeavoured to avoid some potential disadvantages of group interviews. Furthermore, as respondents would also be individually rating[19] C, M, Os, and the means of these data would be collated to generate 'Data Outcome Patterns' (discussed in Section 5.5.5iii), this gave a further opportunity to ensure all voices were given an equal rating (i.e. because the mean was taken and data completion would occur individually, potential conformity effects would be reduced).

[18] 'The extent to which the appropriate conclusions are drawn from the data' (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999, p62).
[19] '1' for essential, through to '4' for not important'.

In research adopting a flexible design like this study, the terms ‘dependability’ and ‘credibility’ are often preferred to ‘reliability’ and ‘validity’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Robson, 2002). I would contend that the present study has a good level of ‘dependability’ and ‘credibility’.

5.5.5 Analysis of the data

> *“The core requisites for qualitative analysis seem to be a little creativity, systematic doggedness, some good conceptual sensibilities, and cognitive flexibility”*
>
> (Miles and Huberman, 2002, p395).

In order to analyse data, Miles and Huberman’s (1994) three-stage approach to qualitative data analysis was followed:

- *data reduction* to focus, refine and organise data, so C, M, Os are identifiable for discussion;
- *displaying data* in an organised, compressed way to enable conclusions to be drawn e.g. Data Outcome Patterns and refined Programme Specifications (discussed in Chapter 6, shown in Tables 6.3, 6.4 and 6.6); and
- *drawing conclusions* by noting regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, causal flows and propositions, and verifying conclusions.

The details of data collection and analysis (see Figure 5.1) are outlined below.

5.5.5i Realist synthesis

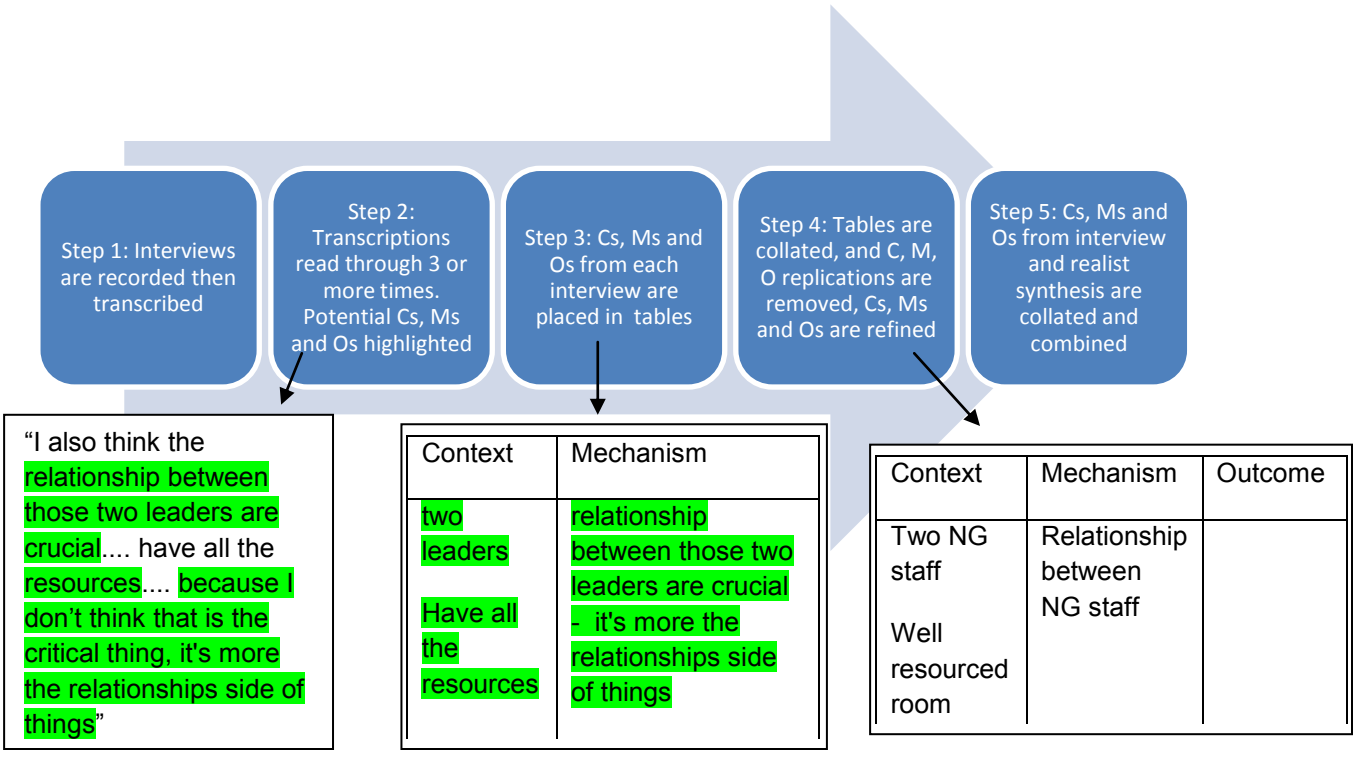
This was described in Chapter 2, shown in Chapters 3 and 4 and the process outlined in Sections 5.5.3i. Additionally, so that processing of data should be available for scrutiny and to facilitate replicability, Cs, Ms and Os abstracted from four NG studies were provided as exemplars (as discussed in Section 5.5.3i; shown in

Appendix V); Cs, Ms, Os were used to develop initial Programme Theories (shown in Sections 3.3.3, 3.4, 3.5.4 and 4.4).

5.5.5ii Individual interviews

Interviews were recorded and transcribed, then re-read three or more times, and potential C, M, Os relating to NGs, staff practice and training were highlighted. Key attributes, skills and experience for NG staff were also identified separately, so potentially important detail was safeguarded. Highlighted data were placed in a table as a C, M, or O for each interview. Data from the ten tables were rationalised and presented within a single table, with multiple responses gradually synthesised into superordinate Cs, Ms or Os. Data were further analysed and positioned at community/family, whole school, mainstream class, or nurture group levels (Appendix XIII), with a separate table for training-related data (Appendix XIV). Salient qualitative data (illustrative quotations) were also abstracted and presented in grey boxes throughout Chapter 6. Figure 5.10 illustrates the process:

Figure 5.10: Process for abstraction and synthesis of interview Cs, Ms and Os



5.5.5iii Generation of Data Outcome Patterns and Group Realist Interview

At the start of the group interview stage, I planned for participants to individually 'rate' data collated from the realist synthesis and interviews (Appendices XIII and XIV). This allowed 'averages' to be ascertained, to help uncover which Cs, Ms, and Os participants felt more or less strongly about, and generate 'Data Outcome Patterns' (after Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p170-172). Participants elected, however, to do this 'rating exercise' at home and return responses by post; a few commented this gave them more time to consider data, and also maximised group discussion time. I felt this aptly demonstrated the commitment made by participants to the research process (and reinforced their position as 'co-researchers'). The return rate was high (70%) (Cohen *et al*, 2007).

Each of the seven respondents individually rated ('1' for essential, through to '4' for not important) the collated Cs, Ms and Os synthesised from the literature and interviews (Appendices XIII and XIV). Participants' ratings were entered into an Excel spreadsheet, and means for each factor were calculated[20] (all means are shown in Appendices XVII and XVIII). Following Pawson and Tilley (1997) those *"objectives which collectively met with (i) considerable to modest agreement, (ii) moderate to slight agreement and (iii) slight to no agreement"* (p170) were distinguished for community/family, whole school, mainstream class and NG level C, M, Os to generate 'Data Outcome Patterns' (shown in Appendices XIX, XX and XXI)[21]. In their

[20] Modes were also considered, so that 'outliers' were not ignored or subsumed when a mean of the data was taken.
[21] An editorial decision was made to not show the Data Outcome Patterns for NG level factors, as these were so numerous, I did not want readers to be overwhelmed with unfiltered data.

research on prisoner education, Pawson and Tilley (1997, p170) used a mid-point axis (score 2.5) to help highlight the *"general balance of sentiments"* of their respondents, so this was also provided. However, because the means of so many objectives collectively fell in the 'essential - desirable' bracket (1-2), only those with the lowest means (1-1.4 for community, school and class levels and 1-1.25 for NG level factors), and therefore considered *most* essential, are show in Chapter 6, Table 6.3 (and emboldened in the Data Outcome Patterns shown in Appendices XIX, XX and XXI).

The group realist interview had been recorded[22] and transcribed, and read through three times, salient comments were highlighted and are reported in Chapter 6 (in grey boxes). Photos were taken of the group card-sort activities (see Appendices XXII), where the group had ranked Cs, Ms and Os and arranged these into CMO configurations (these were also illustrated figuratively so that data were easier to analyse – Appendix XXIII). Data from the group CMO ranking activity were considered in conjunction with Data Outcome Patterns (as depicted in Figure 5.1). Following careful scrutiny of the data corpus, conclusions were drawn and Programme Specifications were proposed (Chapter 6, Tables 6.4 and 6.6).

The next Chapter presents an exploration of the contextual characteristics and mechanisms which contribute to positive outcomes for children who attend NG provision in Coalshire.

[22] Unfortunately a technological malfunction on the day meant one of the small group discussions (regarding community/family, whole school and mainstream class levels) was not recorded. The commissioning SEP who attended the group interview, however, was able to make notes to inform my understanding of their discussion. I also liaised between both small groups, and made my own notes at the end of the group interview. These notes were also included in the data analysis process.

CHAPTER 6

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses findings with respect to the following research questions (Research Questions A-D were addressed through the Realist Synthesis in Chapters 3 and 4), shown below:

Table 6.1: Research Questions E-I

Research question	Addressed in...	Data from
E. What do practitioners consider are the key attributes, skills and experience effective NG practitioners should have?	Chapter 6, Section 6.2	Individual interviews
F. What community/family, whole school, mainstream classroom, and NG level factors (contexts and mechanisms) do practitioners consider support or hinder their practice and the outcomes of NGs?	Chapter 6, Section 6.3	Realist Synthesis and individual interviews, Data Outcome Patterns from individual rating exercise and group realist interview
G. With regard to NGs and staff practice, what contexts and mechanisms do NG practitioners consider most powerful in influencing outcomes?	Chapter 6, Section 6.4	
H. What aspects (contexts and mechanisms) of training/CPD do NG practitioners consider would support their own and others' professional development most effectively?	Chapter 6, Section 6.6	Realist Synthesis and individual interviews, Data Outcome Patterns from individual rating exercise and group realist interview
I. With regard to staff development, what contexts and mechanisms do NG practitioners consider most powerful in influencing outcomes?	Chapter 6, Section 6.7	

For the individual interviews there were 10 participants in total. All participants attended the group realist interview, and most (70%) returned their individual rating of Cs, Ms and Os (as discussed in Section 5.5.5). Refined Programme Specifications are provided for NGs and staff practice (see Table 6.4), and for training (see Table 6.6).

6.2 Research Question E: What do practitioners consider are the key attributes, skills and experience effective NG practitioners should have?

The semi-structured interview schedule and transcribed response exemplar are presented in Appendices XI and XII. The interview design, rationale and method was discussed in Chapter 5. The data extraction process is illustrated in Appendix XII, as discussed in Section 5.5.5.

Part of the individual interview involved asking participants to identify the key attributes, skills and experience they would be looking for if they were to design a job specification for an NG practitioner, to elicit essential and desirable qualities. There appeared significant overlap and congruence between the responses the NG practitioners gave. Table 6.2 below (p129) presents collated responses; different colours are used to indicate each participant's responses, so that individual differences are not lost. Where more than one participant identified and ranked a factor similarly, the number of participants choosing this factor is indicated in brackets.

TABLE 6.2: Collated interview responses in response to question: 'what would be the key attributes/skills/experience you'd be looking for in NG staff?'

Ranked most highly ←			→ Ranked less highly
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4+)
Value individuals/guide individual learning Nurturing (2) Empathetic (2) Respectful – of child's situation/how they feel Knowledge of early years/child development (2) Teamworker Previous experience (e.g. of NGs/parenting) (2) Being human/non judgemental/ Positive (e.g. discipline) Having appropriately high expectations (2) Communication skills Ability to personalise learning Caring Approachable Sense of humour Likes children Patience and persistence	(2) Patience Openness (3) Non-judgemental Caring Show you care/kind/ Good sense of humour Good role model/ team member Knowledge of emotional and behavioural development Supportive (2) Empathetic Positive (e.g. relationship with TA) Understanding Trust children/they trust you (2) Good communicator Seize opportunities for learning (2) Warmth Experience of children (e.g. working with/or own children/nieces) People person/likes children Observant/Reflective Adaptable Assertive Not controlling Create a safe place (2) Resilience Consistent/fair Emotionally literate Sense of humour	(3) Flexible – go with the children/fit things round the child (3) Not taking things personally Consistent approach Knowledge of Nurture Groups (4) Keep up to date on current practice/ Willing to learn/access training/Commitment to training (2) Thoughtful Being reflective/observant Acceptance Encouraging (3) 'Being human' (people relate to you)/ Form bonds/can relate to parents/ Respectful (to parents and children) Understand background of children Good listener Knowledge of emotional development/attachment (3) Knowledge of child development/psychology/recognise children's learning is developmental/ Valuing child initiated learning Knowledge of curriculum 'Think outside the box'/be creative Fun (not too sensitive) Understand behaviour is a language/separate behaviour from the child Good communicator (verbally and non-verbally) Ability to assess, analyse data , plan interventions and review Effective leader Proactive Assertive – firm but fair – not hostile Confident/secure Calm demeanour Intuitive	(3) Knowledge of SEN/outside agencies Awareness of SEN Knowledge of NGs Experience of work with SEN children Emotional maturity (2) Able to see things positively Positive Good judgement (2) Enthusiastic Passionate Fun Sense of humour Experience of work with small groups (2) Flexibility/Adaptability (2) Able to build trust and relationships Team worker Good organisational skills (2) Empathetic 'Show you're a real person' Open/honest Calm/constant (2) Resilient (2) Intuitive/Instinctive Reflective Humble/ show humility Tolerance Patient Non-judgemental (2) Warmth/ability to love/unconditional positive regard for the children

KEY: Those factors which align well with Rogers' (1967) 'core conditions' for facilitative counselling and educational practice (discussed in Section 3.5.4) are highlighted as follows: grey = realness/congruence, green = prizing/acceptance/trust and yellow = empathetic understanding (yellow)

Many of the more frequently mentioned factors appeared to align well with Rogers' (1967) focus on the importance of interpersonal relationships in the facilitation of learning (see highlighted sections in Table 6.2). Rogers (1967) considers realness/congruence (grey), prizing/acceptance/trust (green) and empathetic understanding (yellow) 'core conditions' for facilitative counselling and educational practice (discussed in Section 3.5.4). It is noteworthy that NG practitioners, who are likely to use counselling skills in their work, also prioritised these qualities:

> *"...the children have got to know you like them..."*
>
> *"...never assume that it's the children who haven't got it quite right it's always been my responsibility... [if it isn't] quite right it means I haven't thought it [through] properly or we haven't come up with the right decision to make it work for these children..."*
>
> *"You've also got to know how to relate to parents to make them feel comfortable, not judged, respected... that you're on the same side..."*
>
> *"it's about knowing...the individual children and what they will be vigilant to."*
>
> *"I think the values of the staff...and their communication skills are part of that whole central thing."*
>
> *"I think anybody could do it who's empathic and has a desire to want to make these children successful... it's about being receptive... wanting to learn to do it [teach] slightly differently"*
>
> *"I always say this and it's not easy.. but to try and put yourself inside their little mind and try and think about what they're thinking of... not just look at how they're reacting but why they're doing it really..."*

In addition to Rogerian qualities, a number of other factors were identified (numbers in brackets indicate number of respondents from sample of 10); resilience/persistence, patience, being reflective and observant, (each identified by 4 participants), flexibility/adaptability (6), being consistent/fair (3). Personal qualities -

like having a sense of humour/being fun (5), staff being secure in themselves/emotionally literate (3) and not taking things personally/being over-sensitive (4), were also stressed. One participant highlighted:

> *"Nurture group staff support each other and think about the child's needs not their own.... not just doing it so the children like you... it shouldn't be about [the] staff needing to be loved"*

Skills that appeared most valued were knowledge of early years/child development (6), being a team-worker (3), good communication skills (5), and a skill which arguably emanates from Rogers' 'empathetic understanding' – the ability to personalise learning/value child-initiated learning (3).

Prior experience did feature (4), but responses were varied. One participant felt experience of NGs or parenting was very important, one felt working with children was important, and 'experience of SEN' or 'small group teaching' was noted by two participants but ranked as a '4'. I think the general view was summed up nicely by one respondent:

> *"I think my experiences helped me, but I don't think my experiences are essential to this job"*

Furthermore, although the interviews highlighted that observing others' NG practice was considered important for training purposes (discussed in Section 6.7), only three participants felt prior knowledge of NGs was necessary, and even these participants ranked this as '3' or '4'. Some explained to me that knowledge of theory (e.g. attachment theory) or NGs was something that could be taught, and was therefore

less important than personal qualities which they tended to rank more highly. Referring to personal qualities, one participant commented:

> *"I don't think you can train those"*

The influence of context on the mechanism of staff practice was illustrated by one participant: *"it's not that I'm doing anything that nobody else could do...I think it is just being in a small group* (C) *just gives the children that different feeling that they can talk to me in a different way"* (M). She went on to acknowledge she was working in a *"really inclusive school"* (C), where other *"teachers are so nurturing"* (C). Consequently, perhaps most staff had the same skills and qualities (M) necessary in a good NG practitioner – with contextual support emphasised more strongly than any 'unique' skills or qualities possessed by NG staff. Additionally, this participant had seemed embarrassed at times, not wanting to appear immodest, and I wondered whether she was in some way playing down her abilities. I think this also highlights a benefit of individual face-to-face interviews; non-verbal cues may help with understanding of verbal responses (Robson, 2002), and affect interpretation.

There was definitely consensus from the majority that those working in NGs needed to be 'the right kind of person'.

> *"I think your disposition it needs to be...you do need to be a certain type of person to be able to cope with some of the children and the problems"*
>
> *"I think it's a very special way of teaching I really do"*
>
> *"She just had that nurturing way about her"*
>
> *"I think [staff practice is] very important because if you've got the wrong people working there, as we've seen before, it doesn't work or run efficiently... if you haven't got the right staff working there it can fall apart totally"*

In conclusion, I believe the results confirm the hypothesis that NG staff would value personal qualities far more highly than expert knowledge, skills or experience, as these can be developed with training, whilst the former are arguably more resistant to change. Although personal qualities such as 'empathy' and 'patience' can theoretically be 'taught', in the same way that one would seek an engineer with already well-developed spatial skills (irrespective of whether such skills were innate or nurtured), for staff who work with some of our most vulnerable children, one would not seek someone whose personality or own personal development might interfere with that of the children:

> *"So there is training and many of our practitioners are trained, but you can't get away from the natural inclination for the type of work, and how important that is at the beginning..."*

6.3 Research Question F: What community/family, whole school, mainstream classroom, and NG level factors (contexts and mechanisms) do practitioners consider support or hinder their practice and the outcomes of NGs?

Contexts, Mechanisms and Outcomes were identified from the interviews using a qualitative approach to data analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994) (see Section 5.5.5 for discussion). Alongside identifying Cs, Ms, Os and qualities that make an effective NG practitioner, qualitative data analysis was used to analyse the data corpus (Miles and Huberman, 1994); the Cs, Ms and Os identified from the Realist Synthesis and individual interviews are presented in Appendices XIII and XIV.

Additionally, a small number of themes are presented which I felt 'emerged' during scrutiny of the transcripts, because they were commented on by a majority of

participants. I considered they required more analysis than simply labelling them a 'C', 'M' or 'O'. These 'themes' will now be discussed in the following sections.

6.3.1 Support for NG practitioners

The need for support from the head and wider school community was identified as critical by most participants:

> *"...the bottom line is, that however creative and however dedicated a nurture class teacher you've got, if they haven't got support from the top... it won't happen ... You've got to have total support because if it's not valued ...and if it's not funded...it's not going to work".*

'Support' was conceptualised in a number of ways. For example four participants noted the need for head teachers and governors to view NGs as a 'financial priority', ensuring funding did not restrict opportunities for children. Another four participants noted the need for support from colleagues e.g. with helping identify appropriate children, keeping NG staff 'in the loop' of communication within the school, and ensuring the NG was viewed positively. To this end most respondents commented on the need for colleagues to receive on-going training so they had awareness and understanding of NGs. All participants felt a whole-school approach was needed, and that schools needed an inclusive ethos; *"nurture is a whole school issue"*.

The findings from this study regarding the importance of whole school effects align well with previous studies discussed in Chapter 3. For example O'Connor and Colwell (2002) noted the need for a 'whole school nurturing approach'. Scott and Lee (2009) found mainstream staff's perceptions of the NG staff and children were important. Reynolds *et al* (2009) considered schools where NGs occurred and

‘worked’ were in a ‘state of readiness’, with a ‘philosophical bias’ towards this type of approach, with nurturing principles at a whole school level. Sanders (2007) viewed whole school approaches as ‘critical’, and noted the need for *all* staff, including those with a more indirect impact such as lunchtime supervisors to ‘be on board’ and aware of the NG and its rationale; in this way children’s behaviour difficulties were a ‘shared concern’. Clearly, whole-school level contexts and mechanisms are important in influencing NG practice and pupil outcomes.

6.3.2 Collaborative working

The closeness of the relationship between some NG staff was palpable during the interviews, particularly where both the teacher and TA from a NG were interviewed:

> *“If I ever worked in a nurture group with someone else... the first time that changes, that would be hard...it would feel like starting over...at the moment even if the children change... we still know what we are doing”*

Boxall (1996) herself stresses how critical the relationship between ‘teacher and helper’ is, because this may be the “only opportunity the children have of seeing constructive interaction between adults” (p33). The perceived importance of working collaboratively with one’s NG partner was apparent from the majority of participants:

> *“I think it is absolutely...to me....how the [NG] staff are with each other... and how they are as a team is key, absolutely central, it is the core of how it [the NG] will be effective”*
>
> *“we are showing them appropriate role models”*
>
> *“if one of us is ill or on a course we don’t operate, it is that critical... it's not just having the body to make up the ratios it is who that person is... to have another person, even if it's a member of staff in school... that isn’t the ideal scenario at all, it would just change the dynamics”*

> *"nurture group staff work together...it's a consistent approach...maybe sometimes good cop or bad cop... but we support each other"*

This demonstrates that having two adults support the group is considered an important Context, with *how* staff work together the salient Mechanism. For example, when discussing the difference between NGs and other small group interventions, one participant commented:

> *"...it occurred to me that lots of other interventions only have one adult, and perhaps one of the big differences in NGs is that it's two adults modelling together...if you're the only adult doing it you can't model in the same way... whereas if there are two adults there, the children are actually seeing it working between two people"*

Modelling of appropriate social interactions was reported to be important by Bennathan and Boxall (1996), and Scott and Lee (2009). Additionally, Colwell and O'Connor (2003) noted in NGs (relative to mainstream classes) more positive verbal and non-verbal communication. The current study suggests that implicit in the participants' responses was the influence of Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977).

Sanders (2007), meanwhile, discussed collaboration between NG staff and outside agencies. Many participants noted links with outside agencies were helpful, as NG staff's superior knowledge of the child and awareness of external agencies, meant they could better support parents and ensure swift access to relevant services. Furthermore, as they had often already established positive relationships with parents, this provided a 'way in' for outside agents. One participant discussed how she had helped the local early intervention family support worker make links with vulnerable, 'hard-to-reach' families:

> *"We're supporting the parents... they know us already....they wouldn't just turn up at a meeting but because it was... a room that they are familiar with, with people they are familiar with...[they came]"*
>
> *"We tried to boost up the family support worker's [FSW] numbers... tried to get as many parents there as we could...so I think really working with the FSW, knowing exactly what their job is... what they're trying to push ...and for them to know what we're doing...so the FSW knows exactly what the child's targets are... so she can push the same message at home..."*
>
> *"...the class teachers are aware of her [the FSW] and know her...and would see her meet with parents in the day but they wouldn't actually work directly with her... whereas in here we do".*

Participants also valued the expertise and support they received from some external services, with many highlighting the Educational Psychologists who worked with their school, and nine of the participants discussed how the Behaviour Support Teacher (the tenth participant in this study) had been a highly valued and trusted colleague; chiefly, it seemed, because of her own 'lived' experience in NGs.

6.3.3 Parents matter

Crucially, all participants noted the importance of work with parents e.g. *"working with the parents is as important as working with the children"* and relationships with parents *"are 100% important"*.

> *"Without sounding condescending it's like having another group of children because these children have missed out because their parents missed out so you're giving the building blocks back to them [the parents] as well."*

Again, Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) provided a useful, tacit underpinning theory; some participants discussed the use of modelling activities as a non-threatening way of helping parents develop skills.

Rogerian (1967) qualities, like empathy and trust, the need to be non-judgemental in approach, and understanding of the difficulties families faced, were emphasised as important by numerous participants, but implicit in many accounts, was a fairly 'deficit-saturated' view of parents (discussed in Section 6.3.5 and Chapter 7):

> *"It's no good you living in a mansion up the road... and not realising ...when they said they haven't had any breakfast because 'we haven't got any bread'... they mean they haven't got any bread"*
>
> *"[it's about] knowing what kinds of experiences some of these children will have had, and though you can't live it yourself, and you can't sometimes imagine…but to have a good idea of the kind of things they might have had to live through before they even get through the nurture room door, and the impact that can have on them.."*
>
> *"When my grandson was born.... I looked at him with such love in my eyes that I thought only that look...that we're exchanging now, is good enough for any child. We come across so many damaged kids and they deserve exactly the same as my little grandson does, and yet many of them come in to the world already disadvantaged, just the minute they're born they've already got massive disappointments and massive, massive difficulties to face."*
>
> *"I think you need to...be very aware of the....parents... their circumstances, how they might feel... and to make them realise that you are human as well... that I'm not just a teacher that I'm a parent and I am a human being, and we all have issues and problems... it's just how we go about finding the support ... being understanding to the parents and trying to make yourself human to them so you can actually engage them...trusting I suppose".*

Some respondents commented on the lack of understanding of some school staff:

> *"I think that's probably one part I do find hard: that there are people within school who are totally oblivious to what they're [the children] coping with".*
>
> *"Schools can tend to 'sneer at families'...need to make sure you treat them as...human beings and that they're the best person who knows their children...one parent commented that the NG staff 'don't think they're better than us' so it's about being respectful even if you disagree...don't always approve and think how you would feel if people criticised <u>your</u> family... [you need to] recognise how the parents feel if teachers approach them to talk negatively about their child...it can make them feel like the worst parent in the world".*

The preconceptions of school which parents' might be battling with were also raised:

> *"And they also look at it sometimes...if they've had special needs themselves for instance... special schools a long time ago weren't like they are today and so their experience of this place you know [they think] it's going to be awful... their child is going to be segregated and ... picked on".*
>
> *"So to get them to come [to the NG] they actually really like it. We've done some activities with the parents and children, and the parents...they needed to do it more than the children...they loved it... because they didn't have that opportunity. Their idea of school is this terrible place. To get through the door is a nightmare.... 'I ain't going in there, I'm scared of them teachers', they might think 'they might pick on me'. They still feel like they're at school themselves....don't they?"* ***Or someone's going to 'tell them off'?*** *"Yeah exactly...'you're going to tell me off because you know I didn't have any electric last night, so the uniforms not washed'...and we're like 'don't worry about it, do your best, send them in'...and if they do... we'd give them some clean clothes or we've got a washing machine".*
>
> *"Teachers can make parents feel bad about seeing teachers on the playground, as they fear the teachers are going to tell their child off...more positives the better....so teachers are not always associated with giving negatives.... when staff approach parents on the playground, the other parents all know what it's for.... so need to make sure it's positive as well as negative.... avoids stigma".*
>
> *"[I say to parents] we're here to help you... we're not here to judge you or to prosecute you".*

One participant, however, admitted some difficulties in her relationships with parents (see Section 6.3.5 for further discussion):

> *"...sometimes with our parents you get a bit down and you're thinking 'why are we doing this'... I've got one boy...[needs] a sight test and I've been saying to his mum since the beginning of the term... and you just think 'what are we doing here?'...you just wish that you could take them away from the parents... it would be so much better... and I don't mean that... so...the way I've come to terms with it personally... in my head... is that we're teaching the children resilience despite the parents, so they're going to have their parents all their life... you can't do anything about that, you can't change that, but what we can change is the way they cope in life so, that's the way round it."*

Overall, there was a real sense of the importance of working with parents in effecting change:

> *"If you were going to make a very big impression then... you needed to work with the family, not just the child".*
>
> *"Our [NG] parents have been a nucleus for pushing along in the school other parental involvement".*
>
> *"...get the parent on board so that the parent understands why we are trying to contact [external] agencies...sometimes in the past... with speech and language...the parent hasn't turned up for three appointments ....so it's...getting the parents to understand what the importance of it is and getting them working with us".*
>
> *"The parents are the important thing ... you can do whatever you do while they're in here but... they go home to a different existence ... different ... expectations ....you're not trying to change their parenting ...only... maybe their parenting skills for the better. But you've got...to get the parents on board...<u>before</u> the children if anything... that's really important...to be trusted by the parents...so they think what you're doing is actually good for their child..."*
>
> *"working in that triangle ...school - parent - child... those three working together that's when you really effect change.... it really does effect change... any of those... two on its own you can make a difference....but the three of them together..."*

> *"It wasn't until mum said 'you know since he's been coming here he's eating everything at home now... it's like he's a different boy'...".*

The interviews highlighted that involving parents (C) and ensuring a sensitive, empathetic approach (M), was crucial in affecting change for children and their families (O).

6.3.4 Small group size and alternative curriculum

Bennathan (2001) asserts a maximum of 12 children for any NG. Previous research has noted 'small group size' as a clear, distinctive feature of NGs (Reynolds *et al*, 2009); it is an obvious context for consideration. I could, however, find no discussion in the NG literature of theories aiming to account for *why* smaller group size might be important: perhaps because researchers felt it was self-explanatory. Composition of the groups is discussed (see Bennathan and Boxall, 1996).

Within the present study, all participants, directly or indirectly, raised group size as a salient feature, often discussing how it contributed to positive outcomes for children, in this way highlighting the mechanism through which benefits were mediated:

> *"I think it is...being in a small group...just gives the children that different feeling that they can talk to me in a different way"*
>
> *"... getting to know the child so well... we work quite closely with them and do a lot of referrals [to outside agents] that in class might not have happened so soon, because obviously the length of time it takes to get to know those children well...when you're in a class of thirty... so in here we can identify [needs]...sooner".*

> *"... it is very hard to get to know all of those individual children [in mainstream classes] to the level you need to, and I think you're always aware of needing to know them little bit more and I felt in this smaller group, it gives you the chance to [get to know them]..."*

The flexible, 'alternative', often child-initiated and play-based curriculum also featured as an important context, and at times a mechanism too:

> *"...doing things...that they don't perceive as being academic like...cooking... doing your 'welly walk' ... a lot of our targets are to play a game with them so you're playing like a puzzle or a board game...they think that they are 'playing' ...and it's nothing to do with class...and of course what your [helping them practice] is all of the skills they are struggling with in the class... it's a lot more play-based"*
>
> *"...we do our own playtime, so if [something's] happened you're able to talk about it straight away. So I'm really flexible with the timetable and I don't mind that, I think it's not only being flexible it's not minding it, being able to adapt, on the spot...we really go with the flow".*
>
> *"...I'm very much aware that some of the children come to school in a morning [with] so many problems and worries that they need to talk about before they can move on and learn... but there is no chance to do that anymore with the [mainstream] curriculum the way it is... the pace...so I think very much conversation... time... discussion... and care...and to give the children opportunities that they might not have otherwise".*
>
> *"I don't like to say that it doesn't actually go on in class, but they're not able usually... to catch everything in class... whereas here, I can change the timetable so much easier".*

Some argued that the potentially negative impact of time away from the mainstream curriculum was not realistic:

> *"We've had discussions in the past .. that if a child is...in a nurture group, when the rest of the class are doing literacy and numeracy, then when you get them back into class they're going to be behind... but they were going to be behind before they left the class... because if they've been identified as needing nurture... even if they were physically in class they'd still be falling behind because they weren't engaged"*

The results demonstrate the participants consider group size to be an important Context. As a mechanism it appears to work by giving staff an opportunity to get to know the children better, more personally, and these closer relationships mean that children feel more comfortable, and possibly 'trust' the adult more. The alternative curriculum (C) adopted by the NG also seemed to allow more flexibility and 'time' for the pupils (M), and facilitated personalisation (M). Furthermore, a few participants talked about how they got a lot of 'disclosures' of abuse from the children, often during activities (e.g. making and eating food together) that would not necessarily occur in a mainstream classroom environment.

6.3.5 'Filling the gaps'

Another theme that emerged from transcript analysis was participants' perception they were 'filling the gaps' in the children's development. Their views aligned well with the original purpose of NGs which was to *"supply a setting and relationships for children in which missing or insufficiently internalised essential early learning experiences are provided"* (Bennathan and Boxall, 2000, p129):

> *"... giving them all those experiences that you would hope that a lot of children would have but where they are missed..."*
>
> *"...we work with those children to plug the missing gaps that they haven't had".*
>
> *"...the way we've come to think of it is... we decided we were filling the gaps... doing what they've actually missed".*
>
> *"...to take the children back to where they are socially and emotionally, which can be toddler-like behaviour really. And initially it's to allow the children to fill the gaps that they have missed perhaps in terms of play, in terms of forming attachments, in terms of learning to trust… and letting children start right back at the beginning in terms of maybe playing alone and then playing with an adult and then playing with another child".*

> *"we know how important a nurturing home was on the behaviour of the child in school and if we can try and replicate some of the nurturing that perhaps some of our children had missed out on, then it was to our benefit really and to the child's benefit".*

Arguably, within these descriptions is the implicit or occasionally explicit assumption that children who attend NGs have 'missed out' in some way, and that one can somehow compensate for 'poor parenting', rather than offer support to parents (highlighted by one participant in Section 6.3.3). This view risks further marginalising parents who have often already experienced significant social and/or economic exclusion/oppression. Bailey (2007) strongly criticises this 'individualising of deficit', as *"the emphasis on collaborative participation and inclusion will be subverted"* (p15) (see Chapter 7). Additionally, as with other forms of compensatory educative initiatives, this individualising view raises ethical and moral challenges regarding the 'judgements' professionals are making about children and their families. Whilst disadvantage undoubtedly needs to be addressed, and notwithstanding the honourable motivation of professionals to effect change for children, instead of 'filling the gaps' notions of empowering parents and promoting equality are more ethically defensible.

