

**CHILDREN'S CONSTRUCTIONS OF THEIR EXPERIENCES
IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL NURTURE GROUP.**

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by

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Abstract

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Although there has been an increasing body of research into nurture groups, very few studies have attempted to explore how they are received by the children that attend.

My study adopts an interpretivist paradigm to provide insights into the experiences of pupils in a primary school nurture group. In order to address this issue, my research questions focus on what aspects of the experience are important to the children and seek deeper insights into these through an investigation of the ways in which meanings are constructed as children and adults interact in the setting.

The conceptual framework for my study is underpinned by attachment theory. However, it also draws on socio-cultural theory to make sense of aspects of children's experiences that cannot be explained by attachment theory and adopts principles from symbolic interactionism and social constructivism to help to understand how meanings are constructed.

The methodology selected for my research is an ethnographic case study. A variety of methods of data collection are employed, including observations, pupil conversations and a photograph activity.

Two dominant themes emerge as being important to the children; 'relationships with adults' and 'peer relationships'. Within the 'relationships with adults' theme, the nurture staff become represented in terms of 'mothering' and as 'scaffolders' and 'play partners'. Within the 'peer relationship' theme, there is a focus on how children construct 'windows on social worlds' and 'gendered identities' as they engage in joint play with their peers. The new understandings that emerge give insights into some of the ways in which nurture groups might be developed.

My original contribution to nurture group research is that my study explores the social processes that go on between children and adults in nurture groups, with a focus on the ways in which they construct meaning as they interact.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction: A Study of Children's Experiences in a Primary School Nurture Group

Introduction

The aim of my research is to explore children's constructions of their experiences in a primary school nurture group. Nurture groups are small classes of between eight and twelve children based in mainstream schools that provide a short-term intervention for children with social, emotional and learning needs (Boxall, 2002, Lucas, 2010).

The experiences of children who attend this type of provision are notoriously difficult to research. As a result of inadequate experiences of nurturing in early childhood, children who attend nurture groups are often vulnerable, with a range of social, emotional and learning needs. Furthermore, they often have language and communication needs that can make it difficult for them to talk about their experiences. Conducting research with this group of children, therefore, presents huge ethical and practical considerations.

Yet, the children are the main stakeholders in a nurture group and have a right to have a say and be involved in decisions that are made about their education. The challenge is to find an appropriate methodology for giving the children a voice so that they can talk about their experiences.

My research addresses a gap in the literature relating to children's experiences of being in a nurture group. Although there is an increasing body of research on the subject, relatively few studies provide any real insights into the pupil perspective. Studies that have attempted to incorporate the views of pupils report only superficial findings relating to aspects of the nurture group experience that children value, for example, the quality of interpersonal relationships, opportunities for fun and play, the nature of the environment and the support offered by the staff (Cooper, Arnold and Boyd, 2001, Cooper and

Tiknaz, 2007). My study adds to the current research by seeking deeper insights into aspects that emerge as important to the children that attend.

One of the key criticisms directed at nurture group studies that have attempted to seek the views of pupils is the use of the interview as the predominant method for eliciting the views of children (Cooper et al., 2001, Garner and Thomas, 2011, Kourmoulaki, 2013). Researchers have questioned whether interviewing children helps to access their perceptions in a reliable manner. For example, Cooper et al. (2001) commented that the children in their study did not understand what was required of them in the interview situation and many gave guarded answers as they did not want to be disloyal to their teachers. These issues were also recognised by later researchers, who incorporated more child-friendly methods such as drawing (Syrnyk, 2013), circle time (Griffiths, Stenner and Hicks, 2014) and collaborative mapping and poster design (Cefai and Pizzuto, 2017) in an attempt to access the voices of the children. However, although these methods offer a way forward, the researchers combined these approaches with interviewing children.

My research offers an alternative approach to the interview method. I describe my research as an ethnographic case study. I adopt the role of participant observer in an attempt to get an insider view of how children experience being in a nurture group and employ a photograph activity as a method to encourage conversation around their experiences. These methods are explained in more detail in the methodology chapter.

This chapter will now give an overview of the study, including an introduction to the research questions and the conceptual framework for the study. I will then describe my background and the context for the research. The final section gives an outline of the structure of the thesis, with a brief account of what will be covered in each of the chapters.

Overview of the Study

My aim was to investigate children's constructions of their experiences in a primary school nurture group. The following research questions were devised to help to explore this:

Table 1: Research questions

RQ1	What aspects of the experience are most important to the children that attend a primary school nurture group?
RQ2	How do children construct meanings through their interactions with others in the nurture group?
RQ3	How do the nurture staff construct meanings as they interact with children in the nurture group?
RQ4	How do the constructions of children and staff in the nurture group give insights that could be used to shape provision?

In order to answer these questions, I adopt a conceptual framework that recognises the importance of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980) but focuses mainly on the social processes that take place between children and adults in the setting. I apply aspects of socio-cultural theory to explore elements of children's experiences that cannot be explained by attachment theory, such as the processes involved in learning. I also adopt principles associated with social constructionism and symbolic interactionism to explore the ways in which meanings are constructed. This offers a suitable conceptual framework for my study as I believe that there is not one truth or reality but that meanings are constructed by participants as they interact with others in social settings. The conceptual framework for the research will be further explored in the literature review.

Research question 1 is concerned with what aspects of the nurture group experience are important to the children that attend a primary school nurture group. As a participant observer, I am able to spend time in the nurture group,

observing children and recording what they do and say about being in the group. Further data can be collected as children complete an activity in which they take photographs of their favourite aspects of the nurture group and talk to me about their experiences as they arrange their images into a book. The conversations that take place are recorded using an iPad and transcribed after the session. In order to stay close to the data, I base my initial analysis on aspects of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). Raw data is analysed through the identification of first and second level codes in order to identify what aspects of nurture groups are important from the pupil perspective.

The second research question relates to the ways in which children construct meanings through their interactions with others. After having identified which aspects of the nurture group experience are most important to the children, I explore these aspects further by returning to the data from observations, pupil conversations and children's photo books to examine the meanings that are constructed in the course of interactions with adults and peers.

Although I set out to explore the experiences of children, these could not be understood without considering the contribution of the nurture staff. Research question 3 explores the ways in which the nurture staff construct meaning as they interact with children in the nurture group. In order to answer this research question, I draw on data from observations that includes examples of what the nurture staff do and say in the setting and the ways in which they respond to the children. Further analysis of this data may provide an increased understanding of some of the constructions held by staff, which then impact on the experiences of children.

The final research question relates to the ways in which the constructions of children and staff in the nurture group can be used to shape provision. As an open-ended, inductive study, the implications for practice can only be reached through an in-depth analysis of triangulated data from observations and conversations with pupils and staff.

Researcher Background

Further justification for my study comes from my professional interest in nurture groups. For many years, I worked as an advisory teacher in a local authority support service. I first became interested in nurture groups during my time working with children in a team supporting schools to meet the needs of looked after children. I then transferred to the Behaviour Support Team. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980) helped to make sense of the behaviours that some children were exhibiting in the schools that I visited.

In 2008, I completed a four day course on 'The Theory and Practice of Nurture Groups', delivered by the Nurture Group Network and went on to gain the Nurture Group Network Accredited Trainers Certificate. The credits gained in the former contributed towards a 'Masters of Arts in Learning and Teaching', which I completed at the University of Leicester in January 2013.

During my time as a Behaviour Support Teacher, I took on nurture groups as my area of specialism. I worked as part of a multi-disciplinary team offering advice, support and training to staff who delivered the provision. I also ran termly network meetings for schools with nurture groups in the local area.

In January 2017, I set up my own company which I registered under the name of 'Nurture Success'. My role in the company is that of an education consultant, supporting schools to meet the social and emotional needs of children. As the name of my company suggests, a major part of my role involves helping schools to set up and develop nurture groups through the provision of advice, training and on-going support. A key reason for the implementation of the research was to enable me to gain insights that could be used to inform my work with schools.

Although nurture groups were first established in the early 1970s by Marjorie Boxall, I believe that they are now needed more than ever. Many of the children that I am asked to support have social, emotional and learning needs that

schools attribute to inadequate early nurturing and issues relating to their home background, such as family breakdown and domestic violence. The link between negative experiences at home and poorer outcomes for children has also been supported in recent literature (Bellis, Lowey, Leckenby, Hughes and Harrison, 2014, Roffey, 2016).

A further justification for the research is that nurture groups are now being forced to close due to a lack of funding. Many of the groups that I have worked with in the past no longer operate. This tendency is also apparent across the country. According to the Nurture Group Network, many schools today are facing significant budget constraints that may put nurture groups at risk (Ruby, 2017). Given the current economic climate, it becomes even more important that quality research is undertaken to explore what children gain from attending a nurture group.

Research Context

My research is conducted in a local authority in the West Midlands. Information from the 2011 census indicates that the borough had a population of 309,000. Deprivation indicators suggest that it was the 12th most deprived local authority out of 326 in England. According to the local authority website, there are currently 1611 children classed as having Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs. I am unable to name the website from which these data were obtained as the web address includes the name of the borough. However, I have included the statistics as they support my argument that there is a need for further research into nurture groups.

The study takes place in a mainstream primary school. In order to respect anonymity, I refer to this school by the pseudonym of Greenfields Primary School in this thesis. It is a smaller than average primary school, serving an urban area in the West Midlands. It is a one-form entry school consisting of eight classes and caters for 453 pupils between three and eleven years of age.

The school was rated as outstanding by Ofsted in 2009 and was afforded academy status in 2013.

The nurture group that provides a focus for my case study was set up in 2009 as one of six focussed-provision groups in the borough. These groups were funded by the local authority and monitored annually. I refer to the nurture group by the pseudonym the Rainbow Group. The Rainbow Group is run by two staff, who I refer to as the nurture teacher and the nurture assistant. Both staff had completed the three day nurture group training course, delivered by the local authority support service and recognised by the Nurture Group Network. Over the course of the research period, there were nine children in the group between the ages of 4 and 11.

The study was conducted over a period of two terms between January and July 2015. It was comprised of six detailed observations and six sessions working with individual pupils on a photograph activity.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. In Chapter 2, there is a review of the literature including an outline of nurture groups, the conceptual framework for the study and an exploration of the ways in which nurture groups have been researched. A gap is identified in the literature relating to the pupil perspective on nurture groups.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology for my research. A rationale for the study is provided, followed by a justification for the methodological approach selected. It begins with my world view and explains how this leads to my choice of methodology and data collection methods. It then outlines the pilot study before going on to describe the main study.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 describe my research findings relating to the two key themes that emerge as being important to the children that attend the nurture

group; 'relationships with adults' and 'peer relationships'. Further analysis within these themes reveals the ways in which meanings are constructed in the course of interactions between the children and adults in the Rainbow Group. Chapter 4 explores how the nurture staff become represented in terms of mothering. Chapter 5 explores two more ways in which the nurture staff are constructed as they become represented as 'scaffolders' and 'play partners'. Chapter 6 addresses the second most important theme from the pupil perspective; that of 'peer relationships.' There is a focus on the importance of joint play with their peers. The two sections in this chapter relate to the ways in which children make sense of their social world and the ways in which they construct gendered identities as they play with their peers.

Finally, Chapter 7 provides a conclusion to the study. It draws together my findings with reference to each of the research questions and explores the implications for policy, practice and research. The chapter culminates with a discussion of my journey as a researcher and the limitations of the study, before ending with a brief concluding statement.

This chapter has provided an introduction to my research, which is concerned with children's constructions of their experiences in a primary school nurture group. The literature review will now offer a more in-depth outline of nurture groups and a further explanation of the conceptual framework for the study. It will then discuss some of the ways in which nurture groups have been researched, highlighting a gap in terms of the pupil perspective.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review: Conceptual Framework and Nurture Group Research

Introduction

The first part of this chapter relates to literature linked to the conceptual framework for my study. Researchers have identified attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980) as the key theory underpinning nurture groups (Boxall, 2002, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005, Lucas, 2010). It offers a good starting point for my research, given that my study is concerned with what happens in the course of interactions between children and staff. However, my research will seek deeper insights into the social processes that take place in nurture groups. I draw on socio-cultural theory to explore aspects of children's experiences that cannot be explained by attachment theory alone and principles from symbolic interactionism and social constructivism to explore how meanings are constructed in the course of child-adult interactions.

In the second part of the chapter, I will briefly consider criticisms of therapeutic approaches in schools before examining some of the ways in which nurture groups have been researched. I will begin by referring to studies that have employed empirical methods to explore their impact on children's development (Cooper et al., 2001, Cooper and Whitebread, 2007, Reynolds, Mackay and Kearney, 2009, Seth-Smith, Levi, Pratt, Fonagy and Jaffey, 2010, Chiappella, 2015, Grantham and Primrose, 2017). I then discuss studies that have sought the perspectives of those involved in nurture groups. Whilst a small number of studies have included the views of staff (Cooper et al., 2001, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005, Sanders, 2007, Garner and Thomas, 2011, Shaver and McClatchley, 2013), I conclude that there is a gap in the literature relating to the ways in which children experience nurture groups. After outlining some of the challenges faced by previous researchers who have attempted to obtain the pupil perspective, I will refer to some of the literature around pupil voice to

support my argument that the children in nurture groups have a right to be heard.

Conceptual Framework for the Thesis

The following diagram gives an overview of the conceptual framework for the study.

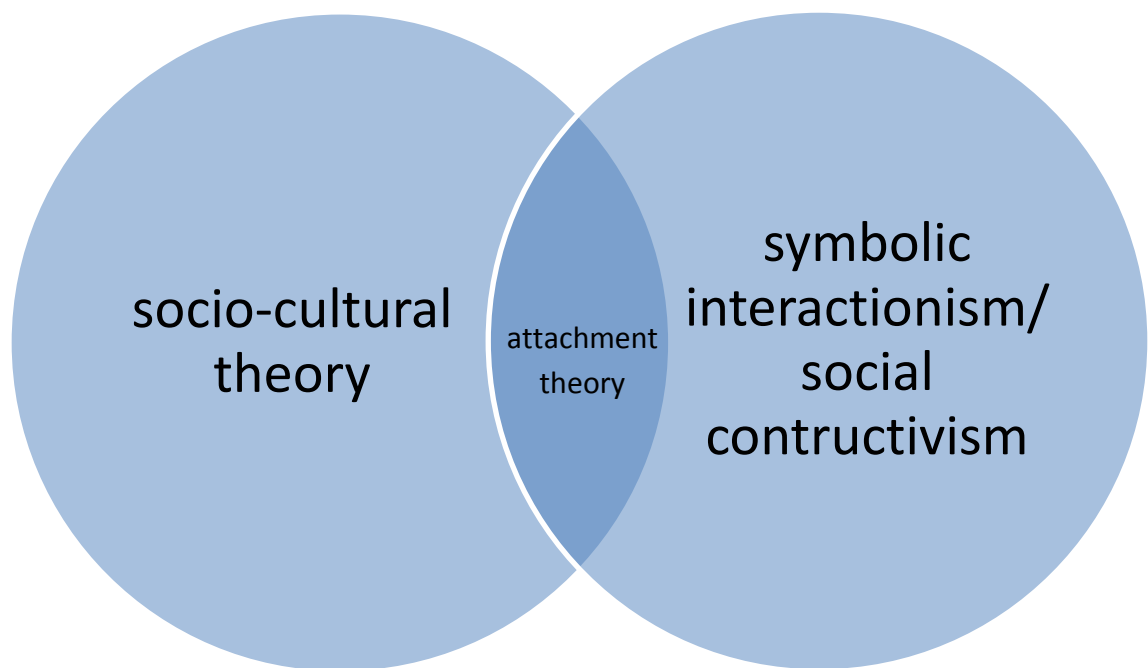


Figure 1: Venn diagram illustrating conceptual framework

Attachment Theory

My research journey began with a consideration of attachment theory (Ainsworth and Bell, 1970, Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980). As a result of my nurture group training and early reading and research, I had come to understand attachment as the main theory underlying nurture groups. Nurture group researchers have often referred to the importance of this theory to the development of nurture groups (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, Cooper and Whitebread, 2007, Bennathan and Boxall, 2008a).

Bowlby was known as the 'Father of Attachment' because of his pioneering work in attachment theory. In 1950, he was asked by the World Health Organisation to advise on the mental health of homeless children. He introduced attachment theory in a talk to the British Psychoanalytical Society in 1957 and published a paper in the following year; *The Nature of the Child's Tie to his Mother* (Bowlby, 1958). He challenged psychoanalytical models and proposed a more motivational theory model based on ethology and comparative psychology and the notion of instinctive drives. Whilst critics of attachment theory have argued that it is just an instinct theory, Bowlby (1958) proposed that attachment can be understood within an evolutionary context in that the caregiver provides safety and security for the infant. According to Bowlby, infants have a universal need to seek close proximity with their caregiver when they feel under stress or threatened.

His theory focused on the importance of early relationships between child and carer. The child's mother was viewed as the primary attachment figure. His work led to the formation of a key principle:

What is believed to be essential for mental health is that the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment.

(Bowlby, 1969: xii)

He proposed that the formation of an attachment was central to a child's subsequent development in terms of capacity to explore the world and learn. Attachment became a major developmental paradigm for understanding human social and emotional development. Although his claims raised important questions in terms of the importance of the mother-baby relationship, his works were purely theoretical and untested.

His ideas were later developed by Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall (1978) and Main and Solomon (1986). Ainsworth provided the first empirical evidence for attachment theory. She investigated the nature of attachment behaviour between young children and their mothers using the 'strange situation' procedure (Ainsworth and Bell, 1970). In this controlled study, she placed 56 white, middle class children between 49 and 51 weeks old in situations with and without their mothers and monitored their behaviours. She defined an attachment as an:

affectional tie that one person or animal forms between himself and another specific one.

(Ainsworth and Bell, 1970, p.50)

She described attachment behaviours in young children as those which promote proximity such as approaching, following, clinging, smiling, crying and calling out. Through observing the behaviour of young children during episodes involving the mother, baby and a stranger, she identified different attachment styles. Ainsworth et al. (1978) proposed that a secure attachment forms when children experience warm and responsive parenting. She considered this to be important as it provides a foundation for future relationships. She identified three attachment styles; secure, insecure avoidant and insecure ambivalent/resistant. She proposed that an insecure attachment develops when the primary attachment figure does not respond sensitively. Disorganised attachment was later identified as a fourth attachment style (Main and Solomon, 1990).

Key nurture group researchers were influenced by attachment theory. For example, Bennathan and Boxall (2008a) claimed that a child's early social and cognitive development stems from early nurturing care, which centres on attachment and involves the close identification of parent and child. This constitutes the first stage of development through which children begin to learn and interact with others. The children's difficulties were understood in terms of impoverished experiences of nurture in early life. They lacked the early learning experiences that usually occur through a "trusting relationship with an attentive

and responsive parent" (Boxall, 2002, p.1). As children who attend nurture groups may not have had access to responsive adults at home, it is particularly important that they build secure attachments with the nurture staff (Boxall, 2002, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005, Lucas, 2010).

The term 'nurture' suggests close, supportive and caring relationships:

The process in the nurture group, as in families, is based in and through attachment and is mediated within and through a secure relationship.

(Boxall, 2002, p. 12)

Nurture groups provide a "restorative experience of early nurture" (Lucas 2010, p.15). They offer children the opportunity to build secure attachments with caring adults in a safe environment (Colwell and O'Connor, 2003). The relationship between the adult and the child is crucial for the development of the child (Bennathan and Boxall, 2008, Billington, 2012). Forming an attachment to key adults in early childhood settings can serve a "compensatory function" (Cugmas, 2007, p.362) for children who have not experienced maternal care at home.

Attachment theory became a major developmental paradigm for understanding human social and emotional development. Since Bowlby's original work on maternal deprivation, attachment theory has helped to understand the link between early relationships and later performance in school, thus providing useful insights into behaviour in the classroom. Geddes (2006) related attachment theory to the behaviour and learning of children in school. She suggested that children who have not built secure attachments find it difficult to cope with the demands of school life and struggle to develop healthy, trusting relationships with adults. This was followed by Bomber (2007, 2011), who argued that the way that the adult responds to the child and meets their needs shapes how the child comes to understand themselves and how they respond to others around them. The nature of the attachment formed provides a template for later relationships (Bomber, 2007). She provided practical

strategies for supporting children who have attachment difficulties as a result of experiencing loss, trauma, abuse and neglect.

Although nurture group studies have often highlighted the importance of close relationships between the staff and children (Cooper et al., 2001, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, Cooper and Whitebread, 2007, Garner and Thomas, 2011), there has been very little nurture group research in which the theme of relationships has been the sole focus. This is surprising given the importance of the attachment relationship for the development of the child (Boxall, 2002, Lucas, 2010, Billington, 2012).

In the latter stages of my study, I conducted a search using the Educational Resources and Information Center (ERIC) and the British Educational Index (BEI). Entering the terms 'nurture groups' and 'relationships' revealed no new studies directly relevant to my research. However, I located one relevant study in *The International Journal of Nurture in Education* (Balisteri, 2016). I also carried out a search using EThOS, the e-theses online service, and found a recent doctoral study focused on relationships in nurture groups (Gibb, 2017).

The focus of the study by Balisteri (2016) was on the way in which children and teachers in nurture groups perceived their relationships with each other. The theoretical base of this study was attachment theory. It set out to measure perceptions of child-teacher relationships over a period of time. Questionnaires were issued to the staff and children in five Key Stage 2 nurture groups and compared with questionnaires completed by matched controls in five schools without nurture groups. The children's feelings towards the practitioners were also recorded on scales and discerned from children's drawings of themselves and the adult. The study found that the staff in the nurture groups felt closer to children than staff in mainstream classrooms. Children felt less vulnerable due to an increase in emotional security, which was attributed to the development of an attachment to the nurture staff. Although this study provided insights into children's perceptions of their interactions with their teachers, the researcher questioned the capacity of some of the measures used to help understand

relationships. For example, the effectiveness of the drawing measure, Fury's Child-Family Drawing Global Rating Scale (Fury, Carlson and Sroufe, 1997) was questioned as it had not been widely used in research and there was limited evidence of its reliability.

A recent doctoral study (Gibb, 2017, p.2) explored the ways in which nurture group staff made sense of their relationships with children in nurture groups. The study highlighted a 'relationship journey' between the practitioner and child, which led to the development of a close relationship. The strong feelings evoked were compared with those experienced within a parent-child relationship. The relationship journey was discussed with reference to psychodynamic and attachment theory. A secure attachment relationship was formed in which the practitioner offered a 'safe base' or emotional security for the child. The staff supported the child's development by offering containment; they were consistently available to help the child manage their emotional needs and this led to the development of a trusting relationship. However, offering containment was also identified as a challenge as some adults experienced a lack of connection with pupils and others found the challenging behaviour of the children hard to manage. The study explored the ways in which close relationships are formed but also advocated for the development of structures to support practitioners who often carried a heavy emotional load. Although Gibb's (2017) study turned to attachment theory to explain practitioners' perceptions of their relationships with children, a symbolic interactionist approach was adopted as a theoretical framework. This will be discussed later in terms of my own approach.

Like Balisteri (2016) and Gibb (2017), I am interested in seeking deeper insights into the nature of relationships between children and adults in nurture groups. In order to do this, I set out to examine the social processes that occur in the course of interactions between children and staff.

The Social Processes within Child-Adult relationships

As discussed in the previous section, nurture group staff have often been viewed as attachment figures, who offer an alternative compensatory experience of early nurture (Cugmas, 2007, Lucas 2010). However, researchers have often considered the role of educational staff in terms of the social processes that go on between children and adults. This is first illustrated with reference to literature around notions of mothering and caring. It then discusses research concerned with the social processes involved in supporting children's learning and emotions and studies that explore the ways in which meanings are constructed through social interactions.

Teaching has been seen as a natural part of women's work since the nineteenth century. Steedman (1985, p.149) referred to Froebel's (1782-1852) dictum that the ideal teacher of young children is like "a mother made conscious". This idea related to the idea of motherhood as a vocation. This notion was viewed as empowering women by valuing their maternal instincts and encouraging them to become educated in order to facilitate their child's development (Froebel, 2014). Steedman (1985) proposed that the link between mothering and teaching derived from two sources; the role of middle class mothers in teaching their children and the natural, instinctive education provided by working class mothers.

Despite its long history, the link between teaching and mothering has often been problematic. A number of researchers have reported that people have undervalued teaching, seeing it as an extension of mothering (Steedman, 1985, Acker, 1999, Vogt, 2002, Biklen, Marshall and Pollard, 2008, Shin 2015). This denies the years of professional training that are involved in becoming a teacher.

Conversely, the positive qualities associated with motherhood have been deemed by others to be desirable in educational settings as a crucial element of good teaching (Burgess and Carter, 1992, 1996, Bredekamp and Copple, 1997,

Collins, 1998, Goldstein 2002, Ruddick, 2004, Copple and Bredekamp, 2009). Burgess and Carter (1992, 1996) identified a 'mumsy' discourse in which the role of the primary teacher was described by a student teacher in terms of qualities associated with motherhood, such as 'caring' and 'nurturance' (Burgess and Carter, 1992, p.353). Certain forms of mothering were regarded as pedagogy, thus primary teaching was seen as "a conscious and articulated version of mothering" (Burgess and Carter, 1992, p.349).

Whilst mothering is inevitably associated with women, caring is an approach that is open to men and women. Hence, some feminist researchers have moved away from narratives of mothering, preferring to discuss notions of caring in education. For example, Gilligan (1995) argued for a feminist ethic of care in which caring is not understood as gendered but as a moral orientation. She described a conception of mothering that goes beyond the implementation of a maternal approach to a care-centred pedagogy that can be applied to practitioners of either gender. A few years later, caring was described by Vogt (2002) in terms of a continuum; ranging from caring as commitment, caring as relatedness, caring as physical care, caring as expressing affection, caring as parenting and caring as mothering. Whereas caring as commitment was stated to be non-gender specific, mothering was associated with traditional notions of femininity.

Other researchers challenged the notion of caring as a virtue or disposition in favour of a view of caring that focuses on reciprocity in terms of the relationship between the 'carer' and the 'cared for' (Noddings, 2003). Noddings argued that caring should not be seen as an individual behaviour or 'way of being'. Instead, she viewed caring as relational in that it refers to the way that an individual engages with another person. The notion of reciprocity was supported more recently by Shin (2015), who set out to explore the ways in which infant teachers recognise and respond to the needs of children and develop caring relationships:

This single case study was undertaken to explore how an infant head teacher meets the needs of the infants, who express their desire to be cared for, in their caring encounters.

(Shin, 2015, p.496)

Caring is proposed to be a two-way, reciprocal process. The staff care for the children and the children wish to be cared for. On the basis of her findings, Shin concluded that teachers and infants co-construct the caring classroom. Therefore, the notion of care goes beyond simply meeting the needs of the children to become part of a more complex pedagogical approach within a highly professional care setting.

Some researchers have described the notion of a care-centred education (Martin, 1992, Noddings, 1992). Caring was interpreted as action rather than an attribute (Goldstein, 1998). Martin (1992, p.27) described a 'schoolhome' which was proposed to offer "a moral equivalent of home". She viewed caring as a purposeful pedagogy that teaches children about relationships with others. Children not only learn that relationships with adults can be positive but learn how to relate to others. This view was supported in a later study, which claimed that an education that focuses on care rather than subject disciplines helps to produce people who are "not only competent, but caring, loving and lovable" (Fielding and Moss, 2011, p.69). More recent research has also supported a view of caring as a means of teaching a set of values (Spratt, 2016, Warin, 2017). Parallels can be drawn between Martin's notion of a 'schoolhome' and a nurture group. In both settings, children learn about relationships and values through their experience of being cared for by others in a safe and homely environment (Cooper and Lovey, 1999). Therefore, the giving of care can be seen as a complex social process, which contributes to children's educational experiences and instruction.

Although discourses of mothering were replaced, to some extent, by narratives of caring, the notion of mothering has never gone away. Educational practitioners have a legal obligation to act in 'loco parentis' when the child is in

school. This phrase is Latin for 'instead of a parent'. The Children Act (1989) states that teachers have a duty of care towards children under their supervision. This legal responsibility may have played a part in reinforcing constructions of mothering.

Examples of mothering discourses have appeared in studies since 2000. This suggests that teachers continue to feel a responsibility to care for children and keep them safe. For example, Pinnegar, Lay, Bigham and Dulude (2006) examined stories of motherhood to explore the impact of mothering on practitioners' beliefs about teaching. They found that both teachers and mothers felt responsible for the development of children and felt uncertain about meeting these obligations. They concluded that reflecting on experiences of being a mother and teacher helps to re-think teaching and mothering in new ways.

Researchers have also reported that teachers feel a particular obligation to care for children when they perceive that they have not received adequate care at home. For example, King (1978, p.146) suggested a "family-home-background theory" in which educational staff attributed lack of progress and poor behaviour to children's home background and culture. On the basis of this understanding, children were viewed as innocent and in need of protection. Support for King's theory can be found in later research. Cugmas (2007) proposed that staff offer mothering to compensate for a lack of maternal attention at home and James (2012, p.171) identified a "deficit discourse" in which teachers felt a need to act as mothers to children who were not receiving adequate care. In her study, James (2012) conducted a narrative enquiry of conceptions of caring held by six elementary school teachers. During this study, a head teacher described her staff as "surrogate parents" (James, 2012, p.172). One of the teachers referred to herself as a mother figure to her students and another described the children as her "babies". These examples illustrate some of the ways in which teachers' beliefs and ideologies in relation to the children impact on their actions. However, whilst deficit discourses support the need for a caring approach, James warned that they might actually serve to limit the development of caring

relationships with pupils due to a tendency for practitioners to make assumptions about what the children need.

Although there is clearly a link between the notion of mothering and attachment theory, I conclude that the constructs of mothering and caring exist within a complex pedagogy. 'Mothering' will be examined further in my study as it emerges as a dominant aspect as I explore child-adult interactions in the Rainbow Group.

The Social Processes Involved in Learning and Supporting Children's Emotions

A key nurture group principle is that learning is understood developmentally (Boxall, 2002, Lucas, Issley and Buckland, 2006, Lucas, 2010). This theory considers within-child factors, such as developmental levels, but does not explore the social context in which learning takes place. My study draws on Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory to explore how learning occurs in the course of social interaction between children and adults in the Rainbow Group.

Whilst the majority of nurture group researchers focus on attachment theory (Cooper et al., 2001, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, Cooper and Whitebread, 2007, Garner and Thomas, 2011, Balisteri, 2016), some have acknowledged the contribution of Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory of learning (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007, Garner and Thomas, 2011, Griffiths et al., 2014). Learning can be seen in terms of the "internalisation of functions experienced in social interaction" (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007, p.147). This view was supported by Garner and Thomas (2011) who claimed that Vygotskian theory can help to explain the educational aspects of nurture group provision and Griffiths et al. (2014) who proposed that factors such as taking regular breaks and reducing task complexity can be related to the scaffolding process, which is advocated by the socio-cultural theory of learning.

Vygotsky (1987) highlighted the key role of social interaction in developing cognitive strategies in learning. The notion of scaffolding has been explained as a process that enables a child to "solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts" (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976, p.90). Scaffolding was originally described as a social support system for enhancing children's learning and development in cultural contexts (Bruner, 1986). It is a process through which an individual's learning is guided by a more competent helper who provides direct support.

Scaffolding is linked to the notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1987). This refers to the process in which children's learning is scaffolded by a more knowledgeable person, extending the learner's thinking beyond the point that they would be able to reach independently. The Zone of Proximal Development is one of Vygotsky's most important contributions to education (Meece and Daniels, 2008, Garner and Thomas, 2011).

Socio-cultural theories have continued to provide insights into child development and learning:

Post-Vygotsky, educational researchers are aware of, and often sympathetic to socio-cultural claims that knowledge can only be constructed and revealed in and through social practices.

(James and Pollard, 2011, p.14).

Researchers since the millennium have acknowledged that adults help children to move on with their learning. Learning takes place as adults interact with children through a scaffolding process (Bilton, 2012, van de Pol, Volman and Beishuizen, 2012, Eshach, Dor-Zluderman and Arbel, 2011, Bakker, Smit and Wegerif, 2015, Wass and Golding, 2014, Muhonen, 2016).

Whilst the notion of scaffolding usually relates to learning, it can also be applied to emotional support. This makes sense given that Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory positions learning, motivation and emotions as interconnected

processes. The link between praise and children's esteem has been recognised by Colwell and O'Connor (2003) and Bani (2011), who proposed that the use of praise in nurture groups was likely to enhance the self-esteem of pupils. However, praise has also been viewed as a social process. Eshach et al. (2011, p.563) claimed that praise functions as a social device which offers a type of "affective scaffolding", reinforcing children's self-esteem and resulting in a more positive attitude to the learning task.

Whilst attachment theory is important to nurture groups, socio-cultural theory helps to give a different perspective on relationships between children and staff. Although some nurture group researchers have referred briefly to socio-cultural theory (Garner and Thomas, 2011, Griffiths et al., 2014), the topic of scaffolding in nurture groups has never really been explored. However, it will feature as an important aspect within my study.

The Construction of Meaning

Whilst socio-cultural theory helps to make sense of relationships between adults and children in terms of the learning process and emotional support, I was also keen to explore how meanings are constructed in nurture groups.

I became interested in the work of King (1978), who made a key contribution to the sociology of schooling. He represented a move away from large-scale surveys, which had been used widely in educational research previously, to conduct more in-depth research in a smaller number of settings. In order to understand the work of teachers in three infant schools in different social areas, he carried out an ethnographic study of infant classrooms. This involved collecting data from observations, interviews and documentary evidence. Through an exploration of how teachers give meaning to their situations, he discovered that teachers' practices relate to their definitions of the nature of young children. He identified certain ideologies around teaching, along with shared beliefs and a common language.

An example of this was his "family-home background theory" (King, 1978, p.146) in which educators interpret children's poor behaviour and progress in the light of "the conditions and the way that they were brought up" (King, 1978 p.90). This was deemed to lead to a more caring approach, based on the conception that the child is essentially innocent and in need of protection (King, 1978). The view that teachers understand the children within the context of their cultures and societies and incorporate these beliefs into their practices was also reiterated in later research (Lam and Pollard, 2006, Pollard and Filer, 2007, James and Pollard, 2011, James, 2012). I will be discussing these ideas in relation to my study later in this thesis.

The study by King was theoretically based on the work of Weber: Weber believed that it was social actions that should be the focus of study in sociology. Such perspectives deny the existence of a social structure that determines behaviour but focus on the way in which social structures are shaped by individuals. A 'social action' was an action carried out by an individual to which an individual attached a meaning:

Sociology...is a science which attempts the interpretative understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects. In 'action' is included all human behaviour when and in so far as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to it. Action in this sense may be either overt or purely inward or subjective; it may consist of positive intervention, or of deliberately refraining from such intervention or passively acquiescing in the situation. Action is social in so far as, by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual (or individuals), it takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course.

(Weber, 1947, p.88)

Weber's social action theory is relevant to my research as it supports an interpretivist approach which focuses on how individuals create meaning in

social situations. According to Weber, sociology is the study of society and behaviour and must therefore look at the heart of interaction.

Whilst King (1978) made a significant contribution to social research in schools, a number of studies since the 1970s have adopted approaches based on symbolic interactionism (Burgess, 1984, Acker, 1999, Pollard, 1985 and Pollard and Filer, 1996, 1999, 2000). As my research questions focus on how meanings are constructed in the course of interactions between children and staff, this seemed to offer a suitable conceptual framework for my study. The term symbolic interactionism was first used by Blumer, based on Mead's idea that society influences human behaviour. Blumer identified five key factors from Mead's work, which helped shape the emergence of symbolic interactionism; the self, the act, social interaction, objects, and joint interaction (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionism focuses on the subjective meanings or interpretations that individuals give to the external world, through joint interactions with each other. According to Blumer (1969), the approach is built on three premises:

The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.... The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.

(Blumer 1969, p.2).

It focuses on the meanings or interpretations that individuals give to social situations and the way in which they then behave on the basis of these meanings (Punch, 2009). The approach is concerned with the ways in which social interactions shape our behaviours and the perceptions and meanings we give to our experiences (Aldiabat and Le Navenec, 2011). As my study seeks to learn how meanings are constructed in the course of interactions between

children and staff in nurture groups, symbolic interactionism appears to be a suitable ontological position for my research.

In his book about field research, Burgess (1984) applied the principles of symbolic interactionism to his study, which was based in a secondary school. He explored the ways in which the teachers and pupils "defined and re-defined the rules and routines in the everyday life of the school" (Burgess, 1984, p.8). Interactionists are concerned with an interpretative view of sociology which puts an emphasis on understanding the actions of the participants on the basis of their experiences of the world and the way in which their actions arise from the experience (Burgess, 1984). There is a focus on the meanings that individuals construct as they interact with others.

Symbolic interactionist approaches also appeared to have relevance for my study in that they are concerned with the perspectives of participants in social settings. For example, Acker (1999) focused on the collective perspectives that are negotiated by participants in social situations. She wanted to understand the interpretations that people place on the world around them and became interested in symbolic interactionism, which was becoming more popular as part of a British sociology of education:

Symbolic interactionists try to find out how people understand and interpret their own and others' actions and reactions in everyday life.
(Acker, 1999, p.18)

Her ethnographic study sought to explore the realities of teachers' work over a ten year period at Hillview Primary School, with a view to understanding what can be learned for the future. Acker also added a feminist perspective as she felt that this had not been given enough attention in symbolic interactionist research. She identified three key themes; work, culture and gender. These will all feature, to some extent, in my own research.

Further reading brought me to the work of Pollard (Pollard, 1985, Pollard and Filer, 1996, 1999, 2000), which helped me to further develop the conceptual framework for my research. Pollard applied his experience as a classroom teacher and a sociological approach to develop analytical models about social processes in schools. He set out to get a better understanding of pupils' identities, learning strategies, experiences and perceptions in the social setting of the primary classroom. Pollard also wanted to find out how the actions of teachers impacted on the ways in which children experience school. He drew on symbolic interactionism, which he defined as:

...founded on the belief that people 'act' on the basis of meanings and understandings which they develop through interactions with others.

(Pollard, 1985, x)

Like King (1978) and Acker (1999), he adopted an ethnographic approach in order to understand the meanings that are developed through interactions. Ethnographers are concerned to describe the perspectives of people in the context being studied through careful observation and participation in the social situation. He focused on the perspectives of teachers and children, which he believed added a sense of grounded realism (Pollard, 1985).

Pollard and Filer (1996) developed a model of pupil and teacher 'coping strategies', which are developed in the course of interactions in the classroom:

This model represents processes of classroom interaction and suggests that the negotiation of rules and understandings produces a 'working consensus' through which classroom relationships and classroom order are established and maintained.

(Pollard, 1996, xiii)

They later developed their theoretical approach to include social constructivism, which is concerned with the ways in which learning is influenced by culture and interaction with others. Although children were acknowledged to actively

construct meaning as they made sense of their experience, the influence of social and cultural factors such as gender and social class were also recognised.

Pollard and Filer (1996) viewed symbolic interactionism and social constructivism as complementary:

...whilst social constructivists provide insights on the processes through which people come to 'make sense' in particular social and cultural situations, symbolic interactionists promise to provide more detailed and incisive accounts of the contexts themselves.

(Pollard and Filer, 1996, xiv.)

Like Pollard, I bring aspects of symbolic interaction and social constructivism to my study. Whilst he developed models about social processes that were used to reflect on and develop classroom practice, my research aims to develop a theoretical position that can be used as a basis for developing practice in nurture groups.

Reflecting on how meanings are constructed can help to understand what goes on in nurture groups. The beliefs of staff impact on their actions and consequently on the ways that children experience the educational setting (Pollard, 1985 and Pollard and Filer, 1996, 1999, 2000). The processes that relate to learning and play opportunities in educational settings can be understood with reference to common ideologies relating to education. For example, Burgess and Carter (1996) explored how student teachers came to understand what it was like to be a 'real teacher' by positioning themselves within two existing narratives; child-centredness and a narrative based on discipline and assessment. Research studies have frequently identified tensions between the child-centred approaches recommended in the Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967) and the current political agenda, which is focused on the curriculum and the standards agenda. Whilst play is important in child-centred approaches, some teachers have found the notion of

learning through play problematic (Martlew, Stephen and Ellis, 2011). Although many are committed to the importance of play, they also express concerns about the progression of the children and the value of some play contexts (Bennett, Wood and Rogers, 1997). The beliefs of educational staff in relation to the value of play do not sit easily within a policy based on raising standards (Anning, 2010, Martlew et al., 2011) and play opportunities have often been reduced due to formal learning, target setting and assessment regimes (Adams et al., 2010). Even when there is an understanding of the importance of play, this has often not been reflected in curriculum planning (Moyles, 2010). These positions will now be discussed further in terms of the social processes involved in learning and play in nurture groups.

Nurture group literature has often referred to the importance of play as part of the nurture group experience (Boxall, 2002, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, Lucas, 2010):

...a special characteristic of nurture groups is the opportunities available for playing as a part of daily nurture group routine.

(Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, p.28)

Much of the literature relating to nurture groups has described play as a developmental process in line with children's levels of competence (Boxall, 2002, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, Bennathan and Boxall, 2008a, Lucas, 2010). This supports a key nurture group principle:

Children's learning is understood developmentally.

(Lucas et al., 2006, p.9)

A staged model of play was proposed in which children advance from solitary play to cooperative and collaborative play (Boxall, 2002, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, Bennathan and Boxall, 2008a, Lucas, 2010). These models were based on the ideas of Piaget, who proposed the children go through a sequence of play activities in the first years of life (Sutton-Smith, 1966). Piaget (1962) linked

play and thought, suggesting that play allows children to practise things that they have learned. Whilst such developmental approaches are useful, they are concerned with capacities within the individual child and fall within the domain of Psychology (Walkerdine, 1989).

