

# **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.

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

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).....

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank all the participants for their contribution. I have furthermore to thank my supervisors Andrew Richards and Tim Maxwell for their support and guidance.

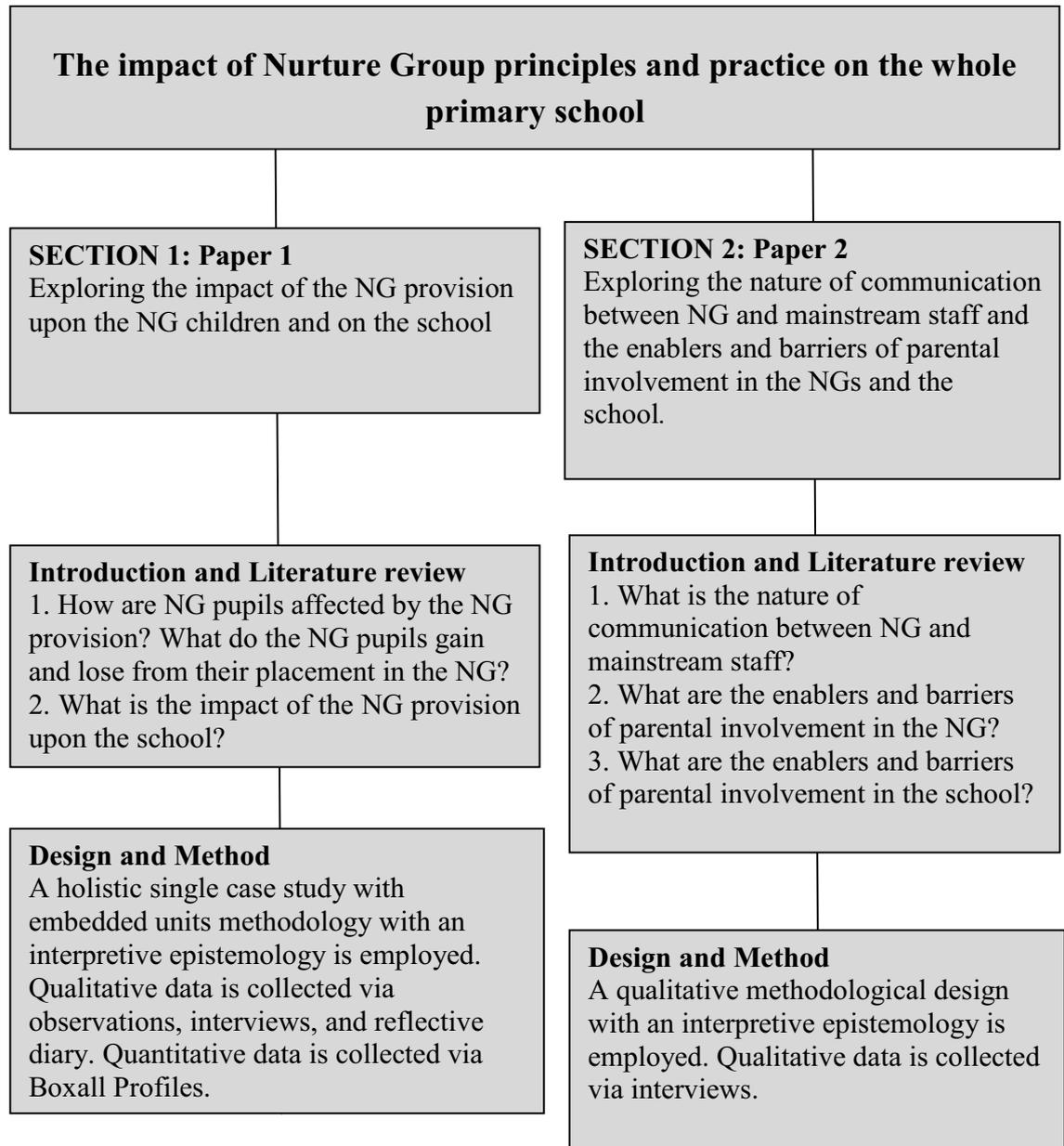
I would also like to thank Terri-Anne for her kind and dedicated assistance.