Positively, overall the data strongly suggest NG staff do endeavour to attend to parents' needs, recognising the importance of their work with parents, and participants' views overwhelmingly appeared empathetic and sympathetic, and recognised the influence of systemic factors (i.e. parents were not 'bad people' but

parenting capacity was currently diminished by adverse experiences). In conclusion, practitioners highlighted many important factors which supported their practice and the outcomes of NGs; including a small group setting (C), a supportive and nurturing whole-school context (C), the delivery of an alternative curriculum which addressed social, emotional and behavioural skill development (M), and good communication and collaboration between mainstream staff, outside agencies and, crucially, parents (M).

6.4 Research Question G: With regard to NGs and staff practice, what contexts and mechanisms do NG practitioners consider most powerful in influencing outcomes?

The group interview occurred in March 2011 (Figures 5.1, 5.9 and 5.10 depicted the process). The schedule, a PowerPoint summary of the content presented to the staff of the group interview, and transcription of the group discussion, are presented in Appendices XV and XVI respectively. As discussed in Section 5.5.3iii (see Figure 5.9), the group was divided into two smaller groups: one looked at NG-level aspects, the other considered community/family, whole school and mainstream class level aspects. Each group carried out a card-sort activity (using cards adapted from Appendix XIII, which had been derived from the realist synthesis and individual interview data). The two groups then rejoined to discuss findings and the whole group made amendments where applicable to the rankings derived from the card-sort activities. Finally, everyone participated in a further card-sort activity and discussion regarding Cs, Ms, Os relating to training (using cards adapted from Appendix XIV, which again, had been derived from the realist synthesis and individual interview

data). The results from the group card-sort activities are illustrated photographically in Appendix XXIII, and to enable closer scrutiny they are also reproduced in Appendices XXIV and XXV.

In the following sections the results from the card-sort activities relating to community/family, whole school, mainstream class and NG level factors, and respective discussions are considered in conjunction with results from the individual ratings exercise. Results relating to training are considered in Sections 6.6 and 6.7.

Section 5.5.5iii outlined the process for generating Data Outcome Patterns for community/family, whole school, mainstream class and NG level factors. Those considered *most* essential by research participants are shown in Table 6.3 below (and emboldened in Appendices XIX, XX and XXI; means are indicated).

TABLE 6.3: Data Outcome Patterns: Cs, Ms, Os considered to be most 'essential' by participants

	CONTEXTS	MECHANISMS	OUTCOMES
Comm-unity/ family level	• NG staff recognise the importance of working with the parents 1.14	• NG staff offer non-judgemental, empathetic support to parents e.g. recognise parents may 'feel judged'1.14 • NG staff have more awareness/knowledge of home background and are empathetic 1.29	• Improved emotional wellbeing 1.0 • Learn 'coping' strategies they can apply at home 1.0
Whole school level	• Dedicated room in school identified 1.0 • Head teacher/SMT have 'shared vision; support role of NG and autonomy of NG staff, this is reflected in appropriate funding for NG 1.17 • NG staff feel part of the whole school team, are kept 'in the loop'. 1.17 • NG not an 'add on', but integral part of school, viewed positively by other children and staff 1.17 • Ethos/school culture: School has a nurturing, inclusive whole school ethos, with a focus on the 'whole child' - all staff adopt this approach and value it. School ethos which "puts children first" 1.17 • Behaviour and learning policy e.g. all staff follow a positive BP 1.17 • Head/Governors support NG so resources allocated accordingly 1.17	• NG staff feel supported by their head and mainstream colleagues as they have awareness of NG and are working towards a shared vision 1.0 • Head teachers' understanding of the NG means they support the group and this encourages the high status of the group within school 1.0 • The focus of support of NG towards wider inclusion of children in school, is acknowledged and valued 1.14 • Continuity and consistency of approach in school e.g. NG children praised for meeting their targets, wherever they are in school. Staff around school notice NG children's positive behaviours e.g. on the playground and report them to the NG staff 1.14 • Allocation of resource/ time for group means NG has status/profile within the school 1.29 • Nurturing ethos means that the relationships between all staff and pupils are positive and affirming 1.29	• Children feel safe within whole school 1.0
Main-stream class level	• MS staff work positively and communicate well with NG staff. Appropriate information is shared 1.14 • All MS staff understand/value role of the NG 1.29 • Staff subscribe to school's learning and behaviour policy e.g. every classroom has a 'quiet place' 1.29 • MS staff have accurate perceptions of the NG children (e.g. 'don't view them as naughty', appropriate expectations of what can be achieved)1.29	• MS staff given clear explanation of purpose/rationale of NG which ensures they respond appropriately 1.0 • MS staff liaise/work with NG staff in order to understand the needs of NG children and implement strategies 1.14 • Targets set in the NG are shared with MS teacher, and worked on in MS class too e.g. shared IEP 1.14 • Staff ensure NG children maintain their class identity e.g. resister in MS, attend trips, in NG part time. 1.14 • United, consistent approach by NG and MS staff 1.14 • NG staff, parents and MS teachers work together 1.29	• Successfully reintegrated into MS class 1.43 • Have learnt and can apply strategies from NG so 'cope'/operate better in class/more resilient. Can function in class/cope with MS curriculum and/or can ask for help when needed 1.43 • More engaged 1.43

NG level	• Always two staff/two adults in room 1.0 • Personality characteristics e.g. empathetic, warm, open, caring, fun, patient, enthusiastic 1.0 • Creating Trust: Being consistent and fair. 1.0 • Good communication skills 1.0 • Use of differentiation, personalised tasks means work starts at child's developmental level not chronological age 1.0 • NG staff have skills to work positively and supportively to identify and meet the evolving social, emotional and behavioural needs of individual pupils in the NG 1.0 • Focus on developing social, emotional, behavioural skills rather than literacy and numeracy 1.0 • NG staff's views integral to group selection 1.0 • Right dynamic of NG staff chosen, staff are 'rounded' emotionally intelligent and have right "temperament" 1.0 • Dedicated room in school, with homely feel and different zones, and space for children's personal things 1.0	• Always two members of staff 1.0 • As NG staff don't have the same curriculum pressures as MS staff, so can focus on meeting basic needs of children 1.0 • Relationship between the two NG staff is crucial. NG staff know and trust each other, are reflective, have shared values, focus and understanding, work in close partnership with each other, and role model positive relationships/ appropriate behaviour 1.0 • NG staff show acceptance, warmth and understanding to enable the children to develop the personal, social and emotional skills necessary for successful learning 1.0 • Fairness: absence of favouritism, and consistent link between rewards in the classroom and actual performance. Consistency of approach 1.0 • Safety and Security: the degree to which the classroom is a safe place, where pupils are not at risk from emotional or physical bullying, or other fear-arousing factors. 'Safe haven'. An emotionally secure environment, relaxed and homely feel, children are provided with routines and have a sense of security so anxiety is reduced, and children are able to disclose 1.0 • Staff who recognise that behaviour is a communication and strive to understand what child is trying to communicate, are able to recognise and meet child's unmet needs 1.0 • Opportunities for social learning through co-operation and play with other children are provided 1.0 • Children explicitly taught communication/social skills e.g. communicating, sharing, taking turns, negotiating 1.0 • Staff reward and reinforce behaviour that moves child nearer to meeting their target 1.0 • A creative and differentiated curriculum is offered, where staff use their knowledge of EYFS in their work, so activities are more accessible/child-initiated 1.0 • Staff apply their professional characteristics (e.g. professionalism, thinking, planning and expectations, leading, ability to relate to others, flexibility, respectful) and this is what creates the positive classroom climate 1.14 • Staff have confidence, resilience, and strong interpersonal and communication skills 1.14 • Staff are 'firm but fair', and observant 1.14 • Staff aware how their own behaviour contributes to/exacerbates or reduces child's difficulties and this understanding ensures they are reflective practitioners 1.14	• Learn link between feelings and behaviour 1.0 • Children develop their independence, children develop social skills, learn to turn-take and talk aloud, develop group play skills, learn to support and work with each other, and grow to know each other well 1.0 • Children develop 'life skills' Children experience a 'developmental catch-up' 1.14 • Children learn language for appropriately communicating /expressing their feelings and learn to manage their own feelings 1.14

NG level	• Managing Pupils: provide clear direction to pupils, and enthuse and motivate them 1.14 • Teamworking: work with others - achieve shared goals 1.14 • Location means the room is not isolated or constantly disrupted 1.14 • Children who have not developed certain social, emotional and behavioural skills are selected e.g. "fill missing gaps" 1.14 • Timings/structure of the day 1.14 • Group led by appropriately skilled teacher or skilled TA 1.14 • Furnished to be reflective of both home and school 1.14 • Respect for Others: underlying belief individuals matter/deserve respect and deserve respect 1.14 • Children whose home environment has not facilitated some social, emotional, behavioural development 1.17 • *Small group size 8-12 1.29*	• In their work with children, NG staff demonstrate warmth, are caring, non-judgemental, accepting, calm, nurturing, loving/affectionate, empathetic, motivating, consistent , flexible, positive, 'motherly', supportive, and have a sense of humour, such personal characteristics ensure children feel valued, can form good relationships with staff, and are able to succeed 1.14 • NG staff supported so don't feel isolated and can continue to offer best practice 1.14 • Children taught the language around feelings/emotions and how to deal with situations appropriately 1.14 • Children are helped to re-experience early nurturing care in a secure, predictable, supportive environment 1.14 • Two adults provide a positive model of appropriate social interaction 1.14 • Relationship between staff gives child opportunity to see constructive interaction between adults 1.14 • Children have 'extra chance', extra time to revisit work, reduced pressure, and increased opportunities for support with building relationships, building trust 1.14 • Needs of children are met at the developmental level they have reached 1.14 • Teachers' have good behaviour management skills, and avoid overreaction, they are consistent and use effective rewards and punishments to motivate children 1.14 • NG staff are skilled in identifying children's specific difficulties and supporting them sensitively 1.14 • Staff set appropriate, individualised targets with a 'nurture' focus, assessment tools used to inform targets 1.14 • Working within a clear, structured framework, staff are responsive and adapt to needs of individuals and group and vary tasks accordingly, staff are proactive rather than reactive e.g. "read the emotional temperature of the group" "read the children". This flexibility/adaptability ensures the individual needs of the children are met 1.14 • Stability: low staff absence, clear routines and structure 1.17 • Multi-method assessment (e.g. including Boxall Profile data) and consultation between NG and MS staff ensures 'appropriate' children are selected for the NG 1.17 • Role of NG staff in selecting pupils means NG staff feel valued, listened to and empowered to make a difference 1.17 • Support: use of praise/focus on positives means pupils feel emotionally supported in the classroom, and are willing to try new things and learn from mistakes.1.17	• Children's anxiety is reduced 1.14 • Missing gaps' in the child's social and emotional development are 'filled' 1.29 • Children's basic needs are met e.g. food/clothing, and emotional needs 1.29 • Children had improved communication skills – more confident in talk, better able to express themselves, improved eye contact 1.29 • Staff consider children feel 'safe', and able to express themselves without feeling judged, can 'be themselves' 1.29

Crucially, whilst small-group size was highlighted as 'essential' (mean = 1.29), it did not fall into the 'most essential' threshold (factors scoring <1.25). This suggests that though group-size is clearly considered an important context (see Section 4.3.1) affecting the efficacy of NGs and staff practice, other contextual influences may impact more significantly on practice e.g. two members of staff, a dedicated room in school, staff personalities. In this way, the results of the group interview echo the interview findings, in that small group size *per se* is not important, but rather this context facilitates the firing of certain mechanisms. For example, during the group interview, the participants had positioned group size in the 'middle' of their ranking of factors. When we discussed this, I asked whether they meant group size was 'not that important', participants responded:

> *Participant 10 "the actual number of pupils is very important..."*
>
> *Participant 7 "...to build relationships.."*

I understood this to mean that group size (C) is only considered important in creating the necessary conditions to build closer relationships (M), or facilitate greater flexibility with the curriculum (M). Similarly, a participant observed that having two adults run the group (C) was crucial, because it meant positive relationships were modelled (M) and the children learned from this modelling by others (O), as articulated in Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977).

The results show how certain contexts are considered to allow specific mechanisms to fire. This highlights how important it is not only to consider variables carefully, but consider interactions between variables. I believe the results help justify the use of

an approach such as RE where instead of controlling or ignoring variables, or over-emphasising correlations, consideration of the interrelationship between factors and *'what works, for whom and in what circumstances'* is key.

Table 6.3 shows factors (contexts and mechanisms) participants viewed as most salient in affecting NG practice and outcomes for children. The group interview results align well with, and reinforce, themes identified from the interviews. Furthermore, results from the card-activity (Appendices XXIII, XXIV and XXV) can be summarised as the following Programme Theories:

- ***Family/community:*** *interactions between family/community characteristics (C), NG staff's recognition of the importance of working with parents (C), by working closely and effectively with parents (M) were considered to have the most significant impact on positive outcomes for NG children and their families (O);*
- ***Whole school:*** *a supportive head teacher/Governors (C), with good awareness of the rationale/practice of NGs (C) would provide a dedicated room (C), enabling NG and mainstream staff to work closely, collaboratively and consistently (M) to produce positive whole school effects (O) which in turn impact favourably on NG children (O);*
- ***Mainstream class:*** *positive collaboration between appropriately skilled MS and NG staff (C), and a united, consistent approach (M) characterised by good communication and children's recognition of this consistency (M) were considered to have the most significant impact on positive outcomes e.g. reintegration for NG children (O);*
- ***NG:*** *the combination and interaction of and between an appropriately focused (e.g. on social/emotional development) curriculum (C), based on 'sound' theoretical underpinnings (e.g. attachment theory) (C), with two members (C) of well supported/trained staff (C), with 'good' knowledge and understanding (C) and the 'right' personal (C) and professional (C) characteristics, can work collaboratively (M) to create a positive classroom climate (M) and develop good working relationships with children and parents (M), with resultant positive effects on children's' attitudes, feelings and self-esteem (O), and additional ensuing impacts on parents and families (O).*

6.5 Refined programme specification for NGs and staff practice

Synthesis and analysis of data gathered from individual interviews, group interview and Data Outcome Patterns (generated from individual rating of data), and 'realistic-orientated review of the literature' (Timmins and Miller, 2007), led to a refined programme specification for NGs (see Table 6.4 below). I have drawn on Timmins and Miller's (2007, p13) work to structure and frame the content, and built on the Programme Theories developed at the end of Sections 3.3.3, 3.4, 3.5.4 and 4.4 in the Realist Synthesis.

Table 6.4: Refined programme specification for Nurture Groups

Aspect	*Contexts*	*Mechanisms*	*Outcomes*
Community and family level	NG staff that recognise the importance of working collaboratively with parents. Parents who consider their child might benefit from a nurturing, small-group intervention.	NG staff have good awareness of parental context and apply 'Rogerian' qualities (e.g. empathic understanding) to their work with parents.	Children demonstrate improved emotional well-being and are able to generalise their learning from NG to other contexts e.g. home Positive relationships between home and school are fostered, parents and children develop their skills and learning, this all positively impacts on the child, their family and the wider community.
Whole school level	Whole school values the NG staff and children, and view NG as an integral part of the school. This is reflected in the resources, funding and room allocated to the NG and how NG staff and children are perceived. School has an inclusive orientation and nurturing ethos, with good communication frameworks.	The head teacher actively promotes the work of the NG, as reflected in awareness raising for all staff regarding the role and rationale of the NG and nurturing principles. Across the school, staff provide a consistent, coherent nurturing approach in their work with children, and work towards a 'shared vision'.	Evidence that children 'feel safe' and secure within whole school. Children are able to generalise their learning from NG to other contexts e.g. play time, assembly. Evidence that staff have learnt from training provided e.g. feel positive about NG, confident they can apply nurturing principles to their work with all children. They feel equipped to support NG children in the classroom and around school.

Mainstream classroom level	Staff subscribe to school's learning and behaviour policy and nurturing ethos. Staff understand and value the NG, and have accurate perceptions of the NG children. They work positively, communicating well with NG staff.	MS staff's secure understanding of the NG rationale ensures they respond appropriately and positively to NG children in their class. MS and NG staff offer a united, consistent approach. They work collaboratively; sharing knowledge and understanding of the needs of NG children, and implementing strategies/targets agreed.	NG children are more engaged and resilient, and able to apply their learning from the NG in the MS context NG and MS staff agree the NG children have made progress in behaviour and learning. NG children are able to be successfully reintegrated into class.
Nurture group level	The right dynamic of NG staff are selected, both have the right personality characteristics, and are appropriately skilled e.g. good classroom management and communication skills. NG staff's views are integral to group selection, so children who may benefit from this type of intervention are selected e.g. children with specific areas for social, emotional and/or behavioural development. The two NG staff have the necessary skills to work collaboratively, positively and supportively, applying their 'Rogerian' qualities to identify and meet the evolving social, emotional, and behavioural needs of the NG children by the creation of a 'nurturing environment'/classroom climate. A carefully structured, alternative curriculum is adopted which focuses on developing social, emotional and behavioural skills, and is developmentally sensitive.	Staff are able to apply their personal and professional characteristics to create a positive, nurturing classroom climate. In their work with the children, staff demonstrate a fair, supportive, accepting empathetic approach, consistently demonstrating positive models of relating to others, and ensuring they work in close partnership with their NG colleague. NG staff value the children, and understand behaviour is a communication. They strive to recognise and meet the children's (unmet) needs. Focus of support is towards wider inclusion and reintegration in the mainstream classroom. Staff support the emotional, social and behavioural development of the children. Staff are able to use their knowledge to set appropriate 'nurture' targets for the children. The focus on a more alternative curriculum means staff have the time to personalise and differentiate the curriculum so that it meets the developmental needs of the individual children.	Children's social, emotional and behavioural development measurably improves e.g. communication skills, have the language for appropriately expressing their feelings. Children are able to apply and generalise their learning across multiple contexts e.g. home, mainstream class, play time. Children can 'be themselves' and their self-concept/esteem improves, anxiety is reduced and basic needs are met. Children and their families are positively affected by their time in the NG and this is demonstrable across multiple outcome measures.

6.6 Research Question H: What aspects (contexts and mechanisms) of training/CPD do NG practitioners consider would support their own and others' professional development most effectively?

A secondary purpose of this study was to explore participants' views regarding effective training for NG practitioners. The same process that had been used to generate data presented in Sections 6.1-6.5 was adopted (i.e. literature and interview data were amalgamated, presented to participants, who rated them, and these data trends were then discussed and ranked during the group interview). Again, the Data Outcome Patterns are shown (Appendix XXII), with results from the group card-sort activities illustrated photographically in Appendix XXIII, and to enable closer scrutiny they are also reproduced in Appendices XXIV and XXV. The findings are now discussed in the following sections[23].

The interview data indicated some consensus regarding what training the practitioners might view as desirable. Broadly, emergent 'themes' from the interview data either related to *content* (aligned with staff practice and interest*)*, *structure*, *purpose* or *delivery of training*. Where a significant number of participants (e.g. 70-90%) mentioned a 'theme', this has been emboldened.

The majority of participants also described how valuable they had found the Nurture Group Network's four day training. It was reported to be 'comprehensive'. Those who had already had experience of NGs, found it helpful for clarification and to discuss current practice and share ideas, and for those who were new to NGs it proved invaluable in covering 'everything you need'.

[23] An editorial decision was made to position Data Outcome Patterns and card-sort activity data in the appendices rather than in the main body of the thesis, so as not to over-whelm the reader with tables. Salient findings from the unfiltered data are, however, presented and discussed in the following sections.

Table 6.5: Themes from the data relating to training/CPD of practitioners

	Aspect	Detail
'Content' of training	**Boxall Profile**	**Understanding/application of the Boxall Profile/ how to identify appropriate children, set targets and what strategies will support development of targets**
	SEN	**Knowledge of SEN and ensuing strategies (e.g. relevant "medical conditions")**
	Child development	**Knowledge of child development/early years/psychology e.g. child-initiated/child-centred learning**
	'Family Links'	**Training on 'Family Links'** [24]
	Attachment theory	**Knowledge of Attachment Theory (and relevant strategies)**
	Outside agencies	Knowledge of outside agencies/referral processes
	Safeguarding	Knowledge of and awareness raising regarding 'safeguarding' children (this term is broader than 'child protection' as it also includes prevention)
	Positive Handling/ Protective behaviours	Training like 'Team-Teach' [25] - de-escalation strategies and 'safe' physical restraint of pupils
	'Social Emotional Aspects of Learning'	Training on SEAL/Silver SEAL[26].
	'Emotional literacy'	Strategies for developing emotional literacy in NG pupils
	Parents	Strategies for working effectively with parents
	Curriculum	Creative ways of literacy/numeracy teaching and possible 'curriculum' of a NG e.g. with regards to planning, target setting

[24] Family Links 'is a national training organisation that uses the 'Nurturing Programme' to promote loving, kind relationships within families, schools, communities and prisons. Family Links trains parenting support workers and school staff to deliver the Nurturing Programme across the UK in parent groups, schools and one to one with parents and carers. The Nurturing Programme focuses on the adult as well as the child. It invites parents, carers and school staff to give time to their own needs and reflect on their own childhood and parenting ideas' (Family Links, 2011).

[25] This involves teaching of the 'least intrusive positive handling strategies and a continuum of gradual and graded techniques, with an emphasis and preference for the use of verbal, non-verbal de-escalation strategies being used and exhausted before positive handling strategies are utilised', and where 'a process of repair and reflection for both staff and children' is provided (Team-Teach, 2011).

[26] SEAL is "a comprehensive, whole-school approach to promoting the social and emotional skills that underpin effective learning, positive behaviour, regular attendance, staff effectiveness and the emotional health and well-being of all who learn and work in schools" (DCSF, 2007, p4).

Structure	**Frequency and duration**	**Half-termly clusters allow NG staff to meet in small, local groups** **Opportunities to revisit training (i.e. it is sustained/on-going)**
	Collaborative	**Mentoring/coaching each other – chances to team teach/observe others' practice**
		Experiential learning - visit and observe practice in a variety of settings
		Opportunities to share current practice e.g. case studies
	Bespoke	Training tailored to level of experience e.g. 'introductory' training for new NG staff, and then follow-up training/conferences once staff more experienced. Bespoke training - annual needs analysis by LA to identify pertinent themes e.g. speech and language difficulties.
	Inclusive	Both NG staff - not just NG leader – have access to training opportunities. Whole school staff training available too.
Purpose	Differing focus/ purpose made clear	To keep up to date with evidence-base e.g. relating to NGs, neuroscience, attachment theory Promote reflexivity Reassurance/confirms own practice is appropriate
Delivery	Trainer skills/ experience	Trainer is passionate and engaging. Trainer has relevant and significant experience of NGs themselves e.g. has been a NG practitioner.
	'Nurturing' nature	Training itself has a nurturing focus, staff 'feel nurtured'

Research Question G is also addressed at the end of the following section.

6.7 Research Question I: With regard to staff development, what contexts and mechanisms do NG practitioners consider most powerful in influencing outcomes?

Data Outcome Patterns for rating training/CPD C, M, O data (synthesised from literature and interviews) are shown in Appendix XXII. As Data Outcome Patterns clearly show participants' views regarding the 'most essential' or 'most powerful' Cs, Ms or Os, they directly address Research Question I. Data Outcome Patterns were also considered alongside results from the card-ranking group activity (Appendices XXIII, XXIV and XXV). The 'most' essential Cs, Ms and Os will now be discussed.

As with the findings from the interviews, the content, structure, purpose, and the delivery of training were all viewed as important. The results from the group interview ranking exercise suggest that one of the most 'powerful' contexts for NG staff training was that it occurred alongside suitable training for other school staff (e.g. regarding the rationale and understanding of NGs, and supporting children with SEBD). This again highlights the import of understanding contextual factors and their influence, as it appeared that the NG practitioners felt that their own training would be less successful without such an input.

Findings from both the Data Outcome Patterns and the group ranking activity suggest a number of contexts and mechanisms were important: Resources (e.g. given time to

train), and on-going, collaborative training (i.e. collaboration with other practitioners, and other professional colleagues on a sustained basis) were considered to be very important. The literature also suggested that collaboration is an important aspect of effective training (Bell et al, 2003; TDA, 2007; HRS, 2011). Findings from the group interview suggest that collaboration with other NG practitioners was preferred (as opposed to other professionals), perhaps because participants considered they would understand better the demands of a NG setting. Furthermore, regarding the mechanism of 'observing others' practice' or 'being observed', some of the participants seemed to indicate that they would find this 'threatening' unless observations were by peers.

Interestingly, regarding Data Outcome Patterns, the 'expertise of the providers' was considered a 'most essential' factor (with a mean of '1' indicates the groups' strong consensus). Further discussion at the group realist interview stage, suggests the participants were conceptualising 'expertise' as 'good craft' knowledge (i.e. it appeared that they considered training providers should have some 'lived experience' of NGs, and have 'anecdotes' to illustrate their teachings). This would of course have implications for training in Coalshire. Perhaps if an EP without direct NG experience were to deliver training for NG teachers, it may be beneficial for them to co-deliver training with an experienced NG practitioner.

To address Research Questions H and I together, it appeared that the aspects (contexts and mechanisms) of training/CPD NG practitioners considered would

support their own and others' professional development most effectively' and 'were most powerful' can be summarised as a refined Programme Theory (refer to Section 4.4):

Programme Theory for developing effective teaching:

NG practitioners who feel supported and who enable their students to make good progress (O) will operate within a school with facilitative organisational aspects, where all staff receive sustained, collaborative, well-focused training (i.e. tailored to their needs for purpose and content) (C) and NG practitioners will have the necessary skills, professional characteristics and experience (C) to apply knowledge (e.g. of child development/SEN) and teaching methods successfully, and can work collaboratively to create a positive classroom climate and structured learning environment with high quality practitioner-student interactions (M).

Additionally, a Programme Specification for training/CPD has been developed and is shown in Table 6.6 below. In conclusion, key contexts, mechanisms and outcomes within training and NG staff development were identified, and there was consensus that training models which involve greater opportunities for peer supervision and learning are more likely to facilitate successful practice, and ensure that learning derived from training and good practice are embedded.

Table 6.6: Refined programme specification for training/CPD of NG practitioners

Contexts	*Mechanisms*	*Outcomes*
Schools which provide their staff with opportunities to access training and necessary resources Schools where there is a commitment to training for all staff (e.g. non-NG staff learn of role/rationale of NG) Training is part of a sustained, deliberately planned process	Training is directly relevant for NG practitioners (content of training is aligned with staff practice and of interest to staff) and takes account of their previous knowledge and experience (e.g. 'bespoke', scope for practitioners to identify their own professional development focus, tailored to experience level – 'advanced' NG practice training available) NG practitioners are able to collaborate with and learn from each other (e.g. via observing others' practice, visiting other NGs, attending cluster meetings) Training is provided by people with the necessary skills and experience (e.g. have good 'craft knowledge') Training tailored to develop skills, knowledge and understanding which will be practical, relevant and applicable to NG staff's current role/career aspiration and to what practitioners consider are the needs of the children (i.e. developing 'emotional literacy')	Positive impact upon NG staff's repertoire of teaching and learning strategies, their ability to match these to their students' needs, their self-esteem, confidence and commitment to continuing learning and development NG staff are well trained, committed to training and can access on-going training opportunities, this increases their confidence, develops their skills and heightens their awareness of children's needs Positive impact upon NG children's learning processes, motivation and outcomes

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

> *"Evidence can be ignored, it can be used as a cosmetic to dress up what has already been agreed, or it can be used as the ground on which an inquisitive, experimental approach is built"*
>
> (Little and Mount, 1998).

7.1 Development of the Programme Theories

Timmins and Miller (2007) describe how in RE programme design is linked to relevant theory and research literature, so when a programme is constructed "knowledge relating to contextual influences and the most effective known mechanisms for achieving outcomes, contribute to programme design" (p10). In this way, the evidence-base is searched to "identify principles which might inform Programme Theory" (Timmins and Miller, 2007, p11). Consequently, in this study the Realist Synthesis led to the development of Programme Theories for compensatory educational initiatives, small-group therapeutic interventions, NGs and effective teaching (shown at the end of Sections 3.3.3, 3.4, 3.5.5 and 4.4 respectively). These Programme Theories were then further developed and refined in light of information garnered from the expert/practitioner knowledge of NG teachers (Timmins and Miller, 2007). The Programme Specifications (shown in Tables 6.4 and 6.6) were derived from these refined Programme Theories and mapped the "programme in terms of assumed Cs, Ms and Os" (Timmins and Miller, 2007, p10). The Programme Theories did not change substantively over the course of the research, but were refined and

developed to inform the more detailed Programme Specifications shown in Chapter 6.

7.2 Critique of methodology

The present study has used an RE framework and realist synthesis to explore the broad question of 'what influences successful or effective NG staff practice'? RE and realist synthesis bring new solutions to the field of evaluative research, but they also bring challenges. Timmins and Miller (2007) have highlighted the difficultly of distinguishing between contexts and mechanisms within the often rather murky presentation of research findings. Timmins and Miller (2007) highlight "contexts are the settings within which programmes are placed or factors outside the control of programme designers (people's motivation, organizational contexts or structures)", whereas "mechanisms are the things people working within the programme do or manipulate to produce the desired outcomes" (p10). Consequently, it is possible that an 'outcome' of NGs (e.g. improved home school communication), could then become a mechanism for further outcomes, thus increasing the difficulty inherent in abstracting Cs, Ms and Os. Additionally, there is considerable, perhaps unavoidable, subjectivity inherent in the abstraction and development process, and in Programme Theory formulation. Furthermore, the risk of researcher bias is compounded by my dual role as researcher, and supporter of NGs in Coalshire (similar to Sanders' (2007) study). This risk has been discussed in Sections 3.5.3vi, and measures taken to address the validity of data collection and analysis are referred to in Section 5.5.4.

Pawson *et al* (2004) also highlight other "*important shortcomings"* which limit

applications of realist review (p37): Realist synthesis is not 'standardisable or reproducible', as there is 'no simple procedural formula' for synthesising all the literature, and it relies on researcher judgment (Pawson *et al*, 2004). This means the approach could be criticised for failing to meet the EPPI-Centre's (2011) clear standards for systematic reviews (i.e. which should be accountable**,** replicable and updateable). Pawson *et al* (2004), however, differ from those *"advocates of procedural uniformity and protocol in research synthesis"* (p37), objecting on two counts. Firstly, they highlight *"the sheer impossibility of making transparent every single decision involved in research synthesis"*, and argue that *all* research synthesis requires judgement (p37). Secondly, they object on philosophical grounds:

> *"We question whether objectivity in science has ever stemmed from standardisation of procedure...",*

stating a preference;

> *"....for a model of validity that rests on refutation rather than replication. In the context of research synthesis this does require 'showing one's working', 'laying down one's methodological tracks, 'surfacing one's reasoning', but clarity on this model is for the purpose of exposing a developing theory to criticism. A fundamental principle of realist review is that its findings are fallible....It is based on a system in which reviewers challenge rather than police each other"* (p38).

Essentially, the whole enterprise can be summarised as *"sifting and sorting theories and coming to a provisional preference for one explanation...constant exposure to scrutiny and critique is thus the engine for the revision and refinement of programme theories"* (Pawson *et al*, 2004, p38), thus highlighting again (see Section 5.3.2), the transient nature of research 'findings'.

Other limitations of realist review highlighted by Pawson *et al* (2004) are that it *"promises no certitude in terms of findings or recommendations"*; and "no easy

answers" (p38). Undoubtedly, given the open nature of educational systems and complexity of social interventions, there are no 'easy answers'. Additionally, the challenging nature of the method means it comes with a 'novices beware' warning. Indeed, Pawson *et al* (2004) argue *"realist reviews are not for novices"* (p38), as *"novice decision making...is rule-bound, formulaic, and reductionist...it ignores anything that is seen as 'complicating factors' and makes little concession to context".* Whilst a novice myself, I would not claim to have conducted a realist review or study of the nature, breadth or depth to which Pawson *et al* (2004) address their warning, and hope to have avoided their description of 'novice decision making' in this research.

I could have chosen an alternative approach to this research, such as a case study, which could have allowed for a detailed illuminative study of NGs and staff practice *in situ*. I have argued, however, that to date there has been insufficient theory development regarding NGs and their evaluation, and did not select a case study approach on this occasion because I considered this to be at the 'specification' or 'configuration focusing' level of realist design (see Figure 5.4 and Section 5.3.2) whereas my aim was at the 'abstraction' and theory development level; where from a nucleus of ideas, one can develop a *"wide range of testable propositions"*, building up *"families of configurations"* (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p123). Furthermore as different studies may draw different answers to the question of 'what works for whom in what circumstances' (as discussed in Section 5.3.2) it was considered important to first develop theory to inform hypotheses for testing. Once theory development has occurred, then hypotheses can be subjected to testing using situated or case studies

within the problem area in order to refine our understanding of the range of CMOs that may apply in that domain (Pawson and Tilley, 1997).

Notwithstanding some of the methodological challenges inherent in using an RE framework and realist synthesis, to rephrase Tolson *et al* (2005, p183), 'in the messy world of NG staff practice development', I believe 'the framework of realistic evaluation proved a worthy design'.