In my study, I argue that it is necessary to look beyond developmental stages within individual children to consider the social processes that go on between them. Nurture group studies have claimed that peer relationships are important to children in nurture groups (Sanders, 2007, Griffiths et al., 2014, Syrnyk, 2014) but have not sought deeper insights into the nature of these relationships. However, other research studies have gone further to explore what happens between children when they play together (Pollard and Tann, 1987, Parker and Gottman, 1989, Dunn, 1993, Clark and Moss, 2011, Kernan and Singer, 2011):

We are missing a major piece of what excites, pleases and upsets children, what is central to their lives... if we don't attend to what happens between children and their friends.

(Dunn, 2004, p.3)

Some researchers have found that children construct meaning as they play. For example, Tarullo (1999) explored the ways in which children create 'windows on social worlds' as they play with their peers:

...play narratives are not samples of actual social interaction... they offer a child the ability to be dramatist, director and all of the actors in a representation of such interactions.

(Tarullo, 1999, p.183)

This idea has also appeared in more recent literature, for example, researchers have argued that socio-dramatic play provides a vehicle for children to construct narratives which help to make sense of the world (Anning, 2010, Whitebread and Jameson, 2010).

Children learn about friendship as they play together. They make friends as they develop shared interests and joy in play activities (Kernan and Singer, 2011). As they play, children become more aware of others, more sensitive towards others and develop a greater understanding of the feelings of others (Bruce, 2011). This also has wider implications as it has been argued that learning about friendships through play helps children to form representations of social relationships in the wider social world (Dunn, 1993).

Children also represent aspects of their home lives as they play together. This would support Vygotsky (1967), who claimed that features of the world most salient to the child at a given time are selected and highlighted through pretend play. Socio-dramatic play has also been referred to as a metaphor for children's lives (Bolton, 1979, Anning, 2010). Children's culture involves "constructing their own reality with each other" (Davies, 1982, p.33). The claim that children construct meaning as they play is supported in Papadopoulou's (2012) research on the ecology of role play. She compared two meanings of 'mimesis'. The first Platonic concept means to produce a direct imitation. The second, which derives from Aristotle, involves a more creative interpretation of the original form in which children "imaginatively construct, negotiate and perform versions of their realities" (Papadopoulou, 2012, p.576). She argued for the existence of an evolutionary play instinct in which children actively create scenarios that help them perceive and make sense of their world. She claimed that children are:

...active agents that constantly engage with and attempt to make sense of their world. They are consumers, but at the same time creators, of culture.

(Papadopoulou, 2012, p.577)

I would argue that play goes beyond the idea of children simply playing out aspects of their home lives to a more creative interpretation, which is better explained by Papadopoulou's second version of mimesis. This can be compared to a social constructivist perspective on play. For example, Lam and Pollard (2006, p.124) stated that children play an active part in "constructing,

reconstructing and responding creatively and differently" through their play. Through this type of play, Tarullo (1999) claimed that children can consider all perspectives of a situation or focus on one. The potential for domestic play to help to make sense of relationships was also supported by Kitson (2010), who claimed that socio-dramatic play leads to a greater awareness of social surroundings as the children act out social interactions and experience human relationships through symbolic representation.

Play has also been discussed in terms of its potential for enabling children to try out different future roles. Socio-dramatic play gives children the opportunity to explore who they are and who they might become (Anning, 2010). It has often been seen as a practice for adulthood (Blatchford, Pellegrini and Baines, 2016):

Imaginative play is fun, but in the midst of the joys of make believe, children may also be preparing for the reality of more effective lives.
(Singer and Singer, 1990, p.152)

Play offers opportunities for children to become creators of culture, who generate new ways of interacting and engaging with the environment:

...the uniqueness of role play lies in its variability. Orchestrated and performed by the players themselves, it offers the opportunity to create and experience different conditions, with variable demands, settings and challenges. As such, pretence can become the forum for the expression of the players' imaginations, creativity, understandings, but also concerns, anxieties and fears. It also enables the players to take risks in a safe environment, act out situations that would be potentially threatening in real life and be able to control those. Perhaps the latter could explain the attraction of pretence (or drama) for both children and adults.

(Papadopoulou 2012, p.577)

Whilst play helps children to make sense of their world, there may be a role for staff in enhancing this type of play through the provision of a wider range of play opportunities:

Educators using socio-dramatic play can stimulate, motivate and facilitate the play, encouraging the children to work at a deeper level than they would if left to their own devices.

(Kitson, 2010, p108)

There has also been some interesting research into the ways in which children in educational settings construct meaning in terms of gender as they play. Gender is a complex notion. There are a wide range of views on how it is formed and the role that it plays in society (Chapman, 2016). Researchers have noted that children generally play in single sex groups during the early years (Lloyd and Duveen, 1992, Martin, 2011, Blatchford et al., 2016). This might be explained in terms of 'gender dualism' which refers to the view that boys and girls are naturally different (Garvey, 1991, Pellegrini, 2004). Biological explanations emphasise the view that boys and girls are essentially different from each other. By contrast, feminists in the 1970s questioned the existence of sex differences (Gaskell and McLaren, 1986). Whilst I acknowledge the existence of biological differences, I would agree with researchers who have argued that gender is not fixed but is constructed as children interact with others in the social world. Some of these theories will now be explored in more detail.

The construction of gender identities has been viewed in terms of socialisation. This has been described as "the means by which culture, including notions of appropriate sex roles are transmitted" (Weinrich, 1978, p.19). It has also been explained in terms of an internalisation of the social world by the child (Henriques, Holloway, Urwin, Venn and Walkerdine, 1998). Socialisation theories have claimed that children develop gender identities from those around them. They can, to some extent, provide an account of how the child is produced and can give insights into the differences in how boys and girls play. However, some have argued that they provide a simplistic explanation of how

gender roles are produced (MacNaughton, 2001, Martin, 2011). MacNaughton (2001, p.21) referred to an "osmosis socialisation theory" where children absorb the messages around without question. Socialisation assumes that:

...identity is fixed and coherent, and fails to answer the question of why it is that some children accept some ideas and reject others.

(Martin. 2011, xv)

By contrast, feminist post-structuralist theory claims that gender identities are developed within an on-going process that occurs in social situations (Paechter, 2007, Martin, 2011). These theories have proposed that children learn their gender by positioning themselves inside the masculine and feminine discourses that are available to them in our society.

Whilst gender identities are initially formed in families and communities, they are developed through group processes in school (Blaise, 2005, Martin, 2011, Chapman, 2016). There has been much research to suggest that gender is constructed as children learn what it is like to be a boy or girl as they interact with each other in the school setting (Jordan, 1995, Thorne, 1993. Martin, 2011). Martin (2011) explored how children construct femininities and masculinities through play. She found that the children in early years classrooms played at activities in same-sex groups, with three and four year olds positioning themselves as feminine or masculine in order to be accepted by their peers.

The construction of masculinity is interesting as it often appears to be explained in terms of its opposition to femininity, for example, a significant part of the construction of masculinity is to avoid all things done by girls (Jordan, 1995). When boys do engage in domestic play, it is suggested to be risky in terms of losing masculine status (Davies, 1989, Browne, 2004, Paechter, 2007).

The differences in the ways in which boys and girls play might be explained by studies that refer to differences in the ways in which they view human

relationships in the social world, particularly with regard to power relations. Some researchers have argued that girls use domestic play as a way of feeling powerful (Davies, 1989, Walkerdine, 1989, Browne, 2004). Others have questioned whether aggressive play is typical for a boy or whether it is typical for a boy in a particular social world (Tarullo, 1999). Boys living in communities in which there are high levels of male violence construct "aggressive masculinities in school" (Skelton, 2001, Connolly, 2004, Paechter, 2007).

Other studies have suggested that wider cultural factors, such as the media, influence the gender identity of boys. Researchers have found that boys display masculine power through superhero play (Lloyd and Duveen, 1992, Jordan, 1995). Jordan (1995, p.69) refers to the "fighting boys" who have adopted a "warrior" discourse in which they are cast in the role of hero.

The formation of gender has often been attributed to the actions and beliefs of educational practitioners. School staff inadvertently reinforce gender roles without the educator being aware (Paechter, 2007, Martin, 2011, Chapman, 2016). Paechter (2007, p.70) refers to the way in which home corners are set up as "an unquestionably female domain". This is an example of one way in which practitioners' perceptions and practices might be "encouraging or discouraging participation in activities" (Tonyan and Howes, 2003, pp. 138–139).

Some have claimed that practitioners have "gender-typed expectations for children's behaviour in the classroom" (Ewing and Taylor, 2009, p.93). Boys are perceived as "rough" and "boisterous" when compared with girls who are more "sedate" and "calm" (Browne, 2004, p.106). Others have argued that teachers ignore gendered behaviour as they perceive such constructions of masculinity and femininity to be natural (Lloyd and Duveen, 1992, Martin, 2011).

In 1996, Gaskell and McLaren reported an improvement in the awareness of educational staff in this area compared to the 1970s. However, they called for a continuing need to review the resources on offer in order to ensure that gender

stereotypes are not being reinforced through the books provided. Further research in the 1980s and 1990s explored the use of 'disruptive stories' as a way of challenging children's gendered identities (Walkerdine, 1984, Davies, 1989, Yeoman, 1999):

'Disruptive' refers here to texts that challenge and go beyond conventional and limiting traditional storylines about race, gender and class through presenting unexpected characterisations, plots, outcomes or details-for example, feminist fairy tales.

(Yeoman, 1999, p.423)

Researchers have differed in their views on how disruptive stories should be used to challenge gender stereotypes. Whereas Walkerdine (1984) claimed that fantasies popular with girls can be enticing and called for a need for books that explore appealing alternative fantasies, Davies (1989) found that girls did not understand feminist fairy tales and adopted ideas from post-structuralist theory to support her view that children need to be taught more explicitly about how discourses of gender have implications for social structures. Yeoman (1999) carried out a case study in which she explored the impact of various kinds of texts on children's gendered identity through asking children to produce disruptive stories. She concluded that exposure to disruptive stories can challenge dominant discourses and help children to explore alternative constructions of gender. More recently, Justice (2014) referred to fairy tales as a form of social education. He highlighted recent Disney movies that portray intelligent female characters. With a wider range of options available, I would argue that it should now be easier for staff to locate resources that challenge inferior female roles.

Research has claimed that the perceptions of staff are transferred to the children's play through the planning and resources offered (Chapman, 2016). In a study conducted in Australia, she explored the views of early years practitioners in terms of play and gender in two different pre-school settings and

concluded that their values and beliefs serve to reinforce gender stereotypes during play activities:

...these educators did, unknowingly, support the children's social interactions and stereotypical gendered play.

(Chapman, 2016, p. 1272)

The educators' perceptions emerge, and are thus transferred to the children, through their programme planning, resources offered, feedback provided, general interactions with other educators and the children themselves, and, most significantly, the amount of facilitating and involvement in the children's play.

(Chapman, 2016, p.1280)

The way that the perceptions of educational staff are transferred to the children through the environment and their interactions with children can be viewed as a "hidden curriculum" (Pollard and Tann, 1987, p.164). The finding that free choice is limited by what is considered to be appropriate for a boy or for a girl has received support in the literature (Herbert and Stipek, 2005, Martin 2011, Chapman, 2016).

There is much support for the view that there is a need for a change in conventional ways of understanding gender in educational settings (Blaise, 2005). Pollard and Filer (2007) argued for the importance of challenging assumptions about boys and girls. This is important because gender stereotypes can restrict learning and future opportunities (MacNaughton, 2001, Martin, 2011). It has been argued that fixed explanations of gender should be challenged as they ignore individual differences and reinforce social inequality (MacNaughton, 2000, Martin, 2011). This needs to happen as soon as possible in a child's education as some believe that there is a critical period for combating gender stereotypes in the early years (Aina and Cameron, 2011). The view that assumptions about gender need to be challenged is also supported in more recent feminist postmodern and poststructuralist research.

For example, it has been argued that adults need to provide environments that do not encourage gender stereotypes (Martin, 2011, Hogan, 2012, Chapman, 2016, p.2).

Although research has helped to make sense of how children construct meaning as they interact with others in educational settings, there has been very little exploration of the social processes that go on in nurture groups, other than Gibb (2017). Gibb recognised that the majority of nurture group studies have focused on outcomes and that those that have highlighted the relationship between the practitioner and child have focused on attachment theory:

Whilst the practitioner-child relationship thus far, has often been understood within an attachment framework, which underpins nurture group practice and theory, very little is known about the actual nature of the relationships, and the key factors at play.

(Gibb, 2017, p.18)

Gibb attempted to find out more about the nature of these relationships by seeking insights into the ways in which staff made sense of their relationships with children in a nurture group. The researcher was interested in understanding more about the aspects that strengthen the relationships and those that challenge it.

Symbolic interactionism was chosen as the ontological position for this study. Relationships were viewed in terms of a series of social interactions and, on this basis, it was claimed that nurture group staff:

...give meaning to the practitioner-child relationship, based on events, experiences and social interactions, and further influences such as the practitioners' backgrounds, culture and gender.

(Gibb, 2017, p.34)

Whilst Gibb's study (2017) gave insights into the development of adult-child relationships in a nurture group, the focus was on the perceptions of staff rather than the experiences of children.

Although the principles of symbolic interactionism have not been adopted in nurture group research until recently (Gibb, 2017), they offer a way forward in terms of the contribution that they could make to a study into the ways in which children experience nurture groups. Whilst my study acknowledges the importance of attachment theory, it also adopts principles from symbolic interactionism and social constructivism to explore the ways in which meanings are constructed in the course of interactions between children and adults in nurture groups. The next section will discuss the ways in which nurture groups have previously been researched.

Researching Nurture Groups

In this section, I develop my argument that nurture groups have benefits for children with social and emotional needs. However, it is first necessary to consider some of the arguments against their placement in a school setting (Bailey, 2007, Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009, Gillies, 2011, Ecclestone, 2017 and Cherry, 2018).

Some researchers have spoken out against the inclusion of therapeutic education in schools. Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) referred to the notion of therapeutic education as any activity that focuses on emotional problems. They discussed a number of initiatives, introduced by New Labour, which focused on mental health and well-being, such as the Every Child Matters agenda and Social Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL). They gave examples of interventions such as counselling, drama workshops and nurture groups. In their view, the management of emotions should not be one of the principle functions of state agencies or schools. They argued that therapeutic initiatives in education distract schools from children's learning and result in children being represented in terms of emotional deficits and vulnerability and disempowered.

Furthermore, they claimed that therapeutic education is dangerous as assumptions that focus on vulnerability leave individuals open to emotional coaching by state agencies, which they refer to as a form of social engineering. They also criticised the use of language in education that focuses on children's emotional needs, such as "vulnerable learners", "at risk" and "hard to reach" (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009, xi). The term "therapeutic creep" (Ecclestone, 2017, p.443) was later used to describe the way in which vulnerability has become normalised in educational settings.

Her concerns over the use of language echo those of Bailey (2007), who described nurture groups as part of a rise in therapeutic discourses in primary education. He objected to the damaging effect of terms such as "esteem" and "attachment", claiming that "the adoption of a language of individual vulnerability furthers that vulnerability" (Bailey, 2017, p.9). Although these perspectives provide an interesting counterpoint, children in society are now more vulnerable than ever. In these times of austerity, children face more Adverse Childhood Experiences (Bellis et al., 2014) and exclusions due to social, emotional and mental health needs are rising. With increasing constraints on support services, it is important that schools are equipped to offer support to children with social, emotional and mental health needs. Whereas Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) refer to the dangers of a rise in therapeutic education, I would argue that it would be more dangerous to ignore vulnerability if children are to be safeguarded.

The value of therapeutic approaches in schools was also questioned by Gillies (2011):

Once viewed as inappropriate in an education context, emotionality has become curriculum subject in its own right."

(Gillies, 2011, p.187)

In her study in three Behaviour Support Units in inner-city secondary schools, she stated that the language of feelings adopted in the SEAL initiative were not reflected in the expressions of raw emotion around school. In her view, there was a gap between the "rational emotionality" being promoted in SEAL and the "uncontainable emotions that drive everyday school life" (Gillies, 2011, p.185). She also argued that the therapeutic model focuses on the individual and pathologises the child, without taking

into account social and cultural factors. In response to these arguments, I would argue that therapeutic approaches are much needed to help children to identify and manage their emotions, even though the effects of these interventions may not be immediately apparent. I would agree with Gillies (2011) that the socio-cultural context needs to be considered; my thesis will go on to consider the socio-cultural processes that impact on children in nurture groups.

Further concerns were raised recently by Cherry (2018), who explored the relevance of nurture groups for schools today. Firstly, she questioned the extent to which nurture groups follow the classic model (Boxall, 2002) and queried how success is measured when nurture group practice is variable. Secondly, she echoed the concerns of Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) that a focus on social and emotional development might interfere with children's learning. Thirdly, she raised questions about how equipped the staff are to cope with the emotional issues arising in work with vulnerable children; she called for suitable training and supervision for nurture group staff and all staff who play a part in developing the mental health and well-being of children. Despite these concerns, she concluded that nurture groups are very much relevant in a school setting today and will be increasingly important with the introduction of the Schools Mental Health and Well-being Bill (2017-2019). This will require schools to engage in the social, emotional and developmental needs of children. Although there is variation in nurture group practice, the majority of nurture staff with whom I have worked have been trained and adopt the nurture group principles (Lucas et al., 2006). I do, however, agreed that there is a need to ensure that staff are adequately trained and supervised. Whilst some have expressed concerns about nurture groups preventing learning (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009, Cherry, 2018), I argue that nurture groups help to overcome barriers to learning and equip children with the skills that they need to make academic progress.

Having considered criticisms of therapeutic approaches in schools, my thesis will now provide an account of research into nurture groups. An in-depth review of the research has revealed a wealth of studies into the effectiveness of nurture groups but comparatively little research which has taken account of the perspectives of those involved. Although some researchers have included the perspectives of staff, the voices of the children that attend nurture groups still remain relatively "unheard" (Griffiths et al., 2014, p.124).

Empirical Studies

A review of the literature revealed there to be numerous studies that provide empirical evidence for the effectiveness of nurture groups in promoting pupils' social and emotional development (Cooper et al., 2001, Cooper and Whitebread, 2007, Sanders, 2007, Binnie and Allen, 2008, Scott and Lee, 2009, Reynolds et al., 2009, Seth-Smith et al., 2010, Shaver and McClatchey, 2013, Chiappella, 2015, Grantham and Primrose, 2017). Many of these studies have employed quantitative data from Boxall Profiles (Bennathan and Boxall, 2008b) and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (Goodman, 1997) to measure the impact of nurture group intervention (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005). The Boxall Profile provides a framework for the assessment of children who have social, emotional and behavioural needs and is the main assessment tool used in nurture groups. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire is a behavioural screening questionnaire aimed at children from 3-16 years of age.

In a meta-review of nurture group studies, Hughes and Schlosser (2014) reported on 13 studies. Eleven of these were concerned with the effectiveness of nurture groups in promoting the emotional well-being of children. Although the review provided evidence to support the view that nurture groups have a positive impact on children's social, emotional and behavioural development, the studies into the effectiveness of nurture groups were nearly all based on teacher-rated measures such as the Boxall Profile and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. Having conducted a review of the literature on nurture groups, I would agree with Gibb (2017), who recently claimed that the majority of nurture group studies have focused on the impact of the provision on outcomes.

A further trawl of the research revealed that some studies have attempted to incorporate qualitative measures such as interviews to elicit the perspectives of those involved in nurture groups. These studies have mainly focused on accessing the views of staff.

Perceptions of Staff

Educational staff have recognised that nurture groups impact positively on pupils' social and emotional development. Children's progress has been conceptualised in different ways. For example, some have viewed progress as improvements in behaviour, self-esteem and confidence and engagement in the classroom (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005). Others have referred to improved friendships with pupils, showing a greater ability to empathise with their friends and express their feelings more effectively (Sanders, 2007). More recent research has also suggested a perception that nurture groups have a positive effect on the social and emotional development of pupils, for example, Garner and Thomas (2011) reported that all stakeholders noted improved self-esteem, more independence and increased motivation in school and Shaver and McClatchley (2013) reported that children were more confident and were building attachments with adults and developing improved relationships with their peers.

Practitioners have also perceived nurture groups to have a positive effect on children's learning. For example, based on data from rating scales, Cooper et al. (2001) reported a teacher perception that pupils had made academic progress in English, Maths and Science. In a later study, Scott and Lee (2009) found that teachers perceived there to have been improvements in learning, including improvements in completion of work tasks and enhanced confidence and independence, although academic progress was not apparent from statistical data.

Seeking the perspectives of the staff was argued to have provided deeper insights into the processes involved in nurture groups. Reflecting on the experiences of nurture group staff provides:

...insightful information enabling us to understand more fully the processes at work in properly functioning nurture groups.

(Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005, p.2013)

Researchers have explored some of the factors that staff perceived to contribute to the success of nurture groups and those that challenge it. Factors that support a nurture group have included balanced group composition, staff skills and qualities and the quality of interactions between staff and pupils (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005) and the implementation of a whole school approach (Sanders, 2007). Challenges or "opportunity costs" (Howes, Emanuel and Farrell, 2002, p.109) have included the withdrawal of nurture group pupils from their peer group, a lack of effective communication between mainstream staff and nurture staff and difficulties relating to the balance of pupils in nurture groups (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005). Concerns were also expressed about distanced relationships between class teachers and nurture group children due to pupils spending time out of class (Sanders, 2007). Problems relating to the communication between nurture staff and mainstream staff were also reported by nurture staff in the recent study by Shaver and McClatchley (2013).

Nurture group studies relating to the perceptions of the nurture staff have often highlighted the importance of the children building positive relationships with staff. Teachers have used words such as 'bonding' and 'attachment' when talking about relationships in nurture groups (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005). More recently, Shaver and McClatchley's (2013) reported that the children in nurture groups became more able to build attachments and interactions with staff.

Finally, nurture practitioners have commented on a whole school effect in which nurture groups are perceived to have a positive impact on the school environment (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005, Cooper and Whitebread, 2007, Sanders, 2007, Binnie and Allen, 2008, Cefai and Cooper, 2011).

Although some studies have included the views of staff, very few studies have made any real attempt to understand how nurture groups are experienced by the children that attend.

Perceptions of Pupils and Pupil Voice

Although a small number of studies have attempted to include the views of pupils, these studies have been very limited. I will now discuss some of the ways in which researchers have attempted to access the pupil perspective. I will then refer to some of the literature around pupil voice to support my argument that children in nurture groups have a right to have their voices heard.

As I began to review the literature around nurture groups, it became increasingly apparent that the pupil perspective was under-represented. In order to provide support for the proposition, a number of databases were sourced. These included:

- British Education Index (BEI)
- Education Resources Education Centre (ERIC)
- PsychInfo

Searches were conducted relating to nurture groups linked with:

- pupil voice
- pupil views
- pupil perspective

Based on an advanced search of the British Education Index at the outset of my research, no relevant results were found for 'nurture groups' and 'pupil voice'. There were no results for 'nurture groups' and 'pupil views' or 'nurture groups' and 'pupil perspective.' Using the Education Resources Education Centre database, searching for 'nurture groups' and 'pupil perspective' yielded one result (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007). This book contains a section on what pupils value about nurture groups, based on findings from the earlier work of Cooper et al. (2001). However, no relevant results were found for 'nurture groups' and 'pupil voice' or even for 'nurture groups' and 'pupil views'. Similarly, searching PsychINFO revealed no relevant results for 'nurture groups' and 'pupil voice' or

for 'nurture groups' and 'pupil views.' As for the Education Resources Education Centre database, 'nurture groups' and 'pupil perspective' yielded only one result (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007).

A trawl of the studies revealed only a small number that made any attempt to include the perspectives of the pupils (Cooper et al., 2001, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005, Sanders, 2007, Garner and Thomas, 2011).

The research by Cooper et al. (2001) was perhaps the first study to attempt to access the voices of the pupils. As part of their study into the effectiveness of nurture groups, they conducted interviews with children between the ages of four and ten. Their findings were later included in a book about nurture groups. According to the authors, the children expressed positive views about the nature of nurture groups with particular reference to the following features:

- *the quality of interpersonal relationships in the nurture group and their fondness for nurture group staff;*
- *opportunities for fun activities and play;*
- *the quietness and calmness of the nurture group environment;*
- *the frequency and quality of staff support.*

(Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, p.70)

Although the authors claimed that the children were able to articulate which aspects of the intervention helped them, their views were only sought as a small part of a large-scale study. Furthermore, the findings were superficial in that they only referred to aspects of the nurture group experience that children valued.

This was followed by other studies that included the pupil perspective. For example, Sanders (2007) conducted semi-structured interviews with seven children in Key Stage 1 nurture groups. She reported that the pupils liked school more, were more able to make friends and developed a more positive concept of themselves as learners as a result of attending the school nurture group. Like

Cooper et al. (2001), she claimed that seeking the perception of those involved offered "valuable insights to aid understanding of the interactions which might contribute towards the success of a group" (Sanders, 2007, p. 59). However, the findings in this study can be questioned as the conclusions relating to the pupil perspective were based on responses from a small sample of seven children.

Another study that included the pupil perspective was carried out by Garner and Thomas (2011). Individual interviews were conducted with six children who attended nurture groups. Thematic analysis led to the identification of four themes; relationships, secure base, outcome and communication across systems. All children, parents and staff emphasised the importance of the nurture staff as a factor contributing to the effectiveness of the group. Although this study sought the views of the young people, the voice of the pupils did not emerge clearly as the views of the different stakeholders were not separated by researchers in the discussion of the findings.

All three of the studies discussed employed the interview as the sole method for exploring pupils' perceptions (Cooper et al., 2001, Sanders, 2007, Garner and Thomas, 2011). Yet, the limitations of using the interview as a means of eliciting the pupil perspective were recognised many years ago:

It is difficult to know the extent to which young children understand what is required of them in the interview situation, and the purpose behind the questions they are asked. It is clear, for example, that many of the children interviewed in this study did not wish to be disloyal to their teachers and schools, and gave very guarded answers to questions.

(Cooper et al., 2001, p.164)

Reflecting on the methodological limitations in these studies led me to question the use of the interview as a means of accessing the voices of the vulnerable children in nurture groups.

Exploring other studies that were carried out during my research period reinforced this view. For example, Kourmoulaki (2013) explored the purpose, features and value of two nurture groups in Scottish secondary schools. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with current and former members of the nurture group as well as parents and staff. The value of the nurture group experience for young people fell into five key categories:

...feelings of safety, sense of belonging, school readiness, development of social communication skills and anti-bullying strategies.

(Kourmoulaki, 2013, p. 68)

Although these findings were interesting, the researcher acknowledged that the responses of the nurture group members were limited as participants were interviewed as a group. She claimed that individual interviews may have resulted in a better quality of data.

Another study in the same year sought the views of 19 pupils across three primary schools in Northern Scotland through focus groups and questionnaires. The following questions were asked during the focus groups:

- *Why do children go to the nurture group?*
- *What do you do at the nurture group?*
- *What are the best things about the nurture group?*

(Shaver and McClatchley, 2013, p. 98)

When asked what they do in the nurture group, the children reported a liking for food-related and social activities. When asked why they go to the nurture group, the children said that attending the group had helped with confidence, behaviour and learning. As in the study by Kourmoulaki (2013), children were interviewed as a group, which may have limited responses. This would be supported by Kennedy, Kools and Kruger (2001) who claimed that focus groups are subject to the same demand characteristics as interviews. Furthermore, although questionnaires were also used to find out more about children's

experiences, it is likely that many children would give a positive response to make their teacher happy.

My concerns regarding the use of the interview as the predominant method for accessing the perspectives of young children in nurture groups have been echoed in more recent studies that have adopted what they perceived to be more child-friendly methods to access the voices of children in nurture groups (Syrnyk, 2013, Griffiths et al., 2014, and Cefai and Pizzuto, 2017).

In a study by Syrnyk (2013), drawing was employed as a tool to elicit the views of children ranging from six years to nine years of age. The researcher claimed that a combination of drawing and interviewing children provided depth of insight into the perceptions of pupils. She concluded that the children became more aware of classroom practices and expectations and showed a growing fondness for staff as a result of attending the nurture group. Although the use of drawing offered a child-friendly alternative for eliciting the pupil perspective, the children were also interviewed. Therefore, the issues relating to interviewing the children in nurture groups (Cooper et al., 2001) still apply. I would, therefore, agree with that "much remains to be learned about how this approach is received by children" (Syrnyk, 2013, p.1).

A further attempt was made to gain insights into children's experiences through incorporating child-friendly methods. Griffiths et al. (2014) explored Key Stage 2 children's constructions of their experiences through focus groups that were built into the nurture group circle-time. They employed age-appropriate activities, including paired discussions and the use of post-it notes on which children could record their idea. Thematic analysis led to findings consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of nurture groups: environment, learning, self-regulatory behaviour and relationships (Griffiths et al., 2014, p.129). The theme of relationships contained six sub-themes; belonging; feeling like a family, availability, predictability, trust, and friendship. The researchers claimed that child-centred methods provide a valuable vehicle for accessing the voice of the child. Although the researchers claimed that focus groups can provide a

platform for young children to share their views, I would argue that other approaches might be more suited to provide insights into children's experiences. These will be discussed in the methodology chapter.

In a recent study in Malta, Cefai and Pizzuto (2017) attempted to capture the views of pupils in nurture classes in a primary school using approaches such as collaborative mapping and poster design. They claimed that their child-friendly, participative approach enabled the children to express their views on their educational experiences. On the basis of their findings, they made recommendations for possible improvements, such as more opportunities for play-based learning and a greater focus on the emotional dimensions of learning. However, again, semi-structured group interviews were used alongside child-friendly methods.

Although some studies have attempted to include the pupil perspective, the majority have only made brief reference to aspects of nurture groups that children value (Cooper et al., 2001, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, Garner and Thomas, 2011). Others were limited in terms of the methods adopted for eliciting the views of the children in nurture groups (Cooper et al., 2001, Sanders, 2007, Garner and Thomas, 2011, Kourmoulaki, 2013, Shaver and McClatchley, 2013, Syrnyk, 2013, Griffiths et al. 2014, Cefai and Pizzuto, 2017). My literature review, therefore, argues that further research is needed to access the "unheard voices" (Griffiths et al., 2014, p.124) of the children who attend nurture groups. It is important that the pupil perspective is gained, especially as it is the pupils who are the main stakeholders.

The claim that the voices of the children in nurture groups are still relatively unheard would be supported by the view that fewer studies have been carried out with pupils with social and emotional needs (Davies, 2005, Cefai and Cooper, 2010, Grieg, Hobbs and Roffey, 2014):

The voice of students with social, emotional and behaviour difficulties, however, is one of the least heard, with relatively few studies that sought to capture the voice of these students in an authentic and emancipatory way.

(Cefai and Cooper, 2010, p. 184)

According to Sellman (2009), pupil voice initiatives are less frequently attempted for students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties as they are more challenging to implement. However, although this may be true, the literature on pupil voice reinforces the argument that children have a right to have a say and be involved in decisions that are made about their education.

The idea of pupil voice had its roots in the twentieth century. Prior to that, children were considered to be "passive, silent, compliant, submissive and incompetent spectators in life events" (Cheminais, 2008, p.5). Researchers became interested in the pupil perspective in the 1970s. It was claimed that pupils would do better at school if they were treated, "with respect as learners ...and [their] ideas listened to and taken seriously" (Stenhouse, 1975, p. 32). However, there was little commitment on the part of the schools to promote pupil voice (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006) until the latter half of the twentieth century when the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) signalled a big change in terms of the rights of the child to have a voice:

Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account.

(UNICEF, 1989: Article 12)

The priority given to pupil voice in the 2002 Education Act was underpinned by the principles of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child. Under section 176 of the Education Act (2002), local authorities and schools were required to have regard to consultation with pupils with a view to involving them in decisions which affect them.

Pupil voice has continued to feature strongly in government guidance (DfES, 2003, 2004, DCSF, 2008, DfE, 2014):

The term 'pupil voice' refers to ways of listening to the views of pupils and/or involving them in decision-making. You may also hear the expressions 'learner voice' or 'consulting pupils'. A feature of effective leadership is engaging pupils as active participants in their education and in making a positive contribution to their school and local community.

(DfE, 2014)

The current Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (2014), which was underpinned by Section 19 of the Children and Families Act 2014, reiterates the importance of considering the views, wishes and feelings of the child and enabling them to participate as fully as possible in decisions that are made about their education.

Pupil voice has also received attention in educational research. Children have been considered to be key stakeholders who should be consulted about their education (Flutter, 2007, Tetler and Baltzer, 2011). It has been argued that children are able to talk about their learning experiences at school and make sensible suggestions regarding changes to teaching and learning activities when consulted (Cooper and McIntyre, 1996, McIntyre, Pedder and Rudduck, 2005, Pedder and McIntyre, 2006). Furthermore, listening to pupils can help to develop policy and practice in schools (Rudduck et al., 1996, Flutter, 2007, Ryan, 2009, Cremin, Mason and Busher, 2011, Tetler and Baltzer, 2011).

Although the need to listen to the voices of children is well documented in government guidance and research, pupil voice initiatives have been criticised as flawed because only the views of the more articulate, confident learners have been heard (Flutter, 2007). Consultation assumes a "social confidence" and "linguistic competence" that not all students have (Ruddock and Fielding

(2006, p. 227). I have referred to some of the difficulties in accessing the voices of pupils in nurture groups due to a lack of understanding of the interview process and a wish to remain loyal to their teachers (Cooper et al., 2001).

A further concern is that children in nurture groups are often very young, which makes accessing their perspectives difficult. The majority of pupil voice initiatives have been conducted with older children (McIntyre et al., 2005, Flutter, 2007). However, even young children can give insights into their experiences:

...there is a growing body of evidence that suggests that from an early age young people are capable of insightful and constructive analysis of their experiences of learning in school.

(Pedder and McIntyre, 2006, p. 145)

However, as nurture group texts have often stated, many of the children who attend nurture groups are developmentally behind their peers (Boxall, 2002, Lucas, 2010). This has been supported by nurture group researchers, who have acknowledged that children's responses can be limited by their developmental ability (Syrnyk, 2013, Gibb, 2017). Although some have attempted to develop novel ways to communicate with younger and less able children (Syrnyk, 2013, Griffiths et al., 2014, and Cefai and Pizzuto, 2017), I have argued that researchers need to continue to find new ways to access the voices of children. Looking at research in other educational settings revealed a study in which children with disabilities in a Reception class were able to identify what they liked and disliked, with the help of talking mats and an interview schedule (Georgeson, Porter, Daniels and Feiler, 2014). Although some teachers claimed that the interview schedule was useful, others raised similar concerns to those in nurture group studies, such as children saying what they thought teachers wanted to hear and a lack of understanding of what was being asked of them (Cooper et al., 2001). The teachers in the study commented on the importance of selecting suitable activities for obtaining the views of children, particularly those with poor communication or a lack of confidence. Finally, I came across

the Mosaic Approach (Clark, 2010, Clark and Moss, 2011), which offered a framework for listening to young children's perspectives on their daily lives using photographs, tours and maps alongside talking and observation. I have adapted some of these ideas for use in my study.

In summary, despite the growing body of research on nurture groups, very few studies have provided insights into children's experiences of nurture groups. Those that have been implemented have been limited because of the methodology chosen to elicit the views of the vulnerable, young children that attend. Whilst seeking the views of the pupils in nurture groups might not be easy, researchers have had some success in consulting vulnerable pupils. In view of the importance of gaining the pupil voice, the challenge for my research will be to design a methodology suitable for gaining insights into the experiences of the children who attend.

Conclusion

This chapter began with an exploration of the literature relating to the conceptual framework for the research. Firstly, I discussed the relevance of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980) to the study. Although researchers have considered this to be the main theoretical perspective underpinning nurture groups (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, Cooper and Whitebread, 2007, Bennathan and Boxall, 2008), I have argued that it does not provide insights into the nature of the interactions between children and staff.

I went on to discuss the social processes involved in adult-child interactions, with an initial focus on the literature around notions of mothering and caring. An examination of the different conceptualisations around these constructions helped to gain an increased understanding of mothering and caring as complex processes that exist as part of a pedagogical approach. These notions will be explored later in this thesis, with reference to interactions between children and staff in the Rainbow Group.

This was followed by an exploration of literature concerned with the social processes involved in learning and supporting children's emotions. I have referred to examples of how drawing on aspects of socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) can make sense of how learning and affective support occurs during child-adult interactions in educational settings. Although some nurture group researchers have briefly referred to the relevance of socio-cultural theory to learning (Garner and Thomas, 2011, Griffiths et al., 2014), the social processes involved in learning in nurture groups have received little attention.

I have then referred to social research that has been concerned with the ways in which meanings are constructed in educational settings. This included literature relating to the ways in which the beliefs and ideologies of educationalists impact on their actions (King, 1978, Lam and Pollard, 2006, James and Pollard, 2011) and ethnographic studies that have drawn on symbolic interactionism and social constructivism to help to understand the experiences of participants in school settings (Burgess, 1984, Acker, 1999, Pollard and Filer, 1996, 1999, 2000). I have then discussed some of the ways in which this type of approach can be applied to help to understand learning and play in schools. Whilst these have often been viewed developmentally in nurture groups (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, Lucas, 2010), the social processes involved have largely been ignored.

The second part of the literature review began with a critique of therapeutic interventions in a school setting, before examining some of the research into nurture groups. Whilst empirical research has provided quantitative evidence for the effectiveness of nurture groups in promoting children's development (Hughes and Schlosser, 2014), fewer studies have attempted to elicit the views of those involved in nurture groups. Although a small number of studies have included the perspectives of staff (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005, Sanders, 2007, Shaver and McClatchley, 2013), very few researchers have made any real attempt to ascertain the views of the pupils. The studies that have been carried out have produced superficial findings and have been limited by the

methodology selected for the task (Cooper at al., 2001, Garner and Thomas, 2011, Griffiths et al., 2014).

An exploration of the literature relating to pupil voice has strengthened my argument that the children in nurture groups have a right to have their voices heard. In view of the challenges encountered in eliciting the views of the pupils in previous nurture group studies, my research will take a different approach. It will seek deeper insights into the ways in which children experience being in a nurture group through the implementation of an ethnographic case study. This will be described, in more detail, in the subsequent chapter which gives an outline of the methodology for the study.

Chapter 3 - Methodology: a Framework for a Study of Children's Experiences in a Nurture Group

Introduction

The aim of my research is to explore children's experiences in a primary school nurture group. I am interested in finding out what aspects of the experience are most important to the children that attend. I have explored these aspects through an examination of the ways in which meanings are constructed as children and adults interact in the nurture group setting. The new understandings that emerge provide insights that can be used to shape provision. This chapter provides a justification for the methodological framework taken for the study and the methods adopted to address my research questions. I refer back to Table 1, which is included in the introductory chapter on page 3 of this thesis:

RQ1	What aspects of the experience are most important to the children that attend a primary school nurture group?
RQ2	How do children construct meanings through their interactions with others in the nurture group?
RQ3	How do the nurture staff construct meanings as they interact with children in the nurture group?
RQ4	How do the constructions of children and staff in the nurture group give insights that could be used to shape provision?

The chapter begins with my rationale for a study into the ways in which children experience nurture groups. This is followed by an explanation of my world view, linking the conceptual framework for the study to the methodology and methods selected. I then give a brief account of the pilot study and a more detailed description of the main study.

Rationale

In the literature review, I have argued that there is a need for further research into the ways in which children experience nurture groups. The few studies that have included the pupil perspective have reported superficial findings (Cooper et al., 2001, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, Garner and Thomas, 2011) and have been limited by a reliance on the interview as the predominant method used for accessing the voices of children in nurture groups (Cooper et al., 2001, Sanders, 2007, Garner and Thomas, 2011). Although some researchers have attempted to address this through adopting child-friendly approaches in conjunction with interviews (Kourmoulaki, 2013, Shaver and McClatchley, 2013, Syrnyk, 2013, Griffiths et al., 2014), very little progress has been made in terms of finding alternative approaches for gaining insights into the experiences of the children who attend.

I have also argued that children in nurture groups have a right to have their voices heard and be involved in decisions about their education (Ruddock et al., 1996, Flutter, 2007, Pedder, 2010, Tetler and Baltzer, 2011). The challenge for my research is to create a methodology for exploring the perspectives of the young and vulnerable children in nurture groups. As Gersch (1996) suggests, without suitable vehicles to help children to express their beliefs, their genuine involvement is impossible.

World View and Methodology

I now explain how my conceptual framework fits within an interpretivist paradigm and how this links to the methodology and methods adopted for the research.

The conceptual framework for my research has been introduced in the literature review. Whilst acknowledging the importance of attachment theory (Bowlby 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980), I have argued for a need to explore the social processes that take place in nurture groups. My research has drawn on socio-

cultural theory to explore aspects of children's experiences that cannot be explained by Bowlby's theory. In addition, I have adopted principles from symbolic interactionism and social constructivism to explore the ways in which meanings are constructed in the course of interactions between children and adults.

As the study is concerned with children's experiences in nurture groups and how meanings are constructed, it was located within an interpretivist paradigm and adopted qualitative methods of data collection. A paradigm can be described as the preferred position of the researcher in terms of the research. It refers to a set of beliefs which:

...present a world-view that defines for its holder the nature of the 'world', the individual's place in it.

(Burgess et al., 2006, p. 54)

Paradigms have been described as "positions on the best ways to think about and study the social world" (Thomas, 2009, p.77). They are based on different ontological assumptions. Ontological assumptions concern the nature of reality (Burgess, 2006), for example, whether there is an objective world external to people or whether the world is constructed in the mind of the individual. Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge. It is concerned with how we know about the world and how we come to know what we know (Robson, 2011).