Especially, I would like to thank my family - Christos, Androula, Maria and Constantinos Papamichael for their consideration and unwavering support throughout this journey.

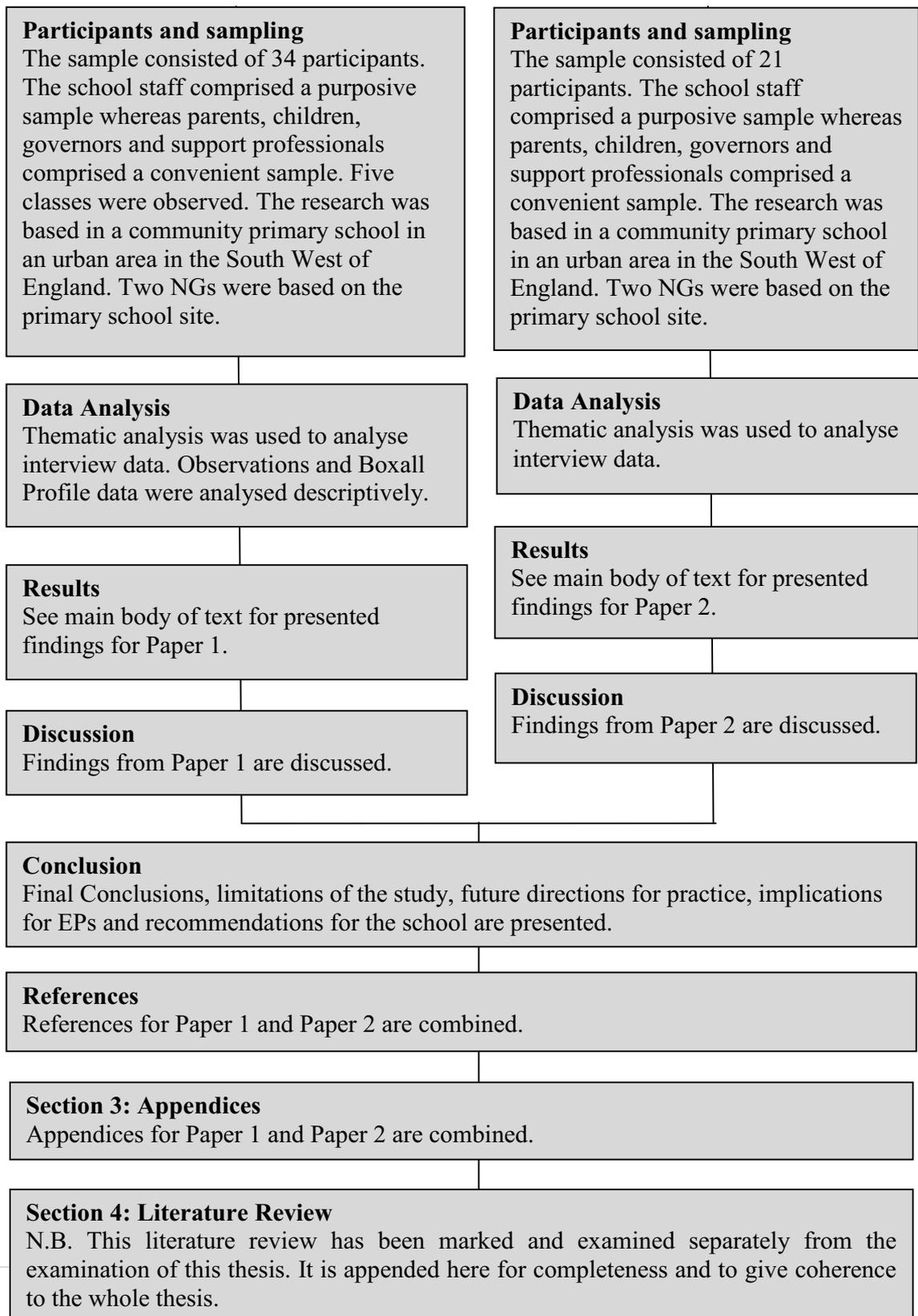
Thank you Tina Dialektaki, Joanna Anastasiou and Theo Tom for being there when I needed you.