7.3 Research findings and the challenge of complexity

Most challenges in evaluating NGs are not unique to this social programme. A review of research on NGs, other compensatory initiatives and small group psycho-educational interventions has highlighted some pitfalls and complexity when evaluating multifaceted interventions like NGs. Loosely defined programme parameters, poor programme specificity, RCT use in social science (e.g. how to appropriately match - or even create - control groups) are among the myriad of obstacles to useful and fair evaluation. Additionally, to be valid, studies (and their evaluations) may need to be long-term and this is not always achievable. Furthermore, similar to Rutter's (2006) contention with Sure Start's evaluation, whilst NGs may have a slightly more defined protocol, 'the extent to which what is happening in the field shows fidelity to the model of what should be happening' has not been adequately examined, neither has the question of whether or not NGs should adhere to a prescribed model (e.g. 'the Classic Boxall' model). Even with a prescribed model, the more ambiguous aspects of programme specification (e.g. child

identification and selection, staff delivery) would remain problematic to assess. Without better evaluation, to paraphrase Rossi *et al* (2004, p195), the only accurate generalisation that can currently be made is *'some NGs are effective, some are ineffective, and, among the effective ones, some are more effective than others'.*

Theory development, rather than generalisation was the goal of this research, to consider *why, where/when* and *how* desirable results might have come about, helping to illuminate what aspects of NGs 'work', for whom and in what circumstances. The current study has used the framework of RE, to open up 'the underlying black box' of NG programme theory (Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Hansen, 2005), to uncover potential causal mechanisms and influential contexts. Programme specifications have been presented, refined and developed (see Chapter 6, Tables 6.4 and 6.6).

The over-arching aim was not to evaluate NGs, but to produce 'tailored, transferable theory' (Sanderson, 2002) regarding NGs and staff practice, both in order to inform and focus future intervention, and so recommendations regarding staff practice and future training for NG practitioners would be evidence-based.

It has been argued that analysis of complex interactions between contextual factors and underlying mechanisms responsible for outcomes, is crucial. As described previously, Pawson and Tilley (1997) argue mechanisms are *not* variables, but instead are *"an account of the make-up, behaviour and interrelationships of those processes which are responsible for the regularity"* so *"a mechanism is thus a theory – a theory which spells out the potential of human resources and reasoning"* (Pawson

and Tilley, p68) (see Figure 2.1). My findings suggest that arguably the most powerful mechanisms operating within NGs are the relationships NG practitioners cultivate: with their NG partner, parents, other staff, senior management, external agencies, the community, and above all, the children who attend NGs. Davies *et al* (2000) stress *"effectiveness may be quite context-dependent"* (p50). Certainly, it would appear that the crucial mechanism of human relationships 'is fired' or operates within a number of important contexts: a 'nurturing' school ethos; the allocation of appropriate resources e.g. the room, two members of skilled staff; a small group setting; support from colleagues.

To summarise, the results showed the participants valued personal qualities and characteristics more highly than experience or other skills. The results suggest that for NGs to be effective, they need to operate in a supportive and inclusive school (C), with all staff (especially the NG staff dyad) working collaboratively with each other (M) and parents (M), to meet the developmental needs of the children (O). This is achieved by running a small group (C), therapeutic intervention with *two* staff who are appropriately skilled and have the 'right' personal qualities to achieve these goals (M). The NG and staff need to be valued by school (C), and NG staff given appropriate support and autonomy from senior management (C). Furthermore, <u>all</u> school staff need to have access to sustained, collaborative, well-focused training (C) which is delivered by appropriately skilled providers (C) and NG practitioners will have the necessary skills, professional characteristics and experience (C) to apply knowledge (e.g. of child development/SEN) and teaching methods successfully, and work collaboratively to create a positive classroom climate and structured learning

environment with high quality practitioner-student interactions (M), to ensure the children in their care make good progress (O).

As discussed, realist investigation not only relies on *"broad hypotheses culled from the background literature"* but also incorporates *"the 'folk wisdom' of practitioners"* (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p107). 'Folk theories', by their very nature, are entirely subjective, perhaps raising questions about the trustworthiness of findings. Pawson and Tilley (1997) argue however, the *"true test of data is whether they capture correctly those aspects of the subject's understanding which are relevant to the researcher's theory"* (p164). Demonstrably, this 'test' has been passed. As with Pawson *et al*'s (2004) assertion of the 'fallibility' of findings from realist syntheses, the same can apply to findings of the empirical study i.e. they are now open to 'challenge'. Challenge, however, is good. Moreover it is a crucial mechanism of realist research. 'Challenge' will send the realist researcher back to the 'theory drawing-board' in order to search for a refinement in understanding of the contexts and mechanisms which would allow us to 'separate and interpret different outcomes' (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p126). Close scrutiny and testing of proffered Programme Theories, leads to further refinement and development, thus providing "*information that may lead to the reformulation of the original Programme Specification, with an increased understanding of how a programme actually works"* (Timmins and Miller, 2007, p12). Accordingly, the 'realist evaluation cycle' rolls on (see Figure 5.3).

7.4 Implications for future training

Practitioners' own tacit knowledge or 'folk' theories was sought and merged with theories abstracted from the literature. Thomas (2004) argues that the issue for some of the proponents of evidence-based practice *"is not in recognising the significance of this kind of tacit knowledge but rather in understanding practitioners' ability to reconcile it and meld it with knowledge from research: research evidence"* (p9). Thomas (2004) discusses how Hargreaves (1996) *suggests "while medics (sic.) achieve a good balance between craft knowledge and declarative research knowledge, teachers have been less successful in employing research evidence – in part because of the nature and presentation of that research evidence – alongside their craft knowledge: less successful in employing this additional corroborative evidence"* (p9). Pring and Thomas (2004) appeal for *"reflection about notions of evidence outside experimental research"* (e.g. personal and craft knowledge) and consideration of *"how that evidence can be systematically marshalled and used"* (p17). I would argue the framework of RE, and the tool of Realist Synthesis, offer a valuable methodological scaffold to meet this end.

Pring and Thomas' (2004) hope is that *"the collation and synthesis of findings that the evidence-based practice approach promises",* will *"occur more broadly, across different kinds of evidence"* (p17). The present study has positioned practitioners as co-researchers, and melded their theories with research evidence, with the aim of developing a synthesis capable of informing future training directly, and future practice indirectly of NG practitioners in Coalshire. Arguably, therefore, the present

study has contributed to the promotion of evidence-based practice in education that aligns well with Pring and Thomas' (2004) vision.

Research shows pupils learn best when staff are motivated, developed and updated (TDA, 2007). Collaborative and sustained CPD increases practitioners' confidence, self-esteem, enthusiasm and commitment to continuing to learn about teaching (TDA, 2007). The NG practitioners involved in this study showed impressive commitment and motivation with regards to this research, and a clear finding was their desire for more collaboration, peer learning and increased training opportunities. I consider that it is important that the findings of this study are now used to shape future CPD for NG practitioners.

Pawson and Tilley (1997) argue that when evaluators tell us a programme is 'successful' they *should* be *"demonstrating what it is (M) about the program which works for whom in what conditions (C)"* (p72). Without analysis of causal mechanisms or influential contexts, evaluation fails to provide evidence which can reliably inform and improve future interventions. Many researchers have evaluated NGs highlighting their positive effects (Gerrard, 2006; Sanders, 2007; Reynolds *et al*, 2009; Scott and Lee, 2009), but to date, none have has fulfilled Pawson and Tilley's aforesaid 'success' criteria. This study has not evaluated NGs, but it has met its aim of building theory which is now open to further testing.

7.5 Future Research

Reynolds *et al* (2009) have called for large-scale RCTs (ideally incorporating blind assessment procedures), with good statistical rigour, which consider outcomes like academic attainment, effects of group size, the application of nurturing principles at a whole school level, and the different ways NGs are structured and operationalised. Howell's (2009) systematic review highlighted the need for research which considers whether positive outcomes are maintained, triangulates data, gives control groups an 'attention' placebo, and uses assessment tools of greater reliability and validity. A recommendation of the present study however, would be that, prior to the instigation of such costly studies, greater theory development needs to occur.

Reynolds *et al* (2009) argue *"if NGs are a beneficial intervention, it is necessary to isolate and assess their key ingredients in order to inform future best practice"* (p211). This study has conceptualised 'key ingredients' as contexts and mechanisms, and the Programme Theories (see Sections 3.3.3, 3.4, 3.4.5 and 4.4) and Programme Specification (see Tables 6.4 and 6.6) developed in this study from their identification could be built upon and tested, by carrying out further realistic evaluations of NGs. This would also facilitate aggregation of valid outcome-data and provide a more robust evidence-base regarding the effectiveness (or not) of NGs. Evaluation of NGs, which prioritised data from children's and parents' perspectives would be preferable, as this is an area which has been poorly attended to. This would mean that 'the key ingredients' of NGs were assessed, but would also ensure crucial data was not lost in the process.

Certainly, there remains a need for further evaluative research which more adequately addresses the inherent complexity of Nurture Groups, building on proposed theory to inform future practice, and ensure that interventions for some of our most marginalised young people are evidence-based, appropriately targeted, and effective.

7.6 Implications for EP practice

Educational Psychologists can contribute to evidence-based practice *by "developing and disseminating evidence-based interventions"* in schools and communities (Kratochwill and Shernoff, 2003, p389). Increasingly, EPs are not only being asked to show how proffered interventions are likely to have a positive impact on outcomes for children and young people, but also to demonstrate their own impact (Turner *et al*, 2010). As demonstrated in this study, evaluating any social programme is complex. To illuminate EP effectiveness some studies have focused on *"evaluating processes"* or *"reducing outcomes to measurable units"*, and some have *"introduced more qualitative research methods"* (Turner *et al*, 2010, p313), but all appear to have significant limitations. Timmins and Miller (2007) argue that the development of realistic evaluations *"can make a useful contribution to the evaluation of educational processes"* and *"presents ideal opportunities for researchers and practitioners to work together"* (p16).

Realistic Evaluation has provided a valuable epistemological and methodological framework for this research, supporting further understanding of a complex social intervention. I would assert it is an effective tool for not only aiding the development and evaluation of evidence-based interventions in schools and communities, but could be used by EPs in a range of ways. For example:

- To develop our skills of consultation (DfES, 2006b).
- To provide support for organisational development (Timmins and Miller, 2007; Thistleton, 2008; Sheppard, 2009) by working alongside staff in settings (schools, nurseries, children's centres and other core work settings), using our skills of realist synthesis (from published literature and stakeholders' folk theories) to help build theory regarding effective mechanisms which are likely to promote valued outcomes for children, for which these organisations are accountable.
- Supporting developments to practice and monitoring outcomes within successive cycles of collaborative action research, to help settings develop powerful mechanisms to attain these outcomes within their unique context.

Realistic evaluation's "manifesto" is clear (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). Such a framework neatly straddles the poles of positivism and interpretivism, and dichotomy of whether studies should focus on producing knowledge or improving practice (Hammersely, 2007). In the messy context of educational settings and interventions, Realistic Evaluation itself could afford a powerful mechanism for the development of theory and evidence-based interventions, and meeting the goal of ensuring all children have fair access to opportunity.

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VOLUME 1: APPENDICES

CONTENTS

APPENDIX I Summary of the Head Start Impact Study by the National Forum on Early Childhood Policy and Programs (NFECPP)

What the study shows...	
Gains were not maintained...	*The achievement of children who applied but weren't randomly assigned to a spot in a HS classroom had caught up to HS students' achievement levels by first grade. Potential gains for the experimental group at the end of their first HS year (e.g. school readiness and family processes), were not maintained as comparison group children caught up with their peers.*
Control and treatment groups' experiences did not significantly differ...	*Child care and early education experiences of the HS and comparison group children were much more similar than treatment and control conditions in most randomized trials. The difference in measures of classroom quality between children assigned to attend HS and comparison group children who attended other centre-based programs was also not as large as expected. The more similar the experiences of control and treatment groups in a randomized study like this, the less likely it is that the two groups of children will differ in terms of their outcomes.*
Access to services did differ...	*HS children received a broader range of health, parent, and family social services. Few children in the control group had access to these services in their centre-based care and education programs.*
Some groups benefited more from Head Start participation than other groups...	*Children with special needs and those who were dual-language learners who were offered the chance to enrol in HS showed important long-run benefits.*
The quality of Head Start centres was variable...	*For the 4-year-olds who won their HS lottery, fewer than one in 20 were in centres with an "excellent" quality rating, although virtually none were in centres rated "poor." Only about half were in centres with recommended pupil/staff ratios. It is important to better understand which features of classroom and program quality are important for improving children's outcomes, and to determine what types of initiatives are likely to be effective mechanisms to improve classroom quality in these ways.*
What the Study Does Not Show...	
The role of quality in elementary schools...	*Most children in both the HS and comparison groups enrolled in schools that serve low-income children. Two-thirds of their classmates, on average, qualified for free or reduced-price lunches and about one-third were not proficient in reading or maths. Whether and how school experiences in kindergarten and first grade affect the likelihood that comparison-group students were able to catch up to the HS group is unknown.*
How Head Start compares to state-funded pre-kindergarten...	*The HSIS cannot answer the question of how the effects of HS and public pre-K programs compare by the end of first grade. No comparable national study of the effects of public pre-K has been conducted. Moreover, the two programs typically do not serve identical populations. HS eligibility is based on family income below the federal poverty threshold or a child's special needs.*

How Head Start compares to state-funded pre-kindergarten...	*State and local prekindergarten programs also serve poor children, but often also enrol a broader population of children who are considered "at risk" based on other family and child characteristics. Typically, HS programs serve children from families that are more disadvantaged than those enrolled in state and local prekindergarten. It would be necessary to randomly assign HS eligible children to either HS or pre-K programs in order to directly compare effects.*
Whether Head Start is worth the money...	*The Impact Study did not follow children long enough to answer whether HS generates more benefits than costs. Previous studies of children who attended HS in earlier decades suggest the program indeed produced long-run benefits, although none conducted a formal cost/benefit study. Given the large increases in availability of centre-based programs for low-income preschoolers, questions persist about the generalisability of those studies to the more crowded early childhood and preschool field that exists today.*
	From: NFECPP, 2010, p1-3

APPENDIX II Summary of findings from the National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) (DfE, 2010a): The impact of Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs) on five year olds and their families

Positives	Negatives	Mixed
• *children growing up in SSLP areas had lower BMIs than children in non-SSLP areas. This was due to their being less likely to be overweight with no difference for obesity.* • *children growing up in SSLP areas had better physical health than children in non-SSLP areas.*		
Mothers in SSLP areas reported:		
• *providing a more stimulating home learning environment for their children.* • *providing a less chaotic home environment for their children.* • *experiencing greater life satisfaction.* • *engaging in less harsh discipline.*	• *experiencing more depressive symptoms.* • *Being less likely to visit their child's school for parent/teacher meetings or other arranged visits (although the overall incidence was low generally).*	
In terms of change over the time between when children were 3 years and 5 years old in comparison with those in non-SSLP areas, mothers in SSLP areas reported:		
• *more positive change in life satisfaction.* • *more improvement in the home learning environment.* • *a greater decrease in harsh discipline (i.e. greater improvement).* • *a greater decrease in workless household status (from 9 months to 5 years of age).*	• *less positive change in self regulation. This was due to comparison group children catching up with the NESS group that had been ahead at age 3.*	• *There was no difference between the two groups in self regulation at age 5.*

APPENDIX III Summary of findings from NESS (DfE, 2010b): The quality of group childcare settings used by 3-4 year old children in SSLP areas and the relationship with child outcomes

<table>
<tr><th>Positives</th><th>Other</th></tr>
<tr><td>

- *The quality of provision in SSLP areas is generally good*
- *The quality of provision in SSLP areas was slightly better than in England overall.*
- *There were modest links between childcare quality and adult-child ratio in SSLP areas: the fewer children per adult, the better the quality of care.*
- *SSLP-funded settings had more children and were open for more weeks a year and more hours a week than other settings in SSLP areas, and SSLP-funded settings also had slightly better adult-child ratios.*
- *Allowing for pre-existing family and area background characteristics, higher pre-school childcare quality was linked with higher child language development (this applied to all sections of the population in SSLP areas).*

</td><td rowspan="3">

- *In SSLP areas educational opportunities are mostly only adequate, as in most settings in England.*
- *There is a wide range of pre-school childcare provision in SSLP areas.*
- *Group childcare settings in SSLP areas show a similar pattern in terms of staff qualifications , child numbers and group size to that across England.*
- *Research (e.g. Melhuish et al., 1990; NICHD, 2005) suggests that it is important to improve childcare quality to improve children's language development. This is because early language development is both predictive of later literacy and academic performance (Young et al., 2002; Sénéchal, Ouellette, & Rodney, 2006) and is susceptible to environmental influence (Melhuish et al., 1990; Hart & Risley, 1995; Tamis-LeMonda & Rodriguez, 2009).*
- *One strategy to improve children's language development in deprived areas would be optimising childcare quality. Other research (see Melhuish, 2004) indicates that improving staff training can improve the quality of childcare provision.*

</td></tr>
<tr><td>***Negatives***</td></tr>
<tr><td>

- *Children in SSLP areas were not showing greater language development by age 5 than children in comparable areas. If SSLPs are to produce greater long term effects upon child outcomes in deprived areas, particularly for literacy and academic outcomes, an important step would be to improve childcare quality.*

</td></tr>
</table>

APPENDIX IV A typical day in a nurture group (Bishop, 2008)

Daily timetable								
9.00-9.40	9.40- 10.10 Breakfast	10.15-10.30 Assembly	10.30-10.45 Playtime	10.45-12.15 Free choice activities Literacy Maths	12.15-1.15 Lunch	1.15-1.30 Reading	1.30-2.30	2.30-3.15
Register Showing What are we doing today? Action songs Preparing for breakfast				Literacy activities 11.05-11.20 Free choice activities 11.20-11.40 Numeracy activities Free choice activities 11.55-12.05 Tidying away 12.05-12.10 Circle Time activities			Mondays Games outside Tuesdays Art activities Wednesday Trip to shops for ingredients Thursdays Cooking Friday In classes	KS1 Children out to play and back in class KS2 Children return to class at 2.45

APPENDIX V Examples of Contexts, Mechanisms and Outcomes extracted from key Nurture Group studies

Key: NG = Nurture Group M/S - Mainstream

Study	Contexts	Mechanisms	Outcomes
2009 **Scott and Lee**	• C1 NG room furnished to be reflective of both home and school • C2 NG room is welcoming, contained and protected • C3 NG room is big enough for large range of domestic and personal activities including 'breakfast' and experiences at baby and toddler level • C4 School policy for home contact (e.g. avoid negative home contact) • C5 Play ground environment • C6 Incidents at home • C7 M/S perceptions of NG • C8 M/S staff perceptions of NG children	• M1 structured daily routines to promote a sense of security • M2 curriculum which includes both personal and social development and the formal curriculum, especially language and mathematics (as tailored to each child's level of development) • M3 an emphasis on language and clear communication, ensuring understanding by the child • M4 fostering of close, supportive and caring relationships between children and staff • M5 opportunities for social learning through co-operation and play with other children • M6 adults providing a positive model of appropriate social interaction • M7 shared eating experiences as an expression of care as well as opportunity for social learning • M8 efforts made to engage positively with parents (Lucas *et al*, 2006) • M9 2 adults present (2 weren't in school 4) • M10 part time attendance	• O1 Significant improvements in Boxall data • O2 Some improvements in Literacy • O3 Some improvements in Numeracy • O4 Some improvements in Motor skills • O5 Positive feedback from staff • O6 Reduced negative incidents at playtime • O7 Reduced negative home contact • O8 Teacher reports of improved behaviour (e.g. less violent and impulsive/more self-confidence/greater independence)
2009 **Reynolds, MacKay and Kearney**	• C1 Smaller class size • C2 School effects – 'state of readiness' • C3 School effects – 'a philosophical bias' • C4 Impact of normal development e.g. on pre-post gains scores • C5 Nurturing principles at a whole school level • C6 Age range of pupils in NG • C7 Types of difficulties experienced by the NG pupils	• M1 Smaller class size • M2 Nurturing approach of teachers • M3 More positive verbal and non-verbal communications • M4 Impact of normal development • M5 Impact on academic attainment – e.g. greater personalisation/differentiation/ attention is easier in smaller group size • M6 Operation of the NG – e.g. part time • M7 Structure of the NG	• O1 Academic improvements [using Baseline Assessment for Early Literacy – MacKay, 2006] • O2 Emotional and behavioural change [statistically significant improvements noted on Boxall Profile and BIOS (but not significant for SDQ)]

2007 **Sanders**	• C1 Whole school approach critical • C2 All staff (eg including lunch supervisors) briefed about principles of the group and type of provision it offers • C3 Staff understand what to expect from children and when changes are likely to occur (e.g. small steps expected) • C4 Other staff and children have access to the group e.g. invited for snack or activity time • C5 Timetable carefully planned (e.g. to avoid clashes with small group teaching sessions) • C6 NG Staff empowered to shift in their understanding of teaching to incorporate social and emotional development rather than focussing solely upon academic activities • C7 Children's behaviour difficulties viewed by staff as a shared concern • C8 Whole school forum to discuss intervention strategies • C9 NG staff included by M/S staff • C10 M/S staff perceptions of NG staff (e.g. having "easy time") • C11 Recognition of NG children's improvements by M/S staff as well as NG staff • C12 Reassurance for NG staff by outside agencies	• M1 M/S and NG staff develop liaison strategies so that plans for academic, social and emotional development are shared between M/S and NG staff • M2 NG staff supported so don't feel isolated • M3 Children have a 'safe haven' to go to when they have experienced trauma • M4 Children are provided with routines • M5 Children have a sense of security • M6 NG staff, parents and teachers work together • M7 Rewards and sanctions (over time less important) • M8 Opportunities for skill development • M9 Children taught communication/social skills e.g. communicate more effectively, share, take turns, negotiate • M10 Use of praise (highly rated as having high impact upon SE development of children) • M11 A consistent approach between NG classroom and playtime/lunchtime sessions • M12 NG children form group identity (? – "formed clique" p55)	• O1 Significant improvements in Boxall data (greater gains in developmental sub-strand) • O2 Significant improvements in Boxall data in comparison to control • O3 Most NG children remained in M/S education • O4 Two thirds staff rated NG children as having made academic gains • O5 Increased motivation to complete academic tasks • O6 Able to work more independently • O7 Greater capacity to take risks with learning • O8 Reduction in permanent exclusions • O9 Improved attendance rate O10Observations showed Children's concentration has improved in play and academic tasks • O11 Increased levels of engagement within groups • O12 More purposeful play • O13 More focused attention, for longer periods • O14 Interest in academic tasks (e.g. asking questions, offering responses) • O15 Quality of interactions between children improved, more collaborative • O16 Children have improved interpersonal/social skills – negotiation skills and compromising, greater empathy with peers, use of humour, expressing feelings more effectively (staff reports) • O17 Quality of interactions between children and NG staff improved, and appear more balanced • O18 Children show better reciprocity (listening, politeness and turn-taking) • O19 When frustrated, children had better coping skills • O20 Greater self-directed behaviour e.g. children would take themselves away from a difficult situation, and sit in a calm place/seek adult support • O21 Children more willing to accept adult requests • O22 Children able to express themselves more rationally and calmly (when adult requests disputed) • O23 Children appear more confident (staff and parent reports) • O24 Children have improved friendships (staff and pupil reports) • O25 Children like school more and enjoy coming (pupil/parent report) • O26 Children have better self-regulation - can control impulses better, more reflective, engage in problem solving, accept boundaries, take turns and share (staff reports)

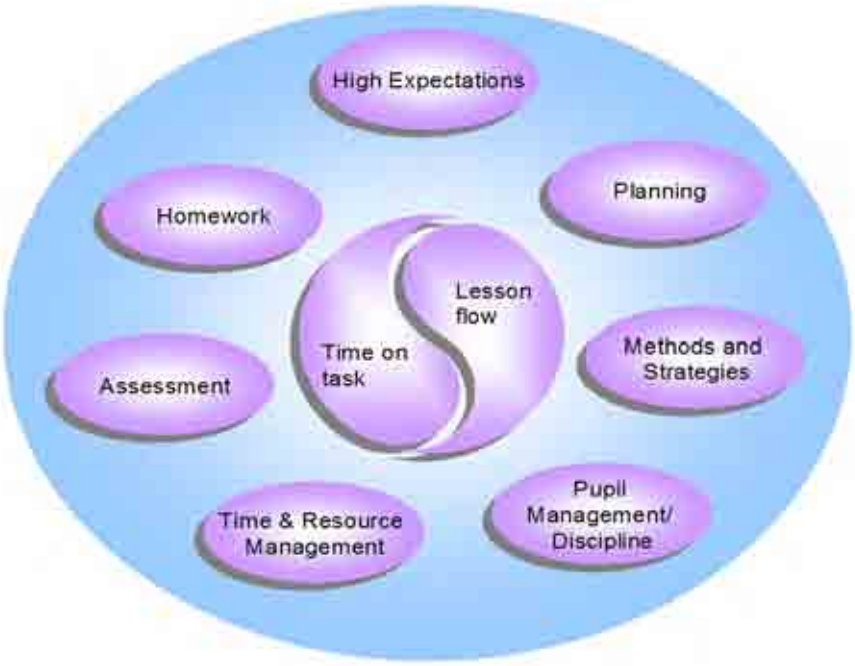
2007 **Sanders (continued)**	• C13 Timetabled liaison slots (so M1 can happen) • C14 School ethos which "puts children first" • C15 Schools channel resources into what children need • C16 Head teacher with holistic approach to child development • C17 Governors support head in their vision • C18 Governors support head so that resources can be allocated accordingly • C19 Part time provision only – so inclusion facilitated – children remain part of M/S class – also makes collaboration easier for NG and M/S staff but means change takes longer and M/S can become disillusioned • C20 Support structures available in LA • C21 Support structures available in school • C22 Ongoing support from EP (Future research suggestions....) • C23 Length of exposure to NG (e.g. older children need longer) • C24 Parents who are supported effectively • C26 Playtimes and lunchtimes better supported (e.g. either by supervisors, or by children having better coping strategies)	• M13 NG children are able to "play members of staff off against each other" – converse of this is a united, consistent approach by NG and M/S staff • M14 NG children given opportunities to generalise their learning from NG into M/S • M15 EP coordinates the initiative in the LA • M16 EP communicates about groups to other LA agencies, contributing to strategic palling for future groups to other LA agencies • M17 EP contributes to quality assurance (Future research suggestions....) • M18 Pupils perceptions of why they are in a NG and what they value about this experience • M19 Children supported to develop better strategies for use in playtime and lunchtime behaviour • M20 Staff recognise value of small changes/steps	• O28 Children have more positive concepts of themselves as learners (pupil reports) • O29 Children had improved communication skills – more confident in talk, better able to express themselves, improved eye contact, keener to engage POSITIVE EFFECTS ON STAFF • O30 Reduced staff absenteeism and turnover, staff less stressed, with more energy • O31 Staff more able to access support and share concerns/strategies • O32 Staff more confident (e.g. to leave school) • O33 Enhanced behaviour management practice, and more energy to implement • O34 Enhanced teaching practice e.g. differentiation using more visual strategies • O35 Positive shift in teachers' thinking re. ability of staff as well as home to influence children's social and emotional development – staff more empowered PARENTS O36Visited school more frequently • O37 Negative feedback cycle changed to positive • O38 Children behave better at home • O39 Parents very happy/grateful children had attended NG • MISC: O40 Children who are quieter and withdrawn make greatest gains and were reintegrated more quickly (NG staff reports) • O41 Change took longer for children with more externalising behaviours (NG staff reports) • O42 For children with acting out behaviours, NG sometimes the only place they were able to experience success, with generalisation to the classroom by the 3rd/4th term • O43 Little impact of NG on playtimes • O44 M/S class teachers report "lost their relationship" with NG children (and less able to assess academic attainments) • O45 M/S children made to feel jealous of NG children who "boast about their experiences" • O46 M/S children receive higher quality teaching and learning experience

2002 **O'Connor and Colwell**	• C1 Change in home circumstances • C2 Age of entry to NG • C3 Nurturing in the M/S class continues beyond exit from NG • C4 Support with school experience and family life • C5 Philosophy of NG staff • C6 Support from LA • C7 Ongoing professional development • C8 Regular meetings • C9 Support from senior staff • C10 Support from LA officers • C11 Support from EPs • C12 Training e.g. of M/S staff • C13 Class sizes in M/S • C14 Pressures of curriculum Suggests need for... • C15 Whole school nurturing approach	• M1 Rationale based on attachment theory • M2 Children are helped to re-experience early nurturing care in a secure, predictable, supportive environment • M3 Secure and trusting relationships are developed • M4 Teacher as substitute attachment figure • M4 Needs of children are met at the developmental level they have reached • M5 NG staff show acceptance, warmth and understanding to enable the children to develop the personal, social and emotional skills necessary for successful learning • M6 Home and school environment brought more closely together • M7 Parents supported (e.g. when they ask for guidance in managing their children)	• O1 Boxall data shows emotional and behavioural difficulties are reduced on exit • O2 Children can return to M/S class • O3 Children experience a 'developmental catch-up' • O4 Children develop a secure attachment with NG staff • O5 NG Children remain in M/S education without further support • O6 Less likely to require special schooling • O7 Less likely to require Statemented support • O8 Costs of Statements are avoided • O9 NGs cost effective when compared to specialist provision/out-of-county placement

APPENDIX VI Details of Hay/McBer's (2000) identified 'Teaching Skills' and 'Professional Characteristics'

Teaching Skills

HayMcBer (2003) describe how Teaching skills are those "micro-behaviours" that the effective teacher constantly exhibits when teaching a class. The 35 behaviours they looked for are based on research conducted by Professor David Reynolds and other colleagues, and are clustered under the seven Ofsted inspection headings:



Professional characteristics

Hay/McBer (2000) describe professional characteristics as "deep-seated patterns of behaviour which outstanding teachers display more often, in more circumstances and to a greater degree of intensity than effective colleagues. They are how the teacher does the job, and have to do with self-image and values; traits, or the way the teacher habitually approaches situations; and, at the deepest level, the motivation that drives performance". From their data analysis of behavioural event interviews with the teachers in their sample

they found 16 characteristics believed to contribute to effective teaching. Hay/McBer (2000) argue strength in five clusters is required, and that certain different combinations of characteristics within these clusters can be equally effective. This is not a static "one-size-fits-all" picture. They argue, effective teachers show distinctive combinations of characteristics that create success for their pupils".

Hay/McBer's (2000) model of professional characteristics

Effective teachers need to have some strengths in each of the 5 clusters.

APPENDIX VII Contexts, Mechanisms and Outcomes generated from the High Reliability Schools Project (2011) and TDA (2007) literature regarding Continued Professional Development and training for teachers

Contexts	Mechanisms	Outcomes
Content of CPD/Focus of intervention: Understanding the theory behind professional change	• A focus on teacher learning, beliefs, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours • Develop teachers' knowledge, understanding or skills (e.g. in specific area) • Developing teachers' beliefs, behaviours and/or attitudes (usually targeted at increasing dynamic learning and teaching exchanges with students) • Explicit modelling within the CPD, of the practices the programme aims to enable amongst teachers • Interventions designed to take account of what teachers knew and could do already • Explicit teaching of the theory behind professional change	For teachers: • Increased confidence • Increased commitment due to increased autonomy and personalisation • Enhanced beliefs of their power to make a difference to pupils' learning (self efficacy) • Development of enthusiasms for collaborative working (despite initial anxieties about being observed/receiving feedback) • Greater commitment to changing practice and willingness to try new things • Development of a wider range of learning activities in class and strategies for students • OVERALL: positive impact upon teachers' repertoire of teaching and learning strategies, their ability to match these to their students' needs, their self-esteem, confidence and commitment to continuing learning and development For students: • Enhanced student learning • Demonstrable enhancement of student motivation • Improvements in performance e.g. tests
Scope for teachers to identify their own professional development focus	• Choices within the CPD programme which enable individuals to find an appropriate focus and level, so individuals can identify their own needs and ensure they are taken into account. (links with increased commitment due to increased autonomy and personalisation [O])	
CPD is sustained and collaborative: collaboration with other teachers, and teachers collaborating with other professional colleagues on a sustained basis Collaborative structure of CPD Observation and feedback, working with outside agencies The use of external expertise linked to school-based activity support	• Mentoring for new teachers • Direct classroom observation • Modelling of new methods • Observation of teaching by 'experts', and feedback (usually based on observation) • Emphasis on peer support, rather than supervisory or managerial leadership [CPD more likely to continue as bottom-up/empowering effect?] • Processes to encourage, extend and structure professional dialogue • Opportunities for joint planning • Opportunities for team teaching • Use of coaching (support) teams and study groups • Increased teacher collaboration acts as positive model for collaborative working between pupils • (*negative*) Individual teachers working on their own • (*negative*) one-day/short residential courses with no planned classroom activities as a follow-up and/or no plans for building systemically upon existing practice • Processes for sustaining professional development over time to enable teachers to embed the practices in their own classroom settings • Combination of external expertise and peer support	

Evaluation of impact	• CPD which provide planned opportunities for teachers' learning prior to, during, and/or after specific interventions, and which enables teachers to relate inputs to existing and future practice	• More positive responses to specific subjects
		• Better organisation of work
		• Increased sophistication in response to questions
		• Increased collaborative working amongst pupils
		• changes in attitudes and beliefs:
		  ○ increased satisfaction with their work
		  ○ enhanced motivation
		  ○ increased confidence
		  ○ increasingly active participation
		• OVERALL: positive impact upon student learning processes, motivation and outcomes
		
		Given the links between "collaborative and sustained CPD and increased teacher confidence, self-esteem, enthusiasm and commitment to continuing to learn about teaching" is there an ensuing impact on retention and recruitment?
		
		Research shows pupils learn best when staff are motivated, developed and updated.
		