My literature review has referred to a number of studies that have explored the effectiveness of nurture groups using positivistic, quasi-experimental research designs based on the collection of pre and post intervention data (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007, Reynolds et al., 2009, Scott and Lee, 2009). The positivistic paradigm offers a scientific, empirical approach to research, which adopts the ontological position that the world is an objective entity that exists independently of the people in it. It works on the epistemological assumption that knowledge can only be valid if it is grounded in the empirical methods of natural science

(Thomas, 2009). Although these studies provided rigorous data to support the effectiveness of nurture groups, the relevance of the positivist approach for social research has been questioned (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2004, p.17).

I argue in this thesis that:

...the social world is not objective but involves subjective meanings and experiences that are constructed by participants in social situations.

(Burgess, 1984, p.78)

My research was not concerned with knowing about nurture groups in an objective sense but with the subjective experiences of pupils. I adopted an interpretivist paradigm and qualitative methods of data collection, including a series of observations and a photograph activity designed to help children to talk about their experiences. Interpretivists believe that qualitative research can help to explore children's "perspectives, views, interpretations, feelings, life histories and everyday behaviour" (Silverman, 2004, p. 25). Qualitative approaches are concerned with "individual perceptions of the world" (Bell, 2008, p. 5) and the "meanings that people give to their experiences" (Newby 2010, p. 115). They can help to provide a deep understanding of social phenomena (Silverman, 2004, Newby, 2010).

Working within the interpretivist paradigm suggests particular types of research approaches. Interpretivists view humans as actors in the social world. The goal is not to determine a truth but to understand a phenomenon through reaching "the lived experience of participant without disturbing their setting" (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 15). This provided a justification for my choice of methodological approach, which I have described as an ethnographic case study.

I initially considered other interpretivist methodologies which I thought might help to explore the experiences of children in nurture groups, such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers and Larkin,

2009). This is a form of qualitative research, which aims to offer insights into how people make sense of a given phenomenon. It initially appeared to offer a way forward as it focuses on the experiences of participants and how meanings are made. However, further investigation revealed that IPA involves interviewing children. The difficulties in using this method to obtain the views of children in nurture groups have been highlighted in the literature review. I then turned to ethnography, which I felt would allow me to get as close as possible to the subjective experiences of children, without placing them in artificial and potentially stressful situations such as interviews.

Ethnography is a qualitative research methodology which has developed from anthropology and sociology. It is concerned with collating rich data and thick description that provide insights into the experiences of participants in social settings. It is "concerned with experience as it is lived, felt or undergone" (Banister, 1994, p. 34). It has been claimed that the ethnographic approach can contribute to an understanding of the perspectives of those involved (Pole and Morrison, 2003, Hammersley, 2006):

...what is essential to ethnography is a concern with capturing participant perspectives, or even giving voice to the people studied.

(Hammersley, 2006, p. 9)

Ethnography also fits well with my conceptual framework. There is a "natural affinity" between ethnography and symbolic interactionism (Punch, 2009, p. 125). Ethnography involves observation of people in social settings and symbolic interactionism acknowledges the ways in which meanings are created in social situations.

Ethnography became increasingly popular in educational settings (Hargreaves, 1967, King, 1978, Woods, 1979, Davies, 1982, Pollard, 1985, Pollard and Filer, 1996, Woods and Jeffrey, 1996, Pollard and Filer 1999, Pollard and Filer 2000, Jeffrey and Troman, 2003, Frank and Uy, 2004).

However, there has been very little ethnographic research into nurture groups, other than Bailey (2007), who obtained ethnographic data from observations and interviews in mainstream classes and nurture groups over a period of eight months. On the basis of his data, he reported the emergence of a discourse which he claimed worked to disempower the staff and children in nurture groups. Although the research provided some insights into nurture groups, no attempts were made to seek the pupil perspective.

In my research, features of ethnography have provided an alternative way of accessing the perspectives of children without interviewing them. Instead, the experiences of children have been explored through close observation during routine activities in the naturalistic environment of the Rainbow Group.

I took on the role of participant observer, interpreting what I saw and heard. Participant observation has been argued to be a critical part of ethnographic research (Pole and Morrison, 2003, Hammersley, 2006, Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, Brockmann, 2011). The researcher participates in people's daily lives for a period of time, watching what happens, listening to what people say and asking questions (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). In order to understand a social setting, it is necessary to become a participant (Brockmann, 2011). Interpretivist approaches involve the researcher bringing meaning to the research (Thomas, 2013). This is in opposition to the positivist paradigm, in which the researcher is seen as independent of the research process.

Whilst my research has employed features of ethnography, it could not be described as a full ethnography. Some ethnographers adhere to a traditional view of the approach which requires spending long periods of time in the field (Walford, 2009). Others have argued that ethnographies can be carried out over different periods of time, depending on the nature of the research (Wolcott, 1995). The framework for my research was controlled by my working life. At the time, I was only able to commit one morning per fortnight to my fieldwork.

However, I felt that ethnography had much to offer my study. I, therefore, made a decision to retain aspects of an ethnographic approach whilst re-framing the study as an ethnographic case study. This decision was validated by the discovery of other research in which these methods have been combined. For example, Bailey and Thompson (2009) conducted an ethnographic case study to explore how ADHD is constructed in the classroom setting.

The decision to apply features of ethnography within a case study approach made sense as I was keen to get close to the subjective experiences of children in a particular context; a primary school nurture group. The case study is:

...a kind of research that concentrates on one thing, looking at it in detail, not seeking to generalise from it.

(Thomas, 2011, p.3)

Case studies fit within an interpretivist paradigm and employ qualitative methods of data collection. They have occasionally been used in nurture group research. For example, Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) carried out three case studies in which they found that mainstream and nurture group staff valued nurture groups and saw them as making a positive contribution to children's social and emotional development and behaviour.

In case study research, the researcher has a particular connection to the case or a reason to be interested in it (Thomas, 2011). From a professional standpoint, I have worked with many schools to set up and develop nurture groups; first as a local authority advisory teacher and then as an education consultant. Although the majority of schools have used the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 2008) to measure outcomes, pupils have rarely been asked for their views. My research set out to understand children's experiences of being in a nurture group and gain insights that could be used to reflect on and develop practice.

As only a small number of studies have focused on the pupil perspective (Cooper et al., 2001 Sanders, 2007, Griffiths et al., 2014, Syrnyk, 2014), there was very little literature available relating to how children experience nurture groups. My research, therefore, took the form of an exploratory case study (Yin, 2003, Thomas, 2011). Inductive reasoning was applied to develop theory from data collected.

In line with case study and ethnographic research, my study employed different methods so that evidence could be examined from a number of different angles. Case studies use a variety of methods to get as much data as possible in order to form a rich picture of the subject (Stake, 2005, Thomas, 2011). Ethnography also constitutes a multi-method form of research (Walford, 2009). I reflected that employing different methods would reduce the risks involved in relying on one single method of collecting data, such as the interview.

Decisions about how to collect data were also influenced by the Mosaic Approach (Clark, 2010, Clark and Moss, 2011), which offered a framework for listening to young children's perspectives on their daily lives. The authors attempted to gain insights into children's experiences in an early years setting through the use of photographs and maps along with talking and observation. In line with the fundamental underpinnings of my research, the Mosaic Approach, was not concerned with "one truth" (Clark and Moss, 2011, p.4) but with opportunities to create meanings. The authors claimed that even young children could engage in participatory processes and become "experts in their own lives" (Clark and Moss, 2011, p.8). They also proposed that listening to children's views and experiences could help to develop the educational establishments that they attend (Clark, 2010).

My choice of methods was inspired by the Mosaic Approach, particularly the focus on naturalistic observation and the use of photographs. In the course of my ethnographic case study, I conducted careful observations of what children did and said in the Rainbow room and recorded my data as fieldnotes. I also talked to the children as they took photographs of their favourite aspects of the

Rainbow Group and as they created photo books about their experiences. I recorded the conversations that took place on an iPad for later analysis.

As I set out to focus on the experiences of the children in the Rainbow Group and the ways in which meanings are constructed, I decided to employ a data analysis approach based on 'constructivist grounded theory' (Charmaz, 2014). I had initially considered thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) as a means of identifying and analysing themes arising in the data. However, when I applied thematic analysis in the pilot study, I felt that I had interpreted the data based on my prior knowledge and reading. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section. Following the pilot, I decided that grounded theory would offer a better method of data analysis for my study. This offered a qualitative, inductive approach that would allow me to stay close to the data collected during observations and conversations with pupils, in order to generate theory more directly related to children's experiences.

Grounded theory is a methodology that seeks to construct theory about issues that are important in people's lives (Glaser, 1978, Glaser and Strauss, 1967, Strauss and Corbin, 1994, Charmaz, 2014). The approach involves the application of a "systematic set of procedures for the gathering and analysing of data out of which theory is developed" (Burgess et al., 2006). In grounded theory, there is interplay between data collection, data analysis and theory. The process involves constant comparison. It is an iterative process of data collection and analysis in which codes and categories emerge and are compared to form new codes and categories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967):

The researcher analyzes data by constant comparison, initially of data with data, progressing to comparisons between their interpretations translated into codes and categories and more data. This constant comparison of analysis to the field grounds the researcher's final theorizing in the participants' experiences.

(Mills, Bonner and Francis, 2006, p. 27)

Going back and forth between the data provides a deeper understanding of the area being researched (Robson, 2011).

The grounded theory approach has evolved over time. It was first developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The original theory adopted a positivistic position based on the ontological view that there is one reality and one truth to be discovered. They claimed that the researcher should enter the field with as few pre-conceptions as possible. Strauss and Corbin (1994, p. 279) rejected this, preferring the relativist position that truth is "enacted". A key difference is that they acknowledge that the researcher constructs meaning as they interpret data. Charmaz, who was a student of Glaser and Strauss, further acknowledged the position of the researcher in terms of constructing meaning through her constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014). Although she followed the methods of Glaser and Straus (1967), Charmaz focused on the researcher's own constructions, subjectivities and representations of participants.

Grounded theory is characterised by a common set of principles, including coding of data, categorisation and linking of codes and concepts into themes, theoretical sampling, concurrent data collection and analysis, constant comparison, identifying a core category, theoretical integration and memo writing (Birks and Mills, 2011, Gibb, 2017). However, many researchers adopt a partial grounded theory approach, in which data are collected and theorised without formally implementing all of the elements of the grounded theory approach (Burgess et al., 2006). I have adopted elements of the approach that I felt were suited to my research agenda, such as coding, linking codes to themes, concurrent data analysis and constant comparison.

This section began with an explanation of how my conceptual framework has positioned my study within an interpretivist paradigm and went on to explore the methodology and methods of data collection and analysis selected for the study. I have described my research as an ethnographic case study. Whilst framing the research as a case study would allow for rich data to be collected

about the nurture group, features of ethnography would enable me to get close to the subjective experience of the pupils. My research used a multi-method approach based on observations and conversations with pupils in the setting and as they complete a photograph activity. Data have been analysed using an approach based on constructivist grounded theory. This chapter will now discuss a pilot of the photograph activity before moving on to an account of the main study.

The Pilot Study

The pilot study took place between February half term and Easter in 2014. I decided to invite schools in the local authority in which I worked, as these would be easier to access. I had already built relationships with many professionals working in nurture groups through networking meetings, which I helped to organise. I contacted the head teachers in the six schools that ran 'focused-provision' nurture groups to see if they would be interested in participating in the research. These groups were most likely to be running classic nurture groups (Boxall, 2002) as they were funded by the local authority and were monitored annually to ensure that they adhered to the nurture group principles (Lucas et al, 2006). I received two expressions of interest. I decided to conduct the pilot study in the first school that responded and the main study in the second.

Context

The pilot study was conducted at a school that will be referred to, in this thesis, as Oak Tree School. The school was similar to the one in the main study in terms of its size and the number of pupils attending. It was a one-form entry school, catering for around 475 pupils.

The pilot nurture group is referred to by the pseudonym of 'Butterflies'. At the outset of my research, Butterflies had been in operation for seven years. It had been set up as one of the focused-provision nurture groups and operated as a part-time group. Sessions ran four afternoons per week, with the fifth session

allocated to planning and preparation. It was initially set up by two teaching assistants, both of whom were female. As for all of the focused-provision nurture groups, the local authority had required both staff to be trained before the group was set up and the staff received regular visits from an advisory teacher, who worked with them to make sure that nurturing practices were in place.

At the time of the research, Butterflies was being run by two teaching assistants, who I will refer to by the pseudonyms of Mrs Griffiths and Mrs Smart. Mrs Griffiths had worked at Oak Tree School for ten years and had been one of the teaching assistants who set up the group. She had a very warm and open personality and loved working in the Butterflies group. In the mornings, Mrs Griffiths worked in a Reception classroom with children, aged between four and five. She had two children of her own and often talked about them in nurture sessions. Mrs Smart had joined Butterflies four years after it was first established, when the first member of staff left to go to another school. She also had a warm personality and a background in early years and worked in a Reception class during morning sessions. Mrs Smart completed the Nurture Group Network training, before joining Mrs Griffiths as one of the leaders. These two members of staff worked well together and provided an excellent role model for the children in terms of positive social interaction.

Butterflies accommodated eight children from Key Stage 2; five boys and three girls. The children were all in Year 5. They had been selected for the group on the basis of classroom observations, discussions with class teachers and Boxall Profile data.

I had to restrict the pilot study to two pupils as a result of the limited time available. Although I had intended to select the pupils randomly by pulling names out of a hat, the nurture staff wanted to select the children who would participate, as they felt that not all children would respond well. They identified one boy and one girl that they felt would be confident enough to take part in the pilot. These children are referred to by the pseudonyms of Catherine and Omar.

Catherine was nine years old. She had been in Butterflies for two terms. When she had first started to attend the group, she had been very withdrawn. Since then, she had built good relationships with staff and children and was making good progress with learning. At the time of the research, the nurture staff were planning her reintegration back to class.

Omar was also nine but had joined the group more recently; he had been in Butterflies for one term. He had also built good relationships with staff and peers but needed more support with his emotional needs and was struggling with English and Maths.

Activity

Although data would be collected through a series of detailed observations and a photograph activity in my main study, I decided to focus on the photograph activity for the pilot. Whereas observation is commonly used in research, photography is less frequently used as a method of data collection. I wanted to find out whether it might provide an appropriate child-friendly method for helping to access the voice of the pupils.

The photograph activity was comprised of two parts. I worked with each of the children in turn. Firstly, I gave the pupil my digital camera and asked them to take photographs of their favourite aspects of the nurture group. I printed these out after the session. During the subsequent session, I worked with each of them to make their photo books. I recorded the conversation that took place between myself and the pupil using a digital voice recorder app on my iPad. I later transcribed the recordings and used coloured pens to identify themes.

Findings

Both children engaged fully in the photograph activity and appeared to enjoy using my digital camera to take photographs. This provided support for my supposition that photography would constitute a child-friendly activity.

The children talked to me about their favourite aspects of the nurture group as they took photographs. More detailed conversations took place during the second session in which they arranged their photographs to make photo books.

The photographs that the children had taken acted as prompts for them to talk about aspects of the nurture group that were important to them. As the activity progressed, I found that both Catherine and Omar were constructing and reconstructing their experiences in 'Butterflies' as if trying to make sense of them. The conversation did not proceed in a linear fashion but moved backwards and forwards, with some aspects being discussed more than others. For example, the importance of staff and friendships within the group were recurring themes.

The pilot study offered support for the view that photography can be useful in ethnographic research as a means of exploring pupils' perceptions (Allan, 2005, Walker, 1993, Pink, 2007, Kellock, 2011, Clark and Moss, 2011).

Whilst it was not possible to report firm findings based on data from four pilot sessions, some initial insights into the children's constructions of their experiences started to emerge. Colour coding the transcriptions of voice recordings led to the identification of a number of themes that were important to the two children:

- relationship with nurture group staff;
- friendships within the group;
- completing tasks collaboratively;
- a sense of belonging to the group;

- the wide variety of activities available;
- time for pupils to share aspects of their lives outside school;
- the focus on feelings;

Challenges

A number of challenges were highlighted in the pilot study that would need to be considered before proceeding with the main study. The first issue related to the vulnerability of the children. The nurture staff felt that some of the children might be anxious at the introduction of an unfamiliar adult to the group. They suggested that they prepare the children by talking to them beforehand about my impending visits and arranged for me to come and meet them prior to the pilot study. During my first visit, which I refer to as a familiarisation session, I was introduced to the children and was invited to take part in a circle time activity, based on a discussion around feelings and a sharing of news. I felt that this helped me to build a rapport with the children and may have helped them to feel more comfortable when I visited to conduct my pilot study. On this basis, I made a decision to build in two familiarisation sessions before beginning to collect data in the main study.

Another issue, linked to vulnerability, related to how children were selected for the photograph activity. As previously mentioned, I had intended to choose my participants but the nurture staff preferred to select the children who they felt were more confident and would engage best with the task. Their concerns raised ethical considerations regarding the vulnerability of the children in nurture groups that I would need to consider for the main study.

Another lesson learned related to how pupil conversations were to be conducted. Whilst I had intended to have individual conversations with pupils in the main study, I reflected that this process might place similar demands on them to those encountered in the interview situation. As I found that children would talk to me as they participated in routine activities in the Rainbow room, I made the decision that pupil conversations would not be scheduled but that

extracts of conversation would be noted during observations as children communicate naturally in the setting. On reflection, I considered that this would sit more comfortably as part of an ethnographic approach.

Although I did not conduct formal observations in the pilot, I did spend some time taking notes. This gave me an idea of what it would be like to complete fieldnotes in the main study. I felt that it was acceptable for children to see me writing notes as they are accustomed to staff making notes during sessions. However, I began to see other issues that might arise. As a result of children wanting to talk to me and involve me in their activities, my notes had to be limited to very brief jottings. I realised that it would be necessary to write up extended fieldnotes after each of the sessions.

The pilot photograph activity also raised some challenges. A major issue related to difficulties in accessing the true voices of the children. In an attempt to be helpful, the nurture staff had spoken to the children about the activity prior to the session and talked about the types of things that they might want to photograph. As a result, I could not be sure whether the photo books that the children produced were a true reflection of their experiences. To avoid this type of scenario in the main study, I would need to ensure that the nurture staff understand that the focus of the research is on the experiences of the children; it is important that it is the voices of the pupils that emerge, rather than those of staff.

Another complication arose due to the size of the room. The photograph activity proved to be more disruptive than anticipated. Although the room was well-equipped, it was very small. As a study employing features of ethnography, I had intended that all research activities be conducted as routine activities continued in the Butterflies room. However, when children were taking photographs, the other children were very much aware of them and would act up for the cameras. Furthermore, the nurture staff made changes in an attempt to facilitate the photograph activity. I will need to clarify the ethnographic nature of my research with the nurture staff in the main study and ensure that the room

allows for pupils to move around without interfering with normal everyday activities.

A further issue relating to room size was the space available for sitting with the children to make the photo books. In line with ethnographic methods, I had intended that all activities would be conducted in the normal nurture group setting. However, there was only one table and this had been allocated to other activities organised by the nurture staff. As a consequence, the photograph activity had to be relocated to a small room, adjacent to the Rainbow room. This may have caused some distress; Omar became distracted and expressed a desire to return to the group before completing the activity. I would need to consider the space needed for this activity more carefully when planning the main study.

Although I had intended to conduct the pilot study over two sessions, I had to build in two additional afternoons as the activities took much longer than anticipated. An important lesson from the pilot was the need for a more flexible approach to allow activities to progress at the pace of the child. Omar had a short attention span and needed time to go off task and return to the activity. Catherine needed more time as she wanted to include more pages. I had originally intended to complete the photograph activity with all of the nurture group pupils in the main study but I was going to have to adjust my expectations of what could be achieved in the time available.

Using the iPad voice recorder during the second part of the activity allowed me to record the conversation that took place between myself and the pupils as they compiled their books. This proved to be a big advantage for the research, as it soon became clear that making notes would have detracted from the activity. The children required my full attention to remain focused. Omar and Catherine did not appear to be anxious about the voice recorder. In fact, they saw it as a novelty. However, they were aware of it. Catherine was keen to listen to the recording after the session. Although there were no apparent vulnerability issues, the use of the voice recorder may have impacted on pupils'

responses; a factor that would have to be taken into account when analysing data in the main study.

Whilst transcribing was a lengthy process, it allowed for the collection of more accurate data. After completing the transcriptions, brief commentaries were compiled. These served to draw out important points relating to pupils' perceptions and also provided a way of reflecting on practical considerations for the main study.

Although I was able to gain some initial insights into children's constructions of their experiences, the findings in this pilot study were based on a very small sample of two children. I was not too concerned about this as my plan was to collect much more data in the main study through observing and talking to more of the children and conducting the photograph activity with more than two pupils.

Through implementing this pilot study, I have learned a number of lessons about the need to exercise 'reflexivity' (Scott and Usher, 1996). This refers to a need for the researcher to reflect on how their position might impact on the ways in which the data are collected and interpreted. Firstly, I became aware of how my professional position might impact on data collection. During conversations with pupils, I attempted to stand back and listen to what the children had to say. However, I found this to be difficult. As a teacher, I was accustomed to helping children to develop their ideas. As an advisory teacher, who has worked with nurture groups, I had preconceived ideas relating to what I judged to be the important aspects of the intervention. Although I attempted to record fieldnotes and transcripts of conversations with pupils as accurately as possible, the compiling of the commentaries and the subsequent identification of themes involved interpreting the data. During the process of analysis, I became aware that I may have been imposing my constructions on the data, based on my prior conceptions of nurture groups.

In addition, I became aware that my position as a nurture group researcher may have impacted on the ways in which I interpreted data. As I colour coded the transcripts of conversations with the pupils, I noticed that some of the themes emerging echoed previous studies of pupil perceptions that I had become familiar with. For example, the importance of relationships with staff and the nature of the activities on offer was reminiscent of the research by Cooper et al. (2001) and Cooper and Tiknaz (2007). Whilst it could be argued that my findings provided support for previous research, I reflected that I may have been interpreting the data in the light of existing themes in the literature. This highlighted a need to reconsider my method of data analysis.

Although researcher interpretation is a part of this type of research, I need to do everything that I can to ensure that it is the children's voice that emerges rather than my own. I decided to change my method of analysis to a grounded theory approach in an attempt to stay as close as possible to the data.

In this section, an outline has been given of the pilot study, along with a consideration of important issues that needed to be considered for the main study.

The Main Study

The main study was completed over a period of two terms between January and July 2015. It took the form of an ethnographic case study. Data were collected during six observations and six sessions working with children on a photographic activity. Like the school in the pilot study, the school in the main study was one of the six schools that ran 'focused-provision' nurture groups and was, therefore, likely to be running a model similar to the classic model (Boxall, 2002). Both staff had completed the Nurture Group Network training and were visited by local authority staff annually to ensure that nurturing principles (Lucas et al., 2006) were in place.

Context

In order to respect anonymity, the school selected for the main study is referred to by the pseudonym of Greenfields Primary School in this thesis. As stated in the introduction, it is a one form entry school, catering for 453 pupils between the ages of three and eleven and is located in an urban area in the West Midlands. The school has an Ofsted 'outstanding' rating and became an academy in 2013.

The school nurture group is referred to as the Rainbow Group in this study. At the outset of my research, it had been in operation for seven years. The school operated a part-time nurture group; the children attended for five mornings per week from 9 am until 12.15 pm.

The Rainbow Group was led by two female members of staff. Unlike the Butterflies group, which was led by two teaching assistants, the Rainbow Group was run by a teacher and a teaching assistant. Although I will mostly refer to the two members of staff as the 'nurture teacher' and 'nurture assistant' in this thesis, I will use pseudonyms as I provide a little contextual information. I will refer to the teacher as Mrs Hale and the assistant as Mrs Small. Mrs Hale had been a teacher at Greenfields Primary School for fifteen years. She was a member of the Senior Leadership team and had been given responsibility for setting up the group. Mrs Hale was passionate about nurture groups and was able to use her position in school to promote the importance of the group and enhance communication between the nurture group and mainstream school. She worked in the Rainbow Group in the mornings and in a Reception class in the afternoons. Mrs Hale had six children of her own at home. Whilst Mrs Hale led on the planning and organisation of the Rainbow Group, Mrs Small played a supporting role. She had a warm personality and had adult children, who no longer lived at home. Despite differences in the status of the two staff, they had worked together since the instigation of the Rainbow Group and had built a good working relationship. In addition to working in the Rainbow Group, Mrs

Smith was responsible for supporting Maya at play times, lunchtimes and in the Year 2 classroom during afternoon sessions.

The Rainbow Group accommodated nine children; seven boys and three girls. They were aged between five and ten. The children had been selected for the Rainbow Group on the basis of referrals from staff, Boxall Profile data and observations by the nurture teacher.

The following table gives basic information about the nine children who were attending the Rainbow Group at the outset of the research.

Table 2: Participants

Pupil	Year Group	Further Information
David	Reception	David had been in the Rainbow Group for one term; since he started in Reception. He had difficulties with learning, social, emotional and behavioural needs and language and communication issues. At the time of the research, he was being assessed for an Autistic Spectrum Disorder. David had an unsettled home life. His parents had recently split up and his mother had a new boyfriend, who was taking up all of her time. David often came to school tired and in dirty clothes. He had not developed self-help skills, such as dressing himself and eating with a knife and fork. David had no siblings. Although he had learned to trust the nurture staff, he showed little interest in his peers and tended to play on his own.
John	Reception	John had only just started attending the Rainbow Group. He had no identified special educational needs, although he had been struggling with learning activities in class. His home life was very unsettled. His mother had lost a number of babies and had mental health problems. His father was much older than his mother. He had an older sister, who was often left to look after him. John would often arrive at school tired and upset. He would have very little in his lunch box and his clothes were dirty. At the outset of the research, John was very isolated. He was reluctant to participate and showed little interest in the nurture staff or in his peers.

Kye	Year 1	Kye had been in the Rainbow Group for a year. He had progressed with learning, although he would struggle to stay on task when he was tired. Although he was quiet, he had learned to trust staff and had established some good friendships, especially with Zak. Kye had a brother in the Rainbow Group (Craig). His mother had just had a baby, who staff reported was keeping both boys awake at night.
Zak	Year 1	Zak had been in the Rainbow Group for a year. He had learning needs and difficulties with speech and language. He was receiving support from a Speech and Language Therapist. Zak had improved in learning and had established good relationships with staff and his peers, often playing the 'class clown' to make his friends laugh. His mother and father had separated and his mother worked long hours, leaving Zak with relatives.
Andy	Year 1	Andy had been in the group for one term. Although he was making some academic progress, he would often avoid work tasks, distracting others and displaying inappropriate behaviours. His parents had separated and he had no siblings. He was often left to play alone.
Maya	Year 2	Maya had been in the group for two years. She had learning difficulties and epilepsy. She was supported closely by the nurture assistant when in Rainbow Group, at play times and lunchtimes and in the Year 2 classroom in the afternoons. Maya had a very close relationships with the nurture assistant and sought high levels of attention from all available adults. Staff felt that her need for attention stemmed from her mother working long hours and having no extended family in the vicinity.
Sally	Year 3	Sally had been in the Rainbow Group for two years. She had made academic progress and had built good relationships with staff and peers. At the time of the research, the staff had begun a process to reintegrate her back to class. Sally had developed a close friendship with Maya; the only other girl in the group. Her mother was single and was finding it difficult to cope on her own.
Craig	Year 3	Craig was Kye's brother. He had been in the group for two years and had made good progress. Like Sarah, he was in the process of being reintegrated back to class. Although he was doing well, he sometimes found it hard to concentrate due to being tired.

Lee	Year 6	Lee had been in the group for four years. Although staff felt that this was far too long, he had remained in the group, as his classroom teacher was not able to cope with his needs in class. He had learning difficulties, speech and language issues and could become aggressive when upset. Despite his difficulties, Lee has done well in the Rainbow Group and had established good relationships with staff and peers. He left half way through the research as school had arranged for him to have an extended transition to high school.
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Research Period

Although I had hoped to begin my research during the Autumn Term of 2014, there was a delay as the mobile classroom that accommodated the nurture group had to be replaced. A new purpose built nurture room was set up. The Rainbow Group was in operation by November. As in the pilot, I arranged two familiarisation sessions during the Autumn Term. This meant that the children could get to know me before I began to collect data.

Data were collected during visits over a period of two terms from 8th January 2015 to July 2015. A programme of visits was scheduled with the nurture staff. It was decided that these would take place on a Monday morning on a fortnightly basis. The decision to visit on the same day was based on the need for predictability in nurture groups (Boxall, 2002, Lucas et al., 2010). I was only able to visit fortnightly due to work commitments. Where possible, we attempted to stick with this plan, although some sessions had to be changed due to unforeseen circumstances such as whole school events.

The following table shows the dates of the fieldwork.

Table 3: Research Schedule

Visit	Date
Familiarisation Visit 1	06/11/14
Familiarisation Visit 2	20/11/14
Observation Session 1	08/01/15
Observation Session 2	22/01/15
Observation Session 3	05/02/15
Observation Session 4	26/02/15
Observation Session 5	26/03/15
Observation Session 6	16/04/15

Photo Activity Session 1	30/04/15
Photo Activity Session 2	04/06/15
Photo Activity Session 3	11/06/15
Photo Activity Session 4	18/06/15
Photo Activity Session 5	03/07/15
Photo Activity Session 6	16/07/15

Methodology

Having discussed the ways in which my world view links with my methodology earlier in the chapter, I will now provide a clarification of my study as an ethnographic case study. My research is a case study of a particular context; a primary school nurture group. I had a particular interest in nurture groups based on my professional role and previous study. Although there is now a body of research into nurture groups, there had been very little exploration of the experiences of pupils. My case study, therefore, took the form of an exploratory case study, which aimed to collect data in a number of ways in order to create a rich picture of the nurture group. I employed ethnographic methods to provide insights into the experiences of the children. I became a participant observer,

watching and listening to children in the social setting of the Rainbow Group and taking fieldnotes. In line with both the case study and an ethnographic approach, I used a number of methods of data collection to obtain rich data to answer my research questions.

Methods of Data Collection

These refer to the tools and techniques employed to collect data. The first part of my fieldwork was comprised of detailed observations of the children in the Rainbow Group. The children were observed in the naturalistic nurture group environment as they participated in routine activities planned by the nurture staff. The second part was the photograph activity in which the children took photographs of their favourite aspects of the Rainbow Group and arranged them into a book. Each of these methods will now be described in more detail.

Observations

I carried out six observations in the Rainbow Group between November 2014 and April 2016. Pupils were observed as they participated in the normal activities provided in the nurture group setting. Observation has been called the "fundamental base of all research methods" in the social and behavioural sciences (Adler and Adler, 1994, p. 389) and has been employed, to some extent, in nurture group studies (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005, Bailey 2007).

As I was observing children in the school setting, it was necessary to seek informed consent from the head teacher, nurture staff and parents of the children (Appendix 1). As the children were young, written consent was not sought but the nurture staff asked the children if they were happy for me to visit the Rainbow Group.

I chose to undertake an unstructured observation approach as I wanted to immerse myself in the social situation in order to gain a greater understanding of what was going on (Thomas, 2011). As the experiences of children were under-represented in nurture group research, there was insufficient justification for specifying categories prior to the fieldwork. My research, therefore, was open-ended and exploratory. Rather than using structured schedules with apriori categories, I kept a detailed record of observations through the completion of fieldnotes. As Walford (2009, p. 117) argued, "Fieldnotes are the basis on which ethnographies are constructed".

I wrote fieldnotes in a notebook. On one page, I recorded 'substantive fieldnotes'; these constitute a continuous record of the "situations, events and conversations in which the researcher participates" (Burgess, 1984, p.167). As my research focus was on the ways in which meanings are constructed during interactions, I attempted to record episodes of dialogue that took place during interactions in the Rainbow Group. The importance of dialogue in ethnography has been recognised (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995, Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). On each of the adjacent page in my note book, I recorded 'methodological notes' (Burgess, 1984, p. 172). These consisted of personal reflections on the fieldwork and were written up as soon as possible after each session in my Reflection and Methodology Journal (see example in Appendix 2).

The use of ethnographic methods, including participant observation, allowed me to gain an insider perspective. I felt that this approach enabled me to get closer to the experiences of the children. As observations were carried out in the naturalistic setting of the nurture group as they took part in their usual activities, I was able to gain insights into their experiences, without putting them through the stress that might be caused by other methods of data collection such as interviews. Instead, I sought to understand the children's experiences by watching them and listening to them in the setting.

In the course of the research, I learned about some of the difficulties involved in participant observation. Following the pilot, I had decided to organise two familiarisation visits prior to the period of fieldwork. This helped children to get to know me. However, the fact that I had already started to build relationships with the children hindered my role as researcher in some ways. It was difficult to stand back and take notes when children wanted to talk to me and engage me in their activities. On some occasions, I had to physically distance myself from the children, for example, standing in the kitchen area with my note book. The complexities of the role of the participant observer have been the subject of much discussion in ethnographic literature (Walford, 2009, Brockmann, 2011, Mills and Morton, 2013). Gold (1958) distinguished between four roles: the complete observer; observer-as-participant; participant-as-observer and the complete participant. Although I had intended to be a complete observer at the outset of the research, the role that I actually took would be better described as observer-as-participant (Gold, 1958). In retrospect, however, I felt that the higher level of participation strengthened the research as I was able to talk to children about their experiences and ask questions.

A criticism often directed at observational research is the issue of observer bias. This refers to the tendency for a researcher to see what they expect to see, in the light of prior knowledge and experience. I have discussed some of the issues relating to interpretation in the section describing the pilot study. As I conducted observations, I attempted to reduce bias by writing down what I saw and what I heard, sticking as close as possible to actual dialogue. As an ethnographer, I was there to describe what was going on in order to generate theory. However, as I recorded fieldnotes, I became aware that I was constantly selecting what to record and what to leave out. My decisions were influenced both by my previous experience as an advisory teacher and my prior reading of nurture group literature. Although researcher interpretation is considered to be a part of this type of research, I felt that I would still need to exercise reflexivity when considering data.

Observer effects were also apparent. This term means that the act of observing will influence the phenomenon being observed. I would need to consider the possible impact of my presence on the responses and actions of both children and staff during the data analysis process.

A further issue was the limited time available for the research. I was only able to conduct six half-day observations. However, I was then able to collect data of a different kind through the photograph activity. I hoped that this would add depth and some level of triangulation of data, which would enhance my findings.

Photo books and Pupil Conversations

The second part of my fieldwork took the form of a photographic activity. Four children were asked to take photographs of their favourite aspects of the Rainbow Group and then worked with me to arrange them into a book. I have included an example of a page from one of the photo books as Appendix 3. Unfortunately, I have not been able to include many as the majority of photographs taken by the children included images of the staff and other children. The conversations between myself and the children were recorded using a digital recorder on iPad and later transcribed and analysed (Appendix 5).

As discussed in the literature review, some of the more recent nurture group studies had attempted to use child-friendly techniques to access the voices of children in nurture groups (Griffiths et al., 2014, Syrnyk, 2014, Cefai and Pizzuto, 2017). However, I was not aware of any nurture group research that had used photography to gain the pupil perspective. My research explores the ways in which taking photographs and using these as a basis for conversation provides a visual means of helping to give a voice to children in nurture groups who may have limited language and communication skills.

The use of photographs in my study was initially inspired by Clark and Moss (2011), who asked children to take photographs of their favourite aspects of their nursery class and used these visual images as a basis for discussion. Photography has been used in case study research to elicit the perspectives of participants (Thomas, 2001, Cremin et al., 2011) and has also played an important part in ethnographic research. The camera has become a "mandatory element of the 'tool kit' for several generations of ethnographers" (Pink, 2007, p. 65). Whereas photographs were once used as mere illustrations in ethnographic research, they now occupy a more central position (Allan, 2005). It has been claimed that photography can be used as a means of helping children to talk about their experiences in educational settings, for example, Walker (1993, p. 72) argued that photographs can be used "as a silent voice" to capture aspects of educational life that cannot be communicated through language. Furthermore, it has been argued that photographs do not always have to be taken by the ethnographer but can be produced in collaboration to create an understanding of social life (Allan, 2005). This was supported by Kellock (2011), who found that children who photographed aspects of their school lives that they perceived to be important were more able to explore their feelings about their school experiences.

In my study, four children were asked to take photographs of their favourite aspects of the Rainbow Group. They were then asked to work with me to make photo books. They selected the photographs that they wanted to use and talked about how they wanted them to be arranged. They were also asked if they wanted me to write a caption of a sentence underneath the picture. I made the decision to scribe for them as I felt that their limited literacy skills might hinder the expression of ideas. Although the images contributed to the data, the main focus was not on the photographs themselves but on the conversations that took place as the children arranged them to make their photo books. Through this process, I found that children were able to talk about their experiences of the Rainbow Group and explore the aspects that were most important to them. This supported Walker's (1993) claim that it is not the image itself that is important but the way that participants make sense of and interpret it. It also

confirmed Pink's (2007) view that talking about photographs can open up conversations between people and can give insights into how meanings are constructed.

I would describe the photograph activity as child-friendly as the children enjoyed using the iPad to take photographs and loved making their books. The use of the photographs helped them to express their ideas about their experiences in the Rainbow Group.

There were a number of issues to consider when working with children on the photograph activity. Firstly, there were issues of consent. Letters and consent forms were sent out to the head teacher, nurture staff and parents. The children that were selected to participate in the photograph activity were also asked if they were happy to take part immediately prior to the activity. All of the children in the Rainbow Group were asked if they were happy to be photographed.

A key issue in my research was to avoid putting children under additional stress. Although working with an outside person may have created anxiety in some pupils, I made a number of decisions to reduce potential negative effects on the children. I conducted the photograph activity during a normal session with nurture staff and other children present. I also arranged for it to take place during the latter part of the research period so that the children had more time to get to know me before being asked to take part. I also asked the nurture staff which of the pupils would be confident enough to participate. Whilst the element of selection meant that the perspective of the more anxious pupils would not be accessed through the photograph activity, I reasoned that insights into their experiences would be accessed through observation data. I found this to be one of the advantages of the multi-method approach.

School policy did not allow me to use my own equipment. The children, therefore, took photographs using one of the school iPads and the images were downloaded on to a school computer by the nurture staff and printed so that the children could make their books during the subsequent session.

I found the photograph activity to be time-consuming as some of the children needed individual support to use the iPad to take photographs. When I asked them to take photographs of their favourite aspects of the Rainbow Group. I used the following script with each of the pupils:

You are going to use the iPad to take photos of your favourite things in Rainbows/ the things that you like/ the things that are important to you. This could include parts of the room, favourite activities, staff and pupils.

During the subsequent session, each of the children sat down with me individually to make a photo book about their experiences. I used the following script with each of the children:

We are going to make a book about the Rainbow Group today. Are you ok to do that with me? Do you remember when I came in and we used the iPad to take some photos of all your favourite things in the Rainbow room. Here are the photos. I will spread them on the table for you to have a look at and you can decide which ones you want in your book. I am going to record our conversation using my iPad so that I can listen to it. Is that ok?

They chose which of the photographs they wanted to include and decided how they wanted to arrange them. They were asked if they would like to add any captions. As I felt that their literacy skills might restrict their responses, I acted as scribe. When making the photo books, it was necessary to work with each of the pupils individually so that I could observe them closely and listen to their responses. I also recorded conversations using a digital recording app on an iPad. Although the head teacher, nurture staff and parents had already given consent for this, I checked that the children were happy for me to record the conversation prior to beginning the task. Although this was ethically appropriate, it meant that the children were aware of the device. The possibility that this may have impacted on their responses must be considered when analysing the data.

However, recording the conversations meant that I could focus on the children and transcribe and analyse the data later.

Methods of Data Analysis

Data analysis was an on-going process throughout the research period. The coding process proved to be lengthy and laborious. I used models of coding taken from Charmaz (2014) in an attempt to stay close to the data.

The first stage of data analysis took place at the end of each session. Fieldnotes from observations were written up in extended form as soon as possible after each observation. I typed data on to an observation coding sheet, which I devised based on Charmaz (2014) (see Appendix 4). Voice recordings of pupil conversations were transcribed and typed using the same format (see Appendix 5). The recording sheets consisted of three columns. I recorded initial data in the right hand column and attempted to identify some initial codes, which I recorded in the column labelled first level coding. As the research continued, I attempted second level coding. This involved re-coding data and categorising them as broader units of meaning. I found myself constantly going back and forth, often revisiting previous codes in the light of new data. Whilst this step helped to familiarise myself with the data, I felt that I would need to re-examine the themes.

Once I had completed my fieldwork, I decided to compare data collected during observations with that obtained during conversations with pupils as they completed their photo books. The following table shows the themes that were emerging:

Table 4: Emerging Themes

Observation	Photograph Activity
Relationship with adults	Awareness of self
Needing support with learning	Importance of praise
Enjoying receiving praise	Identifying emotions
Needing emotional support	Fun and enjoyment
Appreciating physical needs being met	Relationships with adults
Enjoying attention	Importance of friendship
Needing support with learning	Importance of playing with something
Seeking reassurance from staff	Joint play with friends
Needing emotional support	Creative play
Needing support with transitions	Early learning opportunities
Enjoying role play	Early years toys
Enjoying giving praise	Role play
Pride in work	Pride in work
Enjoying receiving reward	Enjoying learning
Seeking adult attention	Early language activities
Seeking reassurance from pupil	Need for structure
Offering support to peer	Importance of transitions
Engaging in task	Need for calm environment
Sense of belonging to group	Home like environment-food, sofa
Enjoying practical task	
Expressing excitement about children's choice	
Playing on own	
Fun and enjoyment	
Wanting to talk about home	
Being able to play in NG	
Needing reassurance with learning	

(Reflection and Methodological Journal - 02/07/14)

At this stage, I felt overwhelmed by all the themes that were emerging. In order to help me make sense of the data, I involved a critical friend who was also on the EdD course. We looked through the sessions and discussed the codes, agreeing on some of them and changing others when we decided on a better label for the piece of data. We then went on to draw out a coding tree on a large sheet of flip chart paper and used different colour markers to attempt to draw out main themes on larger branches and related sub-themes on the twigs beyond. This did help to think about main themes and I felt that I had made some progress in terms of the clarification of the meanings that were emerging.