A very special thank you to Angelos Menelaou. You have been my everything in every way.

## Overview of thesis



Continued overleaf...



# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Overview of thesis</b> .....	<b>3</b>
The impact of Nurture Group principles and practice on the whole primary school.....	3
<b>Contents</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Abbreviations and Definitions</b> .....	<b>13</b>
Section 1: Paper 1.....	16
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Chapter 1</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Introduction, Theory and Practice of NGs and Literature review</b> .....	<b>17</b>
1.1 Introduction.....	17
1.2 Literature review.....	17
1.2.1 Theory Underpinning NGs.....	17
1.2.2 NGs in Practice.....	21
1.2.3 Effectiveness of NGs upon children.....	22
1.2.4 Opportunity Cost.....	26
1.2.5 Effectiveness of NGs upon the school.....	26
1.3 Summary and Research Aims.....	28
<b>Chapter 2</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>Design and method</b> .....	<b>30</b>
2.1 Epistemological and methodological perspectives.....	30
2.2 Procedure.....	33
2.3 Methods.....	34

2.3.1 Observations .....	34
2.3.2 Interviews .....	35
2.3.3 Boxall Profile .....	36
2.3.4 Reflective Journal.....	37
2.4 Participants and sampling.....	37
2.4.1 Information about the school and the NGs.....	38
2.5 Data analysis: Thematic analysis.....	39
2.5.1 Thematic analysis process .....	39
2.6 Ethics .....	40
<b>Chapter 3.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Results .....</b>	<b>42</b>
3.1 Impact upon NG children - Positive .....	42
3.1.1 Social, emotional and behavioural gains .....	43
3.1.1.1 Observation Records .....	45
3.1.1.2 Boxall Profile Data.....	46
3.1.2 Academic gains .....	47
Impact upon NG children - Negative .....	49
3.1.3 Isolation .....	49
3.1.3.1 Perceptions, attitudes and feelings of NG children.....	49
3.1.3.2 Reintegration.....	50
3.1.3.3 Practical Reasons: Lack of space .....	50
3.1.4 Reintegration Concerns .....	51
3.1.4.1 Difficulties Handling Change .....	51
3.1.4.2 Other children’s perceptions of NG children.....	52

Summary.....	52
3.2 Impact upon school - Positive .....	52
3.2.1 Influence on other classrooms.....	52
3.2.1.1 Influence on mainstream teachers.....	52
3.2.1.2 Influence on mainstream children.....	53
3.2.2 Influence on school’s culture and practices .....	54
3.2.2.1 Understanding children’s behaviour .....	54
3.2.2.2 Identification of needs.....	55
3.2.2.3 Spreading good practice.....	56
Impact upon school - Negative .....	56
3.2.3 Cost.....	56
3.2.3.1 Cost of NG provision.....	56
3.2.4 Perceptions .....	57
3.2.4.1 External perceptions of school.....	57
3.2.4.2 Internal staff perceptions of NG .....	58
3.2.5 Influence on mainstream children .....	59
3.2.5.1 Unfairness .....	59
3.2.6 Observation records and extracts from reflective journal .....	60
Summary.....	60
<b>Chapter 4.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>4.1 How are NG pupils affected by the NG provision? What do the NG pupils gain and lose from their placement in the NG? .....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>4.2 How is the school affected by the NG provision? .....</b>	<b>64</b>