		Research indicates positive links between pupils' learning and sustained CPD

Research focus	• Use of action research by teachers (reflective process of progressive problem solving, led by individuals working with others to improve the way they address issues and solve problems) • Use of research literature as a springboard for dialogue/experimentation	
Resources: e.g. time **Widespread consensus about what is effective CPD (see TDA article, 2007)** 1. Sustained as part of a deliberately planned process 2. Shared vision and defined outcomes for evaluation 3. Directly relevant to participants 4. Expertise of providers 5. Evidence-based 6. Tailored to individual 7. Coaching 8. Use of lesson observation 9. Modelling 10. Ethos in school of lifelong learning and development 11. Evaluation	• Paid or negotiated non-contract time for participating teachers • Specific time is available for discussion, planning and feedback, and/or collaborative lesson planning within workshops • Access to suitable resources e.g. ICT • Each activity is part of a coherent long-term plan that gives the participants opportunities to apply what they have learned, evaluate the effect on their practice, and develop their practice. • Planned with a clear vision of the effective or improved practice being sought. This vision is shared by those undertaking the development and by the people leading or supporting it. What understanding/technique the CPD is intended to deliver is clear, with defined outcomes for evaluation of the impact of the CPD • Enables participants to develop skills, knowledge and understanding which will be practical, relevant and applicable to their current role/career aspiration. • Provided by people with necessary experience, expertise and skills (e.g. peers or specialists – internal or external) • Based on best available evidence about teaching and learning • Takes account of participants previous knowledge and experience • Supported by coaching/mentoring from experienced colleagues (inside or outside school). Coaching most effective when staff with identified need is paired with colleague with expertise in this domain. • Observation used as basis for discussion about focus of CPD and its impact. Observations conducted in collaborative and supportive manner. • Models effective learning and teaching strategies e.g. active learning, and opportunities to try things out in supportive setting • Continuous enquiry and problem solving is embedded in daily life of the school. Staff role model learning as instinctive and continual activity • Impact on teaching and learning is evaluated, and evaluation used to guide subsequent professional development activities	

APPENDIX IX Letter and consent form for the individual interview

Presented on Coalshire headed paper and formatted accordingly

REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION: Nurture Group Research – seeking practitioners' perspectives regarding what makes effective practice, with a view to using this information to inform future training directions.

1. Purpose and Aims of Research

I am seeking your informed consent to participate in a research project about Nurture Group staff practice. I am investigating what it is that makes good practice in Nurture Groups and supports the best outcomes for children. I think that an effective means of finding this out is to canvas the views of experienced staff, and I want to hear your views. I will then share the anonymised information with yourselves and with senior practitioners like XXX and XXX, so they can use it to inform future training directions and support for Nurture Group staff in Coalshire.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. In order to ensure that you are aware of what the research entails I have outlined details below. However, please do ask me further questions if there is anything about which you would like further clarification.

2. What would participation in the study involve?

The research methodology that I am using is called 'Realistic Evaluation'. The nature of this methodology means that the researcher needs to engage with participants in an active way. The research would involve:

- individual interviews in order to collect your perspectives - lasting a maximum of 60 minutes;
- participation in a focus group with other Nurture Group staff. This would involve the sharing and discussion of ideas derived from the individual interviews. It would also involve me trying to 'learn' your theories (e.g. about NG staff practice and what makes it work), formalise these theories, and then report them back to you as a reliability check. You could then comment upon, clarify and further refine these key ideas. The focus group would last for a maximum of 90 minutes; and
- a final group session in order further to refine theories that have previously been suggested, and where research findings will be shared. This meeting will last a maximum of 45 mins.

3. Feedback

Feedback is an integral part of this research, and during individual interviews, the focus group and final meeting feedback will be given and amended in light of new information from participants. Alternatively or additionally, research findings will also be presented in written form at the end of the research.

4. Confidentiality and Data Protection

Interviewees' names will not be disclosed. Similarly, all data will be confidential – although others outside of the interviews and focus groups will hear about the views given; only group members will know who said what in the focus group. To prevent data being linked with a specific participant, I will assign individual ID codes, to ensure that names of respondents are not recorded or stored. Interviews will be recorded and then transcribed. Once recorded interviews have been transcribed, to comply with University regulations they will be kept on a secure University computer system for 10 years, after which they will be destroyed. Data will also briefly be stored on an encrypted memory stick to allow transfer of data.

At all times Coalshire safeguarding protocols would be followed, if participants would like further information please do contact me or visit http://www.coalshiresafeguarding.org.uk/.

5. Participant Withdrawal

I am hoping that you will enjoy participating in the research. However, if at any point you wish to withdraw from the project, please just let me know. There are no consequences for withdrawing from the study, and all you responses will be treated as confidential. If you wish to withdraw you simply have to let me know which ID coded data needs to be discarded. Involvement in the project is entirely your choice, and I am concerned that you should feel completely comfortable to participate or not at any time. I will have access to the data, and will share only anonymised data with my University supervisor and the research sponsor XXX. When data are reported, they will be anonymised.

6. Use of the research findings

The purpose of the research is to investigate your perspectives regarding effective staff practice. These views will then inform future training directions and staff development for Nurture Group practitioners in Coalshire. The research forms part of my thesis requirements, which are part of my professional training as an educational psychologist. I am hoping that this research will offer one of the first Realistic Evaluations of Nurture Groups. I hope you will benefit from giving your views and being actively involved in the research process, and from participating in group work with other NG staff. To consolidate the potential benefits of meeting as a group with other NG practitioners, I will, if you wish, incorporate time in group sessions for you to network and liaise with other Nurture Group staff more informally.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to consider this request. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions prior to accepting or declining participation.

Oonagh Davies

Trainee Educational Psychologist

University of Birmingham

Contact e mail/telephone

CONSENT FORM

☐ I have read the conditions above and agree to participate in this research project. I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time, with no cost incurred.

☐ I give my consent to the use of information I provided being written up for research purposes.

☐ I give my consent to the researcher potentially quoting me in the results, and understand that my responses will be kept confidential and anonymised, so that I cannot be identified within the reporting of the research.

Name: .....

Position: .....

School: .....

Contact details: .....

.....

Date: .....

APPENDIX X Consent form for the Group Realist Interview

Thank you for your continued participation in the project. As you know, my name is Oonagh Davies and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist. I am doing a research project investigating the perspectives of Nurture Group staff regarding what makes effective practice, with a view to using this information to inform future training directions in Coalshire. I have conducted individual interviews with you all and now wish for us to discuss the findings from these interviews, and the literature, and together come up with some robust theories as to what makes effective Nurture Group staff practice, and how NG staff can best be supported e.g. via training or other avenues.

I have my contact details for you on a sheet, should you need them again. Before we start I would like to remind you again that:

- your participation is entirely voluntary;
- you are free to decline to answer any question;
- you are free to withdraw at any time.

As this is a Focus Group, and you are interacting with other participants, I cannot guarantee confidentiality of responses. However, with your consent, I would like us to establish some group rules, and to include an agreement about confidentiality within the group. Are there any others you would like to agree on?

Discuss and write down group rules on flip chart

As before, your responses will be kept strictly confidential and only anonymised responses will be available to members of the research team (my supervisor at University and the research sponsor XXX). This focus group will be recorded and transcribed. Excerpts from this focus group and quotations of individual contributions will be included in the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or any identifying characteristics be included in the report.

If you are still willing to participate, please sign this form to show that I have read the contents to you, and that you agree to participate in the study.

Printed name: .....

Signed: .....

Date:.....

APPENDIX XI Individual Interview Schedule

(Annotations show rationale behind question design)

Read through informed consent criteria (taken from Robson, 2002, p381):

As you know, my name is Oonagh Davies and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist. I am doing a research project investigating the perspectives of Nurture Group staff regarding what makes effective practice, with a view to using this information to inform future training directions. The project forms part of my Doctoral thesis for the University of Birmingham and has been commissioned by Coalshire Educational Psychology Service.

In case you have any questions my contact details are:

Educational Psychology Service *Address, telephone number and e mail provided here*

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the project. Before we start I would like to remind you that:

- Your participation is entirely voluntary
- You are free to refuse to answer any question
- You are free to withdraw at any time

This interview will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to members of the research team (my supervisor at University and XX at Coalshire). The interview will be recorded and transcribed. Excerpts from the interview and individual results may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or any identifying characteristics be included in the report.

Please can you sign this form to show that I have read the contents to you.

Printed name: .....

Signed: .....

Please send a report on the results of the project:

(tick one) ☐ YES ☐ NO

Address for those requesting a research report:

(Researcher to keep signed copy and leave unsigned copy with respondent)

Rapport building:

Do you mind if I ask you something about you, and what it is that drew you into this line of work?

Background:

What was your previous background/experience prior to starting as a Nurture Group practitioner?

Used to address Research Questions E, F and G

Personal and professional meaning of Nurture Groups:

I would like to ask some more questions. I do not consider that there is a 'right' answer to any of these questions. What I am interested in is your views and opinions regarding them, so please try to answer as honestly and as freely as you can:

a. What does the term "Nurture Group" mean to you personally? And if different, professionally? (expand by asking participants to consider: the job of NGs; distinctive features of the set up most instrumental in achieving positive outcomes for children and families; how central/peripheral do you consider the role/skills/disposition of NG staff are regarding creating effective practice and outcomes – for example where would you position the importance of the practice of NG staff, in creating positive outcomes for NG children, on a scale of 1- 10, where 1 is 'unimportant', and 10 is 'critical'?
b. What do you consider are the attributes that characterise effective Nurture Group staff?

c. What kind of previous knowledge/understanding or experience do you think effective NG staff should have?

Used to address Research Questions 'E, G, H and I'

d. What kind of factors do you think help make effective NG staff practice?.... and what hinder effective NG staff practice?

Used to address Research Questions 'F and G'

e. What do you consider are the desired outcomes/success criteria for Nurture Groups and/or for children attending Nurture Groups?

Used to identify salient outcomes

Job Specification:

So if you were to design a job specification for a Nurture Group practitioner, what would be the key attributes/skills/experience you'd be looking for?

- *Write each one on a post-it note*

Can you now please try and arrange these in order of importance to you *(could present as a diamond shape, with most important on top, then next two on same level, etc, then least important one on bottom)*

Activity designed to address Research Question 'E' specifically, but depending on responses given, Cs and Ms relevant to Research Questions 'F-I' might also arise.

Questions designed to address Research Questions 'H and I' specifically, but depending on responses given, Cs and Ms relevant to Research Questions 'E-G' might also arise.

Training preferences:

f. Can you tell me what of the previous training or study you have done has proved most helpful/useful?

g. Why do you think this is?

h. What could have made other training/study experiences more useful?

i. Where do you currently get support from? ...and training?

j. What learning experiences have, to date, influenced your practices as a NG practitioner most strongly?

k. If you were to be in charge of developing training/support for Nurture Group staff (existing and new staff), what would you do? Ideally.....

During the interview process, synthesise information from the interview into tabular form using table:

Context	Mechanism	Outcome

Used for 'member checking', and to reduce potential researcher bias (see Robson, 2002, p174)

Right, so my understanding of our conversation is that for you the following factors have a really important impact on the effectiveness of Nurture Group staff practice *(summarise factors identified by participant.*

What do you think about this? Have I understood you correctly? Is there anything you would like to add or change? *Present any amendments/additions in table below:*

Context	Mechanism	Outcome

Do you have any questions for me?

Are you still happy for your anonymised data to be shared at the focus group?

I'd like to thank you for your participation in this interview process. I will be in contact to discuss when to hold the focus group – do you have any preferred times/days?

If you wish to contact me in the meantime, please do not hesitate to do so.

END OF INTERVIEW

APPENDIX XII Transcribed and annotated interview exemplar to show data analysis process

[section selected to illustrate data abstraction process]

What kind of features or characteristics of the nurture group set up do you consider most important for achieving good outcomes?

Erm **what factors do you think are most?** well were lucky in that we've got what was the caretakers bungalow so it's very much setup as a house scenario and everyone that comes from other nurture groups to come and see us always say aww its wonderful you're so lucky, but I do point out that, that's just a building, and I don't think that actually the building, yes it's a nice you know it sets a nice house situation and I don't think that that's the be all and end all and if I had to work in a little tiny room then it's would still be very valuable I think that one of the key things is the teacher whether that is a teacher of a nurture group assistant or whoever it might be that had are key, **so that nurture group leader,** yeah whoever, **yea,** are key, obviously its them that can identify the children's needs and I also think the relationship between those two leaders are crucial, the children can see what the ideal should be what it should look like to have people that respect each other and work together and so it is all modelled for them really. **Yea.** Erm...**to model positive relationships,** erm I mean again its lovely to have all the resources but certainly when this was first set up there was very few resources, we were sharing them, begging and borrowing from reception and as the years have gone on we've bought from car boots and things because I don't think that is the critical thing, it's more the relationships side of things and probably the biggest thing I would do without would be the breakfast room and again however that might look whether it's one little table or whether it is a big room like we've got because I would say most of our social side of things come on at the breakfast table, **during a meal,** during the meals erm that's also the time we have a lot of disclosures made, because it's a time when they are comfortable talking about their home life and things that have gone on.erm and even things like your table manners how you sit and what is expected it often isn't and very few of them have a table where they sit down to eat so I think the breakfast room one of the most important actual physical parts of the building but actually the staffing, **yea,** the staff don't get on well I think that already,. They miss a lot of opportunities if the staff don't get on well.

Highlighted data was extracted and recorded in tabular form as Cs, Ms or Os, combined with data from the Realist Synthesis and is shown in Appendices XIII and XIV. Examples highlighted in green or pink are also highlighted in the table below to illustrate part of the qualitative data analysis process followed.

Erm so .... how central then or peripheral is the role and the skills and disposition of the nurture group staff in terms of making effective practice? From what you're saying?

It's crucial, **it's crucial... and where would you position the importance of the practice of nurture group staff in creating positive outcomes if we were doing a scale of 1-10, 1 is it's not really important not critical and 10 is its essential.**

It's essential, 10 definitely. Erm as I say if you haven't got that bit quite right then, **yea,** then that would limit the success you would have really and which again is part of our policy is to why if in the nurture group one of us is ill or on a course we don't operate, it is that critical it's not just having the body to make up the ratios it is who that person is the fact that the children are familiar with that person, they feel safe with that person, they're secure with that person, they know they can trust that person and what will happen, that the routines and things will stay the same with another body in there but that the, for some of these children that have different adults coming and going in their life, week by week day by day, that to have another person, even if it's a member of staff in school that isn't the ideal scenario at all, it would just change the dynamics./

Erm what do you consider are the actual attributes that characterise the nurture group staff? So you know like

Oh I think you need to be positive, supporting, understanding, have you need to be a good listener, have good communication skills, erm...and I think you need to...be very aware of the different people, particularly the parents their circumstances, how they might feel, and to make them realise that you are human as well that I'm not just a teacher that I'm a parent and I am a human being, and we all have issues and problems it's just how we go about finding the support sort of thing so and being understanding to the parents and trying to make yourself human to them so you can actually engage them, ...erm...trusting I suppose, **do you mean so that you are trusting of the children or so that people can trust you?** I suppose both ways round really, yeah both ways. And that your prepared to stand up for the children and hear their voices and share their voice as well if that's with other staff at school or parents whether sometimes they're disclosures and things making them know that you've got to share those things but it's ok to do that and making them understand. Tricky. *Laughing.* **That's fine. Thank you.**

What kind of previous knowledge or understanding or experience do you think effective nurture group staff should have?

I think anybody that is going to run a nurture group will need to have been involved with nurture groups needs or to have seen nurture groups, erm and in a variety of settings, I mean our nurture group runs typical to the model really where as a lot of them currently don't but can still be effective so I think it's important they go and see a range of nurture groups and how they work, erm I think they need an understanding of the Boxall profile, and how to identify those children and really, what nurture is, certainly it's something we work hard with the new staff here, so they all get to come and spend some time in rainbow house, the children often go to be in their classes and they need to see where these children go to and what the philosophy is. In here and what we believe and what those children do erm and when we are talking about selecting new children you can't really ask a teacher too say children that they think might be a candidate for rainbow house if actually they don't really understand, **yea,** what it's really about, **yea.** And we do erm work with new staff and people to show them what we really think nurture is and that it isn't just the child who behaves naughtily in class and be ideal to get them out of the way, but actually what there nurture needs really are.

Contexts	Mechanisms	Outcomes
MS staff have time to visit NG (observe practice) Don't have to follow National Curriculum Staff are able to identify children for whom this intervention is appropriate **Personal experience of NG staff** - Awareness of needs of NG children from own experience as a mother – new awareness of what nurturing is (also see as theme from P4 and P1) Room set up as a house scenario Breakfast room Children still part of their class – register there, attend trips etc NG not an add on – work with their class teacher Friday afternoons available to meet with/drop in for parents, look at targets and set new targets, process the week, Available to parents at registration too, as this can be difficult time Supportive senior management – head listens to NG staff, so doesn't push on new initiatives e.g. around assessment, or phonics, unless NG staff feel it is appropriate, trusts NG staff to do the right thing, head has been training in NG practice/rationale too	Smaller group means as they know children as individuals Advocate for children awareness of parents own difficult school experiences/ get parents on side Relationships that are formed between the NG staff and children STAFF ARE KEY – identify children's needs and support them and move them on **Relationship between two NG staff is crucial** – model positive relationship – respectful of each other, work together (children see this) Breakfast room – facilitates children talking about homelife – lots of disclosures, develop social skills e.g. using cutlery Role of NG staff/skills/disposition is Crucial 10/10 Don't run NG if one staff member absent – consistency of staff Team work – communication between MS staff and NG staff and children are aware adults talk Consistency of approach. Equality of NG staff regardless of teacher or TA.	Children feel secure with the NG staff Widen children's experiences/give opportunities e.g. tr Parer organ Parer their c **Succ** Our u succe that th when Atten Know signp these know paren recog the ch appoi Childr foster care. Make progress with their learning alongside their social development

Interviews were read through a number of times, to ensure all possible Cs, Ms or Os had been highlighted. The data was then positioned in tabular form (as depicted here). Each interview produced many tables worth of data. The data from each interview was then gradually collated, and refined, and where multiple participants identified a C, M or O, these were subsumed under one super-ordinate C, M or O. Additionally, data was positioned at the community/family, whole school, mainstream class or Nurture Group level (whole school level data is shown in the table below). This data was then gradually combined with Cs, Ms, and Os from the realist synthesis and presented at the group realist interview stage (see Appendices XIII and XIV for final version of tabulated Cs, Ms, and Os).

Aspect	***Contexts***	***Mechanisms***	***Outcomes***
Whole school level	Whole staff awareness and understanding of the rationale and practice of the NG School has a nurturing, inclusive whole school ethos, with a focus on the 'whole child' - all staff adopt this approach and value it e.g. "Nurture is a whole school issue" NG staff have high informal status in school. NG staff are part of SMT or have someone on the senior leadership team who can advocate for the group. Head teacher/Senior Management Team have 'shared vision', they support role of NG and autonomy of NG staff, this is reflected in appropriate funding for NG. NG staff feel part of the whole school team and are kept 'in the loop'. NG not an 'add on', but integral part of school, viewed positively by other children and staff e.g. "NG encompasses the whole ethos of the school" New staff are given training opportunities ('up-skill') All staff trained in 'Family Links' with training updates for all staff School has a positive behaviour policy which all staff follow	Whole school staff are trained regularly on the rationale and workings of the NG, new staff given training too Head teacher/SMT have been trained in rationale/practice of NGs so have good awareness and understanding All staff are trained in Family Links, so all use the same language ensuring consistency of approach and that children's social and emotional development is fostered Continuity and consistency of approach in school e.g. NG children praised for meeting their targets, wherever they are in school. Staff around school notice NG children's positive behaviours e.g. on the playground and report them to the NG staff	Staff: - notice children's good behaviours - have framework which promotes consistency of approach. Consistently use positive language with children - 'Language' of school changes (e.g. use of Famiily Links language, gives staff and children the language by which they can communicate their feelings). Children: - are able to apply the strategies they have learnt in the NG - feel safe within school - make qualitative improvements in desirable behaviour - use positive language/vocabulary from Family Links to describe their feelings - behaviour improves as result of more positive, consistent language of staff - exclusions are reduced/prevented - cause less disruption in assemblies Outside agencies notice improvements

For clarity, this table provides an illustrative example of the collated and refined Contexts, Mechanisms and Outcomes, extracted from all the individual interviews. Only 'whole school' level factors have been shown.

QUALITATIVE INFORMATION/QUOTES TO CONSIDER USING:

And it is very hard to get to know all of those individual children to the level you need to and I think you're always aware of needing to know them little bit more and I felt in this smaller group it gives you the chance to

I do enjoy a challenge and that sort of unknown, which is again very much in the nurture group its very much unknown you never know what's going to happen each day

and I'm very much aware that some of the children come to school in a morning so many problems and worries that they need to talk about [illegible] ance to do that anymore with the curriculum the [illegible] on, time discussion, and care, and opportunities [illegible] ot have otherwise..... the children giving them [illegible] f children would have but where they are [illegible]

This section illustrates how additional relevant qualitative data were also highlighted. Some of these would later be used to provide illustrative quotes on any 'themes'.

work with those children to plug the missing gaps that they haven't had and to scaffold with the parents very much work alongside the parents scaffold for them many of whom it's a vicious circle they obviously often haven't had the nurturing themselves so don't actually know what it looks like in order to pass it onto their children, so really to scaffold to them what nurture should look like how to go about it

again is part of our policy is to why if in the nurture group one of us is ill or on a course we don't operate, it is that critical it's not just having the body to make up the ratios it is who that person is the fact that the children are familiar with that person, they feel safe with that person, they're secure with that person, they know they can trust that person and what will happen, that the routines and things will stay the same with another body in there but that the, for some of these children that have different adults coming and going in their life, week by week day by day, that to have another person, even if it's a member of staff in school that isn't the ideal scenario at all **it would just change the dynamics**

I think also it's that getting to know the child so well so any other agencies or people that need to be erm sought really a lot of what we do in here they often do come hand in hand with special needs and whether it's the educational psychologist or the special language team or erm whoever it might be we work quite closely with them and do a lot of referrals that in class might not have happened so soon, because obviously the length of time it takes to get to know those children better than when you're in a class of 30 so in here we can identify that sooner and push for that to happen and again to get the parent on board so that the parent understands why we are trying to contact those agencies and cos sometimes in the past its where they've tried to get in touch with speech and language but the parent hasn't turned up for three appointments so they've been knocked off again so it's that getting again the parents to understand what the importance of it is and getting them working with us erm to sign the paperwork and get it on board really and get it going

I think you need to...be very aware of the different people, particularly the parents their circumstances, how they might feel, and to make them realise that you are human as well that I'm not just a teacher that I'm a parent and I am a human being, and we all have issues and problems it's just how we go about finding the support sort of thing so and being understanding to the parents and trying to make yourself human to them so you can actually engage them, ...erm...trusting I suppose,

And that your prepared to stand up for the children and hear their voices and share their voice as well if that's with other staff at school or parents whether sometimes they're disclosures and things making them know that you've got to share those things but it's ok to do that and making them understand. Tricky one.

Data from response to question: 'what would be the key attributes/skills/experience you'd be looking for in NG staff? (where staff listed these on post-its and ranked in order of importance, with '1' indicating most important/essential)

Order of importance	Characteristic/quality/experience of NG leader
1	Being human/non judgemental – that's what gets the parents on board and without them on board that limits have much success you can have
1	Teamworker (with other staff, parents, outside agencies, MS staff, NG partners) – children know you work as a team
1	Previous experience e.g. of NGs, Boxall/SDQ, understanding of parenting
2	Supportive
2	Empathetic
2	Positive (e.g. relationship with NG TA)
2	Understanding
2	Caring
2	Trust children/they trust you
2	Good communication
3	Thoughtful – got to be this in order to communicate so do go together

A table was produced for each participant's responses. These tables were combined and are shown in Chapter 6, Table 6.2

TRAINING

I think anybody that is going to run a nurture group will need to have been involved with nurture groups needs or to have seen nurture groups, erm and in a variety of settings, I mean our nurture group runs typical to the model really where as a lot of them currently don't but can still be effective so I think it's important they go and s
need to understand how they run
necessarily going to be a specific
areas, you know certain areas, ar
right down to how many you migh
circumstance which is I think why
nurture group I've got to make mi
board but then do your own versi

I think they need an understandin

The same process (as illustrated above) was carried out for training-related data. Interviews were read through a number of times, to ensure all possible Cs, Ms or Os had been highlighted. The data was then positioned in tabular form. Each interview produced one or two tables worth of data. The data from each interview was then collated, and where multiple participants identified a C, M or O, these were subsumed under one super-ordinate C, M or O.

I say I think very much the most you get from things is actually seeing it in practice, **yea,** in a range of variations/different people doing it

Do 4 day training – if have done already – helps clarify

Need awareness that don't have to follow national curriculum

emotional literacy

we did the family links training as well at school – school deliver family links parenting - we do parents sessions, so as a school, erm which very much passes the messages to them as to how we are teaching the language that we are giving the children so they can use the same.

APPENDIX XIII Collated community/family, whole school, mainstream class and Nurture Group level Contexts, Mechanisms and Outcomes from the interviews and realist synthesis

Community and family level

CONTEXTS	MECHANISMS	OUTCOMES
OUTSIDE SUPPORT: ☐ NG staff are supported by outside agencies ☐ NG staff have good knowledge of outside agencies and referral processes **STRUCTURES:** ☐ Clear frameworks (e.g. CAF) are used to coordinate support for families. **FAMILY/COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS:** ☐ Parental socio-economic status ☐ Parental education ☐ Parental ethnicity ☐ Affluence ☐ Population density ☐ Geographical location ☐ Child returns to very negative environment at end of school day, effectiveness of group can be unpicked **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT:** ☐ Support for parents runs in parallel to NG e.g. parenting skills group/positive discipline is modelled/ 'drop in Friday' ☐ Parents (sensitively) given information regarding rational/purpose of NGs ☐ Parents are encouraged to participate, come in and observe practice ☐ NG staff recognise the importance of working with the parents	**WORK WITH OUTSIDE AGENCIES:** ☐ NG staff are supported by and work collaboratively with outside agencies to support the educational, health, social, and emotional development of the pupils ☐ NG staff can mediate/advocate for parents with outside agencies (help secure provisions/share strategies) ☐ EP coordinates the initiative in the LA ☐ EP communicates about groups to other LA agencies, contributing to strategic planning for future groups to other LA agencies ☐ EP contributes to quality assurance ☐ Frameworks (e.g. CAF) ensure coordinated support for families **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT:** ☐ Parents have good understanding of role/purpose of NG so support their child's involvement ☐ NG staff offer non-judgemental, empathetic support to parents e.g. recognise parents may 'feel judged' ☐ NG has an 'open door policy' for parents/are easily accessible which fosters good/regular communication with parents (good news passed on), and sharing of strategies ☐ NG staff 'scaffold' parents' learning about how to 'nurture'/ how their interactions can impact positively on their child's behaviour, so parents develop knowledge of how to support their child's development in parallel with their child's learning – application of new skills in the home environment ☐ NG staff have more awareness/knowledge of home background and are empathetic	**PARENTS:** ☐ As home contact more positive, parents have increased engagement with school ☐ Report more positive behaviour at home ☐ Support and value NG as they see a positive difference in their child - happy/grateful their child attends NG ☐ Know how to help their children/ have learnt new skills ☐ Are signposted to relevant outside agencies ☐ Grow in confidence, become a nucleus for driving other initiatives forward ☐ Visit school more frequently ☐ Negative feedback cycle changed to positive ☐ whole family is positively affected ☐ removes the barriers between school and families ☐ NG staff build relationships with children, parents and families which persist over time, and continue once children have left the group (NG staff can offer on-going support) ☐ *Child's increased confidence and reduced anxiety, undermined by parents* ☐ *Return to negative home environment undermines progress made by children in NG* ☐ *Return to negative home environment prevents children making any progress* **NG CHILDREN:** ☐ Improved emotional wellbeing ☐ Learn 'coping' strategies they can apply at home ☐ Increased resiliency and can cope with life's adversities ☐ Improved health outcomes e.g. brushing teeth ☐ Appear more confident ☐ Likes school more and enjoys coming

Whole school level	CONTEXTS	MECHANISMS	OUTCOMES
	SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS: ☐ Collegiality of staff ☐ Ethos/school culture: School has a nurturing, inclusive whole school ethos, with a focus on the 'whole child' - all staff adopt this approach and value it. School ethos which "puts children first" ☐ Size of school ☐ Building and Facilities ☐ Behaviour and learning policy e.g. all staff follow a positive BP ☐ Proportion of high-ability intake ☐ Groundwork has been done – school in a 'state of readiness' ☐ School has had experience of other small group interventions ☐ 'A philosophical bias' (towards inclusion/nurture) ☐ Head teacher with holistic approach to child development ☐ Governors support head in their vision **STAFF INVOLVEMENT/AWARENESS:** ☐ Whole staff awareness and understanding of the rationale and practice of the NG with all staff (e.g. including lunch supervisors) briefed about principles of group and type of provision it offers ☐ Whole school forum to discuss intervention strategies ☐ All staff trained in 'Family Links' with training updates for all staff/new staff ☐ Head teacher/SMT have been trained in rationale/practice of NGs so have good awareness and understanding ☐ Other staff and children have access to the group e.g. invited for snack or activity time ☐ NG staff have high informal status in school. ☐ NG staff part of SMT/have advocate on SMT ☐ Head teacher/SMT have 'shared vision; support role of NG and autonomy of NG staff, this is reflected in appropriate funding for NG ☐ NG staff feel part of the whole school team, are kept 'in the loop'. ☐ NG not an 'add on', but integral part of school, viewed positively by other children and staff **ALLOCATION OF TIME AND SPACE:** ☐ Timetable carefully planned (e.g. avoid clash with NG sessions, allows for resource preparation) ☐ School channels resources into what children need ☐ Head/Governors support NG so resources allocated accordingly ☐ Dedicated room in school identified	**SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS:** ☐ Nurturing ethos means that the relationships between all staff and pupils are positive and affirming ☐ School actively promotes staff involvement in supporting the social and emotional development of its pupils, as reflected in training provided for staff re NG and school's behaviour and learning policies ☐ NG staff feel supported by their head and mainstream colleagues as they have awareness of NG and are working towards a shared vision ☐ The focus of support of NG towards wider inclusion of children in school, is acknowledged and valued **STAFF INVOLVEMENT/AWARENESS:** ☐ Whole school staff are trained regularly on the rationale and workings of the NG, new staff given training too, so consistency of messages/learning from NG is across the whole school ☐ As all staff are trained in Family Links, all use the same 'language' ensuring consistency of approach ☐ Continuity and consistency of approach in school e.g. NG children praised for meeting their targets, wherever they are in school. Staff around school notice NG children's positive behaviours e.g. on the playground and report them to the NG staff ☐ Head teachers' understanding of the NG means they support the group and this encourages the high status of the group within school **ALLOCATION OF TIME AND SPACE:** ☐ Allocation of resource/ time for group means NG has status/profile within the school	**NG CHILDREN:** ☐ Apply strategies they have learnt in the NG ☐ Feel safe within whole school ☐ Make qualitative improvements in desirable behaviour across school resulting from more positive, consistent language of staff ☐ Exclusions are reduced/prevented ☐ Less disruption in assemblies **STAFF:** ☐ Positive evidence of staff learning from training e.g. feel able to support them in class ☐ Staff notice children's good behaviours ☐ Greater consistency of approach ☐ Reduced staff absenteeism and turnover, staff less stressed, with more energy ☐ Staff better able to access support and share concerns/strategies ☐ Staff more confident (e.g. to take NG on trips) ☐ Enhanced behaviour management practice, and more energy to implement ☐ Enhanced teaching practice ☐ Positive shift in teachers' thinking re. ability of staff as well as home to influence children's social and emotional development ☐ Staff empowered **WHOLE SCHOOL EFFECTS:** ☐ 'Language' of school changes (Family Links) ☐ Nurturing approach/ethos is reinforced ☐ Other children in school view NG positively ☐ Outside agencies notice improvements ☐ School improvement (e.g. targets on SIP) ☐ Teachers contribute to national educational policy ☐ Reduced negative incidents at playtime ☐ MS children receive higher quality teaching and learning experience ☐ *MS children feel jealous of NG children who "boast about their experiences"*

Mainstream Class level

CONTEXTS

KNOWLEDGE OF NG:
- ☐ All MS staff understand and value the role of the NG
- ☐ MS staff can identify children who may need this intervention
- ☐ MS staff have time to visit NG, observe NG practice, see children in NG context

CONSISTENCY/CONTINUITY:
- ☐ Staff subscribe to the school's nurturing ethos
- ☐ Staff subscribe to school's learning and behaviour policy e.g. every classroom has a 'quiet place'

PERCEPTION OF NG
- ☐ MS staff respect and have confidence in NG staff
- ☐ MS staff have accurate perceptions of the NG children (e.g. 'don't view them as naughty', appropriate expectations of what can be achieved)
- ☐ *MS staff have negative perceptions of NG staff (e.g. NG staff have "easy time")*

MS AND NG STAFF COLLABORATION:
- ☐ MS staff work positively and communicate well with NG staff. Appropriate information is shared
- ☐ NG staff included by MS staff
- ☐ Regular meetings occur

MS TEACHER SKILLS/CHARACTERISTICS:
- ☐ MS staff have appropriate personal qualities and skills to support NG pupils in their classroom

MS CLASS CHARACTERISTICS:
- ☐ Class size
- ☐ Range of ability
- ☐ Social class mix
- ☐ Curriculum pressures e.g. EY/Year 6

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OCCASION:
- ☐ Period of the academic year
- ☐ Time of day
- ☐ Weather
- ☐ Preceding lesson

MECHANISMS

KNOWLEDGE OF NG:
- ☐ MS staff given clear explanation of purpose/ /rationale of NG (e.g. understand about 'curriculum holiday', learning objectives may focus on social/emotional development), ensures they respond appropriately
- ☐ Early identification of those who may need NG