The main themes represented on the coding tree were:

- relationships
- attention
- learning
- play
- emotions

(Researcher and Methodological Journal, 23rd July 2014)

I then went through the fieldnotes from sessions with these themes in mind. The primacy of 'relationships' then emerged as dominant as all of the other aspects occur in the course of interactions with adults or peers. For example, attention was sought and provided during interactions with staff and the importance of play was evident during interactions between children and staff and between children and their peers. The emerging themes of 'relationships with adults' and 'peer relationships' provided a framework through which the other aspects of the nurture group experience could be viewed.

I then re-coded the data in terms of the main themes of 'relationships with adults' (Appendix 6) and 'peer relationships' (Appendix 7). A number of key aspects began to emerge within each of the themes.

Aspects of relationships with adults ranked in order of importance to children



Figure 2: Aspects of relationships with adults

Table 5: Frequency of Aspects Emerging within the Relationships with Adults Theme

	Observations	Pupil Conversations	Total
Attention	118	1	119
Praise	47	3	50
Emotional Support	26	1	27
Physical Proximity	15	2	17
Support with Learning	9	0	9

Aspects of peer relationships ranked in order of importance to children

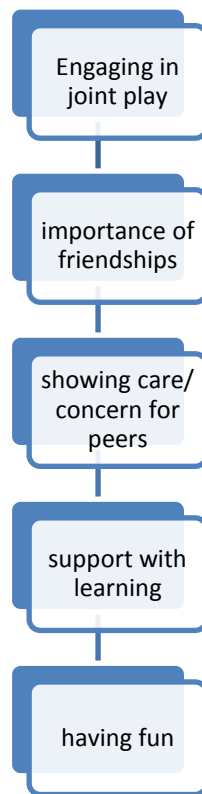


Figure 3: Aspects of peer relationships

Table 6: Frequency of Aspects Emerging within the Peer Relationships Theme

	Observations	Pupil Conversations	Total
Engaging in joint play	40	9	49
Importance of friendships	3	22	25
Showing care/concern for peers	11	0	11
Support with Learning	9	0	9
Having fun	2	4	6

I decided to focus on the aspects that were emerging as most important within each of the main themes. Firstly, I examined what was happening between adults and children during episodes of attention and praise. Secondly, I considered the ways in which children were constructing meaning as they engaged in joint play with their peers. I found that further reading helped me to make sense of the threads of meaning that were emerging.

Although there was a high level of researcher interpretation in my study, this is acknowledged to be an important part of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). I found that the reiterative process helped to move towards a deeper level of analysis. I returned to the data often, ensuring that I was able to support my claims using data from observations or direct quotes from children and staff. I would also argue that the triangulation of data from observations and conversations with pupils in the setting and as they make photo books adds to the reliability of the data.

Ethical Considerations

As the focus of the study was on vulnerable children in nurture groups, ethical considerations have been discussed throughout this chapter. However, they are also discussed in this section as they are fundamental to the study.

Decisions regarding how the research should be conducted were informed by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) and ethical approval was gained from the University of Leicester at the outset of the study.

A major issue in my research related to the notion of "respect for persons" (Burgess et al., 2006, p.32). I attempted to give this priority in all aspects of my research planning. All participants were required to give informed consent prior to the commencement of the research. It was important that the head teacher and nurture staff were fully informed with regard to the purpose of the research and what would be involved. All consent forms are included as Appendix 1.

As pupils were all under the age of 18, parental consent was needed. In addition to giving permission for their child to take part in the research, specific agreement was needed for their child to appear in photographs taken by other children and for conversations between myself and their child to be recorded using a digital voice recorder. As some pupils had limited literacy skills, children were not asked to give signed consent. Parents were asked to speak to their child to ensure that they were happy to participate before signing their agreement (see Appendix 1). I also sought verbal consent from the children prior to the implementation of all research activities and made it clear to them that they could withdraw at any time.

Ethnographic methods were chosen for my study so that children were not placed in artificial, stressful situations, such as interviews. All research activities were conducted in the naturalistic setting of the nurture group. They were designed to cause as little disruption to the normal running of the group as possible. Where activities were different from the norm, such as the photograph activity, I had taken a number of measures to ensure that children did not become anxious. These include familiarisation visits, positioning the photograph activity at a later point in the research and asking the nurture staff which children would cope with the activity best. The activity itself was designed to be engaging and child-friendly. The children would be able to participate regardless of their language skills or developmental ability.

I not only had to consider how children could be protected in the planning stages but needed to be aware of children's vulnerability throughout the research. There are often unforeseen circumstances in real-life research, which lead to a researcher having to take action to mitigate the risk to participants. For example, I had to cancel an observation session and reschedule when a new and vulnerable member was introduced to the group. I was able to resume sessions when the nurture staff felt that the child had settled.

As well as issues pertaining to the protection of children, there were also ethical considerations relating to data collection and storage. Although getting children

to take photographs of aspects of the Rainbow Group helped them to talk about their experiences, there were a few issues to be resolved at the outset of the study. During initial discussions with staff about the photograph activity, I was made aware of the school Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Guidance (September, 2014). This stated that personal technology cannot be used to take photographs. I was, therefore, unable to use my camera, as I had in the pilot study. Instead, the nurture teacher and head teacher agreed that children could use a school iPad to take photographs. The photos would then need to be downloaded to a school computer and printed by the nurture staff. It was agreed that copies of the photo books could be taken away for analysis as long as I stored them in a locked cabinet and did not share them with anybody. As I needed to transcribe pupil conversations, the head teacher gave permission for me to record the photograph activity on my personal iPad, with the proviso that voice recordings and transcriptions were stored securely. It was agreed that these data would be retained by myself as research evidence for a period of five years and then destroyed.

In this section, I have addressed some of the ethical considerations relevant to my study. This includes issues relating to consent, the measures taken to protect the children involved in the research and matters relating to data collection and storage.

Conclusion

This chapter has set out the methodological framework for the study, including a rationale, an outline of the conceptual framework and methodology, a brief account of the pilot study and a more detailed explanation of the main study. The chapter ends with a discussion relating to ethical considerations. In order to find out more about the ways in which children experience being in a nurture group, my study has adopted an interpretivist paradigm. I have described my methodology as an ethnographic case study and have explained the ways in which data were collected during a series of observations and a photograph activity. I have also outlined how data from fieldnotes and audio recordings

were analysed using an approach based on constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). This led to the identification of two main themes that the children perceive to be important elements of their experience in the Rainbow Group; 'relationships with adults' and 'peer relationships'. These themes are explored in the subsequent findings chapters.

Chapter 4 - Findings: Relationships with Adults

Mothering

Introduction

The emergence of 'relationships with adults' as the theme most important to the children in the Rainbow Group is unsurprising, given the importance of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980, Ainsworth et al., 1978) to nurture groups (Boxall, 2002, Lucas, 2010). Its place as the dominant theme in my research provides support for studies which have highlighted relationships with adults as being important to children in nurture groups (Cooper et al., 2001, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, Garner and Thomas, 2011, Kourmoulaki, 2013, Syrnyk, 2014, Griffiths et al., 2014, Pyle and Rae, 2015).

However, my research seeks deeper insights into the social processes that take place within child-adult relationships. This leads to the identification of a number of aspects that appear to be particularly important to the children in the Rainbow Group. These were ranked in order of importance in the data analysis section of the methodology chapter. Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 focus on two aspects that have emerged most strongly in the data; 'attention' and 'praise'.

The notions of attention and praise have received some attention in the literature. It has been claimed that children seek attention when they have a need that has not been sufficiently met (Bomber, 2007). Cooper and Tiknaz (2007) proposed that the children who benefit most from nurture groups are those who need an environment in which children receive more attention than is available in the mainstream classroom. Praise has been described as a statement or gesture that "provides a student with positive feedback for a desired behavior" (Floress, 2017, p. 519). The importance of praise has been recognised in nurture group literature. Praising children when they achieve small steps was proposed to contribute to ensuring success in nurture groups

(Lucas, 2010). Furthermore, positive interactions based on praise were seen as likely to enhance the self-esteem of the pupils that attend (Bani, 2011).

The emergence of 'attention' and 'praise' as important within the dominant 'relationships with adults' theme partly addresses research question 1, which is concerned with the aspects of the nurture group experience that are most important to the children that attend.

However, a deeper exploration of episodes of interaction featuring attention and praise provides further insights into the social processes that occur as children and adults interact in the Rainbow Group. My study adopts a conceptual framework that incorporates principles from socio-cultural theory, symbolic interactionism and social constructivism. Socio-cultural theory helps to explain aspects of children's experiences that cannot be understood by attachment theory alone, such as the ways in which children learn as they interact with adults. Adopting aspects of social constructionism and symbolic interactionism helps to address research questions 2 and 3, which are concerned with the meanings constructed by children and staff in nurture groups.

The new understanding that emerge help to address research question 4, which is concerned with the ways in which the constructions of children and staff can provide insights that can be used to shape nurture provision.

My findings suggest that adults become represented in different ways:

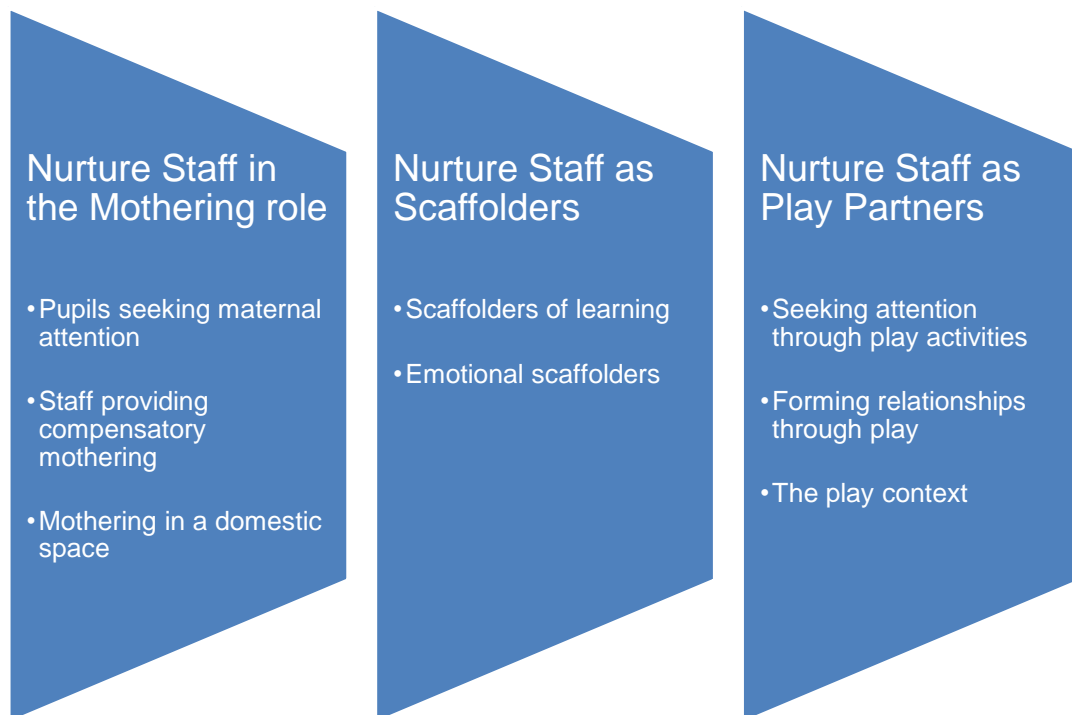


Figure 4: Representations of adults- mothers, scaffolders and play partners

This chapter will now explore the first of three representations of adults that have emerged in my study.

Mothering

This chapter illustrates the ways in which the nurture staff become represented in terms of different aspects of mothering in the course of interactions involving attention and praise in the Rainbow Group.

Whilst mothering practices are clearly influenced by attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980), incorporating aspects of symbolic interactionism and social constructivism gives insights into the ways in which the notion of mothering is actively constructed as children and adults interact in the Rainbow Group.

The notion of mothering has emerged as the dominant aspect within the 'relationships with adults' theme, hence the need to dedicate a whole chapter to this subject. I have not been entirely comfortable with the label that I have given this theme, as mothering is gender specific and it is not only women that can support children in the ways that I discuss. Although I had considered using a more gender neutral term such as 'caring' instead, I decided to retain the term 'mothering' as there are many examples of data which support this construction. These will be discussed in more depth in this chapter. The emergence of 'mothering' may be due to the fact that the Rainbow Group was run by two women. I may have reached a different construction if the nurture staff had been men. I acknowledge that this is a possible area for future research. However, in all my years of working with nurture groups, I have only ever encountered one male member of staff. I would argue that it is not accidental that we might struggle to find men involved in nurture groups because nurture and mothering are intertwined in our culture.

I also argue that the definition of mothering in my study is far more complex than the simple giving of maternal care. In my study, I propose that mothering goes beyond the 'instinctive' or 'innate' (Biklen, 1985, Steedman, 1985, Gaskell and McLaren, 1986, Grumet, 1988, Acker, 1999, Goldstein, 1998). It goes beyond the implementation of a maternal approach to a care-centred pedagogy that is open to women and men (Gilligan, 1995). Some of the different interpretations placed on the notion of mothering will be discussed in this chapter in relation to my findings.

Firstly, this chapter will explore examples of the ways in which children seek maternal attention and the ways in which staff respond. It will then explore the notion of compensatory mothering, including an examination of how the actions of staff can be understood in terms of the beliefs and ideologies that they hold in relation to the nature of the children that attend. Finally, there will be an exploration of how the domestic environment supports the construction of mothering.

Pupils Seeking Maternal Attention

The children in the Rainbow Group actively seek a high level of attention and praise from the nurture staff. I argue that this is an expression of their desire to be cared for or 'mothered'. I will illustrate this with reference to examples of children seeking maternal attention through the sharing of personal aspects of themselves and their home lives and through their attempts to achieve physical closeness with adults.

Firstly, I found that children would seek attention in relation to aspects of their physical appearance, such as their clothes and hair. When the nurture teacher noticed that Lee had new shoes, he was evidently proud to show them off:

Nurture teacher: You have new shoes...they are Kickers aren't they?

Lee: (putting his feet in the air so that the teacher can see them).

(Observation 1, 08/01/15)

When Maya had her hair arranged in a different style, she wanted to show it to the nurture teacher:

Maya: (to nurture teacher) I have a French plait.

Nurture teacher: (smiling and touching her hair) That's not a French plait but they are plaits.

(Observation 5, 26/03/15)

Secondly, the need for maternal attention was evident in episodes in which the children shared things about home, for example, when they talked about their pets and the things that they play with. When I first attended the Rainbow Group, Kye appeared to be wary of me. However, when he became accustomed to my presence, he sought a closer connection through sharing information about his cat:

Kye: Belle sleeps on my bed.

Researcher: You were telling me about your cat Belle before. What colour is she?

Kye: Black and white...

(Observation 3, 05/02/15)

The children in the Rainbow Group enjoyed talking about the things that they play with at home:

Nurture assistant: Ah yes-let's talk about our favourite toys/ thing to play with.

David: The Hoover

(Nurture assistant looks at me with a smile)

(Observation 4, 26/02/15)

The nurture assistant had different ideas to David regarding the definition of a toy and invited him to talk about other things that he plays with:

Nurture assistant: What else?

David: I have yellow barriers.

Nurture assistant: Are you talking about your train set?

David: And I have red barriers.

(Observation 4, 26/02/15)

Kye then joined the conversation, talking at length about his three Xboxes, a range of toys that he called Connectables and his zombie collection:

Kye: I have lots and lots of zombies.

(Observation 4, 26/02/15)

Thirdly, the children in the Rainbow Group sought maternal attention through their desire for physical proximity. This can be explained in terms of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980), as physical closeness between the

mother and baby is regarded as crucial to the development of a secure attachment. Other researchers have also referred to the importance of physical closeness as part of the attachment relationship. For example, Gerhardt (2004) referred to the importance of proximity and touch in building and maintaining attachment. In my research, I have explored the ways in which the children in the Rainbow Group seek physical proximity through episodes of social interaction with adults.

The children often sought physical proximity through play, for example, they would frequently take on the role of hairdresser:

*Maya: (approaches me with toy hairdryer). I'm going to curl your hair.
(Observation 2, 22/01/15)*

*David approaches the nurture teacher and starts to blow dry her hair.
(Observation 5, 26/03/15)*

*David: (puts rollers in my hair... goes to get comb, combs his own hair
and then combs mine)
(Observation 5, 26/03/15)*

*John: (coming over and starting to blow dry my hair)
(Observation 6, 16/04/15)*

Similarly, the children used the medical kit as a way of seeking physical proximity with adults:

*Maya: (taking on role of doctor) Now sit on the chair. Put mask on and
held stethoscope to my chest (making noise of heart beat -dum dum
dum.)
(Observation 5, 26/03/15)*

Books provided a further opportunity for physical closeness. In the following excerpt, the children sat close to me on the carpet:

Maya: (bringing me book) Can we read this?

John and Kye: (sitting down with us)

John: (Giving me book and sitting down next to me)

Researcher: (reading story to John)

John: (moves up close, smiles and put his thumb in his mouth)

(Observation 4, 26/02/15)

In these touching examples of children's need for proximity, I felt that I had taken on the role of mother.

The children's need for physical proximity was also apparent in examples of the children spontaneously hugging the adults. Although I was told by the nurture teacher that hugging is discouraged in the mainstream classrooms, it was permitted in the context of the Rainbow Group. Maya frequently hugged the nurture assistant and this was accepted and reciprocated as an important part of the caring approach adopted in the Rainbow Group. When I asked David to come to make his photo book, he smiled and hugged me (Pupil Conversation 2). Caring has commonly been defined in terms of physical closeness. For example, it has been described as being characterised by "gentle smiles and warm hugs" (Goldstein, 1998, pp. 244-261). Vogt (2002) agreed that caring could be understood in a range of ways including displaying affection through cuddles. In an ethnographic study carried out into pupils hugging the teacher in an Israeli Kindergarten, Golden (2004, p. 399) described children hugging the teacher as fulfilling a need and compared the Kindergarten to a loving home. In my study, the adults were cast in the role of mother and the Rainbow room had become the loving home.

Physical proximity and touch were also used by adults to reassure children and keep them safe. When the fire bell rang, the nurture teacher held hands with

David and John and asked Maya to take my hand. Maya smiled and immediately took my hand:

Nurture teacher: (holding hands with John and David) The bell is to keep us safe if there is a fire.

(Observation 5, 26/03/15)

After the fire drill, David sought further reassurance. He moved close to the nurture teacher and pretended to style her hair with the toy brush and hairdryer (Observation 5).

The above examples have illustrated some of the ways in which children seek physical proximity. This has supported the view that the majority of the children in nurture groups respond to physical affection (Lucas, 2010). Whilst the need for physical closeness has often been associated with attachment (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980, Gerhardt, 2004), the above examples have also supported socio-cultural theories of embodiment (Shilling, 1993, Vogt, 2002, Golden, 2004). The children sought physical contact through social actions such as sharing toys and books and the adults offered physical contact as an act of reassurance and care. Therefore, my research supports Warin (2017), who acknowledged the relevance of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980) whilst also exploring the ways in which an ethos of care is created in social settings.

The many illustrations of the children seeking maternal attention have provided support for my argument that this aspect of mothering is important to the children in the Rainbow Group. Receiving maternal attention appears to be a vital aspect of the nurture group experience for children who may have lacked nurturing care at home. This has implications for the ways in which nurture staff should respond to the children. They clearly need adults who show an interest in them and will respond in a caring and warm manner. The finding that physical closeness is important to the children may have implications for schools who adhere to strict 'no touch' policies.

However, the importance of maternal attention not only fulfils a need but has been viewed as an important part of the learning process. An examination of the interactions between staff and children has provided support for the notion of reciprocity, which has been associated with the notion of an ethic of care (Noddings, 2005, Tronto, 2006). Through the implementation of a caring approach, the children not only receive the care that they crave but also learn about caring. This finding provides a further justification for the provision of maternal attention in nurture groups.

Although my research has focused on the children, I argue that mothering is not a one-way process. There have been many examples of children seeking maternal attention and the nurture staff responding as a mother would. I would, therefore, argue that mothering is co-constructed between the children and the nurture staff as they interact during caring encounters in the Rainbow Group. Maternal attention is clearly an important part of the nurture group experience for both children and adults.

Staff Providing Compensatory Mothering

The maternal attention that is provided to the children in the Rainbow Group can be viewed as compensatory mothering. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980) is clearly relevant to the notion of compensatory mothering as the nurture staff become alternative attachment figures (Boxall, 2002, Lucas, 2010). It has been claimed that forming an attachment to key adults in early childhood settings can serve a "compensatory function" when maternal care is not provided in the home (Cugmas, 2007, p. 362).

However, an examination of the social processes involved in compensatory mothering has provided support for my claim that the nurture staff offer a caring response based on their beliefs about the nature of the children and their upbringing. In this section, I refer to examples of the nurture staff giving special attention to the physical and emotional needs of the children when they

consider that the children's needs are not being met at home. This supports findings in previous research, such as King's "family-home-background" (1978, p. 89) and James' (2012, p. 171) "deficit discourse" in which teachers felt a need to act as mothers to their students as a result of their view that they are not receiving adequate care at home.

In the following examples relating to David and John, the nurture staff offer compensatory mothering as they take action to address their physical hunger needs. At the beginning of Observation 4, I observed that David was looking tired, dishevelled and hungry when he entered the Rainbow room. When the nurture teacher asked if he was hungry he replied, "Yes, I'm hungry today" (Observation 4). The nurture staff ensured that David ate a good breakfast. He consumed a bowl of cereal and was then offered jam on toast by the nurture assistant.

At the beginning of Observation 5, John arrived late. When the nurture assistant was helping him to sort out his coat and lunch box, she noticed that his lunch box contained only a handful of crisps. She spoke to the teacher on entering the Rainbow room and made arrangements for him to have a proper meal:

Nurture assistant (to the nurture teacher) Kate [John's sister] put crisps in the lunch box. I need to speak to them [parents] again about putting sandwiches in. I have put him [John] down for a school dinner.

(Reflection and Methodological Journal, Observation 5, 26/03/16)

The belief that children's physical hunger needs are not always met at home has implications for practice. In this case, John was provided with a school lunch. Sadly, the perception that many of the children come to school hungry is one of the reasons why breakfast takes a central role as part of the nurture group experience. The nurture staff are able to give the children special attention in terms of ensuring that they have had enough to eat.

Given the importance of the provision of food in nurture groups, the nurture staff might be encouraged to reflect on other opportunities to ensure that children's hunger needs are met. For example, the children might be offered a snack later in the session or a bowl of fruit could be left out in the kitchen.

Compensatory mothering was also provided in the form of emotional support for the two children. During early observations, the nurture teacher shared her belief that David's behaviour is not good at home due to a breakdown in the relationship between his parents:

Nurture teacher: Mom and dad split up in the Summer. Mom has problems with him at home. He has tantrums and breaks the rules.

(Observation 2, 22/01/15)

In a later session, David appeared to be agitated. He demanded a high level of attention from the nurture staff, talking incessantly about his mother and her new boyfriend. He refers to his mother as “mommy”.

David: (to the nurture teacher) I went to Wetherspoons with mommy and Gus (pauses) and David (says his name).

(Observation 4, 26/02/15)

David went on to speak about an episode at home which resulted in him being sent to his room:

I knocked the paint off the wardrobe.

Nurture teacher: What happens if you are naughty?

David: I go to my room.

(Observation 4, 26/02/15)

The nurture staff informed me that David is often left for long periods in his room when his mother and her boyfriend are busy. This view was also supported in the following extract, which suggests that David is not allowed to get up at night:

Nurture teacher: When you wake up, is the picture gone? (to me) David has a special alarm clock with a moon on. He can get up when the moon is not there.

David: Yes. If I get up, mommy shuts the door.

(Observation 4, 26/02/15)

The implication of these comments is that David is not receiving enough attention at home as his mother is occupied with her new boyfriend. This belief resulted in the nurture staff giving David special attention at a time when they believed that he was lacking nurturing care at home.

A further example of compensatory mothering was seen in extracts involving John. During early observations, the staff told me that John often arrives at school in a distressed state:

Nurture teacher: ... [John} he often comes in upset and refuses to take part. He would not even join the other children for breakfast during the first few sessions.

(Reflection and Methodological Journal -Observation 1, 08/01/15)

This was supported by observation data. During Observation 1, John refused to engage in a game of dominoes. He sat with his head down and covered his face with his hands. He cried when staff attempted to engage him. During 'Children's Choice', four of the children fell easily into role play, acting out a scenario involving a mom, a dad, a cat and a dog. By contrast, John played quietly on his own in the play house. During Observation 2, he sat at a table on his own threading a toy mouse on a string through holes in a toy cheese as the majority of his peers played together. At the beginning of Observation 3, John came in upset. He stayed close to the adults instead of going off to play.

The nurture staff explained John's emotional state in terms of factors linked to his home background:

Nurture teacher: His older sister looks after him in the playground before school. His dad is much older. Mom has had several miscarriages. The children know about the babies far too early.

(Observation 2, 22/01/15)

There were three pieces of information relating to the home situation in this short extract of conversation. The nurture teacher implied that it is inappropriate for John's older sister, who is in Year 6, to be looking after him in the playground when his parents should be present. Secondly, she commented on the age of John's father, implying that he is too old to look after him. Thirdly, she shared her view that the parents are telling the children things that they should not know at a young age.

At the beginning of Observation 3, the nurture assistant observed that John was upset and took him aside:

Nurture assistant: Why are you sad John? You were the happiest one yesterday. You will be ok in a bit. Go and play and enjoy yourself. You enjoyed yourself yesterday.

(Observation 3, 05/02/15)

The gentle and reassuring approach helped John to settle and he became happier as the session continued. The nurture teacher commented on his improved mood at breakfast:

*Nurture teacher: (to the nurture assistant) He **is** happy is Rainbows. Just tired. His brother keeps him awake playing Xbox in his room. He sleeps on the settee with his dad.*

John: I don't sleep on the settee. Dad burned it in the garden.

(Observation 3, 05/02/15)

The unspoken message in this extract reflects the nurture teacher's belief that there is a lack of basic care in the home.

The above examples relating to David and John have illustrated the view that the nurture staff perceive there to be inadequacies in the care that the children receive at home. In the examples relating to David and John, the children seek attention from the adults and the adults respond by offering special attention in the form of compensatory mothering.

Whilst the children's needs can be explained in terms of a lack of nurturing at home (Boxall, 2002, Lucas, 2010), my research has been more concerned with the social processes that occur within adult-child interactions, with particular reference to the ways in which the nurture staff position themselves in the role of mother during caring encounters (Steedman, 1988, Burgess and Carter, 1992).

The notion of compensatory mothering (Steedman, 1985, Burgess and Carter, 1992, Cugmas, 2007, James 2010, James 2012) has been supported by the comments of nurture staff who often referred to the children in the Rainbow Group as 'our children'. The nurture teacher stated that what makes the Rainbow Group different from mainstream classroom is "children being treated as our own". This echoes previous studies in which staff have referred to pupils as 'their children' (Steedman, 1987, Acker, 1999). I noted a tenderness when the staff talked about the children in this way, which would support the claim that staff teach from a place of "attentive love" (hooks, 2003, p. 131).

The above extracts relating to David and John have illustrated the ways in which the nurture staff explain the behaviour of the children in terms of what is going on at home (King, 1978, James 2012).

The nurture staff have worked with the children every day and some of the children have been in the Rainbow Group for a long time. During this time, the staff have built a picture of the children:

The nurture staff clearly know the children well. They inform me about their key characteristics and explain the way that they act in terms of underlying factors such as things that are going on at home and in terms of their individual needs.

(Reflection and Methodological Journal, Familiarisation Session 1, 08/01/15)

I argue that these explanations help the nurture staff to maintain their beliefs and ideologies in terms of the essential innocence of the child (King, 1978). My research supports the notion of 'typification' (Schutz, 1972, King, 1978) in that the staff build a picture of how children ought to be. There are echoes of the notion of childhood innocence in the construction of a 'good child.' In my study, the staff guide the children towards an ideal notion of 'a good child'. This construction is similar to Pollard and Filer's (1999) notion of the ideal child. The following examples illustrate the ways in which the nurture staff guide the children towards this ideal (Pollard and Filer, 1999) using a number of techniques, including attention and praise. The examples below support the view that the 'good child' is one who is happy and shows good manners.

As discussed earlier in this section, John often appeared to be unhappy when he arrived at school. There was a discrepancy between the way that John acted and the constructions of the nurture staff regarding the happy child. The nurture staff employed a number of techniques to resolve this. During Observation 1, the nurture assistant noticed that John looked sad and attempted to get him to smile by praising another child who was smiling:

Nurture assistant: David smiles all the time. (David looks up and smiles)

(Observation 1, 08/01/15)

The nurture staff also tried to distract him by getting him to participate in a Maths activity but John continued to sit with his head down with his hands covering his face (Observation 1).

The nurture teacher then attempted to change his behaviour through the use of a firmer, rule-based approach:

Nurture teacher: Covering you face is not allowed in here. It's rude.

John starts crying.

Nurture teacher: Tears don't work. They're pretend.

John continued to cry

(Observation 1, 08/01/15)

Similarly, when he was sitting with his head down during Observation 2, the nurture teacher stated that sulking is against the rules:

Nurture teacher: No sulking. Our rules in here, not your rules.

(Observation 2, 22/01/15)

The nurture assistant tried a more nurturing approach. When John entered the Rainbow room in tears at the beginning of Observation 3, she took him aside into the home corner for a chat. Although this helped to settle him, the response, "You will be ok in a bit, John. Go and play and enjoy yourself." (Observation 3) might be considered to be dismissive. This episode highlighted an uneasiness arising from a discrepancy between how John was acting and the construction of the happy child. Although there have been many examples of the nurture staff supporting children emotionally, there were also times when more support could have been given. The finding that the children's emotional needs have not consistently been met highlights a need for the staff to reflect on the ways in which emotional support can be given. For example, they could introduce 1-1 mentoring sessions and use feelings diaries and emotions cards to help children to talk when they are distressed.

Later in the session, John was washing up his plate and cup after breakfast and making patterns in the bubbles as he counted in twos. The nurture staff observed that he seemed much happier. They offered positive attention and praise and allowed him to add a marble to the jar. They used praise and reward

in an attempt to maintain his happier demeanour, which was now more in line with the nurture staff's construction of how he ought to be (King, 1978). Thus, praise was used in interactions between the nurture staff and the children to bring children into line and to reinforce desired behaviour.

The nurture staff appeared to be happy at time when the children were happy. During Observation 5, they teased the children to make them smile. They let the children know that it is important to them that they are happy:

Nurture teacher: Mrs Small and me have sorted this out for you. We have paid for it-not the whole school just you!

Nurture assistant: It is worth it to see you smile!

(Observation 5, 28/03/18)

In the above excerpt, the happy mood of the children was consistent with the staff construction that 'a good child' is a happy child.

Another core construction held by staff was that 'a good child' shows good manners. The nurture staff focused on teaching good manners as a mother would at the breakfast table:

I am surprised but impressed with the expectations put on children at the breakfast table, for example, children are not allowed to eat until everyone is ready and are reminded to use good manners if they open their mouths while eating.

(Reflection and Methodological Journal- Familiarisation Visit 2, 20/11/14)

Good manners were reinforced through praise:

Lee: (to me) Miss, I'm saying please and thank you.

Researcher: Well done, Lee!.

Lee (to nurture assistant) Miss-I'm saying please and thank you

(Observation 2, 22/01/15)

Maya: (taking a piece of toast) Thank you.

Nurture assistant: Good manners Maya!

Maya: Thank you! (smiles and looks pleased)

(Observation 3, 05/02/15)

The way that Lee and Maya responded to positive recognition and then sought further praise supported the view that children have an "infinite appetite for approval" (King, 1967: 56).

In some cases, the nurture staff had to take action to teach the children what they perceived to be more appropriate ways of behaving. Although children were good at using manners at the table, some had difficulty waiting their turn when they wanted the attention of adults. In the following examples, the children interrupted staff when they were talking to other children.

During Observation 3, Andy attempted to get the attention of the nurture teacher who was talking to Sally:

Andy: Miss Miss Miss....

Nurture teacher: You will notice I didn't answer as I was talking to Sally.

You need to wait if I am talking to someone else.

(Observation 3, 05/02/15)

A more serious challenge to the social order was presented by Levi who overtly displayed bad manners in an attempt to get the attention of staff. When he was reminded to use good manners, he answered defiantly:

Levi: (had been eating with his mouth open and now burps loudly).

Nurture assistant: That was very rude.

Levi: It was pretend.

Nurture assistant: You put your hand in front of your mouth if you need to burp.

Nurture teacher: (speaking sharply) you need to sit up. I have had to speak to you a few times at the table. Do you do that at home?

Levi: Yes (brazenly)

Nurture teacher: Does mummy tell you off?

Levi: No- it's fine in my house!

(Observation 6, 16/04/15).

Levi directly challenged the staff construction of 'a good child' who uses good manners. He argued that his behaviour is considered to be acceptable at home. At this point, it may be that Levi's construction of what makes a good child is not congruent with that of staff. This illustrated the importance of compensatory mothering in that the nurture staff had the job of teaching good manners when bad manners may be accepted at home.

In the above examples, the nurture staff offered compensatory mothering in cases in which they perceive that children's physical and emotional needs have not been met. This supports research which has claimed that educational practitioners offer a mothering approach based on a belief that there is a lack of maternal care in the home (King, 1978, Cugmas, 2007, James, 2010, James 2012). The finding that the beliefs of the staff lead to the caring approach adopted in the Rainbow Group also corroborates the view that the beliefs of staff regarding children are incorporated into their practices (Lam and Pollard, 2006). However, whilst I have provided many examples of the ways in which the staff offer compensatory mothering to address children's physical and emotional

needs, I have also argued that there is room for development. It is hoped that sharing my findings relating to compensatory mothering will help the nurture staff to reflect on the ways in which they support children. Having discussed some of the ways in which the staff have become represented in terms of mothering, this chapter will now move on to a discussion relating to how this construction is strengthened by the nature of the environment that has been provided.

Mothering in a Domestic Space

The domestic environment of the Rainbow room provides a secure base (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980, Lucas et al., 2006), in which the adults become represented in terms of mothering. My research suggests that the nurture staff are not just playing at being mother but are actively involved in creating a home-like environment in which children learn through caring encounters with adults.

The way that the room has been set up gives insights into the meanings held by staff about what a nurture group should be like. Following the demise of the old mobile classroom, which had to be condemned, the nurture staff were given free licence to set up the room exactly as they chose. The way that the room was organised reflects the knowledge that the nurture staff have gained from nurture group training and literature. For example, the room was set up with features of the classroom such as work tables and chairs and features of home such as a comfy seating area and kitchen (Boxall, 2002, Lucas, 2010):

The nurture room itself is a crucial part of the NG model and provides a base, or rather a 'home' for NG staff and children, which is intended to be a welcoming and relaxing environment with soft furnishings, a kitchen and other comfortable features. The nurture room is the hub for the intervention and is intended explicitly as a bridge between school and home.

(Billington, 2012, p. 321)

At the beginning of my Reflection and Methodological Journal, I noted that the Rainbow room had been organised as a domestic space with features of home including:

- *home area- comfy seating, curtains, videos, lamp;*
- *breakfast table with table cloth;*
- *kitchen area - fridge/freezer, cooker, toaster, microwave, bread bin, storage jars.*

(Reflection and Methodological Journal -Familiarisation Visit 1, 06/11/14)

In the light of my research, I argue that the domestic space supports the co-construction of the nurture staff in the mothering role. An exploration of the social processes in nurture groups must take account of the environment as the nature of the environment signals how children are expected to act (Georgeson and Payler, 2010). As Clark (2010, p. 12) suggested, "...early childhood spaces...are rich in symbols, rituals and routines".

Within the domestic space, the nurture staff provide activities that a mother might do in the home. In the following extract, the nurture staff were making Easter cornflake cakes with the children. The tone was light-hearted and fun. The staff presented the activity as being a special one, set up exclusively for the children in the Rainbow Group:

Nurture teacher: We are going to make our cakes. What do we do? Put this cereal box and this bar of chocolate in the bowl? (putting the whole box and bar of chocolate in the bowl)

Children: (laughing) No!

Sally: You need to break it up into little pieces...

David: Continuing to giggle.

(Observation 5, 26/03/15)

This example of the staff cooking with the children echoes the 'sensitivity discourse' (Walkerdine, 1989, Burgess and Carter, 1992) in which teachers combined domestic tasks with learning activities.

Breakfast plays an important role within the domestic setting of the Rainbow Group. At the table, the children have learned to be part of a 'family,' with the nurture staff providing mothering through food and nurturing care. The staff always laid the table and served the children:

The nurture teacher and nurture assistant are handing out juice, toast and jam.

(Observation 3, 05/02/15)

The observation that the nurture staff encouraged the children to use good manners as a mother might do in the home has been discussed in terms of the construct of 'a good child', with reference to examples of how good manners are reinforced during interactions involving positive attention and praise. The children have been taught to wait until everybody is ready to eat before beginning their breakfast and were often reminded to close their mouths when chewing their food.

During Observation 3, I noted that the children had learned to conform to these expectations:

{All pupils sitting quietly, waiting until everyone is ready to start}

Nurture teacher: Ok- we can start.

(Observation 3, 05/02/15)

The fact that children had to be taught to eat properly raised questions about what happens at home.

Some of the children had to be reminded how to use cutlery properly. For example, I was told that David struggled to eat his cereal with a spoon when he first attended the Rainbow Group:

Nurture teacher...he used to be bottle fed and had his food pureed but now he can feed himself and eat solid food.

(Observation 2, 22/01/15)

In addition to teaching appropriate behaviour at the table, the nurture staff would frequently support the children with other self-help skills that would usually be taught in the home, such as dressing themselves. When Maya asked me to help her put on her coat, the nurture assistant quickly intervened to let me know that she needed to do this for herself:

Nurture Assistant: You can do it Maya...she gets people to do everything for her...we are trying to encourage independence. It transpires that one of her targets is to put on her own coat.

(Reflection and Methodological Journal, Observation 1, 08/01/15)

I was also reminded of this during the subsequent session:

Maya: (showing me her coat)

Researcher: (starting to help)

Nurture teacher: Maya would let people dress her. Try it yourself, Maya.

(Observation 2, 22/01/15)

As Maya put on her own coat, she sought attention from myself and the nurture assistant:

Maya: (approaching) I am getting my coat on. (proceeding to put her own coat on)

Maya: (approaching again) I've got my coat on. (Looking at me for help with the zip but manages to do it herself)

Nurture assistant: (who supports Maya at playtimes) comes over) (to me)

Did Maya ask you to help her?

Researcher: No she did it all by herself-didn't you Maya!

Nurture assistant: You are doing so well Maya!

Maya (smiling).

(Observation 5, 26/03/15)

Maya's smile suggested that she enjoys receiving praise.

The nurture staff also encouraged other self-help skills such as teaching the children to wash their hands:

Nurture assistant: (smiling at David) Have you washed your hands, David? Well done! Come and sit down. (David smiles and moves to table)

(Observation 2, 22/01/15)

David: (coming over to show me that he has washed his hands).

Researcher: Good boy.

(Observation 6, 16/04/15)

Once again, praise was used to reinforce appropriate behaviour. David smiled when the nurture assistant praised him and then sought further praise as he approached me to show me his hands.

At first glance, the nurture staff might be viewed as simply replicating what a mother would do in the home. However, I would argue that the nurture staff actively create conditions in which children receive care within a domestic situation. This supports Goldstein's (1998) claim that caring should be viewed as an action rather than an attribute and the notion of caring as part of the child's learning experience (Martin, 1992, Noddings, 1992, Tronto, 2006).

The above examples have illustrated how the domestic space supports the construction of the nurture staff in terms of mothering. The beliefs of staff have been reflected in the way that the environment is set up and the ways in which they interact with the children in the room. This supports the argument that the nurture staff are not just fulfilling an instinctive maternal role but are actively involved in constructing situations which support the children's learning experiences. It is hoped that raising the awareness of the nurture staff of the importance of the domestic environment for the learning and moral development of the children will lead to reflection on how the room and activities within the room might be further developed.

Conclusion

The emergence of 'relationships with adults' as the main theme in my research has provided support for the claim that this is important to the children who attend the Rainbow Group. Further analysis within this theme revealed that interactions featuring 'attention' and 'praise' were most important to the pupils. An analysis of these interactions highlighted three ways in which the nurture staff become represented. This chapter has explored some of the ways in which the staff become represented in the mothering role.

Firstly, I have argued that the children in the Rainbow Group seek maternal attention through sharing personal aspects of themselves and their home lives and through their attempts to seek physical proximity with adults. I have referred to many examples that strengthen my argument that mothering is important for children who may have lacked nurturing care at home. However, this is not a one way process; the children seek maternal attention and the nurture staff respond as a mother would. I have, therefore, argued that mothering is co-constructed between children and staff as they interact in the setting. This supports the idea of mothering as a reciprocal process (Noddings, 2005, Tronto, 2006). Furthermore, my research has supported claims that mothering in educational settings constitutes a complex social process through which children learn about caring (Martin, 1992, Noddings, 1992, Goldstein, 1998,

Tronto, 2006). In the light of this finding, the nurture staff need to reflect on the ways in which they can meet the needs of pupils, whilst also contributing to their learning and social development.