<b>Chapter 5</b> .....	<b>66</b>
<b>Bridging Phase 1 of research to Phase 2</b> .....	<b>66</b>
The impact of Nurture Group principles and practice on the whole primary school.....	67
Section 2: Paper 2.....	67
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>68</b>
<b>Chapter 6</b> .....	<b>69</b>
<b>Introduction and Literature Review</b> .....	<b>69</b>
6.1 Introduction .....	69
6.2 Literature review.....	69
6.2.1 Communication between NG and mainstream staff .....	70
5.2.2 Communication with Parents .....	72
6.3 Summary and Research Questions .....	75
<b>Chapter 7</b> .....	<b>76</b>
<b>Design and method</b> .....	<b>76</b>
7.1 Epistemological and methodological perspectives.....	76
7.2 Procedure .....	76
7.3 Methods .....	76
7.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews .....	76
7.4 Participants and sampling.....	76
7.4.1 Information about the school and the NGs.....	77
7.5 Data analysis: Thematic analysis.....	77
7.6 Ethics .....	77
<b>Chapter 8</b> .....	<b>78</b>
<b>Results</b> .....	<b>78</b>

8.1 Quality of Communication .....	78
8.1.1 Communication .....	78
8.1.1.1 Sharing Information .....	78
8.1.1.2 Sharing practices .....	81
8.1.1.3 Reasons for poor communication .....	81
8.1.1.4 Impact of the poor communication and poor understandings on NG staff .....	82
8.2 NG enablers .....	83
8.2.1 Communication .....	83
8.2.1.1 Impact on parents of NG children .....	83
8.2.1.2 Share of strategies .....	85
8.2.1.3 Understanding and support developed good perceptions of NG staff .....	85
8.3 NG barriers .....	86
8.3.1 Challenges to involvement in the NGs .....	86
8.3.1.1 Stigma attached .....	86
8.4 School enablers .....	87
8.4.1 Forms of communication .....	87
8.4.1.1 Informal meetings .....	87
8.4.1.2 Formal meetings .....	88
8.4.1.3 Reports .....	89
8.4.1.4 Newsletters .....	90
8.4.1.5 Phone calls .....	90
8.4.2 Positive attitude .....	91
8.4.3 Decision making .....	92

8.4.3.1 Participation in formal bodies .....	92
8.4.3.2 Engagement in informal school decisions .....	93
8.4.4 Community-school relations .....	93
8.4.4.1 Out-of-school opportunities .....	93
8.4.4.2 Volunteering .....	94
8.4.4.3 Learning opportunities .....	94
8.5 School Barriers .....	95
8.5.1 Attitudinal barriers .....	95
8.5.2 Socio-cultural barriers .....	96
8.5.3 Resource Barriers .....	97
8.5.4 Communication Barriers .....	97
<b>Chapter 9.....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Discussion.....</b>	<b>99</b>
9.1 What is the nature of communication between teaching staff? .....	99
9.2 What are the enablers and barriers of parental involvement in the NG?.....	100
9.3 What are the enablers and barriers of parental involvement in the school? .....	101
<b>Chapter 10.....</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>104</b>
10.1 Summary of conclusions from Paper 1 and 2 .....	104
10.2 Limitations of the study .....	106
10.3 Future Directions and Implications for EPs .....	109
9.4 Recommendations for practice .....	110
<b>Chapter 11.....</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>112</b>

Section 3 .....	123
<b>Chapter 12.....</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>123</b>
Appendix 1: Completed Observation Schedule .....	123
Appendix 2: Mainstream teacher Semi-Structured Interview Schedule .....	126
Mainstream teacher Semi-Structured Interview Schedule continued: .....	127
Appendix 3: NG children Semi-Structured Interview Schedule .....	129
Appendix 4: Mainstream children Semi-Structured Interview Schedule.....	131
Appendix 5: Table showing a summary of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) Phases of thematic analysis .....	132
Appendix 6: Table showing an example of the identification of initial codes.....	133
Appendix 7: Table showing data extracts collated together within ‘mainstream teachers can get on with their teaching’ code.....	134
Appendix 8: Figure showing initial thematic map showing seven subthemes that show the positive impact of the NG upon NG children and five subthemes themes that show the negative impact of the NG upon NG children .....	135
Appendix 9: Figure showing final thematic map showing four sub-ordinate themes and the result of the re-organisation of codes and subthemes for positive and negative impact of the NG upon NG children.....	137
Appendix 10: Table showing themes, codes and their associated meanings .....	139
Appendix 11: Table showing the responses of different groups of participants regarding the positive impact of the NG upon the NG children .....	144
Appendix 12: Table showing the responses of different groups of participants regarding the negative impact of the NG upon the NG children.....	147
Appendix 13: Certificate of Ethical Approval .....	151
Appendix 14: Information Sheet and Consent Form for the Head teacher .....	159
Appendix 15: Table showing super-ordinate, sub-ordinate and sub themes.....	162