CONSISTENCY/CONTINUITY:
- ☐ School policy informs staff response to pupils in the classroom (e.g. appropriate support provided)
- ☐ School's ethos affects staff response to pupils
- ☐ Nurturing in MS class continues beyond exit from NG

PERCEPTION OF NG
- ☐ Observations by MS staff of NG children in NG context, and communication with NG staff, means MS staff have appropriate (high) expectations of NG pupils

MS AND NG STAFF COLLABORATION:
- ☐ NG staff gain trust of MS staff and support them with their practice, NG staff feel supported by MS colleagues
- ☐ MS staff liaise/work with NG staff in order to understand the needs of NG children and implement strategies
- ☐ Timetabled liaison slots ensure regular meetings occur and that plans for NG child are shared
- ☐ Targets set in the NG are shared with MS teacher, and worked on in MS class too e.g. shared IEP
- ☐ Staff ensure NG children maintain their class identity e.g. resister in MS, attend trips, in NG part time.
- ☐ MS teacher retains responsibility for literacy/numeracy
- ☐ MS teachers supported with reintegration e.g. continued access to NG, support is on-going
- ☐ Child's difficulties viewed as a shared concern
- ☐ NG staff, parents and MS teachers work together
- ☐ United, consistent approach by NG and MS staff
- ☐ *NG children "play members of staff off against each other"*

MS TEACHER SKILLS AND CHARACTERISTICS:
- ☐ MS staff demonstrate appropriate personal qualities and skills to support NG pupils in their classroom e.g. are flexible, differentiate, adapt the curriculum creatively
- ☐ Provide opportunities to generalise learning from NG

OUTCOMES

NG CHILDREN:
- ☐ Successfully reintegrated into MS class
- ☐ Move down SEN COP
- ☐ Have learnt and can apply strategies from NG so 'cope'/operate better in class/more resilient. Can function in class/cope with MS curriculum and/or can ask for help when needed
- ☐ More confident with taking risks e.g. with their learning, trying something new
- ☐ More engaged
- ☐ Improved attendance and punctuality
- ☐ Learning progresses alongside their social development
- ☐ Increasingly socialise with peers
- ☐ Cause less disruption in MS class

CLASS TEACHER:
- ☐ Class teacher and NG staff agree that NG children make progress in behaviour and learning
- ☐ Improved understanding of the child, means they support NG children (and other vulnerable children) better in their class
- ☐ Has appropriately high expectations of NG child
- ☐ Time away from challenging children for MS staff, gives MS staff recuperation time
- ☐ Reduced numbers in MS class, benefits MS staff, find it easier to cope with NG pupils when they return

PARENTS:
- ☐ Improved relationships between MS class teacher and NG child's parents

MS CHILDREN:
- ☐ Reduced disruptions from NG children in their class lead to positive learning outcomes
- ☐ Increased teacher attention

Nurture Group level

CONTEXTS	MECHANISMS	OUTCOMES
NG STAFF CHARACTERISTICS: ☐ Gender ☐ Age ☐ Personality characteristics e.g. empathetic, warm, open, caring, fun, patient, enthusiastic ☐ Attitude ☐ 'Philosophy' of NG staff ☐ Social class ☐ Nature of teachers' training ☐ Experience: have had their own children ☐ Experience: have had relevant experience of working with children ☐ Teaching background (rather than TA) ☐ From a background which aligns well with the concept of 'nurturing' (e.g. nursing, EY) ☐ Prestige/selectivity of the institution attended by a teacher ☐ Teachers with specific certification teach that discipline e.g. trained in EY, teach EY ☐ TAs have NVQ level 3 and Special Needs Training ☐ Lead NG staff has had specific training ☐ NG staff's aptitude/ achievement ☐ Knowledge of Nurture Groups ☐ Knowledge of pedagogy ☐ Knowledge of child development ☐ NG staff have an understanding of child development (social, emotional and behavioural), appreciate where children have come from/their background, and what needs developing ☐ NS staff have seen how other NGs are run ☐ NG staff have background knowledge of the curriculum and experience of MS classrooms ☐ Staff have good knowledge of SEN/are the SENCO	**NG STAFF CREATE A POSITIVE CLASSROOM CLIMATE BY PROVIDING PUPILS WITH:** ☐ **Clarity**: e.g. around purpose of activity, appropriate feedback given ☐ **Order:** discipline/ clear boundaries (helps pupils stay on task) ensures disruption to learning minimised ☐ Clear set of **Standards** as to how pupils should behave/what each pupil should do and try to achieve/clear focus on high standards ☐ **Fairness:** absence of favouritism, and consistent link between rewards in the classroom and actual performance. **Consistency** of approach ☐ **Participation:** opportunity for pupils to participate actively in class, staff use sensitive prompts/probes/questioning, often directed to whole group so no one singled out ☐ **Support:** use of praise/focus on positives means pupils feel emotionally supported in the classroom, and are willing to try new things and learn from mistakes. ☐ **Safety and Security:** the degree to which the classroom is a safe place, where pupils are not at risk from emotional or physical bullying, or other fear-arousing factors. 'Safe haven'. An emotionally secure environment**,** relaxed and homely feel, children are provided with routines and have a sense of security so anxiety is reduced, and children are able to disclose ☐ **Interest:** classroom is an interesting/ exciting place to be, pupils feel stimulated to learn. Learning is fun. ☐ **Environment:** the feeling that the classroom is a comfortable, well organised, clean and attractive physical environment, good displays, NG room layout (home area etc.). Effects of room zoning mean home ☐ **Stability:** low staff absence, clear routines and structure ☐ **Respect:** children are 'taught' about respect/respecting others, staff respect students ☐ Foster **autonomy:** children's confidence and self-esteem is promoted by the active promotion of autonomy in pupils e.g. contribute to group rules **PUPILS PERCEPTIONS, STRATEGIES AND BEHAVIOUR** ☐ Pupils perceive staff as being understanding, helpful and friendly ☐ Perceive the staff to show leadership without being too strict **GROUP SELECTION:** ☐ Multi-method assessment (e.g. including Boxall Profile data) and consultation between NG and MS staff ensures 'appropriate' children are selected for the NG ☐ Role of NG staff in selecting pupils means NG staff feel valued, listened to and empowered to make a difference	**PUPIL OUTCOMES:** ☐ Measurable improvements in children's development are shown on assessment tools e.g. significant improvements in Boxall data, show emotional and behavioural difficulties are reduced on exit ☐ Some improvements in Literacy and/or Numeracy ☐ Improved academic outcomes/higher test scores ☐ Improved attitudes to school subjects ☐ Short-term and long-term positive cognitive/educational outcomes ☐ Increased motivation to complete academic tasks/ learn to stay on task/engage in academic activities ☐ Some improvements in motor skills ☐ Increased time on task ☐ Improved attitudes to school/enjoys school ☐ Able to work more independently ☐ Greater capacity to take risks e.g. learning ☐ Reduced delinquency ☐ Develop Internal 'locus of control' (pupils with high internal locus of control believe that events result primarily from their own behaviour and actions, rather than believing chance/other people/fate are in control) ☐ Reduced behavioural problems ☐ Improved self-esteem ☐ Students make progress across multiple dimensions

Nurture Group level

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OCCASION:

- ☐ Period of the academic year
- ☐ Time of day
- ☐ Weather
- ☐ Preceding lesson/break time

NG STAFF PROFESSIONAL CHARACTERISTICS:

- ☐ **Challenge and Support:** "Tough caring". Challenge others in pupil's best interests e.g. don't take on unnecessary curriculum demands
- ☐ **Confidence:** Emotional resilience/ keep calm
- ☐ **Creating Trust:** Being consistent and fair.
- ☐ **Respect for Others:** underlying belief individuals matter/deserve respect and deserve respect
- ☐ **Analytical Thinking:** ability to think logically
- ☐ **Conceptual Thinking:** see patterns and links
- ☐ **Drive for Improvement:** set and meet challenging targets
- ☐ **Information Seeking:** drive to find out more and get to the heart of things; intellectual curiosity
- ☐ **Initiative:** anticipate and pre-empt events
- ☐ **Flexibility:** adapt to needs of a situation, change tactics
- ☐ **Hold People Accountable:** set clear expectations
- ☐ **Managing Pupils:** provide clear direction to pupils, and enthuse and motivate them
- ☐ **Passion for Learning:** drive and an ability to support pupils in their learning
- ☐ **Understanding Others:** i.e. why they behave as they do
- ☐ **Impact and influence:** ability and drive to produce positive outcomes by impressing and influencing others
- ☐ **Teamworking:** work with others - achieve shared goals

APPLICATION OF PERSONAL/PROFESSIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

- ☐ Staff apply their professional characteristics (e.g. professionalism, thinking, planning and expectations, leading, ability to relate to others, flexibility, respectful) and this is what creates the positive classroom climate
- ☐ Staff have confidence, resilience, and strong interpersonal and communication skills
- ☐ Staff aware how their own behaviour contributes to/exacerbates or reduces child's difficulties and this understanding ensures they are reflective practitioners
- ☐ Staff are 'firm but fair', and observant
- ☐ Staff who recognise that behaviour is a communication and strive to understand what child is trying to communicate, are able to recognise and meet child's unmet needs
- ☐ Recognise strengths of child and have appropriately high expectations
- ☐ In their work with children, NG staff demonstrate warmth, are caring, non-judgemental, accepting, calm, nurturing, loving/affectionate, empathetic, motivating, consistent , flexible, positive, 'motherly', supportive, and have a sense of humour, such personal characteristics ensure children feel valued, can form good relationships with staff, and are able to succeed
- ☐ NG staff show acceptance, warmth and understanding to enable the children to develop the personal, social and emotional skills necessary for successful learning
- ☐ NG staff are themselves emotionally literate/secure, and have an interest in developing children's SE skills
- ☐ "Being human" Staff are approachable to parents and to children
- ☐ NG staff have a "desire to make a difference", are committed, dedicated and motivated, see role as a vocation
- ☐ Staff are 'open'
- ☐ Children are set achievable targets for development
- ☐ Staff reward and reinforce behaviour that moves child nearer to meeting their target

ROOM CHARACTERISTICS:

- ☐ Zoning of room creates different atmosphere e.g. house scenario/home like environment means children feel more relaxed and have chance to discuss their home life – homely feeling, photos of children affirms them. Quiet area means 'time out' not viewed negatively. As the children have own desk/tray, photos of them on walls, means it feels like "their" room.
- ☐ Relaxed setting facilitates close physical proximity and eye contact between staff and children

SUPPORT FOR NG STAFF:

- ☐ NG staff supported so don't feel isolated and can continue to offer best practice
- ☐ NG staff feel supported and are therefore able to demonstrate high quality teaching and apply their professional characteristics

PUPILS (continued):

- ☐ Improved attendance
- ☐ 'Missing gaps' in the child's social and emotional development are 'filled'
- ☐ Children's basic needs are met e.g. food/clothing, and emotional needs
- ☐ Original referral reason is met
- ☐ Children develop 'life skills'. Children experience a 'developmental catch-up'
- ☐ Reduction in (permanent) exclusions
- ☐ Children develop their independence Children develop social skills, learn to turn-take and talk aloud, develop group play skills, learn to support and work with each other, and grow to know each other well
- ☐ Children had improved communication skills – more confident in talk, better able to express themselves, improved eye contact,
- ☐ Can share their skills with other NG children
- ☐ Staff consider children feel 'safe', and able to express themselves without feeling judged, can 'be themselves'
- ☐ Children learn language for appropriately communicating /expressing their feelings and learn to manage their own feelings
- ☐ Develop their empathy and start to show concern for others
- ☐ Learn link between feelings and behaviour
- ☐ Short-term and long-term positive affective (emotional) outcomes

Nurture Group level

NG PUPIL CHARACTERISTICS:

- ☐ Prior achievement/ability
- ☐ Age
- ☐ Gender
- ☐ Social class
- ☐ Values
- ☐ Personality
- ☐ Types of difficulties experienced by pupils
- ☐ Age of entry to NG
- ☐ Incidents at home/changes in home circumstances e.g. become LAC

NG STAFF TEACHING SKILLS:

- ☐ Expectations (appropriately high, clear and consistent)
- ☐ Use variety of teaching methods and strategies e.g. effective questioning
- ☐ Good pupil management /discipline
- ☐ Time and resource management
- ☐ Range of Assessment methods used and critical and supportive feedback is given to pupils
- ☐ Good classroom management (planning, time on task and lesson flow, starting the lesson, seating arrangements, establishing clear rules and procedures, a limited focus within the sessions, ending the lesson)
- ☐ Good communication skills
- ☐ Give time to and set appropriate homework
- ☐ Use of differentiation, personalised tasks means work starts at child's developmental level not chronological age
- ☐ NG staff have skills to work positively and supportively to identify and meet the evolving social, emotional and behavioural needs of individual pupils in the NG

CURRICULUM:

- ☐ Focus on developing social, emotional, behavioural skills rather than literacy and numeracy
- ☐ Rationale based on attachment theory and this is central to the work of the NG Other theories central to NG work

CHARACTERISTICS OF TASKS AND ACTIVITIES:

- ☐ Whole group teaching: staff actively teach the whole group, spending time explicitly lecturing, demonstrating or interacting with the class
- ☐ Opportunities for 're-learning/re-visiting' and skill development
- ☐ Focus of support is child-centred, and towards developing children's social, emotional and behavioural skills rather than academic work/ following national curriculum (aim is to address any gaps and ultimately for children to be reintegrated/ included in the mainstream classroom)
- ☐ A creative and differentiated curriculum is offered, where staff use their knowledge of EYFS in their work, so activities are more accessible/child-initiated
- ☐ Staff notice/use opportunities in the national curriculum to develop social/emotional skills
- ☐ Self-help/life skills explicitly taught
- ☐ Students have opportunity to learn as curriculum covered/time on relevant tasks
- ☐ Children taught the language around feelings/emotions and how to deal with situations appropriately
- ☐ Staff make learning 'anxiety free' e.g. choice with learning activities, positive reinforcement, no punishment for non completion of activities
- ☐ Shared eating experiences are an expression of care as well as opportunity for social learning
- ☐ Tasks include both personal and social development and the formal curriculum, especially language and maths (as tailored to each child's level of development)
- ☐ Opportunities for social learning through co-operation and play with other children are provided
- ☐ Children explicitly taught communication/social skills e.g. communicating, sharing, taking turns, negotiating
- ☐ Children are helped to re-experience early nurturing care in a secure, predictable, supportive environment
- ☐ Home and school environment brought more closely together
- ☐ Opportunities for staff to attempt to relive with the child the missed nurturing experiences of the early years
- ☐ There is fidelity to the NG intervention e.g. delivered as intended, follow 'Classic model'
- ☐ Opportunities to verbalise their emotional experiences mean pupils develop their 'emotional vocabulary'
- ☐ As NG staff don't have the same curriculum pressures as MS staff, so can focus on meeting basic needs of children
- ☐ Staff use role play with children, so the children can act out and discuss what is bothering them
- ☐ Opportunities to practice and apply learning
- ☐ Focus in home zone e.g. on tidying up and putting away, helps build organisation into the child, giving them security, confident anticipation and prediction and a sense of time

- ☐ Children develop "an emotional vocabulary and can express themselves with words rather than behaviours"
- ☐ Children's anxiety is reduced
- ☐ Significant, long term changes in children's behaviour
- ☐ Child learns to have ownership of their own behaviour and can make a different choice
- ☐ Children are empowered and realise they can make decisions that impact on them positively
- ☐ Children take responsibility for their own actions/choices
- ☐ Children appear happier and more confident, with greater self-esteem
- ☐ Develop more positive view of life/feel loved, valued and lovable
- ☐ Children become more self-aware and grow in their self-esteem, see they can achieve
- ☐ Children learns to "have a go" at things they wouldn't have tackled previously
- ☐ Children develop a secure attachment with NG staff
- ☐ Children are respected, learn to respect NG staff and form good relationships with them
- ☐ Children relate better with peers and adults
- ☐ Children learn to form positive attachments with others e.g. parents
- ☐ On-going support for reintegration
- ☐ Children can return to MS class
- ☐ NG children remain in MS education
- ☐ NG Children remain in MS education without further support
- ☐ Less likely to require Statement

Nurture Group level

PUPIL SELECTION:

- ☐ Triangulated referral (e.g. assessment tools, consultation with staff, parents)
- ☐ NG staff's views integral to group selection
- ☐ Responsive to individual need e.g. child who's experienced bereavement
- ☐ Group balance/ group dynamics considered e.g. gender balance
- ☐ Children who are disengaged
- ☐ Children who have not developed certain social, emotional and behavioural skills are selected e.g. "fill missing gaps"
- ☐ Children whose parents care, but parents need help and support to develop their skills
- ☐ Children who are 'neglected'
- ☐ Children with attachment difficulties
- ☐ Children with or without behavioural difficulties are selected
- ☐ Children whose home environment has has not facilitated some social, emotional, behavioural development

ACCESS TO SUPPORT:

- ☐ NG consultant available (planning/preparation/advice)
- ☐ Reassurance of NG staff by outside agencies
- ☐ Support structures available in LA, support from LA staff
- ☐ Support structures available in school, support from SMT
- ☐ Ongoing support from EP
- ☐ NG clusters

TIMING AND STRUCTURE:

- ☐ Timings/structure of the day
- ☐ Part time attendance in NG e.g. am only
- ☐ Full time attendance in NG e.g. all day
- ☐ Length of time in NG, 2-4 terms
- ☐ Time set aside for meeting parents
- ☐ Time set aside for paperwork and reflection e.g. an afternoon to set targets, reflect on the week and plan together

NG STAFF SELECTION/PARTNERSHIP:

- ☐ Relationship between the two NG staff is crucial. NG staff know and trust each other, are reflective, have shared values, focus and understanding, work in close partnership with each other, and role model positive relationships/ appropriate behaviour
- ☐ One NG staff member takes more of a lead/slight hierarchy of staff (e.g. one does the planning)
- ☐ Doesn't matter one is a teacher and one is a teaching assistant "we are one"
- ☐ Two adults provide a positive model of appropriate social interaction
- ☐ Relationship between staff gives child opportunity to see constructive interaction between adults
- ☐ Head teacher is also important, represents wider world of school, and is seen to value/support NG staff
- ☐ A man is also involved, peripherally or centrally if possible
- ☐ Always two members of staff

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NG STAFF AND CHILDREN/PARENTS:

- ☐ Fostering of close, supportive and caring relationships between children and staff means secure and trusting relationships are developed with children
- ☐ NG staff are a substitute attachment figure
- ☐ Staff recognise the importance of and are skilled in building relationships and trust with children, and crucially with parents
- ☐ Staff have awareness of/empathy for parents' needs
- ☐ Different relationship with children and parents than MS staff (e.g. viewed as 'more approachable')
- ☐ Efforts are made to engage positively with parents
- ☐ Parents supported (e.g. when they ask for guidance in managing their children)
- ☐ There is good communication between staff and children, which means children's needs are better understood

SMALL GROUP SIZE

- ☐ Staff have time to focus on individual needs of pupils, increased individual attention, and to listen to the children, children not 'anonymous' 'less gets missed'
- ☐ Facilitates building of close relationships between staff and children, and means staff know children as individuals, and children can talk to staff in different way
- ☐ Allows staff to be more hands on
- ☐ Children have 'extra chance', extra time to revisit work, reduced pressure, and increased opportunities for support with building relationships, building trust
- ☐ Facilitates greater differentiation of work

- ☐ Less likely to require special schooling
- ☐ Opportunity to experience success in academic curriculum
- ☐ Concentration improves (e.g. in play and academic tasks)
- ☐ Increased levels engagement with groups
- ☐ More purposeful play
- ☐ More focused attention/for longer
- ☐ Quality of interactions between children improved, more collaborative
- ☐ Children have improved interpersonal/social skills – negotiation skills and compromising, greater empathy with peers, use of humour, express feelings more effectively
- ☐ Quality of interactions between children and NG staff improved, and appear more balanced
- ☐ Children show better reciprocity (listening, politeness and turn-taking)
- ☐ Child had better coping skills
- ☐ Greater self-directed behaviour e.g. children take themselves away from difficult situation/ seek calm place or adult support
- ☐ Children more willing to accept adult requests
- ☐ Improved friendships
- ☐ Children have better self-regulation, control impulses better, more reflective, engage in problem solving/accept boundaries
- ☐ More positive concept of self as learner
- ☐ Children who are quieter and withdrawn make greatest

Nurture Group level

- ☐ Small group size 8-12

NG STAFF DYNAMICS:

- ☐ Always two staff/ two adults in room
- ☐ One NG staff member takes lead role
- ☐ Both NG staff have equal role/partnership
- ☐ NG teacher/lead knows how to direct and organise work of support NG staff
- ☐ One NG staff takes lead role but still works in close partnership with other NG staff member
- ☐ Group is teacher rather than TA led
- ☐ Group led by appropriately skilled teacher or skilled TA
- ☐ Right dynamic of NG staff chosen, staff are 'rounded' emotionally intelligent and have right "temperament"
- ☐ Group does not go ahead if both staff are absent

ROOM CHARACTERISTICS:

- ☐ Furnished to be reflective of both home and school
- ☐ Contained and protected
- ☐ Big enough for large range of domestic and personal activities including 'breakfast' and experiences at baby and toddler level
- ☐ Dedicated room in school, with homely feel and different zones, and space for children's personal things
- ☐ Atmosphere of room is welcoming and homely
- ☐ Location means the room is not isolated or constantly disrupted
- ☐ Size of room

TRAINING:

- ☐ Staff are appropriately supported/ trained, and committed to training
- ☐ NG staff have had training with 'nurturing' focus e.g. NGN 4 day and/or Family Links

NG STAFF PERCEPTIONS, STRATEGIES AND BEHAVIOUR

- ☐ Staff's beliefs/self-efficacy means they feel capable to support children and that they will progress
- ☐ Training means NG staff are empowered to shift in their understanding of teaching to incorporate social and emotional development rather than focussing solely upon academic activities
- ☐ Needs of children are met at the developmental level they have reached
- ☐ There is an emphasis on language and clear communication, ensuring understanding by the child
- ☐ More positive verbal and non-verbal communications
- ☐ Staff have high expectations of their students
- ☐ Staff demonstrate good subject knowledge; good questioning skills; an emphasis upon instruction; a balance of grouping strategies; clear objectives; good time management; effective planning; good classroom organisation; and effective use of other adults in the classroom
- ☐ Staff apply their knowledge of psychological theory e.g. scaffold pupils' learning, model appropriate learning
- ☐ NG staff foster a supportive group dynamic, teaching children to help each other, provide opportunities to develop social skills, and 'coach' children with their social interactions, use of group targets to promote team building
- ☐ Teachers' have good behaviour management skills, and avoid overreaction, they are consistent and use effective rewards and punishments to motivate children
- ☐ Provide high quality teacher-child interaction
- ☐ Provide a high level of praise and encouragement
- ☐ NG staff skilled in identifying children's specific difficulties/support sensitively
- ☐ Staff's knowledge of child development means they are able to identify child's developmental level, start from where child is developmentally and work forward together, so targets set are achievable and focused
- ☐ Quantity and pacing of instruction keeps children's interest
- ☐ Staff show effective classroom management which creates the conditions under which high quality teaching and learning can occur
- ☐ Staff set appropriate, individualised targets with a 'nurture' focus, assessment tools used to inform targets
- ☐ Staff use knowledge of programmes such as Family Links/SEAL, to provide a framework for teaching
- ☐ Demonstrate appropriate affection to the children
- ☐ Working within a clear, structured framework, staff are responsive and adapt to needs of individuals and group and vary tasks accordingly, staff are proactive rather than reactive e.g. "read the emotional temperature of the group" "read the children". This flexibility/adaptability ensures the individual needs of the children are met
- ☐ Staff demonstrate intellectually challenging teaching
- ☐ Foster a work orientated environment

gains/reintegrated quickest

- ☐ Children with acting out behaviours, NG sometimes only place they succeed

PARENTS:

- ☐ NG staff's knowledge of child development, plus in-depth of NG children, means children's needs are identified more quickly, and that they are signposted/referred on swiftly where appropriate e.g. referral to specialist provision
- ☐ Children feel safe to and have the language to make "disclosures" and appropriate help can be sought e.g. foster care
- ☐ Good relationships with parents are developed (long term change)
- ☐ NG staff build relationships with children and families (persist over time, continue once children left)

STAFF:

- ☐ Teacher reports of improved behaviour (e.g. less violent and impulsive/more self-confidence/greater independence)
- ☐ Staff rate NG children as having made academic gains
- ☐ Consider children more confident
- ☐ Consider children are more willing to accept adult requests

NEGATIVE IMPACTS:

- ☐ M/S class teachers report "lost their relationship" with NG children (and less able to assess academic attainments)
- ☐ Change took longer for children with more externalising behaviours

COSTS:

- ☐ Costs of Statements are avoided
- ☐ NGs cost effective when compared to specialist provision

APPENDIX XIV Collated Contexts, Mechanisms and Outcomes from the interviews and realist synthesis which relate to training and CPD of Nurture Group practitioners

Contexts	Mechanisms	Outcome
☐ **Content of CPD:** ☐ Planned with a clear vision of the effective or improved practice being sought. This vision is shared by those undertaking the development and by the people leading or supporting it. What understanding/technique the CPD is intended to deliver is clear, with defined outcomes for evaluation of the impact of the CPD ☐ A focus on developing teacher learning, beliefs, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours ☐ Develop teachers' knowledge, understanding or skills (e.g. in specific area)	Content of training is aligned with staff practice and of interest to staff ☐ Positive Handling/Protective behaviours ☐ Understanding/application of the Boxall Profile/ how to identify appropriate children, set targets and what strategies will support the development of those targets ☐ Knowledge of SEN and ensuing strategies (e.g. relevant "medical conditions") ☐ **Knowledge of child development/early years/psychology** e.g. child-initiated/centred learning ☐ Knowledge of outside agencies/referral processes ☐ Safe-guarding ☐ Training on SEAL/Silver SEAL ☐ Training on Family Links ☐ Knowledge of Attachment Theory (and relevant strategies) ☐ Knowledge of developing emotional literacy ☐ Working with parents ☐ Creative ways of literacy/numeracy teaching ☐ Possible 'curriculum' of a NG, planning, target setting	**For teachers:** ☐ Increased confidence ☐ Enhanced beliefs of their power to make a difference to pupils' learning (self efficacy) ☐ Development of enthusiasms for collaborative working (despite initial anxieties about being observed/receiving feedback) ☐ Greater commitment to changing practice and willingness to try new things ☐ Development of a wider range of learning activities in class and strategies for students ☐ OVERALL: positive impact upon teachers' repertoire of teaching and learning strategies, their ability to match these to their students' needs, their self-esteem, confidence and commitment to continuing learning and development ☐ staff feel reassured that their practice is effective/aligned with training suggestions ☐ NG staff develop practical, usable strategies for their work with young people
☐ The use of external expertise linked to school-based activity	☐ Combination of external expertise and peer support ☐ Support from a NG consultant	
☐ Understanding the theory behind professional change	☐ Explicit teaching of the theory behind professional change means teachers learn what will help them to make changes in their practice/ what is 'good' CPD/training	
☐ Resources: e.g. time	☐ Paid or negotiated non-contract time for participating teachers ☐ Specific time is available for discussion, planning and feedback, and/or collaborative lesson planning within workshops	☐ Staff who are trained well are confident and deal with situations prior to them

	☐ Access to suitable resources e.g. ICT	escalating into a difficult situation and prevent crises
☐ Training is directly relevant for participants a takes account of participants previous knowledge and experience ☐ Scope for teachers to identify their own professional development focus ☐ Interventions designed to take account of what teachers knew and could do already	☐ Enables participants to develop skills, knowledge and understanding which will be practical, relevant and applicable to their current role/career aspiration. ☐ Choices within the CPD programme which enable individuals to find an appropriate focus and level, so individuals can identify their own needs and ensure they are taken into account. Increased commitment due to increased autonomy and personalisation ☐ Interventions designed to take account of what teachers knew and could do already means targeted support and teachers feel there is value in what they are learning (not just learning about something they already know) ☐ NG Staff consulted on training needs and are able to suggest topics for future training e.g. around specific concerns such as Speech and Language. Canvassing of NG staff views prior to training	☐ NG staff are well trained, committed to training and can access on-going training opportunities, this increases their confidence, develops their skills and heightens their awareness of children's needs ☐ Given the links between "collaborative and sustained CPD and increased teacher confidence, self-esteem, enthusiasm and commitment to continuing to learn about teaching" is there an ensuing impact on retention and recruitment?
☐ Observation and feedback, working with outside agencies	☐ Visit and observe practice in a variety of settings (gives insight into what others are doing, and reinforces that own practice is correct/identify where it needs development) – also gives you template by which to adapt own practice ☐ Direct classroom observation supports staff in identifying where they need to adapt their practice. Observation of teaching by 'experts', and feedback (usually based on observation) helps developing teaching skills (importance of this being done in a non- threatening manner). ☐ Observation used as basis for discussion about focus of CPD and its impact. Observations conducted in collaborative and supportive manner.	
☐ ☐ One off courses	☐ One-off, one-day or short residential courses with no planned classroom activities as a follow-up and/or no plans for building systemically upon existing practice	
☐ ☐ Training for others	☐ Training of whole school/MS staff at NG school e.g. regarding Family Links/Attachment	

☐ **CPD is sustained and collaborative:** collaboration with other teachers, and teachers collaborating with other professional colleagues on a sustained basis ☐ Timing of training/sustained opportunities for training	☐ Mentoring for new teachers means they feel more comfortable to discuss concerns in supportive context. Supported by coaching/mentoring from experienced colleagues (inside or outside school). Coaching most effective when staff with identified need is paired with colleague with expertise in this domain. Mentoring/coaching by other NG staff. Peer support, shadowing, apprenticeships. ☐ Hearing from others their 'real life nurture experiences'. Opportunities to share own experiences/share expertise. ☐ Processes to encourage, extend and structure professional dialogue e.g. use of supervision, NG clusters ☐ Opportunities for joint planning (means individual teachers feel supported/not isolated), and encourages the sharing of good practice ☐ Opportunities for team teaching - models effective learning and teaching strategies e.g. active learning, and opportunities to try things out in supportive setting ☐ Use of coaching (support) teams and study groups e.g. regular NG clusters – sometimes within school day – provide opportunities to share practice ☐ Emphasis on peer support, rather than supervisory or managerial leadership is more empowering ☐ Increased teacher collaboration acts as positive model for collaborative working between pupils ☐ Processes for sustaining professional development over time to enable teachers to embed the practices in their own classroom settings	**For students:** ☐ Enhanced student learning ☐ Demonstrable enhancement of student motivation ☐ Improvements in performance e.g. tests ☐ More positive responses to specific subjects ☐ Better organisation of work ☐ Increased sophistication in response to questions ☐ Increased collaborative working amongst pupils ☐ changes in attitudes/beliefs ☐ OVERALL: positive impact upon student learning processes, motivation and outcomes
☐ Resources: e.g. time	☐ Paid or negotiated non-contract time for participating teachers ☐ Specific time is available for discussion, planning and feedback, and/or collaborative lesson planning within workshops ☐ Access to suitable resources e.g. ICT	
☐ Evaluation of impact, with a shared vision and defined outcomes for evaluation	☐ CPD which provide planned opportunities for teachers' learning prior to, during, and/or after specific interventions (e.g. NG activities), and which enables teachers to relate inputs to existing and future practice ☐ Each activity is part of a coherent long-term plan that gives the participants opportunities to apply what they have learned, evaluate the effect on their practice, and develop their practice.	

	☐ Impact on teaching and learning is evaluated, and evaluation used to guide subsequent professional development activities	
☐ Research focus	☐ Use of action research by teachers (reflective process of progressive problem solving, led by individuals working with others to improve the way they address issues and solve problems) ☐ Use of research literature as a springboard for dialogue/experimentation ☐ Based on best available evidence about teaching and learning	
☐ Expertise of providers	☐ Provided by people with necessary experience, expertise and skills (e.g. peers or specialists – internal or external) ☐ Experience and passion of the trainer (trainer has relevant experience of NGs, perhaps ran one themselves)	
☐ Structure/nature of training	☐ Specific initial training for new NG staff, then collaborate/joint training for CPD of all NG staff ☐ Workshops/conferences for more experienced staff ☐ Pre-training activities to enable focus on specific areas e.g. pre-reading ☐ Revisit learning once had experience in the NG – "until you are actually doing it that **you know what you don't know!"** ☐ Training itself has a nurturing focus, staff feel nurtured, experience the sensation of being nurtured oneself – "the actual general ethos of the nurture group, comes through the whole nurturing way that the whole conference is done, training day is done" ☐ Both NG staff have access to CPD/training, not just group leader ☐ Bi-annual peer training in geographical clusters ☐ Annual day conference, bespoke activity out of school e.g. Training on SEAL, Family Links (Nurturing Programme) with linked parenting course, Resilience, Attachment, Neuroscience ☐ Explicit modelling within the CPD, of the practices the programme aims to enable amongst teachers. Modelling of new methods means staff can see the skill/concept they are being expected to deliver/greater understanding of what to do	

APPENDIX XV Group Realist Interview schedule and PowerPoint slides

Using a Realistic Evaluation framework to consider what constitutes effective Nurture Group Staff practice, how it is facilitated, and what makes effective training/CPD for NG staff

28.3.2011

Oonagh Davies

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Research reminders

- Your participation is entirely voluntary
- You are free to decline to answer any question
- You are free to withdraw at any time
- Sign consent

- Group rules:
  - Confidentiality
  - Any others?