Secondly, I have argued that nurture staff offer compensatory mothering, with reference to examples of them taking action to meet the physical and emotional needs of the children. The caring approach that is adopted stems from a belief that the children do not receive adequate care at home and that they are essentially good and in need of protection. My findings support previous studies in which educational staff have offered compensatory mothering based on a belief that there is a lack of maternal care in the home (King, 1978, Cugmas, 2007, James, 2010, James 2012). Although I have referred to many examples of the ways in which staff take action to meet the physical and emotional needs of the children, it is hoped that sharing my findings with staff will help to develop nurture group practice to ensure that this type of support is consistently available.

Thirdly, my research has focused on the ways in which the domestic environment supports the notion of mothering. I have referred to the ways in which the Rainbow Group has been set up to contain features of home as well as school, in line with recommended nurture group practice (Boxall, 2002, Lucas, 2010, Billington, 2012). This was followed by examples of the ways in which the staff provide activities that would usually take place at home, such as baking and sharing breakfast and examples of the ways in which the staff focus on teaching skills that would usually be taught in the home, such as good manners and self-help skills. At a superficial level, the nurture staff appear to be taking on the role that might traditionally be played by a mother. However, I have also argued for a more intellectualised view of mothering in which mothering is viewed as action rather than an attribute. The nurture staff have provided an environment which supports learning experiences and a moral education (Martin, 1992, Noddings, 1992, Goldstein, 1998). In the light of my findings in relation to the importance of the mothering within the domestic environment, I would argue that the nurture staff should consider how the

environment can be developed further to optimise the learning opportunities available.

This chapter has provided a deeper understanding of some of the ways in which the nurture staff are represented in terms of mothering. My research presents a notion of mothering that goes beyond maternal care to the provision of an approach that supports children's learning. I also refer back to my discussion at the beginning of the chapter relating to the choice of the term 'mothering' rather than adopting a more neutral term, such as caring. The identification of the construction of mothering does not suggest that only women can perform the nurturing role but is a reflection of the fact that the group is run by two women. A different classification may have been reached if the nurture group had been run by male staff and this is a possible area for future research. Chapter 5 will now provide further support for the complex and challenging role of nurture staff, as it addresses the ways in which the nurture staff also become represented.

Chapter 5 - Findings: Relationships with Adults

Scaffolders and Play Partners

Introduction

This is the second of two chapters concerned with the dominant theme of 'relationships with adults'. As in Chapter 4, there is a focus on the two aspects that emerge as being most important to the children that attend the Rainbow Group; attention and praise. Whilst the identification of these aspects helps to address research question 1, which is concerned with the aspects of the nurture group experience that are most important to the children that attend, I seek deeper insights into the nature of the interactions between the children and adults in the Rainbow Group.

As in the previous chapter, I acknowledge the contribution of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980, Ainsworth et al., 1978) to the 'relationships with adults' theme but also apply principles from socio-cultural theory, symbolic interactionism and social constructivism to help make sense of the social processes that occur in the course of child-adult interactions involving attention and praise.

Whilst the previous chapter has explored the representation of the nurture staff in terms of mothering, this chapter explores how they become represented as 'scaffolders' and 'play partners'. Exploring these representations helps to answer research questions 2 and 3, which are concerned with the meanings that are constructed as children and adults interact in nurture groups.

I argue that a greater understanding of these representations will give insights into the social processes that occur as children learn and play in nurture groups and that the new understandings that emerge will highlight areas for further (research question 4).

The first section will explore the representation of the nurture staff as scaffolders. This will then be followed by a second section, which addresses the representation of the nurture staff as play partners.

Scaffolders

Although the term 'scaffolding' was never used by the nurture staff, I argue that the processes involved in scaffolding were utilised in the Rainbow Group. I support this with reference to the ways in which the staff become represented as scaffolders as they interact with children during episodes involving attention and praise. Two strands of scaffolding have been identified. I will now explore some of the ways in which the nurture staff become represented as scaffolders of learning before moving on to discuss their role in terms of emotional scaffolding.

Scaffolders of Learning

Firstly, I explore how learning takes place through interactions involving attention and praise. I will refer to examples of children seeking attention when they need support and examples of the nurture staff responding with carefully scaffolded support. Through this reciprocal process, I argue that the nurture staff become co-constructed as scaffolders of children's learning.

Whilst attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980) has often been considered to be the central theoretical perspective behind nurture groups, some researchers have also referred to the importance of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (Garner and Thomas, 2011, Griffiths et al., 2014). According to this perspective, learning occurs through social interaction and teaching occurs within the social and cultural context of the classroom (Vygotsky, 1978, Turner and Berkowitz, 2005, Kovalainen and Kumpulainen, 2007, van de Pol et al., 2012, Morcom, 2014, Muhonen, 2016).

In my study, I have applied socio-cultural theory to help to understand how learning occurs through interactions between children and staff in the Rainbow Group. In many of the examples, the process of scaffolding involves children seeking attention and the nurture staff responding with the right amount of attention and praise.

Firstly, I observed that the nurture staff always tried to provide learning tasks that matched the ability level of the children. In doing so, they were applying the first of the nurturing principles, which states that "children's learning is understood developmentally" (Lucas et al., 2006). The children were taught in two groups of three to four pupils for more formal learning activities such as English and Maths. At other times, they worked on individualised tasks. However, despite a high level of differentiated learning, it soon became evident that some of the children still required a high level of support from staff to complete tasks. My claim that the nurture staff become constructed as scaffolders will now be illustrated with reference to extracts relating to two of the pupils in the Rainbow Group.

Maya was seven years of age. She had been in the Rainbow Group for one year. She had learning difficulties and epilepsy. The nurture assistant supported her in the Rainbow Group at lunchtimes and in her Year 3 classroom during the afternoons. The following extracts will illustrate the ways in which the close relationship between the nurture assistant and Maya enables the successful scaffolding of learning tasks. This supports Bruner's (1986) claim that learning is as much about building a relationship as it is about mastering a specific skill.

In the following excerpt, Maya was participating in a group number activity. The children were asked to throw a dice and select a domino with the corresponding number of dots. Maya threw the dice and it landed on a four. She attempted to count the dots on the dominoes but was unable to do this. She then sought the attention of the nurture assistant, simply by looking over at her. The nurture assistant was responsive to her non-verbal cues and intervened immediately:

Nurture assistant: Have you forgotten how to count over Christmas?

(Nurture assistant counts the dots on the domino with Maya)....

Nurture assistant: We got there in the end.

Maya: (smiles)

(Observation 1, 08/01/15)

Although the task was too difficult for Maya to achieve on her own, she was able to complete the task successfully with the support of the nurture assistant. She responded, in a timely manner, to Maya's need for attention and praised her when she achieved success. She provided the right amount of assistance to enable Maya to complete the task. This fits the definition of scaffolding as a process that helps the child to complete a task that they would not be able to do without assistance (Wood et al., 1976). It also support the notion of the Zone of Proximal Development, in which the child is provided with just enough support to extend their thinking beyond the point that they would manage independently (Vygotsky, 1978, Pollard and Filer, 1999, Wass and Golding, 2014).

As Maya was accustomed to learning tasks being scaffolded by adults, she was happy to ask for help when she needed it. Although I was a visiting adult, Maya extrapolated her representation of adults as scaffolders to myself. During Observation 3, she was playing an online game in which she was required to count the number of frogs that appeared on the screen. She was struggling to count them independently and looked over at me, seeking my attention. I supported her by pointing to the frogs as she counted them and offered praise when she successfully achieved this:

Researcher: Yes there are five green frogs. Well done!

Maya: (smiling)

(Observation 3, 05/02/15)

Similarly, during Observation 6, Maya threw the dice, which landed on a five and attempted to count out five jewels. When she was not able to achieve this independently, she turned away from the group to seek my attention in the hope

that I would help. However, the nurture assistant intervened to scaffold the task herself, thus reinforcing the representation of herself as the primary scaffolder of Maya's learning:

Maya: (turning round to me) Will you help me count my jewels?

Researcher: (taking her hand to help her count each jewel).

Nurture assistant: (prompting her to return to group and giving her a Numicon holder) Count them for me Maya. Well done. You can have a sticker!

Maya: (looking at me and smiling) I want a smiley star one.

(Observation 6, 16/04/15)

On this occasion, scaffolding was provided in the form of additional apparatus from the Numicon multi-sensory programme. This resource was used frequently in the Rainbow Group to scaffold early Maths for those who struggle.



Figure 5: Illustration of Numicon Apparatus

With the help of a counting frame, Maya managed to count out five jewels. On this occasion, Maya received both verbal praise and a sticker as a reward. Her smile suggested that she was pleased to receive this recognition.

The claim that adults become represented as scaffolders of learning was also illustrated in excerpts involving John. John was five years of age and was in the Reception class. At the beginning of my period of fieldwork, John was new to the Rainbow Group and frequently appeared reluctant to engage in learning tasks. During Observation 1, he refused to take part in a Maths activity:

(John sitting with head down, his hands covering his face).....

Nurture assistant: Find me two please John.

After 2 minutes, nurture assistant asks John to find a domino with 4. He does this (head still down).

Nurture assistant: That's better John!

(Observation 1, 08/01/15)

The allocation of attention and praise when John began to engage had a positive impact; he continued to participate and went on to complete the activity.

Another example of the nurture staff scaffolding children's learning was observed in a phonics session. John was in the lower ability phonics group with the nurture assistant. The children had their own little whiteboards and were asked to write 'at,' 'mat' and 'sat'. John's immediate response was to seek attention in the hope that he would receive some help:

John: (to the nurture assistant) I can't do it.

Nurture assistant: (put him with Zak who helped him).

(John wrote 'sat'.)

Nurture assistant: You said you couldn't do it. You did it!

John: (smiled at nurture assistant and sucked his thumb)

(Nurture assistant wrote 'mast' on board. John said the word.)

(Nurture assistant smiled and sent John to put a marble in the jar. She asks Zak to show him what to do).

(Observation 1, 08/01/15)

Support from a peer provided just enough support, while allowing John to be as independent as possible. Involving a peer in the scaffolding process supports the view that the notion of scaffolding can include support from a more experienced peer (Wass and Golding, 2014, Muhonen, 2016).

When John achieved the task, the nurture assistant gave positive attention and praise. She also offered a reward, prompting him to put a marble in the jar.

Children were given a marble when they did special work. When the jar was full, the whole group received an additional reward. The nurture teacher then offered further positive feedback:

Nurture teacher (working with the other group a short distance away)
Wow! Why has John got a marble?
John: (giving slight smile).
(Observation 1, 08/01/15)

The nurture staff were working together here to provide positive feedback in the hope that it would encourage John to persevere. This proved to be an effective strategy as he appeared to look much happier and was motivated to write more words.

His success spurred him on. By Session 3, he was fully engaging in tasks:

Nurture teacher: So half of 10 is?
John: 5
Nurture teacher: Well done John!
John: (giving shy smile)
(Observation 3, 05/02/15)

John's increased confidence levels were apparent in Observation 4 when I sat with him to practise the formation of 'b', 'o' and 't':

John: I can do it without looking (hides the phoneme card). I can write with this hand as well (usually writes with his left but trying with his right)
(Observation 4, 26/02/15)

In the above examples, both children responded positively to praise. This finding supported previous studies that suggest that interactions in nurture groups are positive and are likely to enhance the self-esteem of children (Colwell and O'Connor, 2003, Bani, 2011) and also the claim that praise results

in a continuation of appropriate behaviours (Bani, 2011). The fact that the two children were able to achieve the task with adult assistance supported the view that scaffolding remains an effective pedagogy for learning (James and Pollard, 2011).

The above examples have illustrated the ways in which Maya and John sought attention when they needed help with learning tasks and the ways in which the staff responded to support them to complete tasks successfully through interactions involving high levels of positive attention and praise. The representation of the staff as scaffolders of children's learning has provided support for research that has argued that learning in nurture groups can be explained in terms of Vygotskian theory (Garner and Thomas, 2011, Griffiths et al., 2014).

The use of scaffolding in the Rainbow Group was also evident in a conversation with the nurture teacher about what makes nurture groups unique. Although the main focus of nurture groups has often been on social and emotional development (Boxall, 2002, Lucas, 2010), the nurture teacher argued for the inclusion of aspects of the curriculum, such as English and Maths. She explained that the children need some balance as they have to cope with these subjects when they are reintegrated into their classes:

I enjoy curriculum. It gives children a chance to experience what classes are like but at a level they need.

(Conversation with nurture teacher, 08/10/16)

However, the notion of scaffolding was supported in her conviction that the work provided should be at a level that the child can cope with:

Nurture teacher: We do phonics little and often but only for as long as the children can concentrate... we never push.

(Conversation with nurture teacher, 08/10/16)

The suggestion that children were provided with scaffolded support but not pushed beyond their own limits fits well with the notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978, Wass and Golding, 2014).

The nurture teacher made a number of comments that implied that there were sometimes pressures from elsewhere in school to move the children before they were ready:

Nurture teacher: being a teacher, I was given the freedom to teach as I knew my children needed.

Nurture teacher: children only transition out of nurture for RML {Ruth Miskin Literacy} when I agree.

Nurture teacher: when the transition is done correctly, they can cope.

Nurture teacher: my concern was to stop the rush to get children back into class before being ready.

(Conversation with nurture teacher, 08/10/16)

Despite the commitment of the nurture staff to work at the level of the children, there were times when the curriculum-focused approaches from the wider school environment impacted on what happened in the Rainbow Group. During breakfast in Session 2, the nurture teacher talked about children's writing. She explained that the senior leadership team in school were monitoring the educational progress of the children in the Rainbow Group. During Observation 3, the phonics co-ordinator visited the group to monitor and model a prescriptive phonics session, based on the Ruth Miskin Literacy programme. Although the nurture staff agreed to teach aspects of the programme, I got the impression that this was perceived to be an imposition:

After play, the nurture teacher talks to the nurture assistant about the feedback given by the phonics co-ordinator. I sense from their facial expressions and body language that they are annoyed.

(Reflection and Methodological Journal-Session 3, 05/02/15)

Despite the pressures imposed from outside the Rainbow Group, it was clear that the nurture teacher had retained her belief in a child-centred approach. Although she had consented to teach phonics using the Ruth Miskin model, she told me that she delivers it 'little and often' rather than implementing the recommended full forty minute session.

Nurture teacher: I can always fight my corner for my nurture and for the children.

(Conversation with nurture teacher, 08/10/16)

When asked what she was fighting for, she explained that she had to fight for the nurture group to be run her way. She argued against the "regular monitoring and the rush to get children back into class before they were ready". A strong element of protection emerged in her comments, which gave insights into her beliefs about the children. Her sentiments echoed claims in previous studies that educational staff perceive children to be dependent on adults and in need of protection (King, 1978, Pollard and Filer, 1999).

Although the nurture teacher argued for working at the developmental level of the child, she conceded that it was not always her decision to make. This supported the claim that there is often a "negotiation between the school's and the teachers' beliefs and practices" (Lam and Pollard, 2006, p. 133). In my study, there appeared to be a negotiation between the child-centred beliefs of nurture staff compared with the curriculum focus of other teachers and senior leaders.

I argue that the different conceptualisations of learning in the Rainbow Group, compared with those held elsewhere in school, reflect changing narratives over

the last thirty years with regard to how those in education conceptualise learning (Carter and Burgess, 1993, Burgess and Carter, 1996). As Anning (2010) argued, education systems have often functioned within a social context, underpinned by a particular set of values and political initiatives.

Child-centred approaches were dominant in primary education in the 1960s and 1970s (King, 1978). The Plowden report, which was underpinned by Piaget's developmental stages, placed the child "at the heart of the educational process" (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967, p. 7). By contrast, the 1988 Education Reform Act placed the curriculum at the heart of the educational process. This Act led to the introduction of the National Curriculum in England and Wales and represented a move towards a more rigorous curriculum, with its focus on attainment, assessment and levels of performance and a teacher dominated pedagogy (Carter and Burgess, 1993, Burgess and Carter, 1996). The focus on curriculum and driving up standards continued into the 1990s, with the introduction of the Primary National Strategies, including the Literacy Hour (DfEE, 1998b) and the Numeracy Hour (DfEE, 1999). Raising standards remained the main focus in government policy into the next century with the introduction of a number of new documents. These included *Excellence and Enjoyment: Learning and Teaching in Primary Schools*, which argued for a renewed "commitment to high standards and excellence within an engaging, broad and rich curriculum" (DfES, 2004, p.4). This was followed by an independent review of the primary curriculum (Rose, 2009) and the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYF) (DfES, 2007b). The publication of the results for the Standard Assessment Tasks for seven year olds reinforced the priority given to pushing standards in English and Maths.

In spite of the political move towards the standards agenda, I would argue that the nurture staff have been trying their best to maintain child-centred approaches. This supports claims made in nurture group texts that those dedicated to nurture groups have retained a child-centred focus (Boxall, 2002, Lucas, 2010).

The need to defend child-centred approaches has raised questions in terms of the status of staff. The fact that the Rainbow Group is led by a teacher rather than a teaching assistant is important. The children in the Rainbow Group have benefitted as the nurture teacher is an experienced member of staff in school and is able to defend her belief in working at the developmental level of the child. Her status in school has allowed her to challenge pressures imposed by senior managers. However, it is likely that the power dynamics would be different in nurture groups run by two teaching assistants, who might not be in such a strong position to challenge.

In the light of my data, I have argued that learning takes place through interactions involving attention and praise in the Rainbow Group. The nurture staff have become represented as scaffolders, with the children seeking support and the nurture staff providing it. Therefore, I argue that the representation of the staff as scaffolders of learning is co-constructed between the children and adults in the Rainbow Group. My research has supported findings from other studies which have commented on the importance of teacher interactions featuring high levels of scaffolding and support for learning (Yates and Yates, 1990, Muhonen, 2016). It is hoped that raising awareness of the importance of scaffolding in the Rainbow Group will help to support the nurture teacher with her argument for the continuation of a child-centred approach.

Emotional Scaffolders

Although the term 'scaffolding' has traditionally been associated with learning, my research has provided support for the notion of emotional scaffolding (Goldstein, 1999, Renshaw, 2013).

As discussed previously, the nurture assistant and nurture teacher offer scaffolding to the children in the Rainbow Group in the form of timely support and the use of positive attention and praise in recognition of the children's efforts. This not only supports their learning but scaffolds them emotionally. I would argue that emotional scaffolding is an important element of nurture group

practice, given that nurture groups are primarily concerned with supporting the social and emotional development of children.

The application of scaffolding to emotional support makes sense given that Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory has positioned learning, motivation and emotions as interconnected processes. I now illustrate emotional scaffolding with reference to two of the pupils.

In the examples relating to Maya earlier in this section (pp.117-119), it is clear that there is a close relationship between Maya and the nurture assistant, who provides support throughout the school day. As the examples have illustrated, positive attention and praise feature highly in interactions between them. The nurture assistant responds with sensitivity (Billington, 2012) and is attuned (Cubeddu and Mackay's (2017) to Maya's needs. The close relationship enables the nurture assistant to support Maya with the emotional or affective aspects of learning. My research has, therefore, provided support for previous studies which have found a link between positive relationships and the scaffolding of children's social and emotional learning (Anderman, Andrzejewski and Allen, 2011, Lovat, Dally, Clement and Toomey, 2011, Billington, 2012, Morcom, 2014, Cubeddu and Mackay, 2017).

The examples that I have referred to have highlighted a strong relationship between Maya and the nurture assistant, based on positive experiences of being scaffolded over time. As a new member of the group, John has yet to build strong relationships with staff. However, I observed a big difference in John's confidence over the course of the research period. In order to illustrate this, I refer back to earlier examples in which the nurture staff used positive attention and praise to encourage John during a literacy activity. During Observation 1, John was asked to write a word on his white board. His immediate response was, "I can't do it" (p. 120). When he achieved the task, with support from a peer, and went on to successfully read a word on the teacher's board, the nurture assistant praised him and rewarded him by sending him to put a marble in the jar. The nurture staff continued to offer a high level of

praise in recognition of his successes. By Observation 4 (p. 121), John appeared to be much more confident. When I sat with him as he was completing a phonics task, he told me that he could write the word that he had been asked to write without looking and with both hands. It appeared that the provision of emotional scaffolding, featuring high levels of praise, had introduced positive affect into the learning experience. This had served to motivate him and encourage increased engagement in the learning process. This finding supports the claim that the use of praise in nurture groups is likely to enhance the self-esteem of pupils (Colwell and O'Connor, 2003, Bani, 2011).

Although I have highlighted a number of examples of the nurture staff offering emotional scaffolding to children, there were times when their responses were less sensitive, for example, when they were occupied during more formal learning sessions. I refer back to an earlier example in which John was upset and refusing to engage in a Maths activity. Instead of taking him aside to comfort him, the nurture teacher stated that "tears don't work" (Observation 1, p. 103) and told him that sulking is against the rules (Observation 2, p. 103). Whilst the nurture staff meet the emotional needs of the children for the majority of the time, there are occasions when the pressures of the curriculum appear to impinge on time to address children's emotional needs.

Despite the above example, I acknowledge that there is a strong commitment by the nurture staff to meet the emotional needs of the children in the Rainbow Group. This is supported with reference to a follow up conversation with the nurture teacher as she shared her view that the children need a high level of emotional support as part of the learning process:

Nurture teacher: Basically the children being treated as our own- a lot of praise, love and reassurance.

(Observation 6, 16/04/15)

The use of term 'love' led me to reflect on how little the term it is used in schools. The use of the terms 'praise', 'love' and 'reassurance' by the nurture teacher support my construction of the nurture staff as emotional scaffolders.

The above examples have supported the representation of the staff as emotional scaffolders. They develop relationships with children through engaging on an emotional level during interactions that feature high levels of positive attention and praise. However, I have also provided examples of times when children's emotional needs have not been met. As the primary purpose of nurture groups is to support children's social and emotional development, I argue that the staff need to reflect on their role as emotional scaffolders and consider ways to ensure that children's emotional needs are always prioritised. In addition to maintaining high levels of attention and praise, the nurture staff might consider other ways in which they can support children emotionally. For example, they might introduce 1-1 mentoring sessions or employ tools such as feeling diaries and emotions cards. A more planned approach to meeting the emotional needs of children would help to elevate care to the centre of pedagogy (Fielding and Moss, 2011, Wrigley, Lingard and Thomson, 2012).

In this section, I have argued that the nurture staff become represented as scaffolders of learning and emotions as they engage with children during interactions involving attention and praise. I have also highlighted some of the ways in which my findings might be used to inform practice. This would support the claims of researchers who have proposed that an increased understanding of the processes involved in scaffolding can help to develop practitioners' expertise in meeting the needs of the children (Eshach, 2011, van de Pol, 2012, Morcom, 2014, Muhonen, 2016).

Although my study has identified the use of scaffolding processes by the nurture staff, my findings were based on data from a small number of observations of learning tasks in one nurture group. I would, therefore, conclude by stating that there is a need for further research in this area. The next section addresses the representation of the nurture staff as 'play partners'.

Play Partners

Whilst I have argued that the nurture staff maintain a child-centred approach in terms of their role as scaffolders, my research also suggests that they remain committed to child-centred learning in terms of the importance of play. This section explores the extent to which adults are represented as play partners as children and adults interact in the Rainbow Group.

It was clear from the outset that the nurture staff view play as an important part of the nurture group experience. This was reflected in the way that the Rainbow room has been set up. During my first visit, I noted my first impressions of the environment. The room was large and spacious. It had been organised into a number of different areas and was well-equipped.

When I listed the things that I observed around me, play equipment featured highly:

<i>sand tray</i>	<i>dressing up clothes and props</i>
<i>water tray</i>	<i>ball pool</i>
<i>soft toys</i>	
<i>dolls house</i>	
<i>play kitchen</i>	

(Research and Methodological Diary, Familiarisation Visit 1, 06/11/14)

The beliefs of the nurture staff in relation to the importance of play were also reflected in the timetable. A large chunk of every morning was allocated to play. I made a note of the timetable during my first visit:

9.00- 10.00 Numeracy
10.00- Breakfast
10.30- Phonics
11.00- Play
11.00- 12.00 Math

(Reflection and Methodological Journal, Familiarisation Visit 1, 06/11/14)

During the course of the fieldwork, play was renamed 'Children's Choice'.

9.00- 9.30 Snack

10.00- 10.20 Maths

10.20- 11.05 Phonics

11.05- Playtime

11.05- 12.05 Children's Choice/ Writing

(Reflection and Methodological Journal- Observation 2, 22/01/15)

Later in the fieldwork, I noted that play was being referred to as 'Guided Children's Choice'.

9.00- 9.15 Problem solving/ Word time

9.15- 9.45 Maths

9.45- 10.00 Breakfast/ snack

10.00- 10.30 Boxall/ Guided Read/ Writing/ Theraplay

10.30- 11.00 Phonics/ Maths split

11.00- Guided Children's Choice

(Reflection and Methodological Journal, Observation 6, 16/04/15)

Whilst the type of play was not specified on the first timetable (Familiarisation Visit 1, 06/11/14), the subsequent timetables referred to 'Children's Choice' (Observation 2, 22/01/15) and 'Guided Children's Choice' (Observation 6, 16/04/15). I discovered that the staff were using the term 'Children's Choice' to refer to child-initiated play in which the children were permitted to play freely with whatever and with whom they liked. By contrast, 'Guided Children's Choice' was adult-initiated and involved the provision of a limited number of structured play activities.

In addition to the different types of play opportunities noted on the timetable, additional time was allocated to play. For example, children were given extra opportunities to play when they had finished their work and during wet play.

The finding that the nurture staff prioritise play, especially free play, supports my argument that the Rainbow Group offers a child-centred approach in which play is recognised as key to children's learning. This is reminiscent of the Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967, paragraph 523) which states that play is the principle means of learning. My observations regarding the importance of play also confirm that some practitioners still recognise the value of play as part of pedagogy (Kagan and Lowenstein, 2004, Moyles, 2010, Gooch, 2010. Copple and Bredekamp 2009).

Whilst play in nurture groups has often been viewed in terms of a developmental process (Boxall, 2002, Lucas, 2010), this section focuses on the social processes that occur in the Rainbow Group as adults become represented as play partners. Firstly, it explores the ways in which children seek the attention that they need through involving adults in their play. This is followed by an examination of how relationships are formed as children and adults interact in play situations. Finally, the importance of the play context is explored, with suggestions for how play might be re-organised to develop further opportunities for children to grow and develop as they interact with adults through play.

Seeking Attention through Play Activities

In this section, I explore some of the ways in which children demonstrate a need for attention through their attempts to involve adults in their play. I begin by referring to a number of examples in which Maya attempts to engage me as her play partner.

During Observation 1, Maya asked me to act out the 'Three Little Pigs' with her. I was unsure about this as I felt that I needed to be concentrating on observing and note taking. When I hesitated, she thrust a pig mask towards my face. Her inability to wait for attention was demonstrated through physical actions such as grabbing and tapping my arm as well as through her verbal requests:

Maya: Do you want to play with me in the doll's house? Come on!
(grabbing my arm)

(Observation 3, 05/02/15)

Maya: We're having a birthday party (tapping me on the arm). We're having a birthday party (bringing plates, cutlery and food on to the carpet next to where I am sitting).

(Observation 5, 26/03/15)

Maya: (approaching) Mrs Morris- can you help me with this (game on lap top)? When I don't respond immediately, she starts tapping me on the arm.

(Observation 5, 26/03/15)

Maya often appeared to find it difficult to share adult attention with others. When John approached with a book, Maya began to compete for my attention:

John: (giving me a book and sitting down next to me)

Researcher: (reading story to John)

John: (moved up close, smiles and put his thumb in his mouth)

Maya: (coming up and thrusting book in front of me) Read this!
(demanding tone)

Researcher: I am reading this story with John. Sit down and listen.

Maya: (sitting down and listening briefly before asking me again to read the book that she had chosen)

Maya: Read this! (demanding tone)

(Observation 4, 26/02/15)

Maya's inability to share attention was also apparent during wet play time. The children remained in the Rainbow room and were allowed to choose an activity:

John: (bringing a book over for me to read)

Maya: (approaches and interrupts) Sit here. Play this game (dressing doll game).

Researcher: I'll come to you next.

(Observation 4, 26/02/15)

When I sat at the computer with Maya, she was evidently delighted:

Researcher: (goes over to Maya and joins in with game on lap top)

Maya: (smiling and laughing)

(Observation 4, 26/02/15)

When Kye approached to say that it was his turn on the computer, Maya was determined not to lose my attention. She led me to a table and insisted that I sit down with her:

Maya: (fetched a template book and started to draw, showing me each drawing as she completed it) I'm taking my time.

(Observation 4, 26/02/15)

Later in the session, Maya once again sought my attention. This time, she tried to engage me in a game on the interactive whiteboard. The game involved counting the number of animals as they appeared on the screen:

Maya: (approaches me and asked me to play with her- counting activity on white board). Play with me.

Kye: I'll play.

Maya: I want a teacher.

(Observation 4, 26/02/15)

Although Kye offered to play with Maya, only adult involvement in the play was acceptable to Maya at this time. For Maya, play appeared to be a vehicle through which she could get adult attention. Her need for constant attention was viewed by the nurture staff as arising from insufficient time spent with her at home. The nurture teacher informed me that Maya lives with her mother, who is often busy with work. Her mother and father have separated. There are no siblings and no extended family in the local area (Observation 4).

Although Maya was the most demanding, there were times when children appeared to compete for my attention. At one point, Maya, John, Kye, Zak and David were all seeking to involve me in their activities.

In my Reflection and Methodology Journal, I noted that the children appeared to be "clamouring for my attention":

...the children continue to demand my attention, bringing me books and wanting me to play...

(Reflection and Methodology Journal, Observation 4, 26/02/15)

Whilst the above extracts have related to children seeking my attention during 'Children's Choice', the children also enjoyed receiving the attention of the nurture staff when they played games with them during 'Guided Children's Choice':

Nurture assistant: (seeing Craig, Maya and Sally sit down to play 'Dotty Dinosaur Game') Can I have a game if you're playing?

Maya and Sally: Yes Miss. (smiling)

(Observation 6, 16/04/15)

Nurture teacher: (sitting with Luke and John playing the 'Scaredy Cat' game)

Luke: (smiling and engaging in game)

(Observation 6, 16/04/15)

Nurture teacher: (sitting with John and Lee playing the 'Game of Ladybirds')

Lee: (smiling and engaging in game)

John: (smiling and chatting to Lee about the game)

(Observation 6, 16/04/15)

Pictures and brief descriptions of the games have been included as Appendix 8.

In this section, I have referred to examples of children in the Rainbow Group seeking attention through involving adults in their play. This supports my argument that the children have represented adults as play partners. This corroborates the claims made by Goouch (2010), who stated that practitioners are often accepted as players. An interesting finding was that the children sought my involvement in play in 'Children's Choice' but did not approach staff, even though they enjoyed playing games with them during 'Guided Children's Choice'. This finding is explored in the final part of this section in which the relationship between the play context and child-adult interactions is discussed.

Forming Relationships through Play

In addition to seeking adult attention through play, I argue that the children in the Rainbow Group also build social relationships through interactions involving play activities. Social play has been recognised as a form of interaction between children and adults (Blatchford et al., 2016).

The earliest social play has been reported to take place between children and their parents (Garvey, 1991, Power, 2000, Blatchford et al., 2016). However, it cannot be assumed that children who attend nurture groups have had access to play opportunities at home.

This was highlighted in the following extract from a conversation that took place at the breakfast table:

Nurture assistant: (to John) What is your favourite toy?

John: (looked down and shook his head)

Nurture assistant: Have you got any toys? (shook head)

John: (continuing to look down).

(Observation 4, 26/02/15)

The nurture staff informed me that John receives little attention from his mother and father. His sister has often been left to look after him and he spends much of his time at home alone in his bedroom.

As John was new to the group, the first time that I met him was in Observation Session 1. Whilst Sally, Craig, Maya, Lee, Zak and Andy engaged in a group role play in the home corner, John played alone in a play house with the door closed. He was pretending to make tea and placing plastic cakes on a plate. His tendency to play alone was confirmed in comments made by the nurture staff:

There is a new pupil in the Rainbow Group this week. John is looking miserable and not engaging. The nurture teacher informs me that he often comes in upset and refuses to take part.

(Reflection and Methodological Journal, Observation 1, 08/01/15)

The finding that John engaged less in play activities compared with the other children could be explained in terms of a lack of secure attachment. Not only is he insecurely attached to his parents but he has not yet built secure attachments with the nurture staff. This supports Cugmas' (2011, p. 3) finding that, "children insecurely attached to both mother and caregiver engaged in the least amount of play". In the absence of a secure attachment and experiences of early play with parents at home, the role of the adults in the Rainbow Group as play partners takes on a greater importance.

When I began to interact with John, as he played in the play house, he was initially uncertain about how to respond. I peered over the wall and said, "Hello John" and then asked him for a cake. At first, he did not reply. After a while, he passed me a plate with a cake which I pretended to eat. Later in the session, he approached me as I played with another child in the group. He stood next to me with a curious expression on his face and eventually spoke:

John: (standing next to me, looking at me curiously). How do you know our names?

(Observation 1, 08/01/15)

During the subsequent session, it appeared that John wants me to engage in a play activity with him but was unsure how to ask:

John: (getting out of his seat and walking away, then coming back and looking at me)

Researcher: You want me to come with you?

John: (nodding)

Researcher: (following John to crate of Lego and sitting on the floor with him) What are you making?

John: Helicopter

(Observation 2, 22/01/15)

In the subsequent observation, his uncertainty about approaching me resulted in him asking Maya for support:

Maya: (to researcher) John said-can you come over?

(Observation 3, 05/02/15)

As John got to know me, he gained the confidence to approach me directly. In the following excerpt, he wanted to play a game that he had seen me play with another child:

John: Can you play? (leading me over to table with new toy on it)
{Melissa and Doug Latch Puzzle Game} (See Appendix 8)
John: Close your eyes (as he closes up the wooden doors).
(Observation 3, 05/02/15)

During a later observation, he wanted me to participate in his pretend play:

(John then approaches and puts two pieces of cake on a plate on the side in the kitchen)
Researcher: Thank you John! Just what I wanted. (John smiles)
(Observation 5, 26/03/15)

John knew from our previous interaction during Observation 1 that I would pretend to eat the plastic cake that he offered. This example has endorsed the view that the interactions that take place during pretend play allow participants to get to know each other through the co-creation of shared meanings (Parker-Rees, 2010).

In the above example, I have demonstrated how John began to form a relationships with me though the medium of play. He was clearly more confident to engage me in play activities in Observation 5 (p139) compared with in Observation 1 (p138). My role as participant observer allowed me to see, at first hand, how children can develop relationships with adults through play.

Whereas John was initially reticent, children who had been in the Rainbow Group longer appeared to be much more confident to approach adults. When I was looking at the 'Melissa and Doug Latch Puzzle Game' (see Appendix 8), Sally came over and started to play with it:

Sally: This is fun. (opens wooden window)
Do you know what is here? (adopting grown up voice)
(Observation 3, 05/02/15)

Craig also sought my involvement in his game. He was pretending to make a hot chocolate in the home corner:

Craig: Would you like one?
Researcher: Oh yes please? (taking a cup and pretending to enjoy)
(Observation 3, 05/02/15)

Both Sally and Craig were confident in the assumption that I would play with them. This may have been a reflection of positive experiences of forming relationships with adults during their time in the Rainbow Group. Sally and Craig had attended for two terms and were in the process of being reintegrated back into their classes.

The children also enjoyed having the nurture staff as play partners. I refer back to examples provided on pages 135 and 136. As the staff played games with them during 'Guided Children's Choice', the children appeared to be comfortable and happy. They smiled and chatted as they played the 'Dotty Dinosaur Game', the 'Scaredy Cat' game and the 'Game of Ladybirds' (Appendix 8). The emergence of 'relationships with adults' as the main theme in my research endorses the view that children with insecure attachment relationships with their mothers can form secure attachment relationships with alternative caregivers, such as early childcare providers (Cugmas, 2011). My observations have confirmed that close relationships can be built as children and adults interact in play activities (Howes and Smith, 1995, Goouch, 2010).

Although I conclude that the children in the Rainbow Group form relationships with adults through play, the above examples support my previous finding that the children appear to seek my attention during play activities more than that of the nurture staff, especially during 'Children's Choice'. I reflected on why this

might be the case. I questioned whether there were actually more attempts to engage with me or whether I noticed these episodes more due to being directly involved. I wondered whether it was because the children had already built relationships with the nurture staff but had yet to get to know me. However, whilst these factors may have been relevant, I eventually realised that the children's patterns of engagement with adults depended on the play context. This view will be explored further in the subsequent section.

The Play Context

The representation of adults as play partners emerged as important within the 'relationships with adults' theme. The finding that the children in the Rainbow Group tended to seek my attention as a play partner more frequently than they attempted to involve the nurture staff during 'Children's Choice' led me to consider the effect of the play context on child-adult interactions. Over the course of the research period, I gained a better understanding of the different types of play opportunities that were being offered.

As stated in the introduction to this section, 'Children's Choice' was a time during which children had free choice of what and who they play with. In 'Guided Children's Choice', the children were given a choice of a limited number of more structured activities which were led by the nurture staff.

From the outset of my research, the nurture staff reflected on how play opportunities were organised. They sometimes appeared to be uncertain about the extent to which they should intervene. This confusion was reflected in changes to the timetable. As mentioned in the introduction, play was described in three different ways on the timetable during the course of the fieldwork. During Observation 1, I noted that a chunk of the timetable was allocated to 'play'. At the end of the session, the nurture teacher talked to me about how play opportunities were organised within the Rainbow Group and told me that she had been considering introducing more structure to the play:

She [nurture teacher] wonders whether there is too much choice and whether the children's play needs more structure.

(Reflection and Methodological Journal -Observation 1, 08/01/15)

By Observation 2 (22/01/15), 'play' had been replaced by 'Children's Choice' and by Observation 6 (16/04/15), 'Children's Choice' had been replaced by 'Guided Children's Choice'.

I reflected on these different play opportunities in my Reflection and Methodological Journal. A key difference between 'Children's Choice' and 'Guided Children's Choice' was the extent to which the nurture staff intervened in the play:

Guided children's choice is also different in that staff play with the children, modelling positive social interaction such as taking turns.

(Reflection and Methodological Journal -Observation 6, 16/04/15)

Whilst the nurture staff prioritised child-initiated play by offering daily 'Children's Choice' sessions, there appeared to be some confusion about what their roles should be within the play process. This finding corroborated previous claims that adults have often been unsure about the ways in which they should be supporting children's play and the extent to which they should get involved (Anning, 2010).

The preference of the nurture staff for free play was challenged by the different perceptions of some of the other teachers in the school, particularly those on the senior leadership team, who leaned towards more structured play opportunities linked to learning tasks. This substantiates claims made by Martlew et al. (2011) that some teachers find the notion of learning through play problematic. Like the teachers in the study by Bennett et al. (1997), the senior leaders questioned the value of play due to concerns about the academic progression of children.

As suggested in the previous section, current ideologies in education are based on the socio-political climate (Anning, 2010). My study has argued that the nurture staff retain child-centred approaches whilst the senior leaders are more conscious of the current socio-political agenda with its emphasis on attainment and standards. This theory can also be applied to the play context. Whilst the approach of the nurture staff appears to uphold the claim in the Plowden Report that "play is the principal means of learning in early childhood" (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967, paragraph 9), the beliefs of senior managers have been swayed by the focus on curriculum and standards which has prevailed since the 1980s. These opposing standpoints substantiate claims that play does not sit easily within a policy based on raising standards (Anning, 2010, Martlew et al., 2011).

Despite these tensions, I argue that the nurture staff have maintained a child-centred approach through the continuation of daily play opportunities. This supports claims that those dedicated to nurture groups remain committed to a child-centred focus (Boxall, 2002, Lucas, 2010). However, the uncertainty regarding how far to structure play in the Rainbow Group did eventually lead to the introduction of the more adult-directed 'Guided Children's Play' by Observation 6.

Whereas it might be claimed that 'Children's Choice' follows a Piagetian model, 'Guided Children's Play' fits better with Vygotskian theory as the adult intervenes to scaffold the play (Vygotsky, 1978). Supporters of child-initiated play (Smith, 2005, Gopnik, 2009, Fisher 2010) have often frowned on the participation of adults in children's play. However, although children appeared to enjoy 'Children's Choice', the examples of the ways in which children seek to involve adults as play partners supports the opposing view that adults play a crucial role in children's play (Moyle, 2010, Bruce, 2011, Chapman, 2016). Having acknowledged the benefits of both forms of play, I would agree with researchers who have argued for a balance between free play and structured play (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock and Bell, 2002, Tickell, 2011, Shin and Partyka, 2017).

However, I would also argue for a third type of play. My finding that children wanted to involve me in their play during 'Children's Choice' has highlighted missed opportunities in terms of adults becoming involved in play in which the children have set the agenda. There has been much support for adult involvement in child-initiated play in the literature on play (Goouch, 2008, 2010, Moyles, 2010, Wood, 2010, Bruce, 2011). Some have claimed that joining in with children's games gives opportunities for staff to get involved in the affective engagement with the children (Pring, 2004, Goouch, 2010). Others have proposed that adults who engage as play partners can help children to make sense of their world as there is a co-construction of meaning between the child and adult (Gopnik, 2009, Wood, 2010, Moyles, 2010).

In this section, I have claimed that the nurture staff remain committed to the importance of play despite pressures from outside the nurture group. However, they have often appeared to be uncertain about their roles in relation to play. This has been illustrated with reference to changes in the types of play opportunities offered. Whilst I have acknowledged the benefits of child-initiated and adult-led play, I have also identified a need for the nurture staff to engage in play that is led by the children. My findings in relation to the importance of having adults as play partners has furthered the argument that adults are an important part of the play process (David, Goouch, Powell and Abbott, 2003, Goouch 2010, Bruce, 2011, Chapman, 2016).