Appendix 16: Information about groups of participants .....	163
Appendix 17: Numbered list of quotations from the transcript that are sourced in the results section .....	164
Appendix 18: Number of times pro-social and negative behaviours were observed per term .....	170
Appendix 19: Table showing the behaviour progress made by individual children each term .....	171
Appendix 20: The table is showing the total number of times pro-social and negative behaviours were observed in Term 1, Term 2 and Term 3.....	172
Appendix 21: Table showing the pre and post NG intervention Boxall scores for a sample of six children in addition to the impact scores .....	173
Appendix 22: Table showing a summary of improvement for the two strands for a sample of six children in addition to the impact scores .....	175
Appendix 23: Selected observations about the ways nurturing is promoted in the wider school environment and extracts from the researcher’s reflective journal..	177
Appendix 24: Shows the factors that affected the effectiveness of NGs .....	186
Appendix 25: Table showing super-ordinate, sub-ordinate and sub themes.....	187
Section 4.....	188
<b>Literature Review.....</b>	<b>188</b>

## Abbreviations and Definitions

EBD	Pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
Emergent Theme	Themes that emerged in the qualitative data analysis
EP	Educational Psychologist
Impact Scores	Difference between pre- and post-Boxall measures
KS1	Key Stage 1
KS2	Key Stage 2
Las	Local Authorities
MC1	Mainstream Child 1
MC2	Mainstream Child 2
MC3	Mainstream Child 3
MC4	Mainstream Child 4
MC5	Mainstream Child 5
MP1	Parent 1 whose child is in the mainstream classes
MP2	Parent 2 whose child is in the mainstream classes
MP3	Parent 3 whose child is in the mainstream classes
MP4	Parent 4 whose child is in the mainstream classes
MP5	Parent 5 whose child is in the mainstream classes
MT1	Mainstream Teacher 1
MT2	Mainstream Teacher 2
MT3	Mainstream Teacher 3

MTA1	Mainstream Teaching Assistant 1
MTA2	Mainstream Teaching Assistant 2
NG	Nurture Group
NGC1	Nurture Group Child 1
NGC2	Nurture Group Child 2
NGC3	Nurture Group Child 3
NGC4	Nurture Group Child 4
NGN	Nurture Group Network
NGP1	Parent 1 whose child is in the NG
NGP2	Parent 2 whose child is in the NG
NGP3	Parent 3 whose child is in the NG
NGT1	Nurture Group Teacher 1
NGT2	Nurture Group Teacher 2
NGTA1	Nurture Group Teaching Assistant 1
NGTA2	Nurture Group Teaching Assistant 2
NGTA3	Nurture Group Teaching Assistant 3
SCM1	School Community Member 1
SCM2	School Community Member 2
SCM3	School Community Member 3
SCP1	Support Professional 1
SCP2	Support Professional 2
SM1	Senior Management 1
SM2	Senior Management 2

SEB	Social, emotional and behavioural
SEBD	Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties
SSI	Semi-structured interview
SDQ	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
Subtheme	Term used to describe a cluster of related themes within a sub-ordinate theme
Sub-ordinate	Term used to describe a cluster of related secondary themes
Super-ordinate theme	Term used to describe a cluster of related emergent themes
TA	Teaching Assistant

# 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.