Today's Task

- Two sections
- You are being asked to reflect individually and respond collectively to a range of factors, extracted from both your interview data and also from the literature/research regarding what others have said about:
  1. Compensatory education, Nurture Groups, other small group therapeutic interventions, and effective teaching
  2. Effective training/CPD for nurture group staff

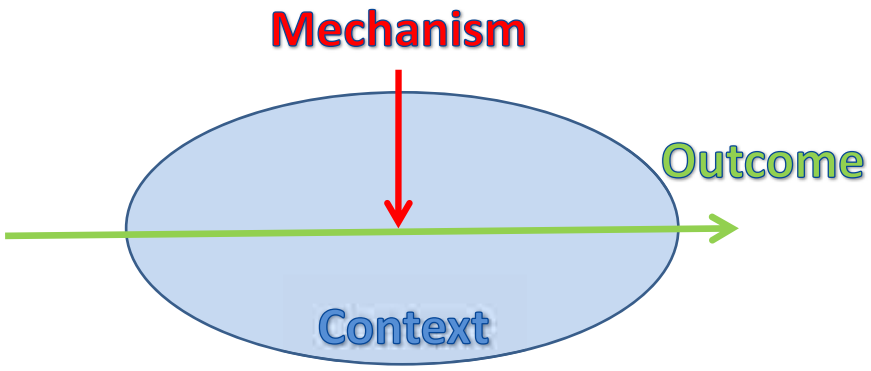
Aim of the Focus Group

The research involves me 'learning' your theories about effective NG practice and effective training, formalising these theories, 'teaching' them back to you, so you can then comment upon, clarify and further refine the key ideas...

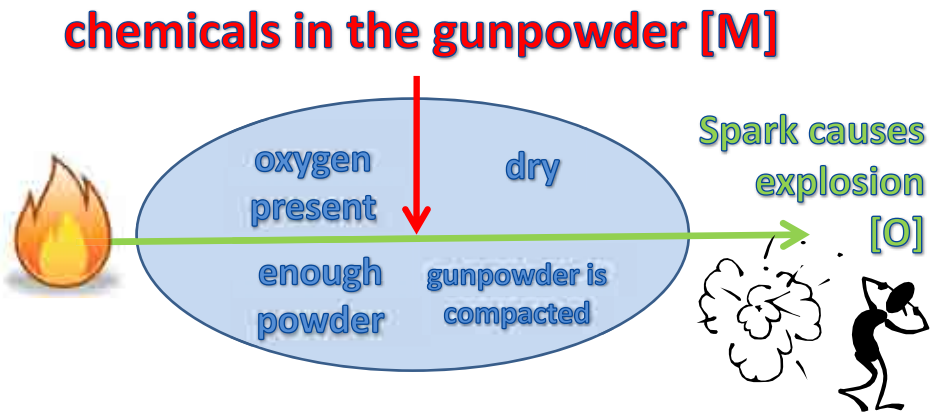
.. we are developing <u>together</u> our theories about Nurture Groups (NGs) and effective staff practice, and training/CPD for NG staff

"what might work, for whom, and in what circumstances"

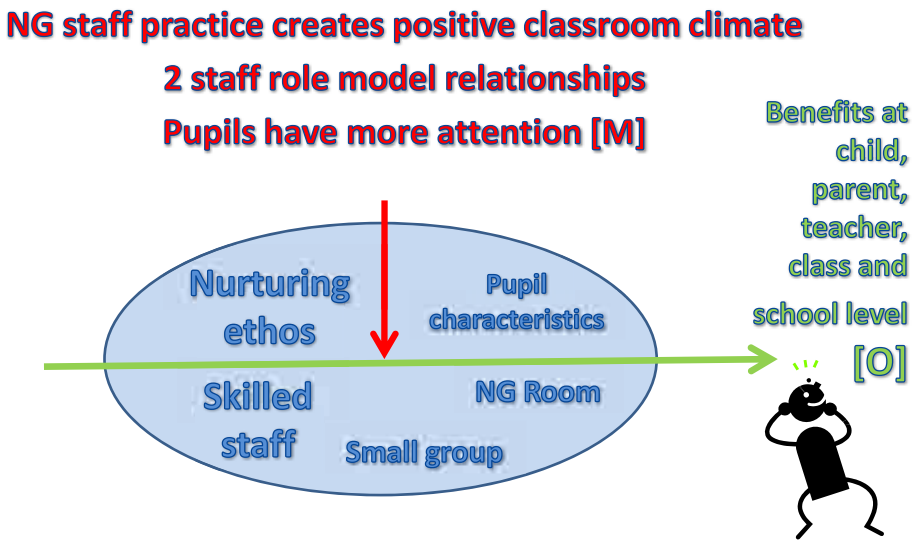
Realistic Evaluation:



Lighting Gunpowder:



Nurture Groups:



Mechanisms = The things people working within the programme do or manipulate to produce the desired outcomes ('why' a programme works).

What is it about NGs or training which may lead it to have a particular outcome pattern in a given context?

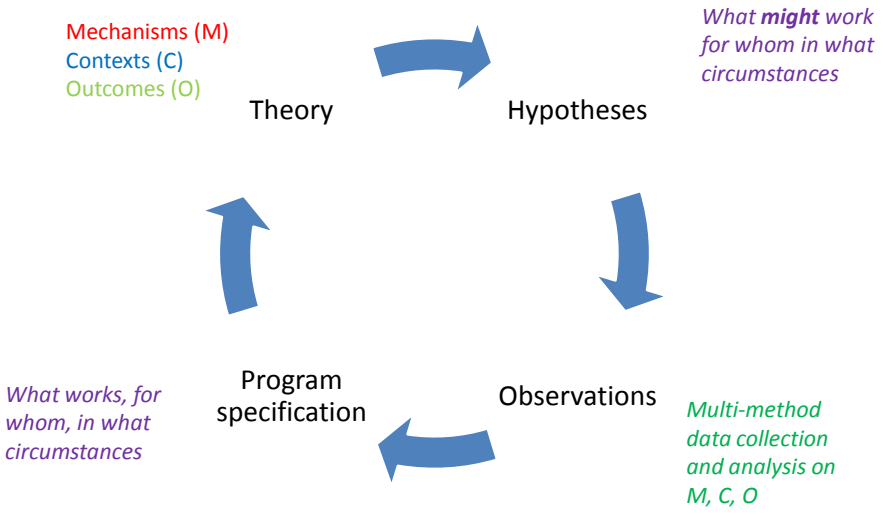
Contexts = settings within which the programmes are placed OR factors outside the control of programme designers e.g. people's motivation, organisational contexts/structures ('for whom/in what circumstances' a programme works').

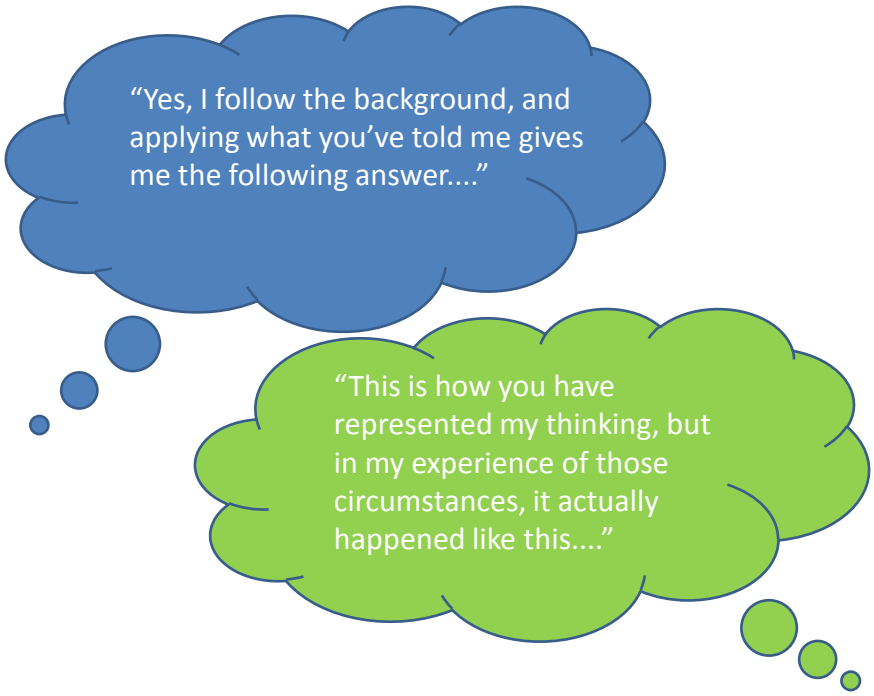
What conditions are needed for NGs or training to trigger mechanisms to produce particular outcome patterns?

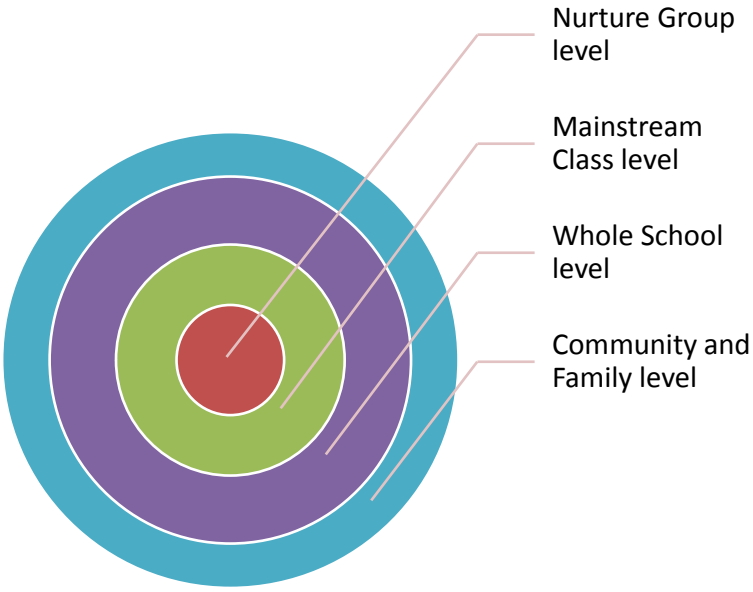
Outcome Patterns = What happens as a result of NGs or training

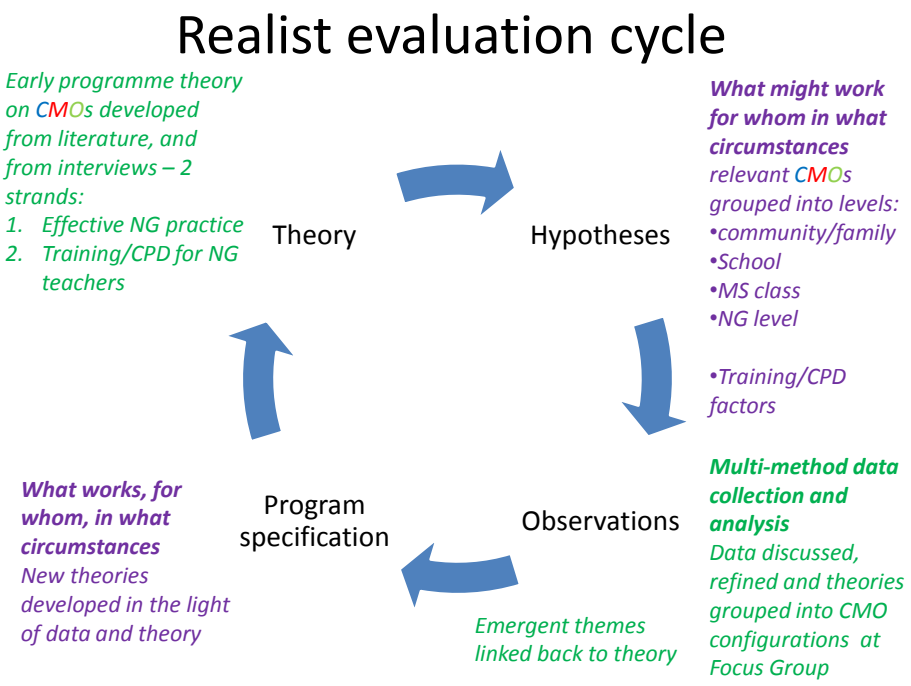
What are the practical effects produced by causal mechanisms being triggered in a given context?

Realist evaluation cycle






Nurture Group level
Mainstream Class level
Whole School level
Community and Family level


Realist evaluation cycle
Early programme theory on CMOs developed from literature, and from interviews – 2 strands:
1. Effective NG practice
2. Training/CPD for NG teachers
Theory
Hypotheses
What might work for whom in what circumstances
relevant CMOs grouped into levels:
•community/family
•School
•MS class
•NG level
•Training/CPD factors
Observations
Multi-method data collection and analysis
Data discussed, refined and theories grouped into CMO configurations at Focus Group
Emergent themes linked back to theory
Program specification
What works, for whom, in what circumstances
New theories developed in the light of data and theory

Activity 1

NURTURE GROUPS/EFFECTIVE TEACHING:

1. Individually: go through the C, M, O sheets, indicate how important you think each factor is (7-8 mins per sheet)
2. In pairs/groups: use the cut up C, M, Os for each level and arrange the C, M, Os in order of relative importance – try to create C-M-Os that link together
3. Group discussion

Rating scale

This factor is....

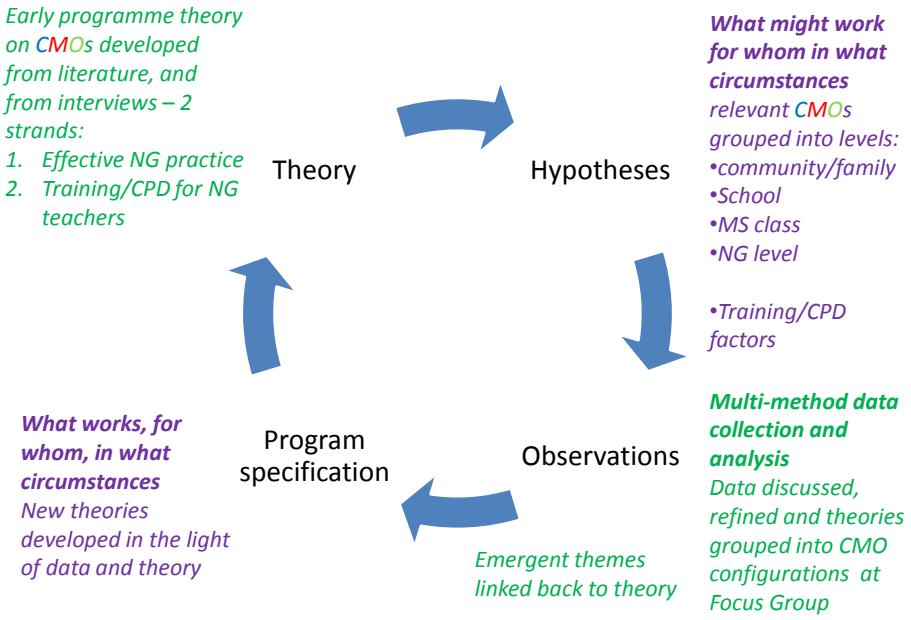
1. Essential
2. Desirable
3. Slightly important
4. Not important

Activity 2

TRAINING/CPD:

1. Individually: go through the C, M, O sheets, indicate how important you think each factor is (5-6 mins per sheet)
2. In pairs: use the cut up C, M, Os for each level and arrange the C, M, Os in order of relative importance – try to create C-M-Os that link together
3. Group discussion

Realist evaluation cycle



APPENDIX XVI Group Realist Interview transcribed exemplar

(see Chapter 5, Figures 5.8 and 5.9 for structure)

Small group (Participants 1, 2, 4, 6 and 10)

OD "Do think out loud with this..."

P8 "its trying to spot those things that are absolutely essential" P4 "or not essential"

(*speaking about curriculum*) P2 "I'd say that's pretty essential...that's one of those things when I talk to other groups they can become unstuck because depending on how pushed they are to do the other things... experience I'd put lower down... lower" P2 "you get your experience doing it"

"Pupil selection , goes with pupil characteristics but goes below it, but that will link to the dynamics...."

"put support for staff lower, as have to get on with it whether there's support or not"

OD – explained that professional characteristics data comes from data on effective teaching

"Training put lower" P2 "lowish... its useful but..." P8 "I'd put it higher"

OD – "Why did you put it higher... what's your thinking P8?"

P8... "because, I've found because we've both done it we both know how we're thinking its helped us to work together and understand where we're taking the children"

P1 "I didn't do the training" P10 "but you'd had the experience of someone else doing the training" P2 "which I'd had" P4"and my TA started with no training and still hasn't" P8 "but if you've got it" P4 "I haven't" *OD "but you've done other training like early years and child development..."* P10 "and you've learnt from other nurture groups in Coalshire"

P10 "there's a lot of bandying about of the word nurture...it's quality control to have the training... you'll go...'I do that'... 'I do that'..." P8 "and though you go 'I do that'...now it makes more sense" P10 "you know why"

OD "that suggests that when we do the training... one of the outcomes you've told me the training gives you is reassurance ...its not necessarily telling you anything new" P8 "it's also like when you've got stuck...you're like ah-hah"

P2 "its also how much understanding the whole school staff have"

P2 "Personality... I think that very much goes with the one where it's about two people working together... as its the personality of both of you really" P4 "yeah you work together"

P4 "are there any we want to change?" P2 "I think we all quite closely agreed didn't we? We all seem to be quite in agreement... it must be good"

Joking around when OD said "shall we blue tack, then glue our responses" – joking that they didn't want other group to change them... "when other group see what they say?"

OD went to other group

P "positive climate sort of links to staff characteristics" *All agreed this was really important*

Discussing the classroom climate "you just get a feel for it straight away" *(i.e. when you visit one)*

The group put 'staff create a positive classroom climate' and 'personal characteristics of staff' alongside each other (as equally important) – more important than the professional characteristics

"Room characteristics... if you haven't got it can still go ahead... muddle along" *(explaining why room characteristics was lower/less important)*

P8 "In a way pupil perceptions is something you have to create"

P10 "psychological theory is not as important as the others... that's what you've got an EP for... it's handy but not essential"

"Pupil characteristics and group selection – we want a link between there"

P10 "you've got to have the right personality to do some of these" *(i.e. build relationships, create positive classroom)*

P10 "the be all and end all isn't money but in the new climate...in the new world..it may be higher than we would perhaps have put it one or two years ago"

"negative effect on MS staff" P2 "it shouldn't be high as long as the relationship and communications are going on between the nurture group and other staff" P8 "it might take that teacher time to form a relationship but the whole point is you've taught that child *how* to make a relationship with an adult"

OD joined them again

P4 "it's a negative one so it's confused us"

OD "I put that in because that's actually from the literature, although some of you did say some negative outcomes of nurture groups.... but I suppose it's how important do you think that is...do you think that does happen a lot?" (the negative impact on MS staff)

P10 "it doesn't happen now as we've got so many part-time groups... if you had an LA where all groups were 'classic' it perhaps is more of an important issue...but for Coalshire it isn't.. as most of our groups are part time so they're with their *[MS]* teacher for half a day anyway"

OD "ok...so why don't you annotate that... so there's one about timings and structure.. that links with part-time and full-time attendance... so it sounds like that's [the structure] important for full-time"

“it *could* be important” *(i.e. could not be too)* “I think it’s about teaching those children about relationships so the adults have got to...” P4 “ it could be important if it happened so we so we don’t let it happen”

Discussing academic improvement P10 “higher test scores need to come right down” *[meaning not a high priority/valued outcome] OD “I’ve clustered these as broadly pupil outcomes but like you say if academic outcomes are much lower... just annotate it”*

P10 “it’s not proving the effectiveness of the nurture group... they might never get a high mark in a spelling test...you know what I mean” P8 “its more that they can access or start to access learning”

P4 “this one feels more right*... (lots of group agreement...)* “that’s..that feels more comfortable” *(describing outcomes where ‘children feel more loved/positive view of themselves/have a go at things’)*

P8 “if they’re willing to have a go at it..at some point they might make that step” *(i.e. academic step/gains)*

P1 “put that first... *(positive child outcomes)* then that helps the parents”

OD “are these the same level here?” [referring to pupil outcomes and parental reports] lots of murmurs of agreement/ ‘yes’ *OD “its interesting as that’s a big cluster there... you might think that social skills comes higher...would it help to have scissors?”*

P4 “It’s these ones here that go there... we’re ok with these ones then being here...it comes next” *[referring to change in attitudes/feelings/self esteem - indicated that these are the precursors to other Outcomes e.g. need these Outcomes in order to access learning]*

OD “so is what you’re saying to me is the things that are most important to you are how the child feels about themselves.. this comes first” P8/P2 “yes” *OD “ and then skill development?”* P4 “comes later” *OD “comes later as a result of them feeling better...*” ALL P “yeah” “yes”

P8 “yes” “yes” “to me that’s what nurture is..... in order for children to be able to go off... its that .. it’...s what’s that attachment thing?... um...explore?” *OD “exploration...you’re right... leaving the secure base to explore.. is that what you mean?”* P8 “yes...thank you ... in there somewhere!”

P10 “it’s that ability to learn.... we’re trying to give them the ability to start the learning process...rather than do the learning process” P4 “yes” P8 “are we happy with that?” ALL “yes”

OD “thanks so much for this” P10 “it’s really interesting actually” P4 “mmm”

P10 “your head was completely on board with this” [discussion with another participant regarding practice]

OD “it’s a bit cheeky of me asking you to take this home?” [referring to taking C, M, Os home to rank] P8 “no...I’d rather do it in my own zone” P2 “yeah... I can concentrate”

OD "my kind of view [from the discussion] .... is that it is people's personal characteristics" ALL "absolutely" *OD "combined with professional characteristics that create this atmosphere in the NG that goes on"* ALL "yeah" *OD "but I felt those are the essential mechanisms... if you don't have the right person you don't have the right climate... you don't have anything?"*

Discussing whether groups needed to be teacher or TA led P2 "I don't agree.. I think it depends on the person not what you've done" (Teacher) "it's the same as social class"

P10 "my view is that its much easier to run a NG in an unsupportive school if you're a teacher rather than a teaching assistant because you haven't got the same clout.. but if it's a good supportive environment it doesn't make a halfpenny of a difference"

OD "so that's really interesting..so the context of the school has more of an impact if its TA led?" P10 "I think so" OD "and it's not to do with the qualities of the TA it's to do with how they're perceived by staff then really...is that what you're saying?" ALL "yes" O*D "is that something you'd agree with P1 as you're a TA leading a group?"* P10 "if you feel powerless it's very difficult to keep going" P1 "absolutely....I think it's about recognition and respect... respect what you're doing and understanding...so yes it's a whole school issue.." P2 "and that you're thought of as an equal.." P10 "absolutely" P2 "...if there was an issue with one of the NG children staff wouldn't think twice about seeing P3, it wouldn't matter that 'oh she's not the teacher I better speak to P2'.. they could catch either of us knowing that we're both equal there...and the children see that too" P1 "and the parents" *OD "because it could be an advantage too.. not being a teacher.. because of how you're perceived by parents?"* P1/P2 "absolutely" P10 "definitely" *OD [referring to the individual interviews] "sometimes the TAs have said they're viewed as less official and that doesn't mean the teachers are coming across as official but just that people have a [negative] perception of teachers, maybe because of their own experiences..."* P2 "yes"

P10 "I'll tell you something else that's interesting.. if P1 [NG TA leader] were to do training for the TAs in the classrooms...it would have more impact sometimes than if a teacher was to do it...my TA, her training has more impact with lunchtime staff and TAs than mine does...because she has that natural empathy and experience and can say 'when I was TA-ing this is what happened" P1 "I find a lot of the other TAs come to me" P10 "because they've got a natural relationship with you?" P1 "yes"

OD "could that be an important point for the training... that it is delivered by someone whose got experience of working in a nurture group?" ALL "yes" or "mmmm" *OD "maybe if we [the LA] think about if there are volunteers from the NGs to deliver the training... that will have more of an impact"*

P10 "*[the director]* was thinking about how we can use the expertise of the team to come under the umbrella of the training arm... it makes enormous sense" P2 "it does yeah" *OD "it would also make sense to use the information from what you've all said today?"* P2 "yes" *OD "to maybe inform the content of that training... and also the structure of that training perhaps?"*

All participants back together (P1-10) after 50 minutes (see Chapter 5, Figures 5.8 and 5.9)

Group Discussion regarding community/family level factors from ranking/sorting activity

1. Discussing outside support and whether it was important

"doesn't happen very often" rather than that they didn't think it was important

"it's important but don't feel it's there" "yeah don't wait for it"

"I would love more support...its desirable"

OD "so outside support would rank higher if there was more of it?"

"yes" P6 "and it gets cancelled and its delayed"

2. Parental involvement

"Really important mechanism and outside support is lower" 'yes'

3. Outcomes for children on top, then outcomes for parents

Lots of "yes"

Group Discussion regarding whole school level factors from ranking/sorting activity

1. *Head and Governors/SMT on board really important* "lots of yes"
2. *Dedicated room*
3. *Staff involvement/awareness, ethos of school, time and space etc*

OD "that's really interesting [regarding layout of factors]... 'ethos' is possibly lower than I might have expected from your individual interviews..you've said support from Head and Governors/SMT first, dedicated room is second then ethos and everything else?"

P7 "but they drive the ethos don't they?" P1 "and without that [head/room] you haven't got a hope have you" *OD "so is that how you'd see it... that the head drives the ethos?"* SEP "it's 'top down' in nature" P10 "you wouldn't have a room if the head's not on board" *OD "so ethos is important but you'd see the head as the ultimate facilitator of that ethos... you wouldn't get it otherwise?"* P7 "you've got to have someone believing in what you're doing and the importance of it.. for it to be successful..and for you to feel valid.. they have to be on board"

Mechanisms – Group wanted all of these at the top

Outcomes – OD summarising what she'd heard of P3, P5, P6, P7 and P9's discussion - "whole school effects were seen as more important than staff views or pupil outcomes... but when we got to the bottom of that... they [the participants] weren't saying the whole school effects were more important but if that [whole school effects] happened you were then more likely to get that impact on the children"

Group Discussion regarding MS class level factors from ranking/sorting activity

OD "You've put a 'united and consistent approach by NG and MS staff' above everything and I think that's a really good point as could that be driving everything else?" SEP "and it's also what the children see..."

OD "I think it's really interesting that you put small group size relatively lower because does that then suggest NGs are not the same as just any small group intervention?"

Group discuss this point – didn't mean that group size not important – it has to be small – but that this isn't as important as other factors - P10 "the actual number of pupils is very important" P7 "to build relationships"

OD "so...where do you want it?" Group suggested to move it up

Group Discussion regarding NG level factors from ranking/sorting activity

OD "you said the relationship between the climate the teacher creates and characteristics of the NG staff are paramount?" P1 "yes... we discussed that on our table too... that you need the right kind of person... because not everybody can do it" P9 ".... not everyone wants to do it either" *OD "is this what sets it [NGs] aside? Because anyone can be a good maths teacher if you've got the right skills... is it these personal characteristics that's setting you apart?"* P1 "it's what puts it aside from other small group interventions... because of the type of person"

Discussing pupil outcomes OD "it seems like what you've put here is that what you're after is these changes of attitudes, children's sense of self first...that's the precursor for everything else?" Others/ ALL P "absolutely" P6 " you can't rush that...." Others "yes" murmurs of agreement...

Discussed the tools we use to measure change e.g. SDQ. As what the group consider most important is changes in children's attitudes/sense of self. OD "ok so do we need better self perception measures?" "do you think that's something I could put as a recommendation then? That we look at developing some scales for the children to rate how they feel before entering the group... how they feel after?...this could be an outcome of the research? ....that would give you some way of pinning down those slightly intangible change?" murmurs of agreement

P8 "do you know what you were saying about other interventions as well....it occurred to me that lots of other interventions only have one adult and perhaps one of the big differences in NGs is that its two adults modelling together...if you're the only adult doing it you can't model in the same way..." *murmurs of agreement* P8 "whereas if there are two adults there the children are actually seeing it working between two people..." SEP "you need a measure there then that looks at the children's security in relation to those adults too then"

OD "a number of you said that you don't run the group if one of you is absent... does this show the children how important it is who's running it?... reinforcing the idea that not anyone can do it"

P3 “we’ve introduced the nurture aunty now” [a third, designated person] *OD “will she have had the same training?”* P3 “she hasn’t done the NG training but she sees them [the NG children] everyday... she does other groups in the school...does see them often...and has been in as a visitor to see what happens...it’s been put in place so that the group still runs if one of us isn’t in”

P10 “we need to remember that one of the quality marks [referring to The Majorie Boxall Quality Award] is the group doesn’t run if the designated staff aren’t there... so if it works in this context fine but I wouldn’t make that as a recommendation as it goes against the quality mark standard”

Group Discussion regarding training/CPD C, M, Os from ranking/sorting activity

OD “Observation of practice...would that be an important mechanism to you?” P7 “are you talking about us being observed?” *OD “maybe...by each other?”* P7 “because that’s a real issue... us being observed by the remit that Head teachers use to observe a numeracy lesson...” *[described this, highlighting how the observation schedule used didn’t reflect what the learning objectives of the NG might be – as these may be very different from typical lesson objectives]*

OD “So if you’re observed... it needs to be against NG criteria?” murmurs of “yes” *OD “you can say what you want.... if you don’t want this as a factor?”* P9 “Is there a different word that we could use instead of observed?... working alongside?” *Group suggested* “team teach” “team working” “collaborative” “visit established group” P9 “collaborative training or something like that... because I know when I came here..when I first started out... so you see how someone else runs it and choose what’s best for you..” P6 “I think that’s a really important factor... because they’re all so different... and you take ideas that you like and will suit your need”

Discussed ‘bespoke training’ P10 “did used to do bespoke training but that didn’t happen this year”

OD “family links came out very high from all of you so I’ll definitely be mentioning that”

P10 “can you add on to that.. neuroscience... because that’s been very well received”

Discussed ‘resources P7 “that’s huge”

Discussed ‘training for others/other school staff’ lots of yes’

Discussed “external consultant” – placed in middle P7 “I would be resistant to ... you’ve got to do this” “you want whoever is offering that to have a very good understanding of what nurture is about” P1 “ideally having worked in a nurture group... done it themselves...” P7 “absolutely”

P10 “I found new groups really valued NG consultant”

SEP “NG clusters...that’s often a springboard for training issues”

Evaluation of impact P10 “it’s something we haven’t done a great deal of to be honest” *OD “maybe [could develop] some way for the children to evaluate the impact [of the NG] on them”* P1 “I think that would be great for the class teachers they are going back to as well, and everyone else in the school... because unless its ‘academic’ they don’t seem to take note of what you’ve done...”

P7 discussed how if training is good/motivating it helps NG staff transmit that positivity into the class and the children then gain an indirect benefit

P1 “it starts with us... to be honest”

Discussed this research - OD “a lot of research looks at just the outcomes and this is trying to look at well what’s actually causing those outcomes.. it’s all very well to say the children are making progress but why do they make progress? and it’s looking like your theories about why they make progress is it’s that interaction between your personal characteristics and your skills creating these classroom climates where children can flourish but its more than just being a small group intervention.... its more than that” murmur of agreement/nodding

P10 “I would suggest that the NGN look at your research alongside quality control mark... because at the moment you get the same tick no matter how relevant the mark is.... the standards need to be rated in my opinion according to crucial – not so important – the criteria are all given the same weighting – whereas much of this is standards – and some things are more important than others to have in place.... [especially as the] quality mark is still in its infancy... still evolving”

OD “do you meant they need to separate out [distinguish] those characteristics that you think are most important?” murmur of agreement/nodding

OD discussed how literature on teacher effectiveness research, does rank skills.

OD “We could come up with our own competencies for being an effective NG teacher?” murmur of agreement/nodding

Gave my thanks to the group. Recapped about issues of anonymity and confidentiality.

APPENDIX XVII Means/Collated responses to Cs, Ms and Os data from interviews and realist synthesis

COMMUNITY AND FAMILY LEVEL

KEY: 1 = Essential; 2 = Desirable; 3 = Slightly important; 4 = Not important.