My finding that different play contexts relate to different patterns of engagement supports researchers who have explored the complex roles of adults as players (Goouch, 2010, Wood, 2010). In the light of my findings, I propose that the nurture staff need to reflect on their roles in relation to play and consider how play opportunities could be re-organised in ways that would support strengthen the relationships between the nurture staff and children.

I would also agree with Anning (2010), who proposed that further research is needed to help practitioners to understand how children learn through play and to clarify their roles in relation to play. This is especially important given the

argument for the role of play in building relationships (Howes and Smith, 1995, Gooch, 2010).

Conclusion

This is the second chapter that has addressed the dominant 'relationships with adults' theme. My study has sought deeper insights into the child-adult relationships through an exploration of the social processes that take place between children and adults. Whereas Chapter 4 was concerned with the representation of staff in terms of mothering, this chapter has explored the ways in which they have become represented as scaffolders and play partners.

The first section has explored the representation of the nurture staff as 'scaffolders.' Although learning in nurture groups has often been viewed developmentally (Boxall, 2002), the social processes involved in learning have not been explored. Principles from symbolic interactionism and social constructivism have been adopted to investigate the ways in which staff become represented as scaffolders. Aspects of socio-cultural theory have also been employed to explore the ways in which learning occurs in the course of child-adult interactions. My findings have suggested that the nurture staff are represented as scaffolders as they provide support with learning and emotional support in the social setting of the Rainbow Group. My argument that the children in the Rainbow Group seek attention and the staff provide it supports the notion of scaffolding as a reciprocal process, through which staff become co-constructed as scaffolders of children's learning. I have argued that a better understanding of the importance of scaffolding in the Rainbow Group could help the staff to defend the child-centred approach adopted when challenged by the senior leaders who adopt a more curriculum-focused view of learning.

I have also proposed that the nurture staff provide emotional scaffolding during interactions involving high levels of attention and praise. I have discussed the link between the close relationships between children and adults in nurture groups and the quality of emotional support. This was followed by a discussion

relating to the ways in which the beliefs of staff in terms of the innocence of the child support a caring approach. However, as children's emotional needs have not always been met, I have called for a need for the staff to reflect on their roles as emotional scaffolders in order to ensure that emotional support is consistently available and to consider new ways in which children can access emotional support.

In the second section of this chapter, I have explored the ways in which the adults become represented as play partners. I have argued that the nurture staff remain committed to child-centred approaches in terms of the importance that they place on play in the Rainbow Group. I have discussed some of the ways in which children seek attention through play and have given examples of how relationships can be formed through play-based interactions with adults. My finding that the children sought my involvement more than the nurture staff during 'Children's Choice' raised questions in terms of the way in which different play contexts have different implications for relationships with adults.

Although the nurture staff prioritised play as an important part of the nurture group experience, I have argued that they sometimes appeared to be unsure of their role in relation to play. Whilst I have argued for a balance between child-led models of play and more structured, teacher-led models, I have also identified missed opportunities in terms of adults becoming involved in play in which the children have set the agenda. I argue that joining in with children's play could help to strengthen relationships between the children and nurture staff, as well as providing opportunities for the co-construction of meaning. In view of my findings in relation to the notion of staff as play partners, I would recommend that staff clarify their role in relation to play and reflect on the ways in which play opportunities are organised.

Whilst Chapters 4 and 5 have explored findings relating to the dominant 'relationship with adults' theme, Chapter 6 will address another theme that has emerged as being important to the children in the Rainbow Group; that of 'peer relationships'.

Chapter 6 - Findings: Peer Relationships

Engaging in Joint Play

Introduction

The emergence of 'peer relationships' as one of the two main themes supports previous studies that have claimed that peer relationships are important to children in nurture groups (Sanders, 2007, Griffiths et al., 2014, Syrnyk, 2014). A number of aspects of 'peer relationships' have been identified in my research. They were ranked in order of importance in the data analysis section of the methodology chapter. This chapter focuses on the aspect that emerged most strongly in my data as being of importance to the children in the Rainbow Group; that of 'engaging in joint play'. This chapter, therefore, addresses Research Question 1, which is concerned with the aspects of the nurture group experience that are most important to children.

My findings demonstrate that the children value play as part of their experience in the Rainbow Group. In the following extracts, the comments made by Zak and Lee suggest that it is the opportunities for play that make the Rainbow Group different from the mainstream classroom:

Researcher: (to Lee) What is it like to be in Rainbows?

Lee: Good

Researcher: What's good?

Lee: Playing with toys...Children's Choice.

(Observation 2, 22/01/15)

Kye agrees and points out that there are more play opportunities in the Rainbow Group than there are in his classroom:

Researcher: (to Kye) What's it like in Rainbows?

Kye: Good. We play with toys. In Year 1, we don't play with toys.

(Observation 2, 22/01/15)

Kye's comment corroborates findings from studies that have claimed that children make a distinction between work and play (Apple and King, 2004, Georgeson and Payler, 2010).

The finding that play is valued by the children in the Rainbow Group substantiates claims that play is an important part of nurture group practice (Boxall, 2002, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, Lucas, 2010).

...a special characteristic of nurture groups is the opportunities available for playing as a part of daily nurture group routine.

(Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, p. 28)

Educational professionals involved in nurture groups have been encouraged to view play developmentally in line with children's levels of competence (Boxall, 2002, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, Bennathan and Boxall, 2008a, Lucas, 2010). This supports a key nurture group principle:

Children's learning is understood developmentally.

(Lucas et al., 2006, p. 9)

A staged model of play was proposed in which children advance from solitary play to cooperative and collaborative play (Boxall, 2002, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, Bennathan and Boxall, 2008a, Lucas, 2010). Staged models of play were based on the ideas of Piaget who proposed that children go through a sequence of play activities in the first years of life (Sutton-Smith, 1966). Piaget (1962) linked play and thought, suggesting that play allows children to practice

things that they have learned. Whilst such developmental approaches have been useful, they have focused on capacities within the individual child and fall within the domain of psychology (Walkerdine, 1989).

Although I acknowledge the importance of developmental theory to play in nurture groups, the emergence of 'engaging in joint play' as the most important aspect within the 'peer relationships' theme highlighted a need to consider the social processes that occur as children play together:

We are missing a major piece of what excites, pleases and upsets children, what is central to their lives... if we don't attend to what happens between children and their friends.

(Dunn, 2004, p. 3)

As previously discussed, I have adopted a conceptual framework influenced by the principles of socio-cultural theory, symbolic interactionism and social constructivism to explore the social processes that take place in nurture groups. Although socio-cultural theory is relevant to the ways in which children learn new things through play (Vygotsky, 1978), the principles of symbolic interactionism and social constructivism have been most helpful in addressing research questions 2 and 3, which are concerned with the ways in which meanings are constructed in the course of interactions.

The two sections in this chapter examine the social processes that go on between children as they engage in joint play in the Rainbow Group, with particular reference to the ways in which meanings are constructed in the course of interactions. The first section is entitled 'Windows on Social Worlds' and the second addresses the notion of 'Gendered Identities'.

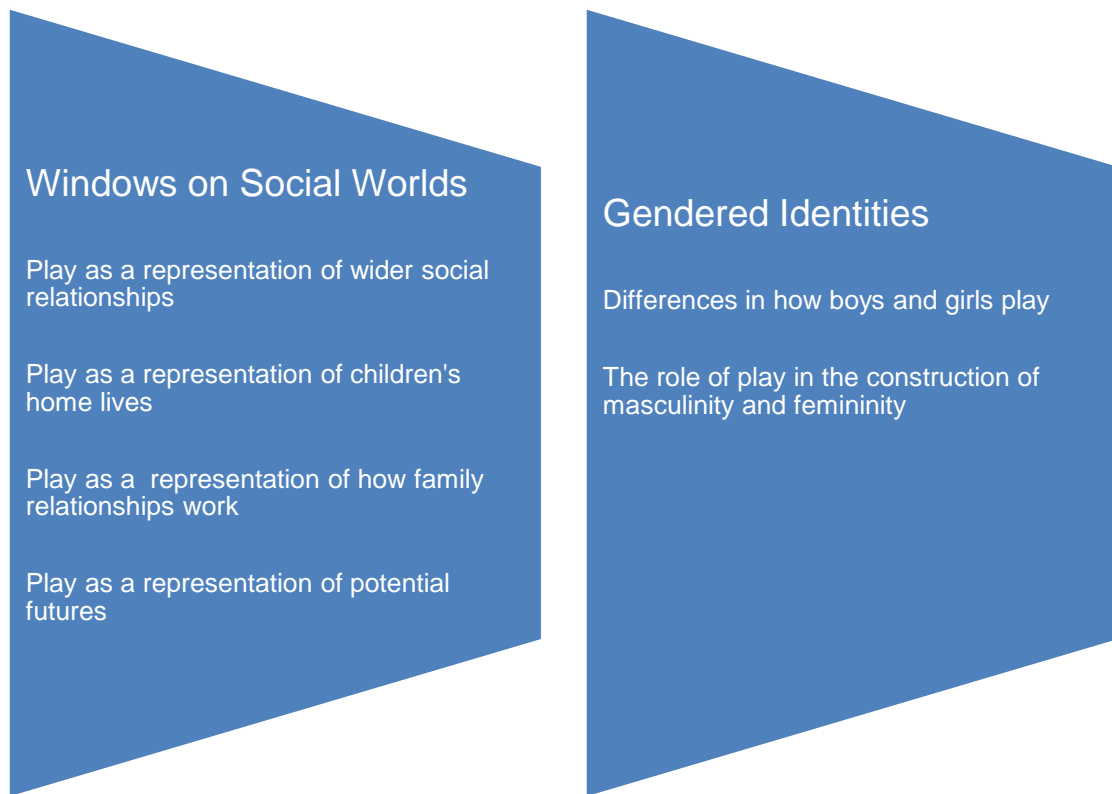


Figure 6: Meanings Constructed as Children Engage in Joint Play

Windows on Social Worlds

This section explores how children's play narratives can be thought of as "windows on social worlds" (Tarullo, 1999, p. 169). Firstly, it explores how children form friendships and construct representations of wider social relationships through play. This is followed by a discussion of the ways in which children construct representations of their home lives and make sense of how family relationships work as they play together. Finally, there is an examination of the ways in which play can be used as a means of exploring possibilities for the future.

Play as a Representation of Wider Social Relationships

My research claims that children develop friendships as they play together in the Rainbow Group. Through play, they learn important lessons about the nature of friendship, which contribute to the formation of representations of what social relationships are like in the wider social world.

One of the aspects that features strongly in the data is the importance of having a special friend. When asked about his favourite things about Rainbow Group, Zak picked out a photograph of the sand pit to put in his book:

Zak: The sand!

Researcher: Is that the next important thing? Tell me more about the sand.

Zak: We can play in the sand and put buckets in and do sand castles. I like to make sand castles with my friend. I like to play sand castles with Kye.

(Pupil Conversation 1, 04/06/15)

Although the photograph was of the sand tray, what was important for Zak was that he plays in the sand with his friend. The focus on playing together with his friend continued as he picked out two photographs with Kye in:

Zak: I want this one because it's got Kye's face on it. He is my friend.

And this one has Happy Street toys. I like Happy Street toys and Kye is playing with them (pointing to Kye's arm in the picture).

(Pupil Conversation 1, 04/06/18)

Again, the emphasis is on the significance of the friendships rather than the toys themselves.

Conversely, it became evident that Kye enjoys playing with his friend Zak:

Researcher: (to Kye) What is your favourite thing to play with?

Kye: I like to play!

Researcher: What?

Kye: I like to play outside-we (Zak and me) play police and robbers.

(Observation 4, 16/07/15)

When it was Kye's turn to make his photo book, his friendship with Zak featured strongly. He selected two photographs with his friends in for his front cover. He chose a photo of Zak first:

Researcher: Why do you want that on your front cover?

Kye: It has my best friend on.

Researcher: Who is your best friend then?

Kye: Zak.

(Pupil Conversation 4, 16/07/15)

Kye also selected other photographs of Zak. This reinforced the importance of this friendship. He included a picture of a Thomas the Tank engine jigsaw. Although Zak did not appear in the picture, he reflected back on this activity as we talked:

This one! I did this with Zak.

(Pupil Conversation 4, 16/07/15)

He then chose a photograph of Zak kissing Winnie the Pooh and one of him in the ball pool. He commented:

Kye: Zak is my friend. He plays with me.

(Pupil Conversation 4, 16/07/15)

He went on to select a photograph showing him and Zak playing a game:

This is me and Zak playing Monopoly.

(Pupil Conversation 4, 16/07/15)

He also picked out a photograph of Zak reclining in the ball pool, holding two of the plastic balls against his eyes:

Zak is putting balls in his eyes [from the ball pool]. Zak plays with me.

(Pupil Conversation 4, 16/07/15)

He told me that Zak is "always silly" and that he makes him laugh. The examples of the friendship between Zak and Kye have suggested that their relationship is based on common interests. However, the shared humour between them also stood out as an important feature of their relationship. For Kye, an important part of his experience of the Rainbow Group was having fun with his friends. This was reflected in his choice of title for his photo book; 'Rainbow Fun'. Through play, therefore, Kye was constructing a view of friendship as being based on shared interests, fun and laughter. Whilst playing with Zak in the Rainbow room, Kye was learning valuable lessons about friendships that would be transferrable to friendships outside the group.

Sally and Maya were also best friends. When I asked Sally what she likes to play with, her response focused on her friendship with Maya rather than the activity itself:

Researcher: (to Sally) What is your favourite thing to play with?

Sally: I like playing with Maya.

Researcher: Lovely. What do you like to play with Maya?

Sally: With the food (points to plastic toy food and trolley).

(Observation 4)

Maya also viewed playing together with her friend as a key part of her experience in the Rainbow Group:

Researcher...tell me about Rainbows.

Maya: It is nice.

Researcher: It is nice? What's nice about it?

Maya: I play with Sally....

(Pupil Conversation 3, 02/07/15)

As Maya made her photo book with me, the strength of her friendship with Sally became apparent. She selected three photographs with Sally in, reflecting the importance of the relationship. Her chosen captions also reinforced this:

Sally and Lola. Lola is a monkey. Sally is my best friend. I play with her.

(Pupil Conversation 3, 02/07/15)

This is my shoe [Cinderella shoe]. This is Sally's arm.

(Pupil Conversation 3, 02/07/15)

Sally continued to feature in the conversation even when she was absent from the photographs:

Researcher: This is a doll's house. It has got a door on

Maya: I play with it with Sally.

(Pupil Conversation 3, 02/07/15)

Maya: Yes we paint teapots. And there is a nursery rhyme. I'm a little teapot- here's my spout... I see Sally's teapot.

(Pupil Conversation 3)

Maya: We play with the Numicon - Sally and me.

(Pupil Conversation 3, 02/07/15)

As for Zak and Kye, the friendship between Sally and Maya appeared to be based on common play interests. This substantiated claims that children develop social relationships with peers because they develop shared interests and joy in play activities (Kernan and Singer, 2011).

As children engage in joint play, they construct meanings in relation to what friendships are like. This supports previous research which has found that children learn about others through play (Bruce, 2011). Furthermore, it has been argued that learning about friendships through play helps children to form representations of social relationships in the wider social world (Dunn, 1993). My finding that playing with peers helps children to learn about social relationships highlights a need for the nurture staff to continue to provide opportunities for children to play freely with their peers. I will now examine other ways in which children construct meaning as they play together.

Play as a Representation of Children's Home Lives

As well as supporting the development of social relationships, I argue that engaging in joint play with peers can provide opportunities for children to construct representations of their home lives. Whilst children's role play has been defined in different ways in the literature (Anning, 2010, Bruce, 2011), my thesis focuses on 'domestic role play'. I use this term for play that is based in the home corner and concerned with domestic themes.

The home corner within the Rainbow room contains many of the features normally found in the home, including a settee and a rug, a play kitchen area, toy crockery and food and a variety of dolls. Through the provision of the home corner, the nurture staff have provided an ideal play space in which children can construct meaning relating to aspects of their lives at home.

At the most basic level, domestic role play could simply reflect life as it is, echoing aspects of what is going on at home. Vygotsky (1967) claimed that features of the world most salient to the child at a given time are selected and

highlighted through pretend play. Socio-dramatic play has also been referred to as a metaphor for children's lives (Bolton, 1979, Anning, 2010).

The idea that children play out aspects of their home lives during domestic play will now be illustrated with reference to an example of a child's play, taken from Observation 2 (22/01/15). I observed Kye sitting on the carpet in the home corner. He was playing silently with a baby doll. He took on the role of caregiver in his play, putting a dummy in the doll's mouth and placing it carefully in the cot. His treatment of the baby doll was gentle and nurturing. The baby lay quietly and went to sleep.

The nurture staff provided a context for Kye's play. They informed me that his mother had recently had a baby and that Kye and his brother were often tired as a result of the baby keeping them all awake at night. In the light of my observation and the information from staff, it appeared that Kye was using play as a vehicle to make sense of the current situation at home. Whilst playing with the doll, Kye was constructing meaning in terms of his understanding of the relationship between his mother and the new baby. This example of play has corroborated claims that children sometimes associate the dolls with members of their own family and may portray events that they have experienced or events that hold some importance to them (Garvey, 1991).

Whilst Kye plays alone in the above scenario, the example has provided support for my argument that children construct meaning about their home lives as they play. I will now move on to describe examples of the ways in which children make sense of family relationships as they play together.

Play as a Representation of How Family Relationships Work

Whilst domestic role play can provide a tool for children to construct meaning relating to the home situation, I also argue that it can be a more abstract representation of how relationships work. Through play, children construct meanings in relation to different types of relationships. In the following excerpt, Lee was playing with a female doll and a baby doll. He provided me with a narrative as he played:

Lee: (playing with female doll) This is Megan.

Researcher: Who is this? (indicating doll)

Lee: Ben (indicates baby doll) This is baby.

Lee: (as Megan) Wake up Ben! (Pretends to feed the baby and puts it in the pram).

Lee: (making the noise of a baby crying) I want my momma.

(Observation 2, 22/01/15)

Lee provided the voice of the mother Megan, who fed her baby and put her to bed. He then changed identity to provide the voice of the baby, crying and saying, "I want my mommy!" Only through play is this role transformation possible. Children are able to form different interpretations as they move between the perspectives of the various participants. On one level, Lee could be simply acting out what is happening at home. However, at a deeper level, this type of play allows him to explore the nature of the mother-baby relationship. His construction of the relationship includes an element of frustration. Despite being fed, the baby cries.

In a different role play situation, six of the children engaged in domestic role-play. Sally took on the role of mother. Craig and Lee became the children. Maya, Zak and Andy joined the scene as the family pets. The children constructed meanings together as they took on roles and improvised:

Sally and Craig: (smiling and excited) Yeah! (ran off and started to get out kitchen items, a shopping trolley and some dolls).

Maya: (approaching) Can I play? I'll be the dog. Woof Woof!

Lee: (to Sally) I'm the boy. Mom- can I go swimming tomorrow?

Craig: (to Sally) Can I play now mom?

Sally: (pretending to clean the cupboard with a washing up brush and talking on the phone at the same time)

Zak and Andy: (pretending to be a cat and a dog)

Sally: (to Lee- who is lying on the sofa) I'm angry with you. Stay in bed!

Lee: No I won't!

Sally: (reading book to doll)

(Observation 1, 08/01/15)

Sally played the role of a busy mother, who was struggling to cope with the demands of the household. Lee and Craig took on the parts of her two sons. Although the boys asked Sally questions, she did not respond as she was cleaning at the same time as talking on the telephone. She also had the family pets to deal with. Sally then pretended to get angry with her son Lee because he would not stay in bed. Her son's response was defiant. While she was trying to keep Lee in bed, she was also reading to the baby.

In these scenarios, the children appeared to be constructing meaning in terms of the relationships that exist within families. After the role of mother had been taken, the other children opted to play children or family pets. Interestingly, none of the children volunteered to be the father. This raised questions regarding the composition of the children's families and the nature of the relationships within them. The lack of a father figure in play scenarios may be because some of the children have no father in the family home or possibly because they play no part in the child care.

The above example has served as an illustration of how children construct meanings in relation to how family relationships work through their play in the home corner. This has supported findings discussed in the literature on play.

For example, Garvey (1991) claimed that the social constructs that guide domestic play are based on children's growing knowledge of individuals and their relationships. More recently, Kitson (2010) proposed that socio-dramatic play leads to a greater awareness of social surroundings as children act out social interactions and experience human relationships through symbolic representation (Kitson, 2010).

The finding that engaging in domestic role play with their peers helps children to make sense of family relationships has highlighted a need for the nurture staff to ensure that they continue to offer regular opportunities for this type of play. Whilst the focus here has been on joint play, the nurture staff might consider intervening, at times, to introduce more positive possibilities for the parent-child relationship, such as leading the children to enact a family outing or birthday party. The notion that staff might have a role to play in the construction of meaning as they engage in children's play has been discussed in the previous chapter. I now go on to discuss how play can help children to construct meaning in terms of their future lives.

Play as a Representation of Potential Futures

Whilst I have referred to examples of the ways in which children make sense of family relationships as they engage in domestic play, I now argue that play can provide a means for children to try out different possibilities for the future.

Through the provision of the home corner and the dolls, the nurture staff have actively created opportunities for children to take on family roles. In many of the scenarios that I observed, children have taken on the role of parents caring for babies and young children.

The excerpt referred to earlier in this section involving Kye showing gentle and nurturing care to the baby doll (Observation 2, 22/01/15, p.165) holds a note of optimism. However, other scenarios have reflected the more pessimistic view that children enact the way that they expect their future lives to be. I refer back

to the scenario in which Sally played the role of a mother, struggling to complete the household chores whilst simultaneously talking on the phone and trying to deal with her unruly son (Observation 1, 08/01/05, p.167). Similar frustrations were apparent in the scenario in which Lee attempted to settle the baby doll. He pretended to feed her and then laid her in the pram. In spite of this, she continued to cry out for her mother (Observation 2, 22/01/15, p.166).

It was interesting that, in both of the above scenarios, the children were a source of frustration for the parents. I argue that the children's constructions of the nature of the mother-baby relationship have been highlighted through their play. This finding was reminiscent of 'The Tidy House' (Steedman, 1987). This book was based on a story about two couples and their children, written by three working class girls in the Summer of 1976. The story constituted a reflection of what children's lives would become as well as an exploration of themselves as they believed that their parents perceived them. Whilst the children were wanted, they were also a source of frustration for their parents, who struggled to keep the metaphorical house tidy.

Whilst the home corner has provided opportunities for children to play at being mother, the children were able to try out other options for the future through engaging in 'community role play'. I have used this term to describe play in which children enact social and professional roles outside the home. This will now be illustrated with reference to examples of children taking on the roles of doctor and hairdresser.

David engaged in community role play at a basic level. Although he showed little interest in playing with his peers, he frequently played with the hairdressing kit and medical kit. In the following excerpt, David took on the role of hairdresser. He sat me down and proceeded to do my hair:

David: (puts rollers in my hair- goes to get comb, combs his own hair and then combs mine)

(Observation 2, 22/01/15)

David's interest in the roles of hairdresser and doctor was also evident in the photo book activity. When he was asked to take photographs of his favourite things in the Rainbow Group, he went straight to the hairdressing kit and the medical kit. His photographs have been included as Appendix 3. He chose to include these images on the first page of his photo book. When asked what he wanted to write about the hairdressing kit, he suggested, "Beauty box- I can dry my hair". Whilst the majority of the children who played doctor pretended to examine others, David stated that he uses the 'doctor box' to test his own heart beat and his ears. Although he did not engage with peers in his play, it could be argued that David was showing a growing social awareness as he took on these social roles. Taking on "different personas" can be seen as a precursor to social play. (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, p. 29).

Maya also tried out the role of hairdresser, with me as her client:

Maya: (approaches with hairdryer) I'm going to curl your hair.
(Observation 2, 22/02/15)

She then enacted the role of doctor:

Maya: Now sit on the chair (puts mask on and held a stethoscope to my chest) -dum dum dum...
(Observation 2, 22/01/15)

Sally too tried out the role of doctor. Unlike David and Maya, she involved other children in her role play. She pretended to attend to Lee, who was lying on the floor after having an imaginary accident (Observation 2, 22/01/15). She then noticed the hairdressing kit and became a hairdresser, beginning to comb and put rollers in Zak's hair (Observation 2, 22/01/15). Lee and Zak played alongside Sally, helping her to construct meanings in relation to these new roles. Although Sally mostly engaged in domestic role play, community role play allowed her to explore two alternative roles for the future.

In the above examples, the hairdressing kit and medical kit have encouraged the children to play more creatively. This provides support for the view that role play offers opportunities for children to become creators of culture who, "generate new interactions and future engagement with the environment" (Papadopoulou 2012, p. 577).

However, although children were able to trial other roles through play, the choices on offer were very limited. The children played at being a mother, a hairdresser and a doctor. In order that children can play more creatively and try out a wider range of options of the future, I argue that there is a need for the nurture staff to provide more varied play experiences and a wider selection of play equipment.

This could begin with a reorganisation of the home corner. Whilst the traditional set up has provided an ideal environment for domestic play, the area could be developed in ways that would encourage children to try out other roles. For example, it might be transformed into a school, a post office or a doctor's surgery. In a study by Taylor and Richardson (2005), the children transformed the domestic space of the home corner into a police station.

A wider range of dressing up clothes and props could also be provided to encourage children to dress up and take on other roles such as teacher, police officer or chef.

The above examples have highlighted some of the ways in which children construct meanings about possible futures as they play together. My findings, therefore, substantiate previous claims that play can serve as a practice for adulthood (Singer and Singer, 1990, Blatchford et al., 2016).

Imaginative play is fun, but in the midst of the joys of make believe, children may also be preparing for the reality of more effective lives.
(Singer and Singer, 1990, p. 152)

However, my findings have also highlighted an urgent need for staff to conduct a review of play opportunities. A wider range of play experiences would enable children to play more creatively to explore a wider range of options for the future.

This section has explored how children's play narratives can be thought of as "windows on social worlds" (Tarullo 1999, p. 169). I have argued that children learn about social relationships, make sense of their home lives and family relationships and explore potential futures as they engage in joint play with their peers. Given the importance of play in helping children to make sense of their social worlds, I conclude that the nurture staff need to continue to offer opportunities for children to play freely with their peers. However, my study has also highlighted a need to reflect on and develop the play opportunities on offer.

Gendered Identities

Whilst the previous section has explored the ways in which children construct meanings about their social world, I now explore the ways in which gender is constructed as the children in the Rainbow Group play with their peers. I argue that an increased understanding of how gendered identities are formed can provide insights that can be used to shape provision.

Gender Differences in How Boys and Girls Play

My research findings suggest that there are differences in the ways in which boys and girls play in the Rainbow Group. The examples in this section support the view that girls and boys generally play in groups of the same gender (Lloyd and Duveen, 1992, Martin, 2011, Blatchford et al., 2016). The girls in the Rainbow Group appear to prefer domestic play whereas the boys tend to play more physical games.

I have referred to a number of examples of domestic role play in this chapter. Although both girls and boys take part in this type of play, it is the girls who

appear to enjoy it most. I refer back to the scenario in which Sally took on the role of mother (Observation 1, 08/01/15, p.158). Sally appeared to be comfortable in the home corner. She knew where to find the kitchen items, shopping trolley and dolls. Her preference for domestic role play was also supported in extracts of conversation. When I talked to her about play in the Rainbow Group, she told me that she enjoys playing with the food and pointed to the plastic food and the trolley (Observation 4, 26/02/05).

Maya's preference for domestic play became apparent as she talked to me during the photo book activity. When she was asked about her favourite activities, she selected a picture of the plastic food and told me how she uses this as part of a role play with Sally:

*Maya: We play with the food. We play mummies and daddies.
(Pupil Conversation 3, 02/07/15).*

The boys appeared to prefer fantasy role play. Games such as 'Zombies' and 'Cops and Robbers' were exclusively played by the boys in the group. In the example below, Lee, Kye, Andy and Zak played cops and robbers in the home corner. They were running about, pushing each other and using the hairdryer symbolically as a gun:

*Nurture teacher: I am going to stop you playing if you play rough.
Andy: We are playing gentle.
Lee and Kye: (pretending that hairdryer is a gun)
Lee: It's not a gun
Kye: it's a flower
Lee: Can we play?
Nurture assistant: You can play cops and robbers as long as you don't fight.
Zak: (again pretending hairdryer is a gun)
Nurture teacher: That is for drying your hair- it's not a gun.
(Observation 1, 08/01/15)*

The preference of the boys for this type of play was reflected in a conversation with Kye. When asked what he likes to do most in the Rainbow Group, he replied that he likes to play 'Cops and Robbers' outside (Observation 4, 26/02/15).

My findings relating to the differences in the ways in which boys and girls play in the Rainbow Group have provided further support for claims that girls show a preference for domestic role play whilst boys engage in more active and physical games (Garvey, 1991, Pellegrini, 2004. Martin, 2011).

Although my data has highlighted gender differences in children's play, I argue that these differences are not natural but are constructed and reinforced through social processes as children learn the rules relating to what it means to be a boy or girl (Paechter, 2007). This chapter now goes on to explore how masculinities and femininities are constructed through children's experiences of the social world. It discusses how gender identities are instigated in the home but reconstructed in other social settings such as school. My study focuses on the ways in which gender identities are constructed as children play together in the Rainbow Group.

The Role of Play in the Construction of Masculinity and Femininity

It has been claimed that gender roles become evident in children at a young age (Maccoby, 1988, Whiting and Edwards, 1988, Chapman, 2016). Whilst some researchers have viewed gender differences as natural (Garvey, 1991, Pellegrini, 2004), my study supports the notion of gender as something that is learned (Davies, 2003). Although I acknowledge that gender identities are first formed in families and communities, I argue that gender is confirmed as children interact with their peers in the school environment (Thorne, 1993, Jordan, 1995, Blaise, 2005, Martin, 2011, Chapman, 2016).

The examples that I refer to in my study provide some support for the notion of socialisation (Weinrich, 1978, Henriques et al., 1998). It has been argued that

children initially develop an understanding of masculinity and femininity from significant others in the family and local community (Blaise, 2005, Martin, 2011). When Sally took on the role of mother struggling to cope with the household chores and children (Observation 1, 08/01/15, p.158), she may have been imitating her mother. The nurture staff had informed me that Sally's mother was finding it hard to cope as a single mother.

Whilst some of the boys in the Rainbow Group joined in with domestic play in subsidiary roles, they were more likely to engage in physical, active forms of play, for example, running around the room playing 'Cops and Robbers' (Observation 1, 08/01/15, p.164). Some researchers have claimed that the preference for physical, aggressive play may be linked to things that go on in their families and communities, such as high levels of violence (Skelton, 2001, Connolly, 2004, Paechter, 2007). Others have explained the physical, boisterous play exhibited by the boys with reference to cultural factors such as the media (Lloyd and Duveen, 1992, Jordan, 1995, Browne, 2004). This would be supported by comments from the nurture staff, who explained the aggressive play displayed by the boys with reference to the computer games that they play at home; they tell me that the boys in the Rainbow Group often play adult games that involve shooting and violence, such as 'Call of Duty'.

A significant part of the construction of masculinity is to avoid all things done by girls (Jordan, 1995). It has been argued that domestic play can be perceived to be risky in terms of losing masculine status (Davies, 1989, Browne, 2004, Paechter, 2007). Although I did observe boys playing in the home corner, they played only subsidiary roles and only maintained the play for short periods of time. When Lee was playing with dolls during Observation 2 (22/01/15, p.157), he used some interesting devices to preserve his masculinity. Firstly, he externalised the play by giving voice to the dolls rather than enacting the role of mother himself. He formed a narrative by giving voice to the female doll and then changed role and spoke through the baby doll. Secondly, the introduction of a zombie to the scenario could be interpreted as an attempt to preserve his masculinity which he has put at risk by participating in play traditionally

associated with girls. After settling the baby doll in the pram, he suddenly picked up another doll and shouted:

Lee: Aaaaghh- Oh no- it's a zombie!

(Observation 2, 22/01/15)

My findings have provided support for the view that children assign gender to particular activities. On the many occasions in which Sally and Maya played with the hairdressing kit, this was accepted as normal by their peers and by the nurture staff. However, when David played at hairdressing and emerged with a new accessory in his hair, this caused much amusement amongst the boys:

David: (approaching with a tuft of his hair in an elastic band on top of his head)

Zak and Kye: (laughing at David's hair)

(Observation 6, 16/04/15)

It could be suggested that David had not yet reached "gender constancy" (Paechter, 2007, p. 70); he had not established himself as a member of masculine or feminine practice and did not associate the hairdressing kit with being a boy or girl. However, Zak and Kye laughed as they perceived the activity and the hair adornment to be associated with femininity and not appropriate for a boy.

Further support for the claim that the majority of the children perceived hair as a feminine interest was seen in an example during Observation 5. When Maya showed the nurture teacher her French plait, Zak commented on his mother's hair:

Zak: My mommy has red dye (laughs out loud)

Nurture teacher: Are you going to dye your hair red Zak? (teasing)

Zak: (smiling) No! my mommy.

(Observation 5, 26/03/15)

Zak's response indicated that he perceives hair styles and colouring as a female interest.

These examples support the view that aspects of things that take place in the Rainbow Group have become 'gendered'. This would support claims made in feminist poststructuralist research that children learn their gender by positioning themselves inside the masculine and feminine discourses that are available to them in our society (Davies, 2003, Blaise and Taylor, 2012, Chapman, 2016). Whilst the gender identities of children are already established when they start school, I argue that they are reconstructed as the children engage in joint play with peers.

Whilst my research has been concerned with the experiences of children in the Rainbow Group, it has also been necessary to examine the ways in which the nurture staff construct meaning in terms of gender. I argue that the beliefs of staff in relation to masculinity and femininity have impacted on the ways in which they have set up the environment, the ways in which they have responded to children and the activities and resources provided.

Whilst 'Children's Choice' is a time in which children play with what and whom they like, I argue that the play is not free as it takes place within a context based on the beliefs and ideologies of staff. This supports the claim made by Cutter-Mackenzie and Edwards (2013) that power relationships between children and teachers mean that play cannot be considered to be free. As Chapman (2016) suggests, gender roles might be supported without the educator being aware. The beliefs of the nurture staff in relation to how boys and girls should act can be seen as part of a "hidden curriculum" (Pollard and Tann, 1987, p. 164). The free choice of the children is limited by what is considered to be appropriate for a boy or girl (Herbert and Stipek, 2005, Martin 2011, Chapman, 2016).

The nurture staff have had sole responsibility for planning the Rainbow room. As the old mobile classroom had been condemned, they had been given free

rein to set up its replacement as they wished. The home corner featured as an important part of the room. It had been equipped with a settee, rug, book shelf and toy kitchen area. There were a selection of toys, dolls, a cot, a pushchair, plastic plates and cups, a shopping trolley and toy food. I argue that the home corner is a space which supports the construction of femininity as it replicates the domestic situation in which women within local families and communities often dominate. The fact that the girls in the Rainbow Group tended to engage in domestic role play in the home corner more than the boys confirmed the view of the home corner as a "female domain" (Paechter, 2007, p. 70). The nurture staff also reinforced this when they tried to stop the boys playing Cops and Robbers in the home corner in Observation 1 (08/01/05).

Although the staff did not approve, the boys' creative interpretation of the home corner raised questions about how the area might be reorganised to become a space in which gender stereotypes could be challenged. I have already referred to an example of a home corner being transformed to become a police station (Taylor and Richardson, 2005). Similarly, it could become a restaurant, school or doctor's surgery.

Whilst I have explored some of the ways in which the environment supports gender stereotypes, I also found that the responses of the nurture staff helped to give meaning to what was appropriate behaviour for a boy or girl. When the nurture staff objected to the rough play exhibited by the boys during the cops and robbers game (Observation 1, 08/01/15, p.164), the boys did not passively accept the rules but tried to negotiate. They argued that the hairdryer, which was being used symbolically as a gun, was actually a flower. In challenging what was acceptable, the boys were actively adjusting their environment and shaping their world (Pollard, 1985, Lazarus, 1991, Lam and Pollard, 2006 Papadopoulou, 2012). When the boys responded with a challenge, the nurture staff took no further action. There was a level of acceptance in terms of the inevitability of boys engaging in this type of physical play. This finding corroborated the view that practitioners have gender-typed expectations for children's behaviour (Browne, 2004, Ewing and Taylor, 2009).

I would also argue that gender stereotypes were being reinforced through the resources provided. For example, stories were often used as the basis for activities in the Rainbow Group and fairy tales were a commonly chosen genre. During my research period, the Rainbow Group had been working on the story of Cinderella. This had clearly made a big impression on Maya.

In the following excerpt, Maya takes on the role of Cinderella and invites David to be her prince:

Come on David-let's dance. (telling David what to do) 1, 2, 3 ...take a bow...

Maya: Come on David-let's dance

Maya: (to David) You be the Prince. (To me) We are playing a game and David is the prince.

(Observation 4, 26/02/15)

Fairy tales have often reinforced traditional notions of masculinity and femininity. The female character is often weak and in need of rescue by the handsome male. Although there has been an increased awareness of gender stereotypes in books and toys compared with the 1970s (Gaskell and McLaren, 1986), traditional fairy tales were still used being regularly in the Rainbow Group. It is likely that they would have had a role in reinforcing traditional notions of masculinity and femininity. I hope that sharing my findings in relation to the ways in which gender stereotypes may be being reinforced through fairy tales will lead to a more careful consideration of the stories that are chosen. I would argue that the nurture staff should avoid those that reinforce traditional notions of masculinity and femininity in favour of books that challenge gender stereotypes, perhaps through the portrayal of strong female characters.

In this section, I have argued that there are differences in the ways in which boys and girls play in the Rainbow Group. Whilst I have acknowledged that gender is first constructed in the homes and communities in which the children

live, I have argued that masculinities and femininities have then been reinforced as they engage in joint play in the nurture group. Although the nurture staff have prioritised free play, I have found that the nurture staff inadvertently support gender roles through the way in which the environment is set up, the ways in which they respond to children and the resources on offer. On the basis of my findings, I argue that the nurture staff need to reflect on how gender stereotype are being reinforced through existing practices and help them to challenge assumptions about masculinity and femininity which could restrict children's learning and life choices. The findings in this section develop arguments relating to a need to challenge gender stereotypes in early years settings (Pollard and Filer, 1999, Blaise, 2005, Aina and Cameron, 2011, Hogan, 2012, Chapman, 2016).

Conclusion

Whilst Chapters 4 and 5 have addressed the dominant theme of 'relationships with adults', this chapter has explored 'peer relationships', which emerged as the second most important theme to the children that attend the Rainbow Group. Further exploration within this theme revealed the importance that children place on engaging in joint play with peers. This supported previous research in which children have identified relationships with peers as of importance, especially with regard to playing together (Pollard and Tann, 1987, Parker and Gottman, 1989, Dunn, 1993, Clark and Moss, 2011, Kernan and Singer, 2011).

Whilst play has often been viewed developmentally in nurture group literature (Boxall, 2002, Lucas, 2010), my study has explored the social processes involved in joint play. This chapter has focused on the ways in which meanings are constructed in the course of episodes of interactions involving play.

Firstly, I have explored the ways in which the children construct meanings in relation to their social worlds as they engage in joint play with their peers. I have given examples of how children build relationships as they play together and

have argued that this helps children to construct representations of wider social relationships (Dunn, 1993). I have then explored some of the ways in which children make sense of their home lives and family relationships as they engage in domestic role play. Finally, I have explored how role play can help children to construct meaning as they explore possibilities for the future (Singer and Singer, 1990, Papadopoulou 2012, Blatchford et al., 2016).

A greater understanding of the social processes involved in children's joint play has given insights which can be used to reflect on practice. I have acknowledged that domestic play in the home corner offers opportunities for the children to make sense of their social worlds. This supports the need for the nurture staff to continue to offer opportunities for this type of play. However, my study has found that there were limited opportunities for children to play out alternative futures. In the light of this finding, I have argued that the nurture staff need to reflect on how play opportunities can be broadened to encourage the children to try out other possibilities.

In the second section of this chapter, I have explored the ways in which children construct gendered identities. My study found that there were differences in the ways in which boys and girls played in the Rainbow Group. Whilst I have acknowledged that children first learn about gender at home, I argue that masculinities and femininities are then confirmed as children learn what it means to be a boy or girl (Paechter, 2007). Whilst previous research has claimed that gender is reinforced as children interact with their peers in the school environment (Thorne, 1993, Jordan, 1995, Blaise, 2005, Martin, 2011, Chapman, 2016), my study has focused on the ways in which notions of masculinity and femininity are constructed, with reference to examples of episodes of play in the Rainbow Group.

Whilst some have claimed that children learn about gender from significant others in the family and local community (Blaise, 2005, Martin, 2011), further examination of episodes of play reveals that the social processes involved in play interactions are more complex. I have also acknowledged the contribution

of the society and the influence of popular culture on the ways in which the boys in the group play. However, I have also argued that children learn about gender by positioning themselves inside the masculine and feminine discourses that are available to them (Davies, 2003, Blaise and Taylor, 2012, Chapman, 2016).

Whilst my research has focused on the experiences of children, the constructions of staff have also emerged as important. I have argued that their beliefs and ideologies impact on the ways in which they have set up the environment, the ways in which they respond differently to girls and boys and the activities and resources that are provided. My study, therefore, supports findings in previous studies that educational staff inadvertently support gender roles (Martin, 2011, Chapman, 2016). In the light of this finding, I have argued that there is a need for the nurture staff to reflect on the ways in which gender stereotypes are being reinforced through existing practices and consider ways in which assumptions about masculinity and femininity can be challenged. I believe that a reorganisation of play opportunities in nurture groups could have a big impact on how gender identities are constructed and consequently on the future lives of the children that attend nurture groups.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion: What has been Learned?

