The impact of Nurture Group principles and practice on the whole primary school

Submitted by Anna Papamichael to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of the Doctorate in Educational, Child & Community Psychology in June 2011.

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

(Signature)...........................................................................................................
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Overview of thesis

**The impact of Nurture Group principles and practice on the whole primary school**

**SECTION 1: Paper 1**
Exploring the impact of the NG provision upon the NG children and on the school

**Introduction and Literature review**
1. How are NG pupils affected by the NG provision? What do the NG pupils gain and lose from their placement in the NG?
2. What is the impact of the NG provision upon the school?

**Design and Method**
A holistic single case study with embedded units methodology with an interpretive epistemology is employed. Qualitative data is collected via observations, interviews, and reflective diary. Quantitative data is collected via Boxall Profiles.

**SECTION 2: Paper 2**
Exploring the nature of communication between NG and mainstream staff and the enablers and barriers of parental involvement in the NGs and the school.

**Introduction and Literature review**
1. What is the nature of communication between NG and mainstream staff?
2. What are the enablers and barriers of parental involvement in the NG?
3. What are the enablers and barriers of parental involvement in the school?

**Design and Method**
A qualitative methodological design with an interpretive epistemology is employed. Qualitative data is collected via interviews.

Continued overleaf…
Participants and sampling
The sample consisted of 34 participants. The school staff comprised a purposive sample whereas parents, children, governors and support professionals comprised a convenient sample. Five classes were observed. The research was based in a community primary school in an urban area in the South West of England. Two NGs were based on the primary school site.

Data Analysis
Thematic analysis was used to analyse interview data. Observations and Boxall Profile data were analysed descriptively.

Results
See main body of text for presented findings for Paper 1.

Discussion
Findings from Paper 1 are discussed.

Conclusion
Final Conclusions, limitations of the study, future directions for practice, implications for EPs and recommendations for the school are presented.

References
References for Paper 1 and Paper 2 are combined.

Section 3: Appendices
Appendices for Paper 1 and Paper 2 are combined.

Section 4: Literature Review
N.B. This literature review has been marked and examined separately from the examination of this thesis. It is appended here for completeness and to give coherence to the whole thesis.
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<tr>
<td>EBD</td>
<td>Pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPS</td>
<td>Educational Psychology Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emergent Theme</td>
<td>Themes that emerged in the qualitative data analysis</td>
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<td>EP</td>
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<td>Impact Scores</td>
<td>Difference between pre- and post-Boxall measures</td>
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<td>Key Stage 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>MT3</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>NG</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEB</td>
<td>Social, emotional and behavioural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEBD</td>
<td>Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSI</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDQ</td>
<td>Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire</td>
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<td>Term used to describe a cluster of related themes within a sub-ordinate theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Term used to describe a cluster of related secondary themes</td>
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<td>Super-ordinate theme</td>
<td>Term used to describe a cluster of related emergent themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Teaching Assistant</td>
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Section 1: Paper 1

Abstract

The provision of Nurture Groups (NGs) has been recognised as an effective early intervention for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). ‘The high expectations of teachers in Nurture Groups can bring about amazing change’ in the lives of young emotionally disturbed children (Lucas, 1999, p.14). When the principles of NG are effectively applied by all staff in all areas of the school and when nurturing attitudes and practices develop throughout the school, teaching and learning become effective for all children (Lucas, 1999). This study aims to extend the understanding of the gains and costs that may be associated with the placement of children in NGs. The NG intervention’s contribution to the wider school system is also documented. However, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding on the impact of NG provision on the mainstream school it serves from the viewpoints of the different groups of participants involved and to look whether the ethos and approaches used in the nurture group are promoted in the wider school environment.

A case study methodology with interpretive approaches was employed in a community primary school in an urban area in the South West of England. Quantitative (Boxall Profiles) and qualitative (interviews and observations) measures revealed that overall there have been improvements in NG children’s social, emotional and behavioural (SEB) functioning and academic development. However, findings also revealed a number of opportunity costs attached to children’s placement in the NG. Qualitative measures also showed that, while NG provision contributed to positive developments within the school, the NGs did not help the school in fully integrating their work in the wider approach to meeting all children’s needs. A number of disadvantages were also reported with regards to the impact of the NG upon the school.
The impact of Nurture Group principles and practice on the whole primary school

Section 2: Paper 2
Abstract

The provision of Nurture Groups has been recognised as an effective early intervention for children with SEBD. ‘The high expectations of teachers in Nurture Groups can bring about amazing change’ in the lives of young emotionally disturbed children (Lucas, 1999, p.14). When the principles of NG are effectively applied by all staff in all areas of the school and when nurturing attitudes and practices develop throughout the school, teaching and learning become effective for all children (Lucas, 1999). Communication between NG and mainstream staff is considered to be important for the effective running of the NGs and for developing a nurturing school ethos. Lack of collaborative partnership work can create tensions between NG and mainstream staff. Parental involvement is also recognised important in the NG. Research reveals that partnership relationships with parents contribute to positive social and emotional outcomes for children and to positive effects for parents in terms of their capacity to understand their children and apply NG practices outside of the NG. Despite the inherent power imbalance between NG staff and parents, there can be a positive outcome if the NG approaches are extended holistically to all school staff.

The aim of this paper is to explore the quality of communication between NG and mainstream staff and the enablers and barriers of parental involvement in the NGs and the school.

This qualitative study was conducted in a community primary school in an urban area in the South West of England and included 34 participants - 13 school staff, 8 parents, 9 children, and 4 professionals and governors. Semi-structured interview data revealed that while some communication existed between NG and mainstream staff there were subtle difficulties involved in creating a collaborative partnership work with regards to sharing information with each other. Despite developing a collaborative relationship and effective communication being seen as the most important enabler for parental involvement in the NGs and the rest of the school, there was a more structured communication and a more supportive support between the NGs and parents of the NG children than the rest of the school and parents.