	MEAN				MEAN
OUTSIDE SUPPORT:	1.86	**WORK WITH OUTSIDE AGENCIES:**	1.90	**PARENTS:**	1.87
NG staff are supported by outside agencies	1.71	NG staff are supported by and work collaboratively with outside agencies to support the educational, health, social, and emotional development of the pupils	1.43	As home contact more positive, parents have increased engagement with school	1.57
NG staff have good knowledge of outside agencies and referral processes	2.00	NG staff can mediate/advocate for parents with outside agencies (help secure provisions/share strategies)	1.71	Report more positive behaviour at home	1.71
OUTSIDE SUPPORT:	2.38	EP coordinates the initiative in the LA	2.29	Support and value NG as they see a positive difference in their child - happy/grateful their child attends NG	1.57
Clear frameworks (e.g. CAF) are used to coordinate support for families.	2.00	EP communicates about groups to other LA agencies, contributing to strategic planning for future groups to other LA agencies	2.00	Know how to help their children/ have learnt new skills	1.71
FAMILY/COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS:	2.76	EP contributes to quality assurance	2.00	Are signposted to relevant outside agencies	2.14
Parental socio-economic status	2.57	Frameworks (e.g. CAF) ensure coordinated support for families	2.00	Grow in confidence, become a nucleus for driving other initiatives forward	2.14
Parental education	2.57	**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT:**	1.37	Visit school more frequently	2.29
Parental ethnicity	3.29	Parents have good understanding of role/purpose of NG so support their child's involvement	1.57	Negative feedback cycle changed to positive	1.43
Affluence	3.00	NG staff offer non-judgemental, empathetic support to parents e.g. recognise parents may 'feel judged'	1.14	Whole family is positively affected	1.43
Population density	2.86	NG has an 'open door policy' for parents/are easily accessible which fosters good/regular communication with parents (good news passed on), and sharing of strategies	1.43	Removes the barriers between school and families	1.57

Geographical location	2.86	NG staff 'scaffold' parents' learning about how to 'nurture'/ how their interactions can impact positively on their child's behaviour, so parents develop knowledge of how to support their child's development in parallel with their child's learning – application of new skills in the home environment	1.43	NG staff build relationships with children, parents and families which persist over time, and continue once children have left the group (NG staff can offer on-going support)	1.86
Child returns to very negative environment at end of school day, effectiveness of group can be unpicked	2.14	NG staff have more awareness/knowledge of home background and are empathetic	1.29	*Child's increased confidence and reduced anxiety, undermined by parents*	2.00
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT:	1.50			*Return to negative home environment undermines progress made by children in NG*	2.50
Support for parents runs in parallel to NG e.g. parenting skills group/positive discipline is modelled/ 'drop in Friday'	1.86			*Return to negative home environment prevents children making any progress*	2.20
Parents (sensitively) given information regarding rational/purpose of NGs	1.43			**NG CHILDREN:**	1.45
Parents are encouraged to participate, come in and observe practice	1.57			Improved emotional wellbeing	1.00
NG staff recognise the importance of working with the parents	1.14			Learn 'coping' strategies they can apply at home	1.00
OUTSIDE SUPPORT:	1.86			Increased resiliency and can cope with life's adversities	1.43
NG staff are supported by outside agencies	1.71			Improved health outcomes e.g. brushing teeth	2.14
NG staff have good knowledge of outside agencies and referral processes	2.00			Appear more confident	1.57
				Likes school more and enjoys coming	1.57

WHOLE SCHOOL LEVEL

	MEAN		MEAN		MEAN
STAFF INVOLVEMENT/AWARENESS:	1.48	**SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS:**	1.21	**NG CHILDREN:**	1.69
Whole staff awareness and understanding of the rationale and practice of the NG with all staff (e.g. including lunch supervisors) briefed about principles of group and type of provision it offers	1.43	School actively promotes staff involvement in supporting the social and emotional development of its pupils, as reflected in training provided for staff re NG and school's behaviour and learning policies	1.43	Apply strategies they have learnt in the NG	1.43
Whole school forum to discuss intervention strategies	1.43	Nurturing ethos means that the relationships between all staff and pupils are positive and affirming	1.29	Feel safe within whole school	1.00
All staff trained in 'Family Links' with training updates for all staff/new staff	1.57	NG staff feel supported by their head and mainstream colleagues as they have awareness of NG and are working towards a shared vision	1.00	Make qualitative improvements in desirable behaviour across school resulting from more positive, consistent language of staff	1.43
Head teacher/SMT have been trained in rationale/practice of NGs so have good awareness and understanding	1.57	The focus of support of NG towards wider inclusion of children in school, is acknowledged and valued	1.14	Exclusions are reduced/prevented	2.00
Other staff and children have access to the group e.g. invited for snack or activity time	1.83	**STAFF INVOLVEMENT/AWARENESS:**	1.39	Less disruption in assemblies	2.57
NG staff have high informal status in school.	1.67	Whole school staff are trained regularly on the rationale and workings of the NG, new staff given training too, so consistency of messages/learning from NG is across the whole school	1.57	**STAFF:**	1.80
NG staff part of SMT/have advocate on SMT	1.83	As all staff are trained in Family Links, all use the same 'language' ensuring consistency of approach	1.86	Positive evidence of staff learning from training e.g. feel able to support them in class	1.86
Head teacher/SMT have 'shared vision; support role of NG and autonomy of NG staff, this is reflected in appropriate funding for NG	1.17	Continuity and consistency of approach in school e.g. NG children praised for meeting their targets, wherever they are in school. Staff around school notice NG children's positive behaviours e.g. on the playground and report them to the NG staff	1.14	Staff notice children's good behaviours	1.43

NG staff feel part of the whole school team, are kept 'in the loop'.	1.17	Head teachers' understanding of the NG means they support the group and this encourages the high status of the group within school	1.00	Reduced staff absenteeism and turnover, staff less stressed, with more energy	1.86
NG not an 'add on', but integral part of school, viewed positively by other children and staff	1.17	**ALLOCATION OF TIME AND SPACE:**	1.29	Greater consistency of approach	1.57
SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS:	2.08			Staff better able to access support and share concerns/strategies	1.86
Collegiality of staff	1.75			Staff more confident (e.g. to take NG on trips)	1.86
Ethos/school culture: School has a nurturing, inclusive whole school ethos, with a focus on the 'whole child' - all staff adopt this approach and value it. School ethos which "puts children first"	1.17	Allocation of resource/ time for group means NG has status/profile within the school	1.29	Enhanced behaviour management practice, and more energy to implement	1.86
Size of school	3.17			Enhanced teaching practice	2.14
Building and Facilities	3.17			Staff empowered/feel empowered	1.71
Behaviour and learning policy e.g. all staff follow a positive BP	1.17			Positive shift in teachers' thinking re. ability of staff as well as home to influence children's social and emotional development	1.86
Proportion of high-ability intake	3.00			**WHOLE SCHOOL EFFECTS:**	1.98
Groundwork has been done – school in a 'state of readiness'	2.00			'Language' of school changes (Family Links)	1.57
School has had experience of other small group interventions	2.71			Nurturing approach/ethos is reinforced	1.43
'A philosophical bias' (towards inclusion/nurture)	1.57			Other children in school view NG positively	1.43
Head teacher with holistic approach to child development	1.71			Outside agencies notice improvements	1.71
Governors support head in their vision	1.43			School improvement (e.g. targets on SIP)	2.14
ALLOCATION OF TIME AND SPACE:	1.29			Teachers contribute to national educational policy	2.43
Timetable carefully planned (e.g. avoid clash with NG sessions, allows for resource preparation)	1.50			MS children receive higher quality teaching and learning experience	2.43
School channels resources into what children need	1.50			Reduced negative incidents at playtime	1.86
Head/Governors support NG so resources allocated accordingly	1.17			MS children feel jealous of NG children who "boast about their experience"	2.86
Dedicated room in school identified	1.00				

MAINSTREAM CLASS LEVEL

	MEAN		MEAN		MEAN
KNOWLEDGE OF NG:	1.52	**CONSISTENCY/CONTINUITY:**	1.62	**NG CHILDREN:**	1.65
All MS staff understand and value the role of the NG	1.29	School policy informs staff response to pupils in the classroom (e.g. appropriate support provided)	1.71	Successfully reintegrated into MS class	1.43
MS staff can identify children who may need this intervention	1.71	School's ethos affects staff response to pupils	1.71	Move down SEN COP	2.00
MS staff have time to visit NG, observe NG practice, see children in NG context	1.57	Nurturing in MS class continues beyond exit from NG	1.43	Have learnt and can apply strategies from NG so 'cope'/operate better in class/more resilient. Can function in class/cope with MS curriculum and/or can ask for help when needed	1.43
CONSISTENCY/CONTINUITY:	1.36	**KNOWLEDGE OF NG:**	1.29	More confident with taking risks e.g. with their learning, trying something new	1.57
Staff subscribe to the school's nurturing ethos	1.43	MS staff given clear explanation of purpose/ /rationale of NG (e.g. understand about 'curriculum holiday', learning objectives may focus on social/emotional development), ensures they respond appropriately	1.00	More engaged	1.43
Staff subscribe to school's learning and behaviour policy e.g. every classroom has a 'quiet place'	1.29	Early identification of those who may need NG	1.57	Improved attendance and punctuality	1.71
PERCEPTION OF NG	1.74	**PERCEPTION OF NG**	1.86	Learning progresses alongside their social development	1.86
MS staff respect and have confidence in NG staff	1.43	Observations by MS staff of NG children in NG context, and communication with NG staff, means MS staff have appropriate (high) expectations of NG pupils	1.86	Increasingly socialise with peers	1.71
MS staff have accurate perceptions of the NG children (e.g. 'don't view them as naughty', appropriate expectations of what can be achieved)	1.29	**MS AND NG STAFF COLLABORATION:**	1.54	Cause less disruption in MS class	1.71
MS staff have negative perceptions of NG staff (e.g. NG staff have "easy time")	2.50	NG staff gain trust of MS staff and support them with their practice, NG staff feel supported by MS colleagues	1.57	**PARENTS:**	1.86

MS AND NG STAFF COLLABORATION:	1.38	MS staff liaise/work with NG staff in order to understand the needs of NG children and implement strategies	1.14	Improved relationships between MS class teacher and NG child's parents	1.86
MS staff work positively and communicate well with NG staff. Appropriate information is shared	1.14	Timetabled liaison slots ensure regular meetings occur and that plans for NG child are shared	1.71	**CLASS TEACHER:**	1.91
NG staff included by MS staff	1.43	Targets set in the NG are shared with MS teacher, and worked on in MS class too e.g. shared IEP	1.14	Class teacher and NG staff agree that NG children make progress in behaviour and learning	1.57
Regular meetings occur	1.57	Staff ensure NG children maintain their class identity e.g. resister in MS, attend trips, in NG part time.	1.14	Improved understanding of the child, means they support NG children (and other vulnerable children) better in their class	1.71
MS TEACHER SKILLS/CHARACTERISTICS:	1.86	MS teacher retains responsibility for literacy/numeracy	1.57	Has appropriately high expectations of NG child	1.57
MS staff have appropriate personal qualities and skills to support NG pupils in their classroom	1.86	MS teachers supported with reintegration e.g. continued access to NG, support is on-going	1.57	Time away from challenging children for MS staff, gives MS staff recuperation time	2.14
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OCCASION:	2.82	Child's difficulties viewed as a shared concern	1.43	Reduced numbers in MS class, benefits MS staff, find it easier to cope with NG pupils when they return	2.57
Period of the academic year	3.14	NG staff, parents and MS teachers work together	1.29	**MS CHILDREN:**	2.07
Time of day	2.57	United, consistent approach by NG and MS staff	1.14		
Weather	2.86	*NG children "play members of staff off against each other"*	3.20	Reduced disruptions from NG children in their class lead to positive learning outcomes	2.00
Preceding lesson	2.71	**MS TEACHER SKILLS AND CHARACTERISTICS:**	1.64	Increased teacher attention	2.14
MS CLASS CHARACTERISTICS:	2.61	MS staff demonstrate appropriate personal qualities and skills to support NG pupils in their classroom e.g. are flexible, differentiate, adapt the curriculum creatively	1.57		
Class size	2.29	Provide opportunities to generalise learning from NG	1.71		
Range of ability	2.71				
Social class mix	2.71				
Curriculum pressures e.g. EY/Year 6	2.71				

NURTURE GROUP LEVEL

	MEAN		MEAN		MEAN
NG STAFF CHARACTERISTICS:	2.37	**NG STAFF CREATE A POSITIVE CLASSROOM CLIMATE BY PROVIDING PUPILS WITH:**	1.29	**PUPIL OUTCOMES:**	1.80
Gender	3.43	**Clarity**: e.g. around purpose of activity, appropriate feedback given	1.33	Measurable improvements in children's development are shown on assessment tools e.g. significant improvements in Boxall data, show emotional and behavioural difficulties are reduced on exit	1.43
Age	3.43	**Order:** discipline/ clear boundaries (helps pupils stay on task) ensures disruption to learning minimised	1.33	Some improvements in Literacy and/or Numeracy	2.43
Personality characteristics e.g. empathetic, warm, open, caring, fun, patient, enthusiastic	1.00	Clear set of **Standards** as to how pupils should behave/what each pupil should do and try to achieve/clear focus on high standards	1.33	Improved academic outcomes/higher test scores	2.86
Attitude	1.29	**Fairness:** absence of favouritism, and consistent link between rewards in the classroom and actual performance. **Consistency** of approach	1.00	Improved attitudes to school subjects	1.86
'Philosophy' of NG staff	1.29	**Participation:** opportunity for pupils to participate actively in class, staff use sensitive prompts/probes/questioning, often directed to whole group so no one singled out	1.50	Short-term and long-term positive cognitive/educational outcomes	2.14
Social class	3.86	**Support:** use of praise/focus on positives means pupils feel emotionally supported in the classroom, and are willing to try new things and learn from mistakes.	1.17	Some improvements in motor skills	2.43
Nature of teachers' training	2.71	**Safety and Security:** the degree to which the classroom is a safe place, where pupils are not at risk from emotional or physical bullying, or other fear-arousing factors. 'Safe haven'. An emotionally secure environment, relaxed and homely feel, children are provided with routines and have a sense of security so anxiety is reduced, and children are able to disclose	1.00	Develop Internal 'locus of control' (pupils with high internal locus of control believe that events result primarily from their own behaviour and actions, rather than believing chance/other people/fate are in control)	1.86
Experience: have had their own children	3.57	**Interest:** classroom is an interesting/ exciting place to be, pupils feel stimulated to learn. Learning is fun.	1.33	Increased motivation to complete academic tasks/ learn to stay on task/engage in academic activities	1.71

Experience: have had relevant experience of working with children	1.86	**Environment:** the feeling that the classroom is a comfortable, well organised, clean and attractive physical environment, good displays, NG room layout (home area etc.). Effects of room zoning mean home	1.50	Improved attendance	2.00
Teaching background (rather than TA)	3.14	**Stability:** low staff absence, clear routines and structure	1.17	Improved attitudes to school/enjoys school	1.57
From a background which aligns well with the concept of 'nurturing' (e.g. nursing, EY)	2.71	**Respect:** children are 'taught' about respect/respecting others, staff respect students	1.33	Able to work more independently	1.86
Prestige/selectivity of the institution attended by a teacher	3.86	Foster **autonomy:** children's confidence and self-esteem is promoted by the active promotion of autonomy in pupils e.g. contribute to group rules	1.50	Greater capacity to take risks e.g. learning	1.71
Teachers with specific certification teach that discipline e.g. trained in EY, teach EY	3.29	**PUPILS PERCEPTIONS, STRATEGIES AND BEHAVIOUR**	1.02	Reduced delinquency	2.00
TAs have NVQ level 3 and Special Needs Training	2.71	Pupils perceive staff as being understanding, helpful and friendly	1.83	Increased time on task	2.00
Lead NG staff has had specific training	1.43	Perceive the staff to show leadership without being too strict	1.20	Reduced behavioural problems	2.00
NG staff's aptitude/ achievement	2.14	**GROUP SELECTION:**	2.33	Improved self-esteem	1.71
Knowledge of Nurture Groups	1.57	Multi-method assessment (e.g. including Boxall Profile data) and consultation between NG and MS staff ensures 'appropriate' children are selected for the NG	1.17	Students make progress across multiple dimensions	1.86
Knowledge of pedagogy	1.83	Role of NG staff in selecting pupils means NG staff feel valued, listened to and empowered to make a difference	1.17	Missing gaps' in the child's social and emotional development are 'filled'	1.29
Knowledge of child development	1.57	**APPLICATION OF PERSONAL/PROFESSIONAL CHARACTERISTICS**	1.24	Children's basic needs are met e.g. food/clothing, and emotional needs	1.29
NG staff have an understanding of child development (social, emotional and behavioural), appreciate where children have come from/their background, and what needs developing	1.43	Staff apply their professional characteristics (e.g. professionalism, thinking, planning and expectations, leading, ability to relate to others, flexibility, respectful) and this is what creates the positive classroom climate	1.71	Original referral reason is met	2.14
NS staff have seen how other NGs are run	2.00	Staff have confidence, resilience, and strong interpersonal and communication skills	1.14	Children develop 'life skills' Children experience a 'developmental catch-up'	1.14

NG staff have background knowledge of the curriculum and experience of MS classrooms	2.00	Staff aware how their own behaviour contributes to/exacerbates or reduces child's difficulties and this understanding ensures they are reflective practitioners	1.14	Reduction in (permanent) exclusions	2.00
Staff have good knowledge of SEN/are the SENCO	2.43	Staff are 'firm but fair', and observant	1.14	Children develop their independence Children develop social skills, learn to turn-take and talk aloud, develop group play skills, learn to support and work with each other, and grow to know each other well	1.00
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OCCASION:	3.17	Staff who recognise that behaviour is a communication and strive to understand what child is trying to communicate, are able to recognise and meet child's unmet needs	1.00	Children had improved communication skills – more confident in talk, better able to express themselves, improved eye contact	1.29
Period of the academic year	3.50	Recognise strengths of child and have appropriately high expectations	1.36	Can share their skills with other NG children	1.71
Time of day	2.83	In their work with children, NG staff demonstrate warmth, are caring, non-judgemental, accepting, calm, nurturing, loving/affectionate, empathetic, motivating, consistent , flexible, positive, 'motherly', supportive, and have a sense of humour, such personal characteristics ensure children feel valued, can form good relationships with staff, and are able to succeed	1.14	Staff consider children feel 'safe', and able to express themselves without feeling judged, can 'be themselves'	1.29
Weather	3.50	NG staff show acceptance, warmth and understanding to enable the children to develop the personal, social and emotional skills necessary for successful learning	1.00	Children learn language for appropriately communicating /expressing their feelings and learn to manage their own feelings	1.14
Preceding lesson/break time	2.83	NG staff are themselves emotionally literate/secure, and have an interest in developing children's SE skills	1.43	Develop their empathy and start to show concern for others	1.57
NG STAFF PROFESSIONAL CHARACTERISTICS:	1.67	"Being human" Staff are approachable to parents and to children	1.29	Learn link between feelings and behaviour	1.00
Challenge and Support: "Tough caring". Challenge others in pupil's best interests e.g. don't take on unnecessary curriculum demands	1.50	NG staff have a "desire to make a difference", are committed, dedicated and motivated, see role as a vocation	1.43	Short-term and long-term positive affective (emotional) outcomes	1.71

Confidence: Emotional resilience/ keep calm	1.29	Staff are 'open'	1.29	Children develop "an emotional vocabulary and can express themselves with words rather than behaviours"	1.43
Creating Trust: Being consistent and fair.	1.00	Children are set achievable targets for development	1.29	Children's anxiety is reduced	1.14
Respect for Others: underlying belief individuals matter/deserve respect and deserve respect	1.14	Staff reward and reinforce behaviour that moves child nearer to meeting their target	1.00	Significant, long term changes in children's behaviour	1.71
Analytical Thinking: ability to think logically	2.29	**ROOM CHARACTERISTICS:**	1.57	Child learns to have ownership of their own behaviour and can make a different choice	1.57
Conceptual Thinking: see patterns and links	2.29	Zoning of room creates different atmosphere e.g. house scenario/home like environment means children feel more relaxed and have chance to discuss their home life – homely feeling, photos of children affirms them. Quiet area means 'time out' not viewed negatively. As the children have own desk/tray, photos of them on walls, means it feels like "their" room.	1.43	Children are empowered and realise they can make decisions that impact on them positively	1.86
Drive for Improvement: set and meet challenging targets	2.14	Relaxed setting facilitates close physical proximity and eye contact between staff and children	1.71	Children take responsibility for their own actions/choices	1.57
Information Seeking: drive to find out more and get to the heart of things; intellectual curiosity	2.29	**SUPPORT FOR NG STAFF:**	1.29	Children appear happier and more confident, with greater self-esteem	1.57
Initiative: anticipate and pre-empt events	1.57	NG staff supported so don't feel isolated and can continue to offer best practice	1.14	Develop more positive view of life/feel loved, valued and lovable	1.57
Flexibility: adapt to needs of a situation, change tactics	1.29	NG staff feel supported and are therefore able to demonstrate high quality teaching and apply their professional characteristics	1.43	Children become more self-aware and grow in their self-esteem, see they can achieve	1.57
Hold People Accountable: set clear expectations	2.43	**CHARACTERISTICS OF TASKS AND ACTIVITIES:**	1.47	Children learns to "have a go" at things they wouldn't have tackled previously	1.71
Managing Pupils: provide clear direction to pupils, and enthuse and motivate them	1.14	Whole group teaching: staff actively teach the whole group, spending time explicitly lecturing, demonstrating or interacting with the class	2.29	Children develop a secure attachment with NG staff	1.86

Passion for Learning: drive and an ability to support pupils in their learning	1.57	Opportunities for 're-learning/re-visiting' and skill development	1.43	Children are respected, learn to respect NG staff and form good relationships with them	1.57
Understanding Others: i.e. why they behave as they do	1.29	Focus of support is child-centred, and towards developing children's social, emotional and behavioural skills rather than academic work/ following national curriculum (aim is to address any gaps and ultimately for children to be reintegrated/ included in the mainstream classroom)	1.00	Children relate better with peers and adults	1.71
Impact and influence: ability and drive to produce positive outcomes by impressing and influencing others	2.29	A creative and differentiated curriculum is offered, where staff use their knowledge of EYFS in their work, so activities are more accessible/child-initiated	1.00	Children learn to form positive attachments with others e.g. parents	1.71
Teamworking: work with others - achieve shared goals	1.14	Staff notice/use opportunities in the national curriculum to develop social/emotional skills	2.00	Support for reintegration is on-going	1.57
NG PUPIL CHARACTERISTICS:	3.28	Self-help/life skills explicitly taught	1.71	Children can return to MS class	1.57
Prior achievement/ability	3.67	Students' have opportunity to learn as the curriculum is covered, and they have time on relevant tasks	2.00	NG children remain in MS education	2.00
Age	3.17	Children taught the language around feelings/emotions and how to deal with situations appropriately	1.14	NG Children remain in MS education without further support	2.57
Gender	3.83	Staff make learning 'anxiety free' e.g. choice with learning activities, positive reinforcement, no punishment for non completion of activities	1.57	Less likely to require special schooling	2.83
Social class	3.83	Shared eating experiences are an expression of care as well as opportunity for social learning	1.29	Less likely to require Statemented support	3.00
Values	3.83	Tasks include both personal and social development and the formal curriculum, especially language and maths (as tailored to each child's level of development)	1.86	Opportunity to experience success in academic curriculum	2.57
Personality	3.33	Opportunities for social learning through co-operation and play with other children are provided	1.00	Concentration improves (e.g. in play and academic tasks)	1.71
Types of difficulties experienced by pupils	2.50	Children explicitly taught communication/social skills e.g. communicating, sharing, taking turns, negotiating	1.00	Increased levels of engagement with groups	1.86
Age of entry to NG	2.83	Children are helped to re-experience early nurturing care in a secure, predictable, supportive environment	1.14	More purposeful play	2.00
Incidents at home/changes in home circumstances e.g. become LAC	2.50	Home and school environment brought more closely together	1.43	More focused attention, for longer periods	2.00

NG STAFF TEACHING SKILLS:	1.66	Opportunities for staff to attempt to relive with the child the missed nurturing experiences of the early years	1.29	Quality of interactions between children improved, more collaborative	1.86
Expectations (appropriately high, clear and consistent)	1.43	There is fidelity to the NG intervention e.g. delivered as intended, follow 'Classic model'	2.00	Children have improved interpersonal/social skills – negotiation skills and compromising, greater empathy with peers, use of humour, express feelings more effectively	1.43
Use variety of teaching methods and strategies e.g. effective questioning	1.57	Opportunities to verbalise their emotional experiences mean pupils develop their 'emotional vocabulary'	1.43	Quality of interactions between children and NG staff improved, and appear more balanced	1.71
Good pupil management /discipline	1.43	As NG staff don't have the same curriculum pressures as MS staff, so can focus on meeting basic needs of children	1.00	Children show better reciprocity (listening, politeness and turn-taking)	1.57
Time and resource management	1.86	Staff use role play with children, so the children can act out and discuss what is bothering them	1.71	Child had better coping skills e.g. frustrated	1.43
Range of Assessment methods used and critical and supportive feedback is given to pupils	1.86	Opportunities to practice and apply learning	1.43	Greater self-directed behaviour e.g. children would take themselves away from difficult situation/ seek calm place or adult support	2.00
Good classroom management (planning, time on task and lesson flow, starting the lesson, seating arrangements, establishing clear rules and procedures, a limited focus within the sessions, ending the lesson)	1.86	Focus in home zone e.g. on tidying up and putting away, helps build organisation into the child, giving them security, confident anticipation and prediction and a sense of time	1.71	Children more willing to accept adult requests	2.14
Good communication skills	1.00	**NG STAFF SELECTION/PARTNERSHIP:**	1.55	Children have improved friendships	2.00
Give time to and set appropriate homework	3.57	Relationship between the two NG staff is crucial. NG staff know and trust each other, are reflective, have shared values, focus and understanding, work in close partnership with each other, and role model positive relationships/ appropriate behaviour	1.00	Children have better self-regulation, control impulses better, more reflective, engage in problem solving, accept boundaries	1.57

Use of differentiation, personalised tasks means work starts at child's developmental level not chronological age	1.00	One NG staff member takes more of a lead/slight hierarchy of staff (e.g. one does the planning)	2.29	Children have more positive concept of self as learner	1.86
NG staff have skills to work positively and supportively to identify and meet the evolving social, emotional and behavioural needs of individual pupils in the NG	1.00	Doesn't matter one is a teacher and one is a teaching assistant "we are one"	1.43	Children who are quieter and withdrawn make greatest gains/reintegrated quickest	2.50
CURRICULUM:	0.86	Two adults provide a positive model of appropriate social interaction	1.14	Children with acting out behaviours, NG sometimes only place they succeed	2.50
Focus on developing social, emotional, behavioural skills rather than literacy and numeracy	1.00	Relationship between staff gives child opportunity to see constructive interaction between adults	1.14	**PARENTS:**	1.86
Rationale based on attachment theory and this is central to the work of the NG Other theories central to NG work	1.57	Head teacher is also important, represents wider world of school, and is seen to value/support NG staff	1.43	NG staff's knowledge of child development, plus in-depth of NG children, means children's needs are identified more quickly, and that they are signposted/referred on swiftly where appropriate e.g. referral to specialist provision	1.43
PUPIL SELECTION:	1.58	A man is also involved, peripherally or centrally if possible	3.00	Children feel safe to and have the language to make "disclosures" and appropriate help can be sought e.g. foster care	2.14
Triangulated referral (e.g. assessment tools, consultation with staff, parents)	1.57	Always two members of staff	1.00	Good relationships with parents are developed which lead to long term change	1.71
NG staff's views integral to group selection	1.00	**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NG STAFF AND CHILDREN/PARENTS:**	1.59	NG staff build relationships with children and their families which persist over time, and continue once children have left NG	2.14

Responsive to individual need e.g. child who's experienced bereavement	1.57	Fostering of close, supportive and caring relationships between children and staff means secure and trusting relationships are developed with children	1.29	**STAFF:**	1.71
Group balance/ group dynamics considered e.g. gender balance	1.57	NG staff are a substitute attachment figure	2.14	Teacher reports of improved behaviour (e.g. less violent and impulsive/more self-confidence/greater independence)	1.57
Children who are disengaged	2.00	Staff recognise the importance of and are skilled in building relationships and trust with children, and crucially with parents	1.43	Staff rate NG children as having made academic gains	2.29
Children who have not developed certain social, emotional and behavioural skills are selected e.g. "fill missing gaps"	1.14	Staff have awareness of/empathy for parents' needs	1.57	Consider children are more confident	1.57
Children whose parents care, but parents need help and support to develop their skills	2.33	Different relationship with children and parents than MS staff (e.g. viewed as 'more approachable')	2.00	Consider children are more willing to accept adult requests	1.43
Children who are 'neglected'	2.00	Efforts are made to engage positively with parents	1.43	**NEGATIVE IMPACTS:**	2.38
Children with attachment difficulties	1.50	Parents supported (e.g. when they ask for guidance in managing their children)	1.57	M/S class teachers report "lost their relationship" with NG children (and less able to assess academic attainments)	2.50
Children with or without behavioural difficulties are selected	1.50	There is good communication between staff and children, which means children's needs are better understood	1.29	Change took longer for children with more externalising behaviours	2.25
Children whose home environment has has not facilitated some social, emotional, behavioural development	1.17	**SMALL GROUP SIZE**	1.37	**COSTS:**	1.95
ACCESS TO SUPPORT:	1.74	Allows staff to be more hands on	1.57	Costs of Statements are avoided	2.40
NG consultant available (planning/preparation/advice)	2.29	Staff have time to focus on individual needs of pupils, increased individual attention, and to listen to the children, children not 'anonymous' 'less gets missed'	1.29	NGs cost effective when compared to specialist provision	1.50
Reassurance of NG staff by outside agencies	2.00	Facilitates building of close relationships between staff and children, and means staff know children as individuals, and children can talk to staff in different way	1.29		
Support structures available in LA, support from LA staff	1.86	Facilitates greater differentiation of work	1.57		

Support structures available in school, support from SMT	1.29	Children have 'extra chance', extra time to revisit work, reduced pressure, and increased opportunities for support with building relationships, building trust	1.14
Ongoing support from EP	1.71	**NG STAFF PERCEPTIONS, STRATEGIES AND BEHAVIOUR**	1.52
NG clusters	1.29	Staff's beliefs/self-efficacy means they feel capable to support children and that they will progress	1.43
TIMING AND STRUCTURE:	1.47	Training means NG staff are empowered to shift in their understanding of teaching to incorporate social and emotional development rather than focussing solely upon academic activities	1.29
Timings/structure of the day	1.14	Needs of children are met at the developmental level they have reached	1.14
Part time attendance in NG e.g. am only	1.67	There is an emphasis on language and clear communication, ensuring understanding by the child	1.29
Full time attendance in NG e.g. all day	2.00	More positive verbal and non-verbal communications	1.43
Length of time in NG, 2-4 terms	1.50	Staff have high expectations of their students	1.57
Time set aside for meeting parents	1.29	Staff demonstrate good subject knowledge; good questioning skills; an emphasis upon instruction; a balance of grouping strategies; clear objectives; good time management; effective planning; good classroom organisation; and effective use of other adults in the classroom	2.14
Time set aside for paperwork and reflection e.g. an afternoon to set targets, reflect on the week and plan together	1.43	Staff apply their knowledge of psychological theory e.g. scaffold pupils' learning, model appropriate learning	1.86
Small group size 8-12	1.29	Provide high quality teacher-child interaction	1.43
NG STAFF DYNAMICS:	1.58	Provide a high level of praise and encouragement	1.29
Always two staff/ two adults in room	1.00	NG staff foster a supportive group dynamic, teaching children to help each other, provide opportunities to develop social skills, and 'coach' children with their social interactions, use of group targets to promote team building	1.29
One NG staff member takes lead role	2.14	Teachers' have good behaviour management skills, and avoid overreaction, they are consistent and use effective rewards and punishments to motivate children	1.14
Both NG staff have equal role/partnership	1.43	NG staff are skilled in identifying children's specific difficulties and supporting them sensitively	1.14
Group is teacher rather than TA led	3.00	Quantity and pacing of instruction keeps children's interest	1.43
Right dynamic of NG staff chosen, staff	1.00	Staff's knowledge of child development means they are able to	1.43

are 'rounded' emotionally intelligent and have right "temperament"		identify child's developmental level, start from where child is developmentally and work forward together, so targets set are achievable and focused	
One NG staff takes lead role but still works in close partnership with other NG staff member	1.43	Staff show effective classroom management which creates the conditions under which high quality teaching and learning can occur	1.86
Group led by appropriately skilled teacher or skilled TA	1.14	Staff set appropriate, individualised targets with a 'nurture' focus, assessment tools used to inform targets	1.14
NG teacher/lead knows how to direct and organise work of support NG staff	1.50	Staff use knowledge of programmes such as Family Links/SEAL, to provide a framework for teaching	1.43
Group does not go ahead if both staff are absent	1.57	Demonstrate appropriate affection to the children	1.29
ROOM CHARACTERISTICS:	1.47	Staff demonstrate intellectually challenging teaching	2.33
Contained and protected	1.29	Foster a work orientated environment	2.86
Big enough for large range of domestic and personal activities including 'breakfast' and experiences at baby and toddler level	1.57	Working within a clear, structured framework, staff are responsive and adapt to needs of individuals and group and vary tasks accordingly, staff are proactive rather than reactive e.g. "read the emotional temperature of the group" "read the children". This flexibility/adaptability ensures the individual needs of the children are met	1.14
Furnished to be reflective of both home and school	1.14		
Dedicated room in school, with homely feel and different zones, and space for children's personal things	1.00		
Atmosphere of room is welcoming and homely	1.75		
Location means the room is not isolated or constantly disrupted	1.14		
Size of room	2.43		
TRAINING:	1.86		
Staff are appropriately supported/ trained, and committed to training	1.86		
NG staff have had training with 'nurturing' focus e.g. NGN 4 day and/or Family Links	1.86		

APPENDIX XVIII Means/Collated responses to Cs, Ms and Os data from interviews and realist synthesis relating to training/CPD

KEY: Those aspects rated most essential (scores of 1-1.5) are highlighted in yellow, grey indicates a theme.