Introduction

This final chapter concludes the study by highlighting what has been gained from my research and the contribution that it makes towards an increased understanding of children's experiences in nurture groups. The chapter starts with a summary of the study. It then explains the unique contribution that it makes to nurture group research. This is followed by a summary of findings, before going on to discuss the implications of my study for policy, practice and staff training. I then give an account of my journey as a researcher and describe some of the limitations of the study. My thesis ends with a concluding statement.

Summary of the Study

In order to explore the experiences of pupils in a primary school nurture group, my research has adopted an interpretivist paradigm. The epistemological and ontological position for my study is that there is no one nurture group reality but that meanings are constructed between children and staff as they interact in the social setting of a nurture group.

Although attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980) was relevant to my conceptual framework, I was interested in exploring the social processes that take place between children and adults as they interact in the nurture group setting. I adopted a conceptual framework based on elements of socio-cultural theory to explore aspects of children's experiences that could not be explained by attachment theory alone and features of symbolic interactionism and social constructivism to explore how meanings are constructed as children and adults interact in nurture groups.

The methodology employed to provide insights into the experiences of the children was an ethnographic case study. Data were collected from observations, conversations with pupils and children's photographs. The approach that was adopted for data analysis was based on constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). First and second level coding allowed for the identification of two dominant themes of importance to the children in the Rainbow Group. Further analysis within these themes revealed deeper insights into some of the ways in which meanings are constructed by children and adults in the course of interactions in the setting. The new understandings that have emerged have given rise to a number of suggestions for developing practice in nurture groups. My findings will be summarised later in this chapter.

Unique Contribution

My study has addressed a gap in the nurture group literature relating to the pupil perspective. The studies that had attempted to seek the views of pupils had only made brief reference to aspects of nurture groups that children valued rather than exploring their experiences in any depth (Cooper et al., 2001, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, Garner and Thomas, 2011). Previous studies have also been criticised because of their reliance on the interview as the predominant method for obtaining the views of pupils (Cooper et al., 2001, Griffiths et al., 2014, Cefai and Pizzuto, 2017).

The ethnographic case study offered an alternative approach for seeking deeper insights into the experiences of children. This methodology enabled me to gain closer access to the experiences of pupils, without subjecting them to the additional stress that an interview might create. I collected my data over the course of six observations. I took on the role of participant observer, observing and listening to children as they followed their usual routines in the naturalistic nurture group setting. Additional data were obtained through the implementation of a photograph activity. The children took photographs of their favourite aspects of the Rainbow Group and talked to me about their experiences as they made photo books. Although photographs had been used in previous research

to help children to talk about their experiences (Pink, 2007, Clark and Moss, 2011, Cremin et al., 2011, Kellock, 2011), this method of eliciting pupil views had never been employed in nurture group research.

The majority of nurture group studies have focused on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980). However, my research attempted to gain insights into children's experiences through an examination of the social processes that take place in the course of child-adult interactions in the Rainbow Group. Adopting a conceptual framework incorporating principles from socio-cultural theory, symbolic interactionism and social constructivism allowed me to gain deeper insights into the experiences of children and the ways in which meanings were being constructed.

Summary of Findings

My study has addressed a gap in the research relating to the ways in which children experience nurture groups. I have identified two main themes that are important to the children in the Rainbow Group; 'relationships with adults' and 'peer relationships'.

The emergence of the 'relationships with adults' theme supported previous research in which relationships have been found to be important to children in nurture groups (Cooper et al., 2001, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, Garner and Thomas, 2011, Kourmoulaki, 2013, Syrnyk, 2014, Griffiths et al., 2014, Pyle and Rae, 2015). However, whilst the majority of studies explained these relationships in terms of attachment theory Bowlby (1958, 1969, 1973, 1980), my study sought deeper insights through an exploration of the social processes that occur between children and staff in the Rainbow Group.

Further analysis of episodes of interaction highlighted a number of aspects that were particularly important to the children in the Rainbow Group. The two that stood out were 'attention' and 'praise'. This substantiated claims by previous

researchers who have argued that these function as key aspects of the nurture group experience (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, Lucas, 2010, Bani 2011).

However, as I wanted to reach a deeper level of analysis in terms of the social processes that take place between adults and children, I conducted further analysis of episodes of attention and praise. This revealed three different constructions relating to the nurture staff. In the course of interactions, they were becoming represented in terms of mothering and as scaffolders and play partners.

I have acknowledged a link between the notion of mothering and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980). It has commonly been claimed that the staff in nurture groups become attachment figures for the children (Boxall, 2002, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005, Lucas et al., 2010). However, my study has explored the notion of mothering as part of a social process. My findings have added to the research relating to a link between mothering and teaching. Whilst some have reported that teaching has been seen as an extension of mothering (Steedman, 1985, Acker, 1999, Vogt, 2002, Biklen et al., 2008, Shin 2014), my research supports a view of mothering as pedagogy (Burgess and Carter, 1992). I have argued that the staff not only provide the maternal attention that children need but that mothering contributes to children's learning experiences and teaches them about caring (Martin, 1992, Noddings, 1992).

The notion of scaffolding (Bruner, 1975) has been discussed in educational literature (Pollard, 2008, Wass and Golding, 2014, Muhonen, 2016). However, although some had claimed that socio-cultural theory has relevance to the way that children learn in nurture groups (Garner and Thomas, 2011, Griffiths et al., 2014), the role of scaffolding had never been explored. My study has examined the ways in which the nurture staff become scaffolders in terms of their use of strategies to support children's learning and emotional development. Attention and praise feature highly within the scaffolding processes adopted. I have also argued that an increased awareness of the ways in which scaffolding processes

benefit children could be used to support the maintenance of a child-centred approach in the Rainbow Group.

Whilst play in nurture groups has often been viewed developmentally (Boxall, 2002, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, Bennathan and Boxall, 2008a, Lucas, 2010), my research has explored the social processes involved in play. I have argued that children enjoy having adults as play partners. They seek attention as they try to involve adults in their play and form relationships through play-based interactions. However, a key finding was that the extent to which the nurture staff engage in play depended on the play context. Whilst they always prioritised play, I found that they sometimes appeared to be uncertain about the nature of the play opportunities that should be offered and their roles in relation to play. After a discussion of the theory around child-initiated play and adult-led play, I have concluded that both types of play are beneficial to children in nurture groups. However, I have also argued that there are missed opportunities in terms of the nurture staff getting involved in play in which children set the play agenda. My findings corroborate claims made in previous research that engaging in play led by the children can enhance child-adult relationships (Pring, 2004, Goouch, 2010) and help children to construct meaning as they play (Gopnik, 2009, Wood, 2010, Moyles, 2010).

The emergence of 'peer relationships' as the second most important theme to the children in the Rainbow Group has supported previous studies that have claimed that relationships with other children are important to children in nurture groups (Sanders, 2007, Griffiths et al., 2014, Syrnyk, 2014). Further analysis within this theme led to the identification of 'engaging in joint play' as the aspect that was most important to them.

Whilst play has long been viewed as an important part of nurture group practice, it has often been viewed developmentally (Boxall, 2002, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, Lucas, 2010). Little attention has been paid to the social processes that take place as children play. My findings have substantiated claims that relationships with peers are of importance, especially with regard to playing

together (Pollard and Tann, 1987, Parker and Gottman, 1989, Dunn, 1993, Clark and Moss, 2011, Kernan and Singer, 2011). However, a deeper exploration of the social processes involved in joint play has highlighted the ways in which children construct meaning in terms of their social world and gendered identities as they play.

I have argued that children create social worlds as they play with their peers. My research furthers the argument that children form friendships and construct representations of wider social relationships as they play together (Dunn, 1993). I have also claimed that children make sense of their home lives and family relationships as they engage in domestic play with their peers. This has corroborated the view that children actively construct meaning in relation to their world through play (Singer and Singer, 1990, Papadopoulou 2012, Blatchford et al., 2016). In my study, I have also referred to examples of the ways in which children construct potential futures as they try out different adult roles (Blatchford et al., 2016). The view that children are able to respond creatively as they play (Lam and Pollard, 2006) has important implications for the provision of play equipment.

Whilst children construct meaning about their social worlds, my findings also add to the literature relating to the ways in which children learn about gender as they engage in joint play with their peers. My findings relating to the differences in the ways in which boys and girls play in the Rainbow Group substantiate previous claims that girls engage in domestic play while boys prefer more active and physical games (Garvey, 1991, Pellegrini, 2004, Martin, 2011). Whilst I would agree that gender identities are first learned in the home (Blaise, 2005, Martin, 2011), an exploration of the social processes involved in play in the Rainbow Group has furthered the argument that children learn about masculinities and femininities as they play together (Paechter, 2007) and as they interact with their peers in the school environment (Martin, 2011, Chapman, 2016).

Although I have focused on the experiences of children, I have also explored the ways in which the constructions of staff impact on the social processes that take place in the Rainbow Group. I have highlighted examples of how the beliefs and ideologies of the staff impact on the ways in which they set up the environment, the ways in which they respond differently to girls and boys and the activities and resources that are provided. This has furthered previous arguments that educational staff inadvertently support gender roles (Martin, 2011, Chapman, 2016). Whilst many have argued that gender stereotypes need to be challenged in early years settings (Blaise, 2005, Pollard and Filer, 2009, Aina and Cameron, 2011, Hogan, 2012, Chapman, 2016), I have identified a need to reflect on how this might be done in nurture groups through a rethinking of the social processes involved in children's play. I will now summarise my findings with reference to each of the research questions.

My research set out to explore children's experiences in a primary school nurture group. This was achieved with the help of the four research questions, which were first introduced in Table 1 on page 3 of this thesis. In order to organise my thoughts relating to my findings, I began by writing notes on each of the research questions (see Appendix 9). I then used these as a basis for summarising my findings.

Research Question 1 - What aspects of the experience are most important to the children that attend a primary school nurture group?

My initial findings revealed two major themes that were important to the children in the Rainbow Group; 'relationships with adults' and 'peer relationships'.

Further analysis of the social processes within the 'relationships with adults' theme revealed a number of aspects that were of particular importance to the children. 'Attention' and 'praise' stood out as being the most significant. An examination of episodes featuring attention and praise then highlighted that children construct meanings in relation to the nurture staff, who become represented in terms of mothering and as scaffolders and play partners.

A number of aspects were also highlighted within the 'peer relationships' theme as being important to the children in the Rainbow Group. The dominant aspect was 'engaging in joint play'. In order to achieve a deeper level of analysis, I looked again at episodes in which children played with their peers. This revealed that children were constructing meaning in relation to their social worlds and their gendered identities as they played together.

These constructions will now be explored further in relation to the second research question.

Research Question 2 - How do children construct meanings through their interactions with others in the nurture group?

The children have represented the nurture staff in terms of mothering through the ways that they seek maternal attention, through sharing personal aspects of themselves and their home lives and through their attempts to seek physical proximity with adults.

The construction of the nurture staff as scaffolders has been supported with reference to examples of the ways in which children seek attention and praise when they need support with learning tasks or emotional support.

The representation of adults as play partners has been illustrated with reference to episodes in which the children seek to involve me in their play and examples of the children enjoying playing structured board games with the nurture staff.

In addition to constructing meaning through their interactions with the nurture staff, I have argued that the children construct meaning as they interact with their peers.

Firstly, I have provided examples of the ways in which children construct meaning about their social worlds as they engage in joint play with their peers. I

have demonstrated how play becomes a medium through which children build relationships and learn about wider social relationships. Play has also provided a vehicle through which children construct representations of their home lives, make sense of family relationships and explore possibilities for the future.

I have also argued that children construct meanings in terms of their gendered identities. Having highlighted differences in the ways in which boys and girls play in the Rainbow Group, I have given examples of the ways in which notions of masculinity and femininity are reinforced through episodes of play. I have also shown how activities in the Rainbow Group have become gendered. I will now discuss this further in relation to the constructions of the nurture staff.

Research Question 3 - How do the nurture staff construct meaning as they interact with children in the nurture group?

Although I have focused on listening to the children in the Rainbow Group, I have argued that the constructions of the nurture staff impact on the experiences of the children.

Whilst I have explored the ways in which the children have constructed representations of adults in terms of mothering and as scaffolders and play partners, my research has highlighted a reciprocity in child-adult interactions. I have argued that the representations that have emerged have been co-constructed during interactions between children and adults.

I have referred to examples of the children seeking maternal attention and the nurture staff responding by providing the mothering that they need. Links have been highlighted between the beliefs and ideologies of the nurture staff and the actions that they take. For example, the staff have responded to the children's need for attention and provided compensatory mothering to meet their physical and emotional needs, based on their belief that the children have not received adequate care at home and that they are innocent and in need of protection.

Similarly, when the children seek support with learning or signal a need for emotional support, the nurture staff have offered support through employing a scaffolding process, involving high levels of attention and praise. Whilst emotional support has not been consistently available, there have been many examples of occasions in which the staff have taken on the role of emotional scaffolders. The notion of scaffolding complements the child-centred ideology held by staff. The representation of staff as emotional scaffolders has also been supported with reference to their beliefs relating to the essential innocence of the child and a commitment to treating children as their own with high levels of praise, love and reassurance.

The representation of adults as play partners has also been supported with reference to the beliefs and ideologies of the nurture staff. I have referred to many examples to support my view that the nurture staff perceive play to be an important aspect of the nurture group experience. Although the daily opportunities for 'Children's Choice' highlighted a preference for child-centred play, there were times when the actions of staff may have been swayed by the standards agenda that prevailed elsewhere in school and in the current socio-political climate. I have suggested that the tensions that arose may have led to the introduction of 'Guided Children's Choice' by Observation 6. However, although the nurture staff have sometimes been uncertain about the nature of the play opportunities offered and their role in relation to play, I have argued that they remain committed to a child-centred ideology that supports the importance of play.

Whilst I have explored how the children make sense of their social worlds through play, I have also argued that their experiences have been influenced by the constructions of the nurture staff who have set up the play environment. The staff have provided a well-equipped home corner in which children can make sense of their home lives and family relationships as they play together with their peers. Given the equipment provided, there have been numerous opportunities for children to play the roles of mothers and children. The staff have also instigated community role play through the provision of the medical kit

and hairdressing kit. However, I have argued that the options are limited in terms of children trying out other adult roles. This has raised questions about the beliefs and expectations of staff in terms of the children's future.

Whilst my research findings have provided support for the view that children learn about gender as they play together, I have claimed that notions of masculinity and femininity may have been confirmed by the staff, who have inadvertently reinforced gender through the way in which they have organised the environment, through the ways in which they have responded differently to boys and girls and the resources that they have provided.

Research Question 4 - How do the constructions of children and staff in the nurture group give insights which can be used to shape provision?

A better understanding of the ways in which children and adults construct meaning in the course of interactions has provided insights which might be used to develop practice in nurture groups.

My finding that the nurture staff have become represented in different ways has highlighted the complexity of the role. An understanding of the social processes involved in mothering, scaffolding and acting as play partners has reinforced the importance of the day to day interactions that take place in nurture groups. In the light of my research, I will need to share my findings with staff with a view to helping them to reflect on each of the representations.

The representation of mothering has reinforced the importance of staff providing the maternal attention that the children need. However, the notion of mothering as pedagogy has highlighted a need for staff to consider how mothering approaches might be furthered to enhance the learning experiences and moral education of the children. An increased awareness of the ways in which the domestic environment has supported the construction of mothering might also lead to a reflection on how the environment could be developed. For example, the staff could consider adding more homely touches, such as photographs and

plants. They might also include a wider range of activities that would traditionally be organised by parents, such as taking the children to the park or organising a picnic.

The emergence of scaffolding as a key social process in nurture groups has highlighted the importance of child-adult interactions for children's learning. I have argued that scaffolding can be linked with a developmental view of learning (Lucas et al, 2006) and a child-centred ideology. I believe that my findings in relation to the ways in which staff become represented as scaffolders will help staff to defend the child-centred approach adopted in nurture groups when faced with pressures to introduce more curriculum-focused methods. A raised awareness of the importance of emotional scaffolding could lead to a reflection on ways to ensure that the emotional needs of the children are consistently met. For example, the nurture staff might consider building in 1-1 mentoring and provide a signal for children to use if they need to take time out to talk.

The representation of the staff as play partners has raised important questions in terms of the play opportunities on offer and the role of the nurture staff in relation to play. Whilst I have argued that the children seek out adult involvement in play, the level of engagement from the nurture staff has depended on the play context. Although I have argued for the importance of continued opportunities for children to play freely with their peers, I have also recommended that the nurture staff reflect on the way in which play opportunities are organised to include a balance between free play and adult-led play. My study has also highlighted a need for the staff to join in play led by the children. This would have benefits for the development of adult-child relationships as well as providing opportunities for the co-construction of meaning. Joining in with children's games might bring opportunities for the nurture staff to develop and extend children's play, perhaps supporting them to play more creatively by introducing new experiences.

Whilst my findings relating to the ways in which the nurture staff have been represented have provided insights into how practice might be developed, a greater understanding of the social processes that occur as children play together also has implications for practice. The finding that children learn about friendships and wider social relationships and make sense of family relationships as they play together has supported the importance of continued free play in the home corner. However, in order to allow children to play more creatively and explore alternative paths for the future, I have argued that the nurture staff need to consider extending the range of play opportunities, for example, through adapting the home corner to represent different settings or extending the choice of role play and dressing up clothes.

Whilst children construct meaning about their social worlds as they play together, I have also argued that the children construct gendered identities. The finding that boys and girls play differently in the Rainbow Group highlights a need for the nurture staff to reflect on the ways in which children construct notions of masculinity and femininity as they play together. In the light of the finding that the constructions of staff influence the ways in which children learn about gender, I have argued that they need to reflect on the ways in they have set up the environment, the ways in which they respond to children and the resources that they provide. As children develop their ideas about gender in early years settings, the nurture group offers the ideal opportunity to challenge gender stereotypes, for example, through the provision of gender neutral activities or encouraging children to participate in activities usually associated with the opposite gender.

Whilst my study has identified many examples of positive practice, the new understandings that have developed in the course of my research have highlighted a number of ways in which nurture provision could be developed.

Implications for Policy, Practice and Research

Having summarised my findings, I now draw out the implications for policy, practice and research, with reference to nurture groups, whole schools and staff training.

Nurture Groups

Having completed my research, my findings place me in a more informed position to assist senior leaders and nurture staff in schools to develop their nurture group policies. Whereas policies have often focused on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980) and the nurture group principles (Lucas et al., 2006), I would now recommend a heavier focus on the social processes that take place in nurture groups. For example, policies should emphasise the importance of nurture groups for helping children to learn about relationships with adults and peers. I will be working with schools to help them to outline the roles of staff in terms of their importance in nurturing children and supporting their learning and emotions. I will also be recommending that they include a section on the different play opportunities on offer and the implications of these for improving life chances and equality of opportunity for boys and girls.

My findings also have implications for nurture group practice in schools. I will initially be using my findings to help shape practice in the Rainbow Group. However, my research will also have a wider impact as I will use the new learning in my work with all the nurture groups that I support.

Firstly, I will share my findings with the nurture staff and senior leaders at Greenfields Primary School. As a token of my appreciation to them for participating in my research, I will offer to support them in an action-planning exercise to help them to reflect on the findings and identify ways in which practice might be developed. This will constitute a more satisfactory end to the study, given that the EdD is a professional doctorate which aims to improve

practice. Through this action-planning exercise, I will help the nurture staff to reflect on their roles as mothers and carers, scaffolders and play partners and identify ways to further develop these roles. I will encourage them to reflect on the ways in which they might support children's learning, with reference to scaffolding and child-centred approaches. I will support staff to identify a wider range of strategies to address children's emotional needs, for example, introducing feelings charts or diaries and scheduling regular 1-1 mentoring time. I will also lead a discussion on the benefits of child-initiated and teacher-led play, whilst sharing my conclusions about the potential benefits of staff engaging in play led by the children. My conclusions relating to the ways in which children make sense of their social world and gendered identities through joint play have important implications for children's futures. I will work with staff to help them to identify ways to raise children's aspirations and address gender inequality in the Rainbow Group.

My case study focuses on one primary school nurture group. However, I will also be able to apply my findings to other nurture groups; a key part of my professional role is to support the development of nurture groups through working with the staff who run them. After working with the nurture staff in the Rainbow Group, I plan to offer action-planning sessions, reviews and training sessions to the schools that I have supported previously and to other schools in the area. I will also share my findings with a wider number of schools through a newsletter, a blog on my website and my Nurture Success Facebook page. I have recently extended my network of nurture group contacts by setting up a Facebook group, linked to my business page. I have called this group the 'Nurture Success Virtual Café'. The aim of the group is to create a forum in which nurture group practitioners can share their experiences. Through this medium, I have reached staff who run nurture groups all over the country and have already instigated discussions relating to my findings.

My study also has implications for nurture group research. It is the only study to have focused on the experiences of the children who attend nurture groups. In addition to exploring the relevance of attachment theory, it has highlighted the

importance of relationships with adults and peers and the social processes that take place in the course of interactions in the social setting of the nurture group. Through attention to the social processes, it has highlighted a number of ways in which adults and children construct meaning about relationships and their experiences.

Although my findings highlight a number of new areas, a limitation of my study is that my conclusions are based on a limited time in one nurture group. However, in my new role as education consultant, I have more flexibility to pursue my research interests. It would now be a good time to consider conducting further ethnographic case studies. As an exploratory study, my research has uncovered a number of areas; each of them worthy of further research. I am particularly interested in conducting further research relating to gender. For example, it would be interesting to compare how nurture staff become represented in a nurture group that is not exclusively run by female members of staff. Whereas the construction of mothering emerged in my study, it is possible that a more gender neutral construction in terms of the nurturing role would be reached in nurture groups led by men. I would also like to spend a longer period of time observing children's play in nurture groups to explore the ways in which gender identifies are constructed. A further development might be to compare the construction of gender in children in nurture groups in different social areas. Whereas my research was based in a school with high levels of poverty, the experiences of children in more affluent areas might be very different.

From an academic perspective, I will write an article based on my research. On two separate occasions, members of the Nurture Group Network have suggested that I contact them to share my research (Ruby, 2010, Stollery, 2018). I will, therefore, be sending them an article based on my findings. It is my ambition to have an article published in a journal, for example, the *International Journal of Nurture in Education* (Nurture Group Network) or *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties* (Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties Association).

Whole School

Whilst my findings can be used to develop work with nurture groups, they also have implications for policy, practice and research in the wider school as many schools are now setting up a whole school nurturing approach. A new development has been the introduction of the National Nurturing School Programme (Nurture UK, 2018); 23 schools are now taking part in this initiative. Through applying my findings to whole school nurturing, my work will have a wider impact, resulting in benefits to an increasing number of staff and children.

Firstly, I will work with senior leaders to develop whole school nurturing policies. Whilst existing policies that I have viewed refer to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980) and the nurturing principles (Lucas et al., 2006), I will also help them to highlight the social processes between staff and children and between children and their peers. I will support them to outline the different roles of staff in nurturing children and supporting their learning and emotional needs within a warm and safe environment. There may be a need for a school-wide consideration of staffing and resources to ensure that children's needs are met. I will encourage senior leaders to refer to the range of play opportunities offered and the potential benefits of play. I will also be recommending that they include sections, outlining the ways in which staff throughout school will aim to raise children's aspirations for the future and ensure that both boys and girls have experiences that could enhance their life opportunities.

My research also has implications for nurturing practices across school. Whilst nurturing schools have been primarily guided by the six principles of nurture (Nurture UK, 2018), I will also encourage staff to consider how their actions and interactions with children will support a nurturing ethos within their classrooms and around school. In these discussions, I will refer to the constructions of staff as mothers, scaffolders and play partners. For example, the notion of mothering will be discussed to help staff to identify what actions could be taken to establish a caring ethos and a warm and welcoming environment. This will include references to the nature of interactions, for example, the importance of

staff engaging with children on a personal level, using their names and talking to them about their lives and interests. It could also involve the development of a more homely environment. A discussion of the representation of staff as scaffolders will initiate a reflection on how staff can meet the learning needs of their pupils through differentiation and enhanced levels of support. It will also help staff to identify approaches that can be used to support the emotional needs of pupils, such as whole school circle time, emotions charts in the classrooms, the implementation of a curriculum focusing on social and emotional aspects of learning, mentoring and celebration assemblies. Finally, my findings relating to the role of staff as play partners and the importance of joint play with peers in raising aspirations and supporting gender equality will provide an impetus to plan how play opportunities can be organised, not just in the early years, but throughout school.

Whilst I have argued that there is a need for further research into nurture groups, I am also actively seeking an opportunity to conduct an ethnographic study to explore the experiences of children when a whole school nurturing school is implemented.

Staff Training

My research will also have implications for training. Through working with staff in different nurture groups across the borough and delivering whole school nurturing training, my research findings will have a wider impact.

In my previous role as a local authority advisory teacher and in my current position as an education consultant and company director of 'Nurture Success', I have offered training programmes to nurture group staff. I have already added a section to my training, relating to the importance of child-initiated play in nurture groups as a result of my early findings. I will now adapt my training to include a number of new aspects. Whilst my current training focuses on attachment theory and the nurturing principles (Lucas et al, 2006), I now intend to review my training packages to include material based on the social aspects

of nurture groups. They will be extended to include material on mothering and caring, scaffolding and the role of staff in play. I will also further develop the section on play to include the powerful findings relating to the importance of play in helping children to learn about their social worlds and gendered identities. Through offering training to nurture staff in a number of schools, my training will reach a wider audience.

As an advisory teacher, I wrote and delivered training on 'The Nurturing School'. Whilst my original package focused on attachment and the nurture principles, my materials will now be adapted to include sections on new aspects identified in my research. These will include creating a whole school ethos of care, the roles of staff in supporting learning and emotional needs and the importance of play in helping children to make sense of their worlds and gendered identities. Whilst nurture group training impacts on two members of staff and a small group of targeted pupils, whole school training will have a wider impact.

In summary, my research into children's constructions of their experiences in nurture groups has resulted in the identification of a number of areas, which have implications for policy, practice and research, with reference to nurture groups, whole schools and staff training. I will now describe the journey that I took in order to arrive at my conclusions.

My Journey as a Researcher

When I embarked on my research project, I set out to learn about the research process. I have found it to be a huge undertaking, with a steep learning curve. I decided to research nurture groups as this was an area that was of great interest to me in my professional role as an advisory teacher. I had supported a number of schools to set up and develop nurture groups and had been involved in delivering training on the theory and practice of nurture groups across the local authority in which I worked.

As I had already completed a great deal of work in the area and had read a fair amount of literature on nurture groups during my Masters research, I made certain assumptions about where my research would lead me. Whilst I had expected to focus on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980), my findings highlighted a need to explore the social processes that take place between children and adults in nurture groups.

My initial reading led me to identify a gap in the literature relating to the perceptions of the pupils that attend nurture groups. Having reflected on the problems in gaining the perspective of the children in nurture groups in previous research (Cooper et al., 2001), the challenge was to find a suitable methodology for my research. My choice of approach was initially influenced by the 'Mosaic Approach' (Clark and Moss, 2011). This offered a multi-method process for listening to the voices of young children in early years settings. The book inspired me to consider observing children in their normal educational setting and led to my decision to include child-friendly methods, such as photographs, as a means of gaining access to the voices of pupils.

I was also becoming increasingly interested in ethnographic studies which set out to explore children's experiences of education, for example, King (1967), Pollard (1985) and Pollard and Filer (1996, 1999, 2000). Ethnography appeared to offer a way of getting close to the experiences of the pupils without putting vulnerable children under further stress.

I was able to gain access to nurture groups reasonably easily as I had already built relationships with a number of schools that operated the provision. I conducted a pilot in one of the schools that I was familiar with and the main study in another school in which I had a good relationship with nurture staff. Although my familiarity proved to be an advantage in terms of access, I had much to learn about the role of researcher.

As an ethnographic researcher, my role was to observe and record what was going on in the research setting. I soon learned about the difficulties faced as a

participant observer. Although I had intended to stand apart from the group and take notes, the children were aware of my presence and wanted to get to know me. I had no choice but to interact with them. Whilst this initially appeared to be problematic, I feel that becoming a part of the group and interacting with the pupils and the nurture staff enabled deeper insights into the nurture group experience.

In line with the ethnographic approach, I maintained on-going fieldnotes and a Reflection and Methodological Journal. I attempted to capture as much as possible in relation to the actions of the children, including episodes of dialogue. I feel that this enabled me to access the subjective experiences of the pupils.

Although I had considered thematic analysis, my desire to stay close to the experiences of children led me down the route of grounded theory. At this time, I had become interested in educational research that attempted to explore how meanings are constructed in educational settings. Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) offered a way forward in terms of data analysis. Although I did not follow Charmaz's methods in their entirety, I employed aspects of the approach, for example, using different levels of coding and moving back and forth between the data. This helped to identify the themes that were most important to the children and to gain further insights into the meanings constructed within these themes.

Whilst the dominant theme of 'relationships with adults' could have been explored in terms of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1969, 1973, 1980), this did not offer insights into the nature of child-adult relationships. Similarly, although I had identified peer relationships as being important to the children in nurture groups, this initial finding did not contribute anything new to the existing literature. However, a deeper analysis of the data resulted in the beginning of whole range of new understandings relating to what happens between children and adults as they interact in a nurture group.

Limitations of my Study

My focus on the experiences of children in nurture groups provided rather a wide focus for the study. In one sense, this was necessary as there had been very little research in this area. I had also maintained an open-ended, exploratory approach as I wanted to focus on listening to the voices of the children. Whilst I feel that this approach allowed me to gain some insights into the pupil perspective, I felt swamped, at times, by the number of themes that were emerging. In order to find a way forward, it was necessary to focus in on the aspects that emerged as most important to the children.

Having conducted this inductive study, however, I feel that I have now identified a number of research interests that I would like to follow up. The area that has appealed to me most has been the research findings in relation to the ways in which gendered identities are developed through play in early years settings. I would like to find out more about feminist research in relation to gender and conduct a further ethnographic case study with this as the main focus.

Adopting an ethnographic case study approach allowed me to gain deeper insights into the experiences of children by observing them and talking to them in the naturalistic setting and as they completed photo books. However, a limitation of the study was that my time in the field was restricted by work commitments. However, whilst my research could not be considered to constitute a full ethnography, I felt that framing the research as an ethnographic case study constituted a reasonable way forward.

Whilst my initial intention was to focus on the pupil perspective, I found that I needed to consider the constructions of the nurture staff as these had a huge impact on children's experiences. On reflection, my claims relating to the constructions of the staff may have been open to researcher interpretation. Interviewing the nurture staff might have strengthened claims made relating to their beliefs and ideologies.

Although insights have been gained into the experiences of the children in the Rainbow Group, caution will need to be exercised in terms of generalising the findings from this case study of one primary school nurture group to nurture groups in general. As a number of nurture group researchers have suggested, there have been a number of variations of Boxall's classic nurture group model (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, Cooper and Whitebread, 2007, Binnie and Allen, 2008, Scott and Lee, 2009). However, I conclude that my research has helped to highlight some new understandings which can be used to reflect on practice in nurture groups and some areas worthy of future research.

Concluding Statement

Whilst I have outlined some of the things that I hope to do following my thesis, I now conclude by returning to the main aim of my research which was concerned with exploring children's experiences of being in a nurture group. Whilst I have long believed that nurture groups make a valuable contribution to the education of vulnerable children, focusing on the pupil perspective has given new insights into the social processes that go on and has highlighted new areas that can be developed. I hope that my research will assist people to set up and develop provision in the future.

Appendix 1 Letters and Consent Forms

Dear _____ (head teacher),

I am an advisory teacher at _____. I am also part of a working group that aims to support nurture group development across the borough.

As part of my Doctorate in Education with the University of Leicester, I am developing a piece of research to help me to learn more about the pupil perspective on nurture groups by observing them and listening to them as they go about their usual activities in the nurture group setting.

I am particularly interested in carrying out the research at Greenfields Primary School as you have demonstrated good practice as a local authority focused-provision nurture group and are in the process of applying for the Marjorie Boxall Nurture Group Award.

The research would take place over a period of three terms. The main research methods would be:

- fortnightly observations in the Rainbow room;
- a photograph activity in which children use a school iPad to take photographs and make a book about the Rainbow Group.

Findings will be written up as a doctoral thesis and used to inform work done by the nurture group working group to contribute to the development of nurture groups in the local authority. I will not be using the name of the school when reporting on the research and no member of staff or pupil would be referred to by name or would be identifiable

Any data collated during the research would be stored securely in line with the school Safeguarding Policy. Photographs will be taken using a school iPad and downloaded to a school computer before being printed. Some conversations

with pupils will be recorded using an app on an iPad. Copies of photo books, voice recordings and transcriptions will be retained by myself as research evidence. All data will be stored securely and will be destroyed after five years.

In order for the research to go ahead, I need your permission as head teacher, as well as the informed consent of the staff who run the nurture group and the parents of the children that attend. I would also speak to the children prior to the research activities to ensure that they are happy to take part and know that they can withdraw at any time.

If you would be happy for your school to participate in this research, please sign and return the attached form. If you would like to discuss the research further or have any questions, I can be contacted on _____ or _____.

Yours sincerely,

Jenny Morris
Advisory Teacher

CONSENT FORM

HEAD TEACHER

I give my permission for observations to be carried out fortnightly in the Rainbow room over the course of one term .

☐

I understand that children's photographs may include pictures of staff and other pupils.

☐

I understand that conversations with pupils may be recorded using a digital voice recorder app on an iPad.

☐

I give my informed consent for the research to be carried out in the school nurture group.

☐

Name: _____ Signed: _____

Date: _____

Dear _____ (nurture staff),

I am an advisory teacher at _____. I am also part of a working group that aims to support nurture group development across the borough.

As part of my Doctorate in Education with the University of Leicester, I am developing a piece of research to help me to learn more about the pupil perspective on nurture groups by observing them and listening to them as they go about their usual activities in the nurture group setting.

I am particularly interested in carrying out the research at Greenfields Primary School as you have demonstrated good practice as a local authority focused-provision nurture group and are in the process of applying for the Marjorie Boxall Nurture Group Award.

The research would take place over a period of three terms. The main research methods would be:

- fortnightly observations in the Rainbow room;
- a photograph activity in which children use a school Ipad to take photographs and make a book about the Rainbow Group.

Findings will be written up as a doctoral thesis and used to inform work done by the nurture group working group to contribute to the development of nurture groups in the local authority. I will not be using the name of the school when reporting on the research and no member of staff or pupil would be referred to by name or would be identifiable

Any data collated during the research would be stored securely in line with the school Safeguarding Policy. Photographs will be taken using a school iPad and downloaded to a school computer before being printed. Some conversations with pupils will be recorded using an app on an iPad. Copies of photo books,

voice recordings and transcriptions will be retained by myself as research evidence. All data will be stored securely and will be destroyed after five years.

In order for the research to go ahead, I need the permission of your head teacher and your informed consent as staff who run the nurture group. I will also be seeking the consent of the parents of the children in the nurture group and making sure that the pupils are happy to take part in research activities.

If you are happy for the research to go ahead in your nurture group, please sign and return the attached consent form. If you would like to discuss the research further or have any questions, I can be contacted on _____ or _____.

Yours sincerely,

Jenny Morris
Advisory Teacher

CONSENT FORM	NURTURE STAFF	Please tick
I give my permission for observations to be carried out fortnightly in the Rainbow room over the course of one term .		<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that children's photographs may include pictures of staff and other pupils.		<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that conversations with pupils may be recorded using a digital voice recorder app on an iPad.		<input type="checkbox"/>
I give my informed consent for the research to be carried out in the school nurture group.		<input type="checkbox"/>

Name: _____ Signed: _____

Date: _____

Dear _____ (Parent/ Carer),

As part of my Doctorate in Education with the University of Leicester, I am developing a piece of research to help me to learn more about pupils' experiences in groups like the Rainbow Group by observing the children and listening to what they say as they go about their usual activities.

The project will be carried out over a period of three terms. The main research methods are:

- fortnightly observations in the Rainbow room;
- a photograph activity in which children take photographs and make a book about the Rainbow Group.

Findings will be written up as a thesis. I will not be using the name of the school and no member of staff or pupil will be referred to by name or will be identifiable. Any data collated during the research will be stored securely in line with the school Safeguarding Policy.

After the Easter holidays, I will be asking children to take photographs and make a photo book about their experiences of the Rainbow group. I will be working with them during a normal session in the Rainbow room. They may wish to take photographs of their favourite activities or of staff and the other children. I will be recording conversations between myself and the children as they make their photo books using a digital voice app on an iPad. This is so that I can listen to their responses later.

I would ask that you talk to your child about the project. If they are happy to take part and you are willing to give your permission, please complete the attached consent form and return to school.

If you would like to discuss the research further or have any questions, I can be contacted on _____ or _____ (email)

Yours sincerely,

Jenny Morris
Advisory Teacher

CONSENT FORM**PARENT/CARER**

Please tick

I give my permission for my child to take part in observations.

☐

I give permission for my child to appear in photographs taken by other children as part of the project.

☐

I give consent for my child to work with the researcher in the Rainbow room with staff and other pupils present.

☐

I have spoken to my child about the project and they are happy to take part.

☐

I give my informed consent for my child to take part in the research.

Name of pupil: _____

Name (parent/carer): _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 2 Example from Reflection and Methodological Journal

Observation Session 1 08/01/15

Having read up on how observations are conducted in the 'Mosaic Approach', I had decided to ask pupils the key question -'What is it like to be here?' Although I ask this when the opportunity arises, it seems more productive to focus on what children do and what they say in the Rainbow room.

I attempt to record things that are said by pupils and staff verbatim or as closely as possible. Although I make a good attempt this, I am conscious that I am missing much of what is going on out of my line of observation. It proves even more difficult to note everything when pupils want me to play or talk to them.

Whereas the 'Mosaic Approach' (Clark and Moss, 2011) is based on snapshots relating to one child, I observe the whole group.

I wonder whether to attempt to record everything or whether to focus on data that might shed light on what the pupils have to say about being in the Rainbow Group. I decide to record as much as possible to see what insights this gives. The significance of something that is said or done may only be apparent later when reflecting on the data.

As from this week, a new timetable is in place. This had been put together in an attempt to provide more structure due to a need to demonstrate impact on learning. I reflect on the role of the nurture group- how much weight should be put on structured learning compared with a focus on the social and emotional?

There is a new pupil in the Rainbow Group this week. John is looking miserable and not engaging in activities. The nurture teacher informs me that he often comes in upset and refuses to take part. He would not even join the other children for breakfast during the first few sessions.

The nurture assistant uses humour in an attempt to bring him out of his mood. By contrast, the nurture teacher adopts a firm approach- "Tears are not allowed"... "Move your hands"... "That's rude". In this situation, the two staff had adopted very different approaches. This made me think about the difficult balance between nurturing and preparing children for the classroom. When John does engage in the task, he receives a high level of praise and a marble and this improves his mood.

In the phonics session, I experience a tension between my role as a researcher and my professional life as a teacher. When I see David practising the letter 'm' using paint and easel, I find myself going over to help him to form the letter correctly. For the purposes of completing my research, I need to avoid getting drawn into teaching and focus on describing what was going on. However, denying help to a child who is struggling also raises an ethical issue.

I am also aware of my intrusion into the group when helping Maya to put on her coat. I am reminded by the nurture assistant when she says, "You can do it Maya....she can get people to do everything for her.. We are trying to encourage independence". Not only have I got drawn in to help but in helping I am going against what staff are trying to achieve with Maya. It transpires that one of her targets is to put on her own coat.

There are fewer opportunities to interact with pupils during this session than during Familiarisation 2 as the session is much more structured.

When children are allowed to play towards the end of the session (children's choice), they express excitement and start a role play as mom, dad, children and pets. Some of the boys are playing cops and robbers and have to be reminded not to play 'rough'.

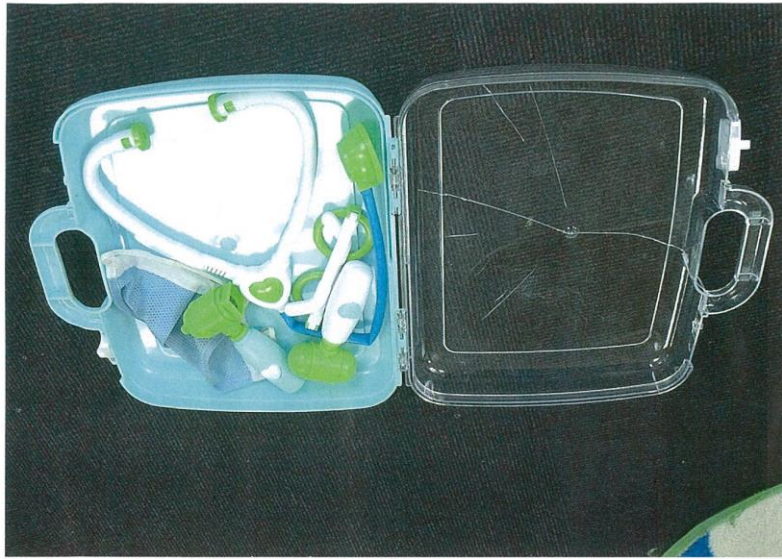
Some of the children approach me and asked me to play. The new boy, John, stands by curiously and asks how I know the children's names.

During the child-initiated session, I get an opportunity to ask Kye, "What is it like being here in Rainbow?" His response is, "I don't know why we don't get to play in Year 1", suggesting that the opportunity to play in the Rainbow room is an important part of the experience for him.

At the end of the session, the nurture teacher suggests that there was too much choice and the play needed more structure. This question about the balance between children's choice (free play) and more structured play is an interesting one. I wonder if free play offers something important as children appear to be drawn towards activities which meet their needs at the level that they are at.