CONTEXTS	MEAN
Content of CPD:	1.71
Planned with a clear vision of the effective or improved practice being sought. This vision is shared by those undertaking the development and by the people leading or supporting it. What understanding/technique the CPD is intended to deliver is clear, with defined outcomes for evaluation of the impact of the CPD	1.43
A focus on developing teacher learning, beliefs, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours	1.86
Develop teachers' knowledge, understanding or skills (e.g. in specific area)	1.86
The use of external expertise linked to school-based activity	1.57
Understanding the theory behind professional change	2.00
Resources: e.g. time	1.43
Training is relevant/personalised/bespoke	
Training is directly relevant for participants a takes account of participants previous knowledge and experience	1.43
Scope for teachers to identify their own professional development focus	1.71
Interventions designed to take account of what teachers knew and could do already	1.86
Observation and feedback, working with outside agencies	2.29
One off courses	2.71
Training for others	1.71
Training is sustained and collaborative	1.57
CPD is sustained and collaborative: collaboration with other teachers, and teachers collaborating with other professional colleagues on a sustained basis	1.43
Timing of training/sustained opportunities for training	1.71
Evaluation of impact, with a shared vision and defined outcomes for evaluation	1.50
Research focus	3.20
Expertise of providers	1.00
Structure/nature of training	1.20

MECHANISMS	
External Support	1.79
Combination of external expertise and peer support	1.71
Support from a NG consultant	1.86
Resources	1.43
Paid or negotiated non-contract time for participating teachers	1.57

Specific time is available for discussion, planning and feedback, and/or collaborative lesson planning within workshops	1.29
Access to suitable resources e.g. ICT	1.43
Content of training is aligned with staff practice and of interest to staff	1.49
Understanding/application of the Boxall Profile/ how to identify appropriate children, set targets and what strategies will support the development of those targets	1.14
Positive Handling/Protective behaviours	1.29
Knowledge of SEN and ensuing strategies (e.g. relevant "medical conditions")	1.43
Knowledge of child development/early years/psychology e.g. child-initiated/centred learning	1.57
Knowledge of outside agencies/referral processes	2.14
Safeguarding	1.29
Training on Family Links	1.29
Knowledge of Attachment Theory (and relevant strategies)	1.43
Knowledge of developing emotional literacy	1.00
Working with parents	1.71
Creative ways of literacy/numeracy teaching	2.29
Possible 'curriculum' of a NG, planning, target setting	1.57
Teaching of theory behind change: Explicit teaching of the theory behind professional change means teachers learn what will help them to make changes in their practice/ what is 'good' CPD/training	1.83
Training is relevant/personalised/bespoke	1.43
Enables participants to develop skills, knowledge and understanding which will be practical, relevant and applicable to their current role/career aspiration	1.14
Choices within the CPD programme which enable individuals to find an appropriate focus and level, so individuals can identify their own needs and ensure they are taken into account. Increased commitment due to increased autonomy and personalisation	1.43
Interventions designed to take account of what teachers knew and could do already means targeted support and teachers feel there is value in what they are learning (not just learning about something they already know)	1.71
NG Staff consulted on training needs and are able to suggest topics for future training e.g. around specific concerns such as Speech and Language. Canvassing of NG staff views prior to training	1.43
Observation/feedback	1.71
Visit and observe practice in a variety of settings (gives insight into what others are doing, and reinforces that own practice is correct/identify where it needs development) – also gives you template by which to adapt own practice	1.29
Direct classroom observation supports staff in identifying where they need to adapt their practice. Observation of teaching by 'experts', and feedback (usually based on observation) helps developing teaching skills (importance of this being done in a non- threatening manner).	2.14
Observation used as basis for discussion about focus of CPD and its impact. Observations conducted in collaborative and supportive manner.	1.71
One off training: One-off, one-day or short residential courses with no planned classroom activities as a follow-up and/or no plans for building systemically upon existing practice	2.86
Training for whole school staff/others: Training of whole school/MS staff at NG school e.g. regarding Family Links/Attachment	1.43
Training is sustained and collaborative	1.62
Hearing from others their 'real life nurture experiences'. Opportunities to share own experiences/share expertise.	1.57

Mentoring for new teachers means they feel more comfortable to discuss concerns in supportive context. Supported by coaching/mentoring from experienced colleagues (inside or outside school). Coaching most effective when staff with identified need is paired with colleague with expertise in this domain. Mentoring/coaching by other NG staff. Peer support, shadowing, apprenticeships.	1.43
Processes to encourage, extend and structure professional dialogue e.g. use of supervision, NG clusters	1.43
Opportunities for joint planning (means individual teachers feel supported/not isolated), and encourages the sharing of good practice	1.71
Opportunities for team teaching - models effective learning/teaching strategies e.g. active learning, opportunities to try things out in supportive setting	1.83
Use of coaching (support) teams and study groups e.g. regular NG clusters – sometimes within school day – provide opportunities to share practice	1.43
Emphasis on peer support, rather than supervisory or managerial leadership is more empowering	1.71
Increased teacher collaboration acts as positive model for collaborative working between pupils	1.71
Processes for sustaining professional development over time to enable teachers to embed the practices in their own classroom settings	1.71
Evaluation	1.62
CPD which provide planned opportunities for teachers' learning prior to, during, and/or after specific interventions (e.g. NG activities), and which enables teachers to relate inputs to existing and future practice	1.71
Each activity is part of a coherent long-term plan that gives the participants opportunities to apply what they have learned, evaluate the effect on their practice, and develop their practice.	1.57
Impact on teaching and learning is evaluated, and evaluation used to guide subsequent professional development activities	1.57
Research focus	2.20
Use of action research by teachers (reflective process of progressive problem solving, led by individuals working with others to improve the way they address issues and solve problems	2.00
Use of research literature as a springboard for dialogue/experimentation	2.43
Based on best available evidence about teaching and learning	2.17
Providers' expertise	1.55
Provided by people with necessary experience, expertise and skills (e.g. peers or specialists – internal or external)	1.43
Experience and passion of the trainer (trainer has relevant experience of NGs, perhaps ran one themselves)	1.67
Structure/nature of training	1.71
Specific initial training for new NG staff, then collaborate/joint training for CPD of all NG staff	1.00
Workshops/conferences for more experienced staff	1.71
Pre-training activities to enable focus on specific areas e.g. pre-reading	2.29
Revisit learning once had experience in the NG – "until you are actually doing it that **you know what you don't know!"**	2.14
Training itself has a nurturing focus, staff feel nurtured, experience the sensation of being nurtured oneself – "the actual general ethos of the nurture group, comes through the whole nurturing way that the whole conference is done, training day is done"	1.71
Both NG staff have access to CPD/training, not just group leader	1.29
Bi-annual peer training in geographical clusters	2.14
Annual day conference, bespoke activity out of school e.g. Training on SEAL, Family Links (Nurturing Programme) with linked parenting course, Resilience, Attachment, Neuroscience	1.43
Explicit modelling within the CPD, of the practices the programme aims to enable amongst teachers. Modelling of new methods means staff can see the skill/concept they are being expected to deliver/greater understanding of what to do	1.71

OUTCOMES	MEAN
For teachers:	1.52
OVERALL: positive impact upon teachers' repertoire of teaching and learning strategies, their ability to match these to their students' needs, their self-esteem, confidence and commitment to continuing learning and development	1.29
Enhanced beliefs of their power to make a difference to pupils' learning (self efficacy)	1.43
Given the links between "collaborative and sustained CPD and increased teacher confidence, self-esteem, enthusiasm and commitment to continuing to learn about teaching" is there an ensuing impact on retention and recruitment?	1.86
Greater commitment to changing practice and willingness to try new things	1.57
Development of a wider range of learning activities in class and strategies for students	1.57
Development of enthusiasms for collaborative working (despite initial anxieties about being observed/receiving feedback)	1.86
Staff feel reassured that their practice is effective/aligned with training suggestions	1.57
NG staff develop practical, usable strategies for their work with young people	1.43
Staff who are trained well are confident and deal with situations prior to them escalating into a difficult situation and prevent crises	1.43
NG staff are well trained, committed to training and can access on-going training opportunities, this increases their confidence, develops their skills and heightens their awareness of children's needs	1.29
Increased confidence	1.43
For students:	1.91
Enhanced student learning	1.67
Demonstrable enhancement of student motivation	1.67
Improvements in performance e.g. tests	2.50
More positive responses to specific subjects	2.67
Better organisation of work	1.83
Increased sophistication in response to questions	2.17
Increased collaborative working amongst pupils	1.83
changes in attitudes/beliefs	1.67
OVERALL: positive impact upon student learning processes, motivation and outcomes	1.17

APPENDIX XIX Data Outcome Pattern: Community/Family Level Contexts, Mechanisms and Outcomes

	CONTEXTS	MECHANISMS	OUTCOMES
1-2	• NG staff are supported by outside agencies • Support for parents runs in parallel to NG e.g. parenting skills group/positive discipline is modelled/ 'drop in Friday' • **Parents (sensitively) given information regarding rational/purpose of NGs** • Parents are encouraged to participate, come in and observe practice • **NG staff recognise the importance of working with the parents**	• NG staff are supported by and work collaboratively with outside agencies to support the educational, health, social, and emotional development of the pupils • NG staff can mediate/advocate for parents with outside agencies (help secure provisions/share strategies) • Parents have good understanding of role/purpose of NG so support their child's involvement • **NG staff offer non-judgemental, empathetic support to parents e.g. recognise parents may 'feel judged'** • NG has an 'open door policy' for parents/are easily accessible which fosters good/regular communication with parents (good news passed on), and sharing of strategies • NG staff 'scaffold' parents' learning about how to 'nurture'/ how their interactions can impact positively on their child's behaviour, so parents develop knowledge of how to support their child's development in parallel with their child's learning – application of new skills in the home environment • NG staff have more awareness/knowledge of home background and are **empathetic**	• As home contact more positive, parents have increased engagement with school • Report more positive behaviour at home • Support and value NG as they see a positive difference in their child - happy/grateful their child attends NG • Know how to help their children/ have learnt new skills • Negative feedback cycle changed to positive • whole family is positively affected • removes the barriers between school and families • NG staff build relationships with children, parents and families which persist over time, and continue once children have left the group (NG staff can offer on-going support) • **Improved emotional wellbeing** • **Learn 'coping' strategies they can apply at home** • Increased resiliency and can cope with life's adversities • Appear more confident • Likes school more and enjoys coming
2-3	• NG staff have good knowledge of outside agencies and referral processes	• EP coordinates the initiative in the LA • EP communicates about groups to other LA agencies, contributing to strategic planning for future groups to other LA agencies	• Are signposted to relevant outside agencies • Grow in confidence, become a nucleus for driving other initiatives forward

	• Clear frameworks (e.g. CAF) are used to coordinate support for families. • Child returns to very negative environment at end of school day, effectiveness of group can be unpicked	• EP contributes to quality assurance • Frameworks (e.g. CAF) ensure coordinated support for families 2.5 (mid-point axis – after Pawson and Tilley, 1997)	• Visit school more frequently • *Child's increased confidence and reduced anxiety, undermined by parents* • *Return to negative home environment prevents children making any progress* • Improved health outcomes e.g. brushing teeth
	• Parental socio-economic status • Parental education • Population density • Geographical location		• *Return to negative home environment undermines progress made by children in NG*
3-4	• Parental ethnicity • Affluence		

Appendix XX Data Outcome Pattern: Whole School Level Contexts, Mechanisms and Outcomes

	CONTEXTS	MECHANISMS	OUTCOMES
1-2	• Collegiality of staff • **Ethos/school culture: School has a nurturing, inclusive whole school ethos, with a focus on the 'whole child' - all staff adopt this approach and value it. School ethos which "puts children first"** • **Behaviour and learning policy e.g. all staff follow a positive BP** • 'A philosophical bias' (towards inclusion/nurture) • Head teacher with holistic approach to child development • Governors support head in their vision • Whole staff awareness and understanding of the rationale and practice of the NG with all staff (e.g. including lunch supervisors) briefed about principles of group and type of provision it offers • Whole school forum to discuss intervention strategies • All staff trained in 'Family Links' with training updates for all staff/new staff • Head teacher/SMT have been trained in rationale/practice of NGs so have good awareness and understanding • Other staff and children have access to the group e.g. invited for snack or activity time • NG staff have high informal status in school. • NG staff part of SMT/have advocate on SMT • **Head teacher/SMT have 'shared vision; support role of NG and autonomy of NG staff, this is reflected in appropriate funding for NG** • **NG staff feel part of the whole school team, are kept 'in the loop'.**	• Nurturing ethos means that the relationships between all staff and pupils are positive and affirming • School actively promotes staff involvement in supporting the social and emotional development of its pupils, as reflected in training provided for staff re NG and school's behaviour and learning policies • **NG staff feel supported by their head and mainstream colleagues as they have awareness of NG and are working towards a shared vision** • **The focus of support of NG towards wider inclusion of children in school, is acknowledged and valued** • Whole school staff are trained regularly on the rationale and workings of the NG, new staff given training too, so consistency of messages/learning from NG is across the whole school • As all staff are trained in Family Links, all use the same 'language' ensuring consistency of approach • **Continuity and consistency of approach in school e.g. NG children praised for meeting their targets, wherever they are in school. Staff around school**	• **Apply strategies they have learnt in the NG** • **Feel safe within whole school** • Make qualitative improvements in desirable behaviour across school resulting from more positive, consistent language of staff • Positive evidence of staff learning from training e.g. feel able to support them in class • **Staff notice children's good behaviours** • Reduced negative incidents at playtime • Greater consistency of approach • Reduced staff absenteeism and turnover, staff less stressed, with more energy • Staff better able to access support and share concerns/strategies • Staff more confident (e.g. to take NG on trips) • Enhanced behaviour management practice, and more energy to implement • Positive shift in teachers' thinking re. ability of staff as well as home to influence children's social and emotional development • Staff empowered/feel empowered • 'Language' of school changes (Family Links) • Nurturing approach/ethos is reinforced • **Other children in school view NG positively** • Outside agencies notice improvements

	• **NG not an 'add on', but integral part of school, viewed positively by other children and staff** • Timetable carefully planned (e.g. avoid clash with NG sessions, allows for resource preparation) • School channels resources into what children need • **Head/Governors support NG so resources allocated accordingly** • **Dedicated room in school identified**	**notice NG children's positive behaviours e.g. on the playground and report them to the NG staff** • **Head teachers' understanding of the NG means they support the group and this encourages the high status of the group within school** • **Allocation of resource/ time for group means NG has status/profile within the school**	
2-3	• Groundwork has been done – school in a 'state of readiness'	2.5	• Exclusions are reduced/prevented • Enhanced teaching practice • School improvement (e.g. targets on SIP) • Teachers contribute to national educational policy • MS children receive higher quality teaching and learning experience
	• School has had experience of other small group interventions		• Less disruption in assemblies • MS children feel jealous of NG children who "boast about their experience"
3-4	• Size of school • Building and Facilities • Proportion of high-ability intake		

APPENDIX XXI Data Outcome Pattern: Mainstream Class Level Contexts, Mechanisms and Outcomes

	CONTEXTS	MECHANISMS	OUTCOMES
1-2	• **All MS staff understand and value the role of the NG** • MS staff can identify children who may need this intervention • MS staff have time to visit NG, observe NG practice, see children in NG context • Staff subscribe to the school's nurturing ethos • Staff subscribe to school's learning and behaviour policy e.g. every classroom has a 'quiet place' • MS staff respect and have confidence in NG staff • **MS staff have accurate perceptions of the NG children (e.g. 'don't view them as naughty', appropriate expectations of what can be achieved)** • **MS staff work positively and communicate well with NG staff. Appropriate information is shared** • NG staff included by MS staff • Regular meetings occur • MS staff have appropriate personal qualities and skills to support NG pupils in their classroom	• **MS staff given clear explanation of purpose/ /rationale of NG (e.g. understand about 'curriculum holiday', learning objectives may focus on social/emotional development), ensures they respond appropriately** • Early identification of those who may need NG • School policy informs staff response to pupils in the classroom (e.g. appropriate support provided) • School's ethos affects staff response to pupils • **Nurturing in MS class continues beyond exit from NG** • Observations by MS staff of NG children in NG context, and communication with NG staff, means MS staff have appropriate (high) expectations of NG pupils • NG staff gain trust of MS staff and support them with their practice, NG staff feel supported by MS colleagues • **MS staff liaise/work with NG staff in order to understand the needs of NG children and implement strategies** • Timetabled liaison slots ensure regular meetings occur and that plans for NG child are shared • **Targets set in the NG are shared with MS teacher, and worked on in MS class too e.g. shared IEP** • **Staff ensure NG children maintain their class identity e.g. resister in MS, attend trips, in NG part time.** • MS teacher retains responsibility for literacy/numeracy • MS teachers supported with reintegration e.g. continued access to NG, support is on-going • Child's difficulties viewed as a shared concern • **NG staff, parents and MS teachers work together** • **United, consistent approach by NG and MS staff**	• **Successfully reintegrated into MS class** • **Have learnt and can apply strategies from NG so 'cope'/operate better in class/more resilient. Can function in class/cope with MS curriculum and/or can ask for help when needed** • More confident with taking risks e.g. with their learning, trying something new • **More engaged** • Improved attendance and punctuality • Learning progresses alongside their social development • Increasingly socialise with peers • Cause less disruption in MS class • Class teacher and NG staff agree that NG children make progress in behaviour and learning • Improved understanding of the child, means they support NG children (and other vulnerable children) better in their class • Has appropriately high expectations of NG child • Improved relationships between MS class teacher and NG child's parents

		• MS staff demonstrate appropriate personal qualities and skills to support NG pupils in their classroom e.g. are flexible, differentiate, adapt the curriculum creatively • Provide opportunities to generalise learning from NG	
2-3	• Class size	2.5	• Move down SEN COP • Time away from challenging children for MS staff, gives MS staff recuperation time • Reduced disruptions from NG children in their class lead to positive learning outcomes • Increased teacher attention
	• *MS staff have negative perceptions of NG staff (e.g. NG staff have "easy time")* • Range of ability • Social class mix • Curriculum pressures e.g. EY/Year 6 • Time of day • Weather • Preceding lesson		• Reduced numbers in MS class, benefits MS staff, find it easier to cope with NG pupils when they return
3-4	• Period of the academic year	• *NG children "play members of staff off against each other"*	

APPENDIX XXII: Data Outcome Pattern for training/CPD

	CONTEXTS	MECHANISMS	OUTCOMES
1-2	• **Planned with a clear vision of the effective or improved practice being sought. This vision is shared by those undertaking the development and by the people leading or supporting it. What understanding/technique the CPD is intended to deliver is clear, with defined outcomes for evaluation of the impact of the CPD** • **Resources: e.g. time** • **Expertise of providers** • **Structure/nature of training** • **CPD is sustained and collaborative: collaboration with other teachers, and teachers collaborating with other professional colleagues on a sustained basis**	• **Specific initial training for new NG staff, then collaborate/joint training for CPD of all NG staff** 1.0 • **Resources: Specific time is available for discussion, planning and feedback, and/or collaborative lesson planning within workshops** • **Access to suitable resources e.g. ICT** • **Content of training is aligned with staff practice and of interest to staff** • **Understanding/application of the Boxall Profile/ how to identify appropriate children, set targets and what strategies will support the development of those targets** • **Positive Handling/Protective behaviours** • **Knowledge of SEN and ensuing strategies (e.g. relevant "medical conditions")** • **Safeguarding** • **Training on Family Links** • **Knowledge of Attachment Theory (and relevant strategies)** • **Knowledge of developing emotional literacy** • **Training is relevant/personalised/bespoke** • **Enables participants to develop skills, knowledge and understanding which will be practical, relevant and applicable to their current role/career aspiration (1.14)** • **Choices within the CPD programme which enable individuals to find an appropriate focus and level, so individuals can identify their own needs and ensure they are taken into account. Increased commitment due to increased autonomy and personalisation** • **Training for whole school staff/others: Training of whole school/MS staff at NG school e.g. regarding Family Links/Attachment** • Mentoring for new teachers means they feel more comfortable to discuss concerns in supportive context. Supported by coaching/mentoring from experienced colleagues (inside or outside school). Coaching most effective when staff with identified need is paired with colleague with expertise in this domain. Mentoring/coaching by other NG staff. Peer support, shadowing, apprenticeships. • External Support: Combination of external expertise and peer support/Support from a NG consultant • Working with parents	• **OVERALL: positive impact upon teachers' repertoire of teaching and learning strategies, their ability to match these to their students' needs, their self-esteem, confidence and commitment to continuing learning and development** • **Enhanced beliefs of their power to make a difference to pupils' learning (self efficacy)** • Given the links between "collaborative and sustained CPD and increased teacher confidence, self-esteem, enthusiasm and commitment to continuing to learn about teaching" is there an ensuing impact on retention and recruitment? • Greater commitment to changing practice and willingness to try new things

	• Training is directly relevant for participants a takes account of participants previous knowledge and experience • A focus on developing teacher learning, beliefs, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours • Develop teachers' knowledge, understanding or skills (e.g. in specific area) • The use of external expertise linked to school-based activity • Scope for teachers to identify their own professional development focus • Training for others • Timing of training/sustained opportunities for training • Evaluation of impact, with a shared vision and defined outcomes for evaluation	• Knowledge of child development/early years/psychology e.g. child-initiated/centred learning • Resources: Paid or negotiated non-contract time for participating teachers • Possible 'curriculum' of a NG, planning, target setting • Teaching of theory behind change: Explicit teaching of the theory behind professional change means teachers learn what will help them to make changes in their practice/ what is 'good' CPD/training • Interventions designed to take account of what teachers knew and could do already means targeted support and teachers feel there is value in what they are learning (not just learning about something they already know) • NG Staff consulted on training needs and are able to suggest topics for future training e.g. around specific concerns such as Speech and Language. Canvassing of NG staff views prior to training • Visit and observe practice in a variety of settings (gives insight into what others are doing, and reinforces that own practice is correct/identify where it needs development) – also gives you template by which to adapt own practice • Observation used as basis for discussion about focus of CPD and its impact. Observations conducted in collaborative and supportive manner. • Training is sustained and collaborative • Hearing from others their 'real life nurture experiences'. Opportunities to share own experiences/share expertise. • Opportunities for joint planning (means individual teachers feel supported/not isolated), and encourages the sharing of good practice • Opportunities for team teaching - models effective learning/teaching strategies e.g. active learning, opportunities to try things out in supportive setting • **Use of coaching (support) teams and study groups e.g. regular NG clusters – sometimes within school day – provide opportunities to share practice** • Emphasis on peer support, rather than supervisory or managerial leadership is more empowering • Increased teacher collaboration acts as positive model for collaborative working between pupils • Processes for sustaining professional development over time to enable teachers to embed the practices in their own classroom settings • Impact on teaching and learning is evaluated, and evaluation used to guide subsequent professional development activities	• Development of a wider range of learning activities in class and strategies for students • Development of enthusiasms for collaborative working (despite initial anxieties about being observed/receiving feedback) • Staff feel reassured that their practice is effective/aligned with training suggestions • **NG staff develop practical, usable strategies for their work with young people** • **Staff who are trained well are confident and deal with situations prior to them escalating into a difficult situation and prevent crises**

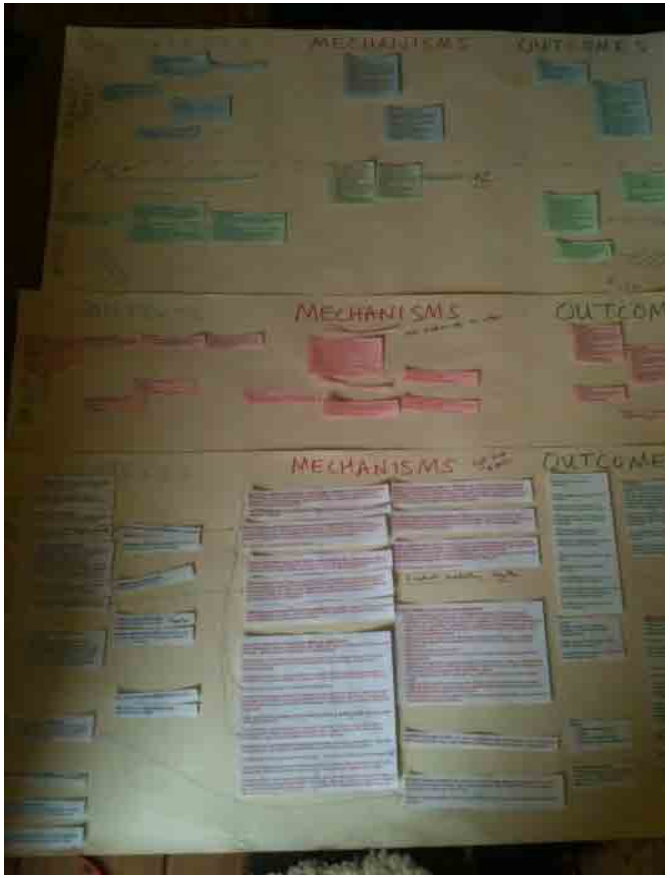
		• CPD which provide planned opportunities for teachers' learning prior to, during, and/or after specific interventions (e.g. NG activities), and which enables teachers to relate inputs to existing and future practice • Each activity is part of a coherent long-term plan that gives the participants opportunities to apply what they have learned, evaluate the effect on their practice, and develop their practice. • **Provided by people with necessary experience, expertise and skills (e.g. peers or specialists – internal or external)** • Experience and passion of the trainer (trainer has relevant experience of NGs, perhaps ran one themselves) • Workshops/conferences for more experienced staff • Training itself has a nurturing focus, staff feel nurtured, experience the sensation of being nurtured oneself – "the actual general ethos of the nurture group, comes through the whole nurturing way that the whole conference is done, training day is done" • **Both NG staff have access to CPD/training, not just group leader** • **Annual day conference, bespoke activity out of school e.g. Training on SEAL, Family Links (Nurturing Programme) with linked parenting course, Resilience, Attachment, Neuroscience** • Explicit modelling within the CPD, of the practices the programme aims to enable amongst teachers. Modelling of new methods means staff can see the skill/concept they are being expected to deliver/greater understanding of what to do	• **NG staff are well trained, committed to training and can access on-going training opportunities, this increases their confidence, develops their skills and heightens their awareness of children's needs** • **Increased confidence** **FOR STUDENTS:** • **OVERALL: positive impact upon student learning processes, motivation and outcomes** • Enhanced student learning • Demonstrable enhancement of student motivation • Better organisation of work • changes in attitudes/beliefs • Increased collaborative working amongst pupils
2-3	• Understanding the theory behind professional change • Scope for teachers to identify their own professional development focus • Observation and feedback, working with outside agencies	• Creative ways of literacy/numeracy teaching • Knowledge of outside agencies/referral processes • Direct classroom observation supports staff in identifying where they need to adapt their practice. Observation of teaching by 'experts', and feedback (usually based on observation) helps developing teaching skills (importance of this being done in a non- threatening manner). • Use of action research by teachers (reflective process of progressive problem solving, led by individuals working with others to improve the way they address issues and solve problems • Use of research literature as a springboard for dialogue/experimentation • Based on best available evidence about teaching and learning • Pre-training activities to enable focus on specific areas e.g. pre-reading • Revisit learning once had experience in the NG Bi-annual peer training in geographical clusters	Student: Increased sophistication in response to questions

	• One off courses	**One off training:** One-off, one-day or short residential courses with no planned classroom activities as a follow-up and/or no plans for building systemically upon existing practice	• Students: Improvements in performance e.g. tests • More positive responses to specific subjects
3-4	• Research focus		

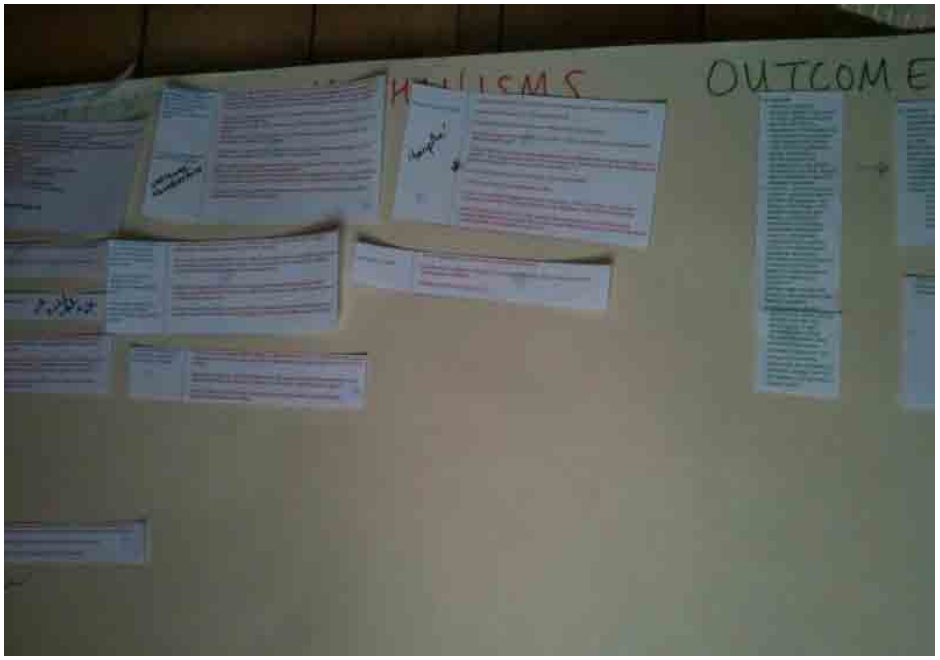
2.5

APPENDIX XXIII Photographs to illustrate the group realist interview findings

COMMUNITY/FAMILY, WHOLE SCHOOL, MAINSTREAM CLASS, NURTURE GROUP LEVELS



TRAINING LEVEL



APPENDIX XXIV Community/family, whole school, MS class and NG level C, M, Os card sort/ranking activity – summary of focus group's collective responses

CONTEXTS	MECHANISMS	OUTCOMES
	COMMUNITY AND FAMILY LEVEL	
FAMILY/COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS **NG staff recognise the importance of working with the parents** Parent 'labelling' of the group (i.e. their perceptions of the group/'special education' and school in general) **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT** **STRUCTURES:** Clear frameworks (e.g. CAF) are used to coordinate support CAF can be good or bad **OUTSIDE SUPPORT**	**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT** **WORK WITH OUTSIDE AGENCIES**	**NG CHILDREN** **PARENTS**
	WHOLE SCHOOL LEVEL	
Head/Governors support NG so resources allocated accordingly **Head drives ethos** Dedicated room in school identified **ALLOCATION OF TIME AND SPACE/** **STAFF INVOLVEMENT/ AWARENESS** **SCHOOL CHARACETRISTICS** **(all level)** Head teacher/SMT have been trained in rationale/practice of NGs so have good awareness and understanding NB minority of dissenting staff can have huge (disproportionate) impact	**STAFF INVOLVEMENT/AWARENESS/SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS/ALLOCATION OF TIME AND SPACE** **(all at top)**	**STAFF** (staff emotional intelligence and skills may remain limited, in spite of improved practice) **NG children** e.g. feel safe within the school – this is important... but child needs to be 'ok' in NG context first, security in whole school context comes later) **WHOLE SCHOOL EFFECTS** (if these were given more importance or were already in place, *then* NG children Outcomes can happen)

MAINSTREAM CLASS LEVEL		
PERCEPTION OF NG.... CONSISTENCY/CONTINUITY ... TEACHER SKILLS/CHARACTERISTICS... MS AND NG STAFF COLLABORATION... KNOWLEDGE OF NG MS CLASS CHARACTERISTICS CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OCCASION	United, consistent approach by NG and MS staff (children perceive/see it as united) **MS AND NG STAFF COLLABORATION** *NG children "play members of staff off against each other"* **Consistency/ continuity** **Perception of NG** **Knowledge of NG** **MS Teacher characteristics**	NG children Class teacher MS children Improved relationship MS teacher and parents (is desirable)
NURTURE GROUP LEVEL		
CURRICULUM: Focus on developing social, emotional, behavioural skills **CURRICULUM:** Rationale based on attachment theory /central to work of NG **NG STAFF DYNAMICS:** Two members of staff/appropriately skilled **NG STAFF CHARACTERISTICS:** knowledge and understanding ⟷ **NG STAFF CHARACTERISTICS:** personality → **NG STAFF PROFESSIONAL CHARACTERISTICS:** challenge and support, have confidence, create trust, respect others etc. **TRAINING:** Staff are appropriately supported/ trained, and committed to training	**NG STAFF CREATE A POSITIVE CLASSROOM CLIMATE** **NG staff apply their characteristics (professional and personal** to create a positive classroom climate) **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NG STAFF AND CHILDREN/PARENTS** **PUPILS PERCEPTIONS, STRATEGIES AND BEHAVIOUR** **Personal characteristics of staff e.g. 'right kind of person'** **NG STAFF SELECTION/PARTNERSHIP** **SMALL GROUP SIZE**	**PUPIL OUTCOMES e.g. change in attitudes/feelings/self esteem (indicated that these are the precursors to other Outcomes e.g. need these Outcomes in order to access learning)** **Social skills etc** **PARENTAL REPORTS**

PUPIL SELECTION: Triangulated referral with NG staff's views integral to group selection

TIMING AND STRUCTURE: Small group size 8-12

NG PUPIL CHARACTERISTICS: e.g. prior achievement/ability, gender

TIMING AND STRUCTURE: Timings/structure of day

TIMING AND STRUCTURE: Part time or full time attendance in NG and length of time (e.g. 2-4 terms)

NG STAFF TEACHING SKILLS: Expectations, teaching methods and strategies, good classroom and pupil management...

NG STAFF CHARACTERISTICS: training

NG STAFF CHARACTERISTICS: aptitude/achievement

ROOM CHARACTERISTICS: Dedicated room/homely feel/different zones

NG STAFF CHARACTERISTICS: experience

ACCESS TO SUPPORT: NG staff operate within a supportive context

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OCCASION: Period of academic year

2 adults modelling together

GROUP SELECTION

Staff apply their professional characteristics

NG **STAFF PERCEPTIONS, STRATEGIES AND BEHAVIOUR**

e.g. more positive verbal and non-verbal communications **(links with 'A')**

e.g. NG staff foster a supportive group dynamic, teaching children to help each other, provide opportunities to develop social skills, and 'coach' children with their social interactions, use of group targets to promote team building **(links with 'A')**

e.g. provide high quality teacher-child interaction, high level of praise and encouragement **(indicated as 'important')**

CHARACTERISTICS OF TASKS AND ACTIVITIES

SUPPORT FOR NG STAFF

ROOM CHARACTERISTICS

STAFF reports

COSTS e.g. costs of Statements avoided

NEGATIV E IMPACTS e.g. MS teacher lost relationship with NG children

PUPIL OUTCOMES e.g. measurable gains in academic improvements/tests, improved skills (indicated that academic improvements won't necessarily show the group worked or didn't work)

APPENDIX XXV Training/CPD C, M, Os card sort/ranking activity – summary of focus group's collective responses

Training for others e.g. whole school staff regarding NGs

CPD is sustained and collaborative

Structure/nature of training e.g. bespoke/and both NG staff have access to training

Content of CPD

Expertise of providers

Resources e.g. time

Training directly relevant for participants/takes account of participants previous knowledge and experience/scope for teachers to identify own professional development focus

The use of external expertise linked to school-based activity e.g. with good knowledge and understanding of NGs

Observation and feedback, working with outside agencies e.g. but not additional direct observation by outside agents

Evaluation of impact, with a shared vision and defined outcomes for evaluation

Research focus

One off courses

Understanding the theory behind professional change

Benefits to teachers

Benefits for students