Appendix 3 Examples of Children's Photographs

6



Doctors Box - I test my heart beat
and my ears



Sand is my favourite

*Unfortunately I have not been able to include many photos out of respect for anonymity as the majority featured children's names and/ or faces.

Appendix 4 Example of Observation Coding

Session 1 - 08/01/15

2nd Level Codes	1st Level Codes	Initial Observation Data to be Coded
		<p>9 45 am Six pupils in the Rainbow room Sitting in a semi-circle on the carpet watching a cartoon as the nurture staff were sorting the shopping. New pupil -John</p>
Relationships with adults	Lee welcoming researcher as a visitor to group.	<p>Lee: (turned round and waved) Hello!</p> <p>Numeracy activity Sitting in semi-circle with 2 members of staff. Task-pupils rolling large dice and selecting corresponding number of jewels. Nurture teacher rolls dice</p> <p>Lee, Maya and John shout out, "6" and start to count out jewels.</p>
Peer Relationships	Maya seeking reassurance with learning task from peers.	<p>Maya takes 6 jewels-one of each colour-checks if she has the same number as other pupils</p>
Peer Relationships	Pupils praising peers.	<p>Nurture teacher asks Lee to count his jewels aloud. She asks the other pupils to put up their thumbs and say "Well done".</p>
Peer Relationships	Lee enjoying receiving praise from peers.	<p>They reply "Well done Lee" in unison and give him thumbs up. Lee smiles.</p>

	<p>John receiving emotional support from adult.</p> <p>David enjoying praise from nurture assistant.</p>	<p>Nurture assistant: (notices that John is looking tired and sad). David smiles all the time. David looks up and smiles.</p> <p>Lee tells the nurture assistant that he is warm.</p> <p>Nurture assistant: Yes it is warm. Why don't you take off your jumper Lee?</p>
Relationships with adults	Lee appreciating nurture assistant managing physical needs.	<p>Lee nods, smiles and removes his jumper.</p> <p>Nurture teacher: You have new shoes Lee- they are Kickers aren't they?</p>
Relationships with adults	Lee enjoying attention.	<p>Lee putting his feet in the air so that nurture teacher can see them.</p> <p>Nurture teacher: You can't ruin them. The leather is nice and thick.</p> <p>The children are in two groups (ability based). Nurture teacher works with one group. Nurture assistant with the lower ability. Nurture teacher moves the higher ability group on to another activity using two dice Now I am going to roll two dice.</p>
Relationships with adults	Lee seeking reassurance from adult.	<p>Lee: Can I make a line?</p> <p>Nurture teacher: If you want to.</p>

Relationships with adults	David seeking reassurance -doesn't like loud noises.	<p>David: (hears bell) What's that? (to me)</p> <p>Nurture teacher: Don't worry. It's the bell. You know it's the bell</p> <p>David: (repeats) It's the bell-Yes.</p>
Relationships with adults	Maya seeking support with learning task.	<p>Maya struggling to count out four jewels.</p> <p>Nurture assistant: Have you forgotten how to count over Christmas? Counts out four jewels with Maya.</p> <p>Nurture assistant: We got there in the end. Maya smiles.</p>
Relationships with adults	Maya responding to praise from nurture assistant	<p>Nurture teacher introduces new activity- dominoes</p> <p>John sitting with head down, his hands covering his face.</p> <p>Nurture teacher and Nurture assistant tease John trying to get him to smile.</p> <p>Nurture teacher tells him to move his hands. Covering you face is not allowed in here. It's rude.</p> <p>John starts crying. Nurture teacher: Tears don't work. They're pretend.</p>
Relationships with adults	John not responding to emotional support.	<p>John continued to cry.</p> <p>Nurture assistant: Find me two please John.</p>

Relationships with adults	John starting to re-engage but still upset.	<p>After 2 minutes, nurture assistant asks John to find a domino with 4. He does this -head still down.</p> <p>Nurture assistant: That's better John!</p> <p>Nurture assistant: Oh I've put it the wrong way round.</p> <p>Nurture teacher: You need to take your hands away from your face so you can see the dominoes John.</p> <p>John continues to sit with his head down and one hand covering his face but takes a domino and adds it to the line.</p> <p>Maya rolls dice to land on a 3 and picks out a domino with a 5.</p> <p>Nurture assistant: We need a 3... We have a problem. What's the problem Kye?</p> <p>Kye: There isn't a domino with a 3 on".</p> <p>Nurture assistant: Well done! (smiling).</p>
Relationships with adults	Kye enjoying praise.	Kye smiles.
Relationships with adults	Maya enjoying praise.	<p>Nurture assistant praises Maya for helping Zak. Maya is smiling.</p> <p>Zak: Jabo</p>

Relationships with adults	Zak needing emotional support	<p>Nurture teacher: Is that a made up word? When do they say it Zak?</p> <p>Zak: When they have finished their Maths.</p> <p>Nurture teacher: Bravo?</p> <p>Zak nods and smiles but looks slightly embarrassed.</p> <p>Nurture teacher asks children to tidy away the dominoes. All start to do as she has asked.</p>
Relationships with adults	John responding to praise from nurture teacher and assistant.	<p>Nurture teacher and nurture assistant: (noticing John tidying up) Well done John. They say this at the same time and smile at each other. John looks pleased</p>
Relationships with adults	Lee wanting support from adult with transition.	<p>Phonics</p> <p>Lee: What are we doing next?</p> <p>Nurture teacher: phonics.</p> <p>Lee: Oh (sad face)</p> <p>Children put into two groups according to ability.</p> <p>One group working with nurture teacher (David, Maya, Zak and John)</p> <p>The other with the nurture assistant (Kye and Lee)</p> <p>Nurture assistant left the room -to look at a leak in the entrance hall.</p>

Relationships with adult	David conscious that nurture assistant has left the room.	David: (to me) Mrs Small gone out. Where did Mrs Small go? Has she gone outside?
Play	Maya taking on the role of teacher -role play.	Maya holding up flashcards with sounds. Children are sitting in a semi-circle in front of her saying the sounds as she holds up the cards. Nurture assistant: (entered the room) I'll take over.
Relationships with adults	Maya pleased to see nurture assistant return.	Maya smiles and moves back to her place. Nurture assistant: (holds up card with a't' -traces over the letter with her finger) Down the tower, across the tower. Next she holds up a card with 'a'. Zak hiccoughs. Nurture assistant: Have you got the hiccoughs? Zak nodded. Nurture assistant: Would you like a drink of water?"
Relationships with adults	Zak having physical needs recognised by nurture assistant.	Zak: Getting up to get one- thank you Nurture assistant continues to hold up cards and say the sounds.

Relationships with adults	David enjoying praise from nurture assistant.	<p>Pupils join in. Each pupil is asked to trace over the letter 'm' with their finger, saying Maisie Mountain Mountain.</p> <p>David took a turn. Nurture assistant: Well done David! David smiles.</p> <p>Nurture assistant: (demonstrates to Zak) Down the tower, across the tower.</p> <p>Zak: (traces over the letter't') Down the tower, across the tower.</p> <p>David took his turn.</p> <p>Maya spontaneously gave David a high 5.</p>
Peer Relationships	Maya enjoying giving positive recognition to David.	<p>David smiling.</p> <p>John took his turn.</p>
Peer Relationships	David enjoying positive attention from peer.	<p>Nurture assistant: Do you think John needs a high five too?</p> <p>Maya and Zak gave him a 'high five'.</p>
Relationships with adults/ Peer Relationships	Maya and Zak praising peer in response to social prompt from adult.	<p>John smiled but put his head down and covered his face when they tried to do it again.</p>
Peer Relationships	John enjoying positive recognition from peers but becoming overwhelmed.	<p>Nurture assistant (laughing): He's done it once.</p> <p>Zak up on his knees. Nurture assistant reminded him to sit on his bottom.</p>

Relationships with adults	David wanting attention.	David turned round and smiled at me. Nurture assistant writes m-a-t on board. Children had their own little whiteboards and were asked to write 'at' and 'mat' and 'sat'.
Relationships with adults	John seeking reassurance.	John: I can't do it. Nurture assistant put him with Zak who helped him. John wrote 'sat'. Nurture assistant: You said you couldn't do it. You did it!
Relationships with adults	John enjoying praise.	John smiled at nurture assistant and sucked his thumb. Nurture assistant wrote 'mast' on board. John said the word.
Relationships with adults	John responding positively to reward.	Nurture assistant smiled and sent John to put a marble in the jar.
Peer Relationships	Zak proud to give peer support with routine.	She asks Zak to show him what to do. Zak is looking proud. Nurture teacher: (working with the other group a short distance away) Wow! Why has John got a marble?
Relationships with adults	John enjoying praise.	John giving slight smile. Nurture assistant: He spelt out 'mast'. He said he couldn't do it!

		<p>Nurture teacher: (to pupil) Whose group is he in in class? (to John) Whose group are you in John?</p> <p>John said the name of a member of staff.</p> <p>Children split off into different reinforcement activities designed to help them practise the formation of m, a, t and s. 2 pupils painting. 2 pupils writing letters with chalk on a chalk board and painting over with water.</p> <p>Other group (Kye, Lee, David and Andy), still working with nurture teacher on Guided Reading task)</p> <p>David was painting an 'm' on an easel. He was not forming it correctly and was looking at me for help so moved over to help him. I guided his hand until he was able to do it independently.</p> <p>Nurture assistant: Well done David. One more 'm' and then you can go and play.</p> <p>David did one more 'm' and then asked me if he could play.</p> <p>Researcher: Yes- Mrs Small told you that you could. Other children who have finished their work are already playing</p>
Relationships with adults	David seeking help with learning task	
Relationships with adults	David seeking reassurance.	
Play	David wanting to play.	

Relationships with adults	Maya seeking attention from adult.	<p>Maya: (approaches me): Can you put Lola in?</p> <p>Nurture assistant: (to Maya) You can do it. (to me) She get people to do everything for her.</p> <p>Maya smiles and puts cardigan on toy monkey herself.</p> <p>Researcher (to Maya): Tell me about Lola.</p> <p>Nurture assistant: Lola goes home on Fridays with one of the children. The children have a book to write in</p> <p>11am all children are now playing as they have finished their work -free choice of activity</p> <p>Playtime</p> <p>Nurture teacher: Coats on if you have put away what you were playing with.</p> <p>Children are slow to tidy up today -it is very cold outside.</p> <p>Researcher: (to Kye) What did you have for Christmas?</p> <p>Kye: I had an X Box, Batman and Minecraft. He puts on his coat and going out to play.</p>
Play	Kye wanting to go out to play -outdoor play.	

Relationships with adults	Pupil appreciating structure provided by adult.	<p>I took the opportunity to speak to the nurture teacher -who updated me on the progress of the children in the group.</p> <p>Sally and Craig are now the only Y3 children left. They are transitioning - only attending Rainbow for the last hour.</p> <p>Lee may be leaving soon. He is in Year 6 and due to have an early transition to the high school down the road. The nurture staff had taken him to visit and were clearly emotional about him going. He had been in the group for a long time (much longer than the usual 2-4 terms)</p> <p>John has been introduced to the group. At the moment, he won't eat breakfast with the other children. At first he would cling to a cuddly tiger that he brings to school. He still brings him into the room but is happy to leave him on the side.</p> <p>After break</p> <p>Children returned to the mobile. They took their coats off and sat straight on carpet as requested by nurture teacher.</p> <p>Group joined by Sally and Craig (Year 3s attending for last hour as undergoing transition).</p>
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Learning	Pupils enjoying early learning activities.	<p>Nurture teacher: We are going to do 'Jasper and the Beanstalk'. The children sat and watched it on interactive whiteboard and joined in the words of the song.</p> <p>Nurture teacher: We are going to grow some beans like Jasper</p> <p>Nurture teacher: You wet the cotton wool and put it in the bag. Then you put the bean in the bag. Then you zip it up. Then we are going to use double sided tape and stick it to the window. Everybody will be able to see our beans growing.</p>
Relationships with adults	Maya seeking reassurance from adult.	<p>Maya: (to nurture teacher) Like this?</p> <p>Nurture teacher: Just listen Maya. Get your bag. Open it.</p> <p>Maya opened her bag.</p>
Peer Relationships	David checking what to do by looking at what Maya has done.	David looked at what Maya had done.
Peer Relationships	Maya noticing that David needs help and showing him how to open bag.	<p>Maya: Like mine David.</p> <p>David opened his bag.</p> <p>Nurture teacher: Well done David.</p> <p>Zak: They look like marshmallows.</p> <p>Nurture assistant: (returned to room) I'm back. What do I have to do?</p>

Relationships with adults	Maya and David pleased to see nurture assistant.	Maya and David smiling.
Peer Relationships	David lacking sense of belonging to group.	Nurture teacher and assistant sat at table where materials were laid out. Children gathered around. David sitting away from the other children, playing with his bag. Nurture teacher: Join the group David. David moves forward. Nurture teacher: (labelling each bag with pupil name and date) What will the beans need to grow?
Learning	Zak and Craig responding to learning activity.	Zak: Water. Craig: Sun. Nurture teacher: Yes they need water and light.
Peer Relationships	David lacking sense of belonging to group.	David standing back from the group.
Peer Relationships	John lacking sense of belonging to group.	John also standing apart from the others. Nurture teacher: John-join the group please. David-come closer.
Relationships with staff	Lee not liking getting into trouble.	Nurture teacher: (noticing that Lee has broken bag) You have broken your bag now Lee. Why are you sitting, not standing like the others? Nurture teacher putting water on cotton wool balls.

Learning	Sally responding to learning activity.	<p>Nurture assistant: Why are we putting water in?</p> <p>Sally: Bean needs it to grow.</p> <p>Children are taking it in turns to pop a wet cotton wool ball in their bags and moved round to collect a bean.</p> <p>Researcher is now standing with a group of children who have their bags ready, talking about what beans need to grow.</p>
Learning	Zak excited about practical task.	<p>Zak: (excited) There will be a giant beanstalk.</p> <p>Children gathered by the window while nurture teacher taped their bags on the window of the mobile.</p> <p>Nurture teacher: (to the first two children Sally and Craig) You are done. Children's choice now.</p>
Play	<p>Sally and Craig excited about children's choice (free play). Knew what they wanted to play with-role play.</p> <p>Maya wanting to join role play.</p> <p>Lee wanting to join in and falling into role as son-role play.</p>	<p>Sally and Craig: (smiling and excited) Yeah! Ran off and started to get out kitchen items, shopping trolley and dolls.</p> <p>Maya: (approaching) Can I play? I'll be the dog. Woof Woof!</p> <p>Lee: (also joining in) I'm the boy. (To Sally) Mom- can I go swimming tomorrow?</p>

Play	Craig falling into role as son-role play.	All children are now in home corner.
	Sally role playing mom-role play.	Craig: (to Sally) Can I play now mom? Sally is pretending to clean cupboard with washing up brush and talking on the phone at the same time.
	Zak and Andy joining in role play.	Zak and Andy pretending to be cat and dog.
	Children getting comfortable or doing what they do at home. I.e. take shoes off.	All pupils had taken off their shoes and put them in a pile in the home corner.
	Sally enacting a situation in which mom is angry-role play.	Sally: (to Lee who is lying on the sofa) I'm angry with you. Stay in bed!
	Lee playing role of uncooperative son-role play.	Lee: No I won't! Sally: reading book to doll
	Sally pretending that the doll is a baby -role play.	
	John playing on his own in enclosed play house.	John is playing alone in the play house. Researcher asking him for a piece of cake and pretending to eat it.
Relationships with adults	Maya seeking attention.	Maya: (giving me a pig mask) Do you want to play with me?
Relationships with adults	David seeking attention.	David taking big bad wolf mask. Maya: Put it on.
Relationships with adult	Lee seeking attention.	Lee saw the mask and laughed out loud.

Relationships with adults	John being curious about me as a visitor to the group.	John: (standing next to me, looking at me curiously) How do you know our names? Researcher: I have been here a few times now but you are new.
	David seeking adult attention.	David: (approaching me) It is Tracy's baby. Repeated this a few times. Rest of what he said not intelligible.
Play	Lee and Kye trying to make sense of what is allowed in terms of physical role play.	Lee and Kye are playing cops and robbers in the home corner. Nurture teacher: I am going to stop you playing if you play rough.
	Pupils attempting to clarify boundaries in terms of what is acceptable.	Andy: (Lee and Kye are pretending that hairdryer is a gun). We are playing gentle. Nurture assistant: We don't have fighting. We don't have guns. Lee: It's not a gun Kye: It's a flower Lee: Can we play? Nurture assistant: You can play cops and robbers as long as you don't fight. Zak again pretending hairdryer is a gun. Nurture teacher: That is for drying your hair-it's not a gun.

Play	Kye acknowledging importance of play in Rainbow.	<p>Tidy up time</p> <p>Researcher (talking to Kye as we tidied up) What is it like being here in Rainbows?</p> <p>Kye: I don't know why we don't pay with toys in Year 1.</p> <p>Children lining up.</p> <p>Nurture teacher: Our first day of the new timetable. We have done numeracy, phonics.</p> <p>After session</p> <p>Researcher: (to nurture teacher and assistant). How do you think the new timetable went?</p> <p>Nurture teacher: I like the new timetable but there is a lot to fit in. Children's choice needs more structure. There is a bit too much choice at the moment.</p>
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Appendix 5 Example of Pupil Conversation Coding

Session 1 - 04/06/18 Zak

2nd Level Codes	1st Level Codes	
		<p>Researcher: Okay Zak. What are we going to do? (had already introduced task)</p> <p>Zak: We are doing our book today.</p> <p>Researcher: About?</p> <p>Zak: About the Rainbow Group.</p> <p>Researcher: Excellent! Well done! So do you remember when I came in last time? We used the iPad to take some photos of all your favourite things in the Rainbow room.</p> <p>Zak: Yes.</p> <p>Researcher: So here are the photos. I have cut them out. Shall we spread them on the table? We can talk about the pictures and decide which ones you want to put in your book. You did take a lot didn't you!</p> <p>Zak: Yes</p> <p>Researcher: You have a lot here! You may or may not want all of them in your book.</p> <p>Zak: I do!</p>

		<p>Researcher: You want them all in your book? Ok (laughing). What shall we put in first? What do you have at the front of a book?</p> <p>Zak: a cover</p> <p>Researcher: Yes a book has a front cover doesn't it? So what do you want on your front cover?</p> <p>Zak: (picking up photo) The clock!</p> <p>Researcher: You want the clock on your front cover? Why is the clock important?</p> <p>Zak: So you know what time it is.</p> <p>Researcher: So do you want anything else on the front cover?</p> <p>Zak: No just the clock.</p> <p>Researcher: Do you want to put that photo in the middle or at the top?</p> <p>Zak: ...at the top</p> <p>Researcher: There we are... I will leave a little bit of room at the top because we need room for a title. Books have titles don't they? What would you like to call your book?</p> <p>Zak: Pictures of my favourite things.</p>
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<p>Play</p>	<p>Choosing the Lego as his favourite activity.</p>	<p>Researcher: Which is your very favourite thing out of all these?</p> <p>Zak: The Lego</p> <p>Researcher: The Lego – okay do you want the Lego on page 2? On its own? Or with something else?</p> <p>Zak: The flower! Picking up photo of tree made of hand prints.</p> <p>Researcher: Tell me about that flower.</p> <p>Zak: It is hand prints.</p> <p>Researcher: Hand prints-tell me more about the hand prints.</p>
<p>Peer relationships</p>	<p>Acknowledging the importance of the pupils who make up the group.</p>	<p>Zak: There are lots and lots of hands – everybody in Rainbow.</p> <p>Researcher: That's a wonderful idea isn't it - a tree made out of the hands of everybody in the Rainbow group. So you would like this on page 2 as well?</p> <p>Zak: Yes</p> <p>Researcher: Which would you like at the top and which would you like at the bottom?</p> <p>Zak: This one picture of hands at the bottom, the Lego at the top.</p>

Play	Preferring things you can play with to things you can only look at.	<p>Researcher: Why do you want the Lego at the top?</p> <p>Zak: Because this one-Lego is best. You can play with it – this one ...hand ...you can only look at it.</p> <p>Researcher: Okay so you like the things you can play with best?</p> <p>Zak: Yes</p> <p>Researcher: Would you like to write anything underneath the picture of the logo? I will write. You tell me what you want to say.</p>
Play	Expressing how much he likes Lego.	<p>Zak: I really love Lego!</p> <p>Researcher: Excellent! Good boy!</p> <p>Researcher: And you want the handprints underneath do you?</p> <p>Zak: Yes</p> <p>Researcher: Do you want me to write something underneath?</p>
Peer relationships	Confirming the importance of his friends in the group.	<p>Zak: Yes – this is everyone's hand prints.</p> <p>Researcher: You have two pages now. Well done! Have a look at all the pictures. We are thinking about your favourite things. What else do you like?</p>

Play	Choosing sand as another favourite activity.	<p>Zak: The sand!</p> <p>Researcher: Is that the next important thing? Tell me more about the sand.</p>
Play/ peer relationships	Focusing on joint play with his friend.	<p>Zak: We can play in the sand and put buckets in and do sand castles. I like to make sandcastles with my friend. I like to play sandcastles with Kye (his friend).</p> <p>Researcher: Tell me about your friend.</p>
Peer relationships	Importance of friendship.	<p>Zak: Lots of friends!</p> <p>Researcher: (writing 'I like to play in the sand pit with my friend Kye') Ok...what would you like to go in next?</p> <p>Zak: (picking out a photo of monkeys) The toilet.</p> <p>Researcher: The toilet? Why did you pick the toilet?</p> <p>Zak: We go in the toilet to wash our hands. I like the monkeys- they have very funny faces – one has a smile up here :-) like this (laughing)</p> <p>Zak: The monkeys are funny (laughing at the monkey's faces in the photo). They make us laugh.</p>
Peer relationships	Having fun with friends.	

		<p>Researcher: So we'll put the picture of the monkeys in on page 3 of your book. What do you want to write about the monkeys?</p> <p>Zak: These monkeys are in the toilets (researcher writes).</p> <p>Researcher: You have three pages already. Shall we do some more?</p> <p>Zak: Yes.</p> <p>Researcher: Let's pick some more pictures.</p> <p>Researcher: Shall we pick four more pictures?</p> <p>Zak: Yes.</p> <p>Researcher: Look at the pictures you have left.</p> <p>Which are your favourite things?</p> <p>Zak: (picking out two photos) I like Maths and Phonics.</p> <p>Researcher: Which do you like best?</p>
Learning	Selecting photographs of learning activities.	Zak: (picking out the Phonics photo) I like this best.
Learning	Choosing Phonics as favourite activity.	<p>Researcher: So where do you want to put that - at the top or bottom?</p> <p>Zak: At the top!</p>

		<p>Researcher: Why?</p> <p>Zak: Because I like it best?</p> <p>Researcher: What do you like about phonics?</p> <p>Zak: I like 'oo' and 'or'.</p> <p>Researcher: What do you want to write?</p> <p>Zak: I really like to learn sounds.</p> <p>Researcher: What do you want to say about this one? What do you want to say about the Maths one?</p>
Learning	Enjoying number work.	<p>Zak: We like building these to make 10 (indicating Numicon blocks).</p> <p>Researcher: Okay one more page? This is the last page in your book. Have a good look at the things that really matter to you in Rainbow.</p>
Peer relationships/ play	Choosing two photos with his friend playing.	<p>Zak: I want this one because it's got Kye's face on it. He is my friend. And this one has Happy Street Toys. I like Happy Street toys and Kye is playing with them (pointing to Kye's arm in the picture).</p> <p>Researcher: Oh yes is that Kye there? I can see his hands! (pointing to 2 selected photos) Why have you picked those two photos?</p>

Peer relationships/ play	Likes playing with Kye.	<p>Zak: Because I like playing with Kye.</p> <p>Researcher: So which one do you want first?</p> <p>Zak picks out the picture which shows all of Kye.</p> <p>Researcher: You want this one first?</p>
Peer relationships/ play	Playing with friends.	<p>Zak: Yes. I like being with my friends. We can play lots of things (picks up the pen and gives it to me).</p> <p>Researcher: Is that what you want me to write?</p> <p>Zak: Yes.</p> <p>Researcher writing sentence.</p> <p>Researcher: So now I'll put in the picture of Kye playing Happy Street?</p>
Peer relationships/ play	Playing with friend.	<p>Zak: Yes (smiling)</p> <p>Researcher: (gluing in the picture) What shall we write about that?</p>
Peer relationships/ play	Playing with friends.	<p>Zak: We can play Happy street with our friends.</p> <p>Zak: Now I want to do a back cover.</p> <p>Researcher: You want to do a back cover?</p>

	Wanting to include a picture of painting easel.	<p>Zak: Yes I did a front cover and now I want to do at back cover. And the back cover is..... this (picking out a photograph of an easel and painting)</p> <p>Researcher: Do you like painting?</p> <p>Zak: 100%.</p> <p>Researcher: 100%? (laughing) Okay is that the end?</p>
Awareness of self	Picking out a photo of himself.	<p>Zak: Yes. Then he points to a picture of himself. I want that in my book.</p> <p>Researcher: Where do you want that in your book? We can put another page if we need to. Near the beginning or near the end or maybe... in the middle (looking through the pages)?</p> <p>Zak: At the end -on the back cover. Miss -you need to put page 6 on the top.</p> <p>Researcher: You want a number on the back cover?</p> <p>Zak: Yes.</p> <p>Researcher: So do you want me to write anything about this picture of you?</p>
Awareness of self	Acknowledging himself as the author.	<p>Zak: I want to write Zak..Zak (says name twice).</p>

		<p>Researcher: (writing Zak's name). Excellent! This is a lovely book isn't it! We'll put it together and put a binding on it.</p> <p>Zak: it will look like a book! (smiling)</p> <p>Researcher: I think you worked really well. Thank you for doing this with me. Have you enjoyed it?</p> <p>Zak: Yes. What are these for? (pointing at pack of crayons)</p> <p>Researcher: I brought them in case you wanted to draw or colour in your book.</p> <p>Zak: Can I draw now?</p> <p>Researcher: Yes you can draw now as you have worked really well.</p>
	Wanting to do a drawing.	

Appendix 6 Example of Theme Development -Relationships with Adults

Observation 1 01/06/16

2nd Level Codes	1st Level Codes	Initial Observation Data to be Coded
Relationships with adults	Lee <i>seeking attention.</i>	Lee: (turning round and waving at me) Hello!
Relationships with adults	John <i>needing emotional support.</i>	Nurture assistant noticing that John is looking sad and asking him to smile.
Relationships with adults	David <i>enjoying praise.</i>	David smiles all the time (David looks up at Nurture assistant and smiles)
Relationships with adults	Lee <i>appreciating physical needs being recognised.</i>	Lee tells the nurture assistant that he is warm. Yes it is warm. Nurture teacher: Why don't you take off your jumper Lee? Lee nods, smiles and removes his jumper.
Relationships with adults	Lee <i>enjoying attention.</i>	Nurture teacher: You have new shoes Lee- they are Kickers aren't they? Lee putting his feet in the air so that the nurture teacher can see them.
Relationships with adults	Lee <i>seeking support with learning.</i>	Lee: Can I make a line? Nurture teacher: ...If you want to...

Relationships with adults	David <i>needing emotional support</i> (doesn't like loud noises).	<p>David: (hears bell) What's that? (to me)</p> <p>Nurture teacher: Don't worry. It's the bell. You know it's the bell.</p> <p>David: (repeats) It's the bell. Yes (smiles).</p>
Relationships with adults	Maya seeking <i>support with learning</i> .	<p>Maya struggling to count out four jewels.</p> <p>Nurture assistant: Have you forgotten how to count over Christmas?</p> <p>Nurture assistant counts out four jewels with Maya.</p>
Relationships with adults	Maya <i>enjoying praise</i> .	<p>Nurture assistant: We got there in the end.</p> <p>Maya smiles.</p>
Relationships with adults	John <i>needing emotional support</i> .	<p>John sitting with head down, his hands covering his face.</p> <p>Nurture teacher and Nurture assistant tease John -trying to get him to smile.</p> <p>Nurture teacher tells him to move his hands. Covering you face is not allowed in here. It's rude.</p> <p>John starting to cry.</p> <p>Nurture teacher: Tears don't work. They're pretend!</p> <p>John continuing to cry.</p>

Relationships with adults	John <i>needing emotional support.</i>	John continues to sit with his head down and one hand covering his face but takes a domino and adds it to the line.
Relationships with adults	Kye <i>enjoying praise.</i>	<p>Nurture assistant: We need a 3... We have a problem. What's the problem Kye?"</p> <p>Kye: There isn't a domino with a 3 on.</p> <p>Nurture assistant: Well done (smiling)</p> <p>Kye smiles.</p>
Relationships with adults	Maya <i>enjoying praise.</i>	Nurture assistant praises Maya for helping Zak. Maya smiles
Relationships with adults	Zak <i>needing emotional support.</i>	<p>Zak: Jabo</p> <p>Nurture teacher: Is that a made up word? When do they say it Zak?</p> <p>Zak: When they have finished their Maths.</p> <p>Nurture teacher: Bravo? Zak nods and smiles but looks slightly embarrassed.</p>
Relationships with adults	John <i>enjoying praise.</i>	<p>Nurture teacher and Nurture assistant (notice John tidying up) Well done John.</p> <p>John is looking pleased.</p>

Relationships with adults	<i>Lee needing support with transitions.</i>	Lee: What are we doing next? Nurture teacher: phonics.
Relationships with adults	<i>David needing consistent adults.</i>	Nurture assistant left the room -to look at a leak in the entrance hall. David: (to me) Mrs Small gone out. Where did Mrs Small go? Has she gone outside?
Relationships with adults	<i>Maya needing consistent adults.</i>	Nurture assistant: (entering the room) I'll take over. Maya smiles and moves back to her place.
Relationships with adults	<i>Zak appreciating physical needs being recognised.</i>	Zak hiccoughs. Nurture assistant: Have you got the hiccoughs? Zak nodding. Nurture assistant: Would you like a drink of water? Zak: (getting up to get one) Thank you.
Relationships with adults	<i>David enjoying praise.</i>	David took a turn. Nurture assistant: Well done David! David smiles.
Relationships with adults	<i>David seeking attention.</i>	David turned round and smiled at me.

Relationships with adults	John <i>seeking support with learning.</i>	Nurture assistant writes m-a-t on board. Children had their own little whiteboards and were asked to write 'at' and 'mat' and 'sat'. John: I can't do it!
Relationships with adults	John <i>enjoying praise.</i>	John wrote 'sat'. Nurture assistant: You said you couldn't do it. You did it! John is smiling at nurture assistant and sucking his thumb.
Relationships with adults	John <i>enjoying praise.</i>	Nurture assistant smiled and sent John to put a marble in the jar. She asks Zak to show him what to do. John is looking proud.
Relationships with adults	John <i>enjoying praise.</i>	Nurture teacher: (working with the other group a short distance away) Wow! Why has John got a marble? John is giving slight smile.
Relationships with adults	David <i>seeking support with learning.</i>	David was painting an 'm' on an easel. He was not forming it correctly and was looking at me for help so moved over to help him. I guided his hand until he was able to do it independently.

Relationships with adults	David <i>needing support with transitions.</i>	<p>Nurture assistant: Well done David. One more 'm' and then you can go and play.</p> <p>David did one more 'm' and then asked me if he could play.</p> <p>Researcher: Yes. Mrs Small said you could.</p>
Relationships with adults	Maya <i>seeking attention.</i>	<p>Maya approaches me. Can you put Lola in?</p> <p>Nurture assistant: You can do it (to me) She get people to do everything for her.</p> <p>Maya smiles and puts cardigan on toy monkey herself.</p>
Relationships with adults	Maya <i>seeking support with learning.</i>	<p>Nurture teacher: You wet the cotton wool and put it in the bag. Then you put the bean in the bag. Then you zip it up. Then we are going to use double sided tape and stick it to the window. Everybody will be able to see our beans growing.</p> <p>Maya: (to Nurture teacher) Like this?</p> <p>Nurture teacher: Just listen Maya. Get your bag. Open it.</p>
Relationships with adults	Maya and David <i>needing consistent adults.</i>	<p>Nurture assistant: (returned to room) I'm back. What do I have to do?</p> <p>Maya and David are smiling.</p>

Relationships with adults	Lee <i>needing emotional support.</i>	Nurture teacher: (noticing that Lee has broken bag).You have broken you bag now Lee. Why are you sitting, not standing like the others? Lee: (looking upset)
Relationships with adults	Maya <i>seeking attention.</i>	Maya: Do you want to play with me? (Giving me a pig mask)
Relationships with adults	John <i>seeking attention.</i>	John: (standing next to me, looking at me curiously). How do you know our names?
Relationships with adults	David <i>seeking attention.</i>	David: (approaching me) It is Tracy's baby. Repeated this a few times. Rest of what he said not intelligible.

APPENDIX 7 Example of Theme Development-Peer Relationships

Observation 1 08/01/15

2nd Level Codes	1st Level Codes	Initial Observation Data to be Coded
Peer relationships	Maya seeking <i>support with learning</i> .	Maya takes 6 jewels-one of each colour-checks if she has the same number as other pupils.
Peer relationships	Pupils giving <i>support with learning</i> .	Nurture teacher asks Lee to count his jewels aloud. She asks the other pupils to put up their thumbs and say, "Well done". They reply, "Well done Lee" in unison and give him a thumbs up. Lee smiles.
Peer relationships	Maya offering <i>support with learning</i> .	Maya spontaneously giving David a 'high 5'.
Peer relationships	David accepting <i>support with learning</i> .	David is smiling.
Peer relationships	Maya and Zak offering <i>support with learning</i> .	Maya and Zak gave him a 'high five'. John smiles but put his head down and covered his face when they tried to do it again. Nurture assistant (laughing): He's done it once.
Peer relationships	Zak giving <i>support with learning</i> .	Nurture assistant smiled and sent John to put a marble in the jar. She asks Zak to show him what to do. Zak is looking proud.

Peer relationships	David seeking <i>support with learning</i> .	Maya opened her bag. David looked at what Maya had done.
Peer relationships	Maya offering <i>support with learning</i> .	Maya: Like mine David. David opened his bag.
Peer relationships	David <i>lacking sense of belonging to group</i> .	David is sitting away from the other children, playing with his bag. Nurture teacher: Join the group David. David moves forward.
Peer relationships	David <i>lacking sense of belonging to group</i> . John <i>lacking sense of belonging to group</i> .	David is standing back from the group. John is also standing apart from the others. Nurture teacher: John-join the group please. David-come closer.
Play/ Peer relationships	Sally and Craig <i>engaging in joint play</i> . Maya <i>engaging in joint play</i> . Lee <i>engaging in joint play</i> . Craig <i>engaging in joint play</i> . Sally <i>engaging in joint play</i> .	Sally and Craig: (smiling and excited) Yeah! Ran off and started to get out kitchen items, shopping trolley and dolls. Maya: (approaching) Can I play? I'll be the dog. Woof woof! Lee: (also joining in) I'm the boy. (To Sally) Mom-can I go swimming tomorrow? Craig: (to Sally) Can I play now mom? Sally is pretending to clean cupboard with washing up brush and talking on the phone at the same time.

	<p>Zak and Andy <i>engaging in joint play</i>.</p> <p>Sally and Lee <i>engaging in joint play</i>.</p>	<p>Zak and Andy pretend to be a cat and dog.</p> <p>Sally: (to Lee who is lying on the sofa) I'm angry with you. Stay in bed!</p> <p>Lee: No I won't!</p> <p>Sally is reading a book to a doll.</p>
Play/ Peer relationships	John <i>engaging in solitary play (not engaging in joint play)</i> .	<p>John is playing alone in the play house.</p> <p>Researcher asks him for a piece of cake and pretends to eat it.</p>
Play/ Peer relationships	Lee and Kye <i>engaging in joint play</i> .	<p>Lee and Kye are playing cops and robbers.</p> <p>Nurture teacher: I am going to stop you playing if you play rough.</p> <p>Andy: We are playing gentle. Lee and Kye are pretending that the hairdryer is a gun.</p> <p>Nurture assistant: We don't have fighting. We don't have guns.</p> <p>Lee: It's not a gun. Kye: It's a flower. Lee: Can we play?</p> <p>Nurture assistant: You can play cops and robbers as long as you don't fight.</p> <p>Zak is again pretending hairdryer is a gun.</p> <p>Nurture teacher: That is for drying your hair-it's not a gun.</p>

Appendix 8 Games

Melissa and Dog Latch Puzzle Game



The game involves releasing latches and opening a numbered door to reveal different numbers of animals in different colours.

Scaredy Cat Game



This game contains bird cards, cat cards and scarecrow cards. Children take it in turns to pick up a card from the pile. If they pick up a bird, they place it face upwards in front of them. If they pick up a scarecrow, they add it to the scarecrow picture. The children play until the picture is complete. The winner is the player with the most bird cards. However, if someone selects a 'Scaredy Cat' card, they have to return all of their bird cards to the pile and start again.

Dotty Dinosaurs



This is a simple game in which the children are required to match shapes and colours with dinosaurs.

Game of Ladybirds



This is an easy game for children of approximately three years of age that encourages counting skills. The 24 cards are placed on the table with the spot side on top. The children throw the dice and then pick up a card with a matching number of spots on it. The children then turn over the card to see how many ladybirds are hiding on the leaf. The winner is the player with the most cards at the end of the game.

Appendix 9 Notes Relating to Research Questions

Relationships with Adults

RQ1	What aspects of the experience are most important to the children that attend a primary school nurture group?	<p>Main theme -relationships with adults.</p> <p>Most important aspects within this theme - interactions involving attention and praise</p>
RQ2	How do children construct meanings through their interactions with others in the nurture group?	<p>Nurture staff become represented in terms of mothering and as scaffolders and play partners.</p> <p><i>Representation of mothering:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -is constructed as pupil seek maternal attention and staff provide it -is constructed as nurture staff provide compensatory mothering to address children's physical and emotional needs based on their belief that they have not received adequate care at home -is reinforced within the domestic environment of nurture group <p><i>Representation of staff as scaffolders:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -is constructed during episodes in which children seek and receive support with learning and is also supported by a focus on the development of the child within a child-centred approach - is constructed during episodes in which nurture staff support children with emotional needs. <p><i>Representation of staff as play partners:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -is constructed during episodes in which children seek adults attention through involving them in
RQ3	How do the nurture staff construct meanings as they interact with children in the nurture group?	

		<p>play activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -is constructed as children seek to form relationships through play -analysis suggests that the engagement of staff in play depends on the play context.
RQ4	How do the constructions of children and staff in the nurture group give insights that could be used to shape provision?	<p><i>Mothering: nurture staff need to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -reflect on mothering as a reciprocal process - develop mothering opportunities based on an understanding that children have a need for maternal attention - consider ways in which mothering can further promote a caring pedagogy in which children learn about caring for others. - reflect on how their beliefs and assumptions about the children and their background impact on how they support children to meet their physical and emotional needs - consider how the environment can be developed to give further opportunities for activities that would take place in the home, with a focus on developing activities which promote a moral education. <p><i>Scaffolding: nurture staff need to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -understand scaffolding as a reciprocal process in which children seek support and adults provide timely attention at the level that they need -reflect on how scaffolding links with the nurture group principle of children learning developmentally -consider how the notion of scaffolding complements the child-centred approach adopted - reflect on how attention and praise are also

		<p>important in the context of emotional scaffolding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -consider relationship between the provision of emotional scaffolding and their beliefs that children are innocent and need protection - reflect on the importance of emotional support and build in more ways to ensure that it is consistently available. <p><i>Play partners: nurture staff need to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reflect on the importance of play within the child-centred approach - consider the children's need to involve adults in their play - understand the ways in which children form relationships through play - reflect on their roles in relations to play -consider how play opportunities can be organised to include a balance between child-led free play, adult-led play and play in which adults engage in play in which children set the agenda. -reflect on how increased engagement in children's play might enhance relationships and allow for the co-construction of meaning.
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Peer Relationships

RQ1	What aspects of the experience are most important to the children that attend a primary school nurture group?	<p>Secondary theme -peer relationships</p> <p>Most important aspects within this theme engaging in joint play with peers</p>
RQ2	How do children construct meanings through their interactions with others in the nurture group?	<p>Children construct meanings in relation to their social worlds and gender identities as they engage in joint play with their peers in nurture groups.</p> <p><i>Social Worlds</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -children construct meanings about friendships and learn about wider social relationships as they play together -they play out aspects of their home lives -they respond creatively to explore how family relationships work -they explore potential futures -the meanings that are constructed by children are influenced by the constructions of staff who provide the environment in which meanings are created.
RQ3	How do the nurture staff construct meanings as they interact with children in the nurture group?	<p><i>Gendered identities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -children construct meaning in terms of gender as they play with their peers in nurture groups -there are differences in the ways in which girls and boys play -although influenced by other factors such as home, culture and the media, gender is constructed within particular discourses of

		<p>masculinity and femininity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -activities in the nurture group have become gendered -meanings that are constructed by children are influenced by the constructions of staff who inadvertently reinforce gender through the way that they organise the environment and the ways in which they respond to children.
RQ4	How do the constructions of children and staff in the nurture group give insights that could be used to shape provision?	<p><i>Social Worlds: nurture staff need to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - continue to offer opportunities for children to play freely with peers in the home corner so that they can develop friendships and learn about wider social relationships and make sense of family relationships, - reflect on how reviewing the play environment and broadening the range of play equipment offered could help children to play more creatively and open up options for the future. <p><i>Gendered identities: nurture staff need to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reflect on the finding that the boys and girls in the nurture group play in different ways - consider the ways in which gender identities are constructed as children play -think about how activities have become gendered - reflect on their own constructions of gender and how these may have impacted on the way that play opportunities have been set up - consider ways in which gender stereotypes can be challenged through a review of play activities and ways of responding as children play.

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