



School of Education

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

**“It’s your bread and butter”: An Exploration of
Teacher Perceptions of Nurture Principles in the
Whole Class Setting**

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for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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Declaration of Originality

This thesis is the result of the author's original research. It has been composed by the author and has not been previously submitted for examination which has led to the award of a degree.

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A handwritten signature in blue ink on a light blue background. The signature reads "Angela Mary S-Stake" in a cursive script.

Date: 22nd April 2024

Abstract

The *Six Principles of Nurture* (Holmes & Boyd, 1999) have been used in schools for over two decades to support children and young people's wellbeing. They are expected to form whole class and whole school wellbeing approaches in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2017).

The aim of this study was to explore teacher perceptions of the principles and their relevance to everyday practice in the mainstream classroom. Included in the study was an appraisal of the term *nurturing pedagogy*, as first developed in early years education in Ireland (Hayes, 2008), and the extent to which Scottish teachers were aware of the concept as it aligned with current nurturing practice.

This research used a case study design with four embedded units of analysis: 3 primary schools and 1 secondary school in a 'cluster' of schools in one Scottish local authority. Visually-mediated focus groups and semi-structured interviews were carried out to investigate the views of 27 participants. Three overarching themes were identified. Professional stance revealed that participants perceived nurture practice as a natural approach for teachers, which included concepts of care and empathy as tantamount to nurturing approaches in the classroom. Professional behaviours for equitable practice detailed participants' understanding of nurture principles as similar to the everyday actions of teachers to provide equitable education in their classrooms. This included adult understanding of children and young people's family backgrounds and experiences. Finally, the challenges of using nurture principles in the mainstream classroom were explored in tensions and dilemmas in nurture practice. Findings included concerns over resources, time, staff development, and perceived imbalance between nurture principles and behaviour management strategies.

The study conclusions contribute a Framework for Nurturing Pedagogy to improve teacher understanding and use of nurture principles in their classrooms. The framework adds to the academic field and enhances the relevance of *The Six Principles of Nurture* (Holmes & Boyd, 1999) in classrooms today through a deeper exploration of additional concepts such as care, empathy, consistency, flexibility, equity, and understanding behaviour. Implications for educational policy are identified alongside the next steps for research in nurture practice.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Nurture practice has been a key focus in UK schools for several decades (Boxall, 2002) and has grown in usage across Europe (Colley, 2017), Canada (Coleman & Cooper, 2017), and beyond. It is an approach initially associated with small group interventions to support vulnerable children who require help with their social, emotional, and behavioural needs due to missing or distorted early life experiences (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000; Boxall & Lucas, 2012). However, there is now a wider association with the practice to include children and young people's wellbeing at the classroom and whole school level (Ruby, 2018). It presents a challenge for teachers who are mainstream practitioners and have had no previous experience or knowledge of a specialist approach to supporting children and young people's emotional wellbeing (Syrnyk, 2012).

In this introductory chapter, I set the scene and impetus for the study by discussing the complexities surrounding nurture practice in schools. Chapters 2 to 7 are summarised to give a brief overview of the literature review, findings and conclusions. Specific terminology and language used throughout the thesis is explained and the research questions shown.

1.1 Nurture practice in schools

As an approach to support children and young people with their wellbeing needs in classrooms and schools, nurture practice has become increasingly associated with the concept of equity in educational settings, particularly in the Scottish policy context through initiatives such as the *National Improvement Framework* (Scottish Government, 2023), and reviews of additional support for learning in schools (Scottish Government, 2020). Although initially used to support children at the beginning stages of primary education, around age five, the practice has evolved for use in the primary school sector for children up to the age of eleven years and in secondary schools for adolescents aged twelve years and older (Brawls & Ruby, 2023).

Nurture practice includes a range of models that vary in size, structure, length of provision, and the environment in which they take place (NurtureUK, 2020). These developments incorporate the use of nurture practice beyond small group settings (Coleman, 2020), and guide nurture-based interventions in schools across the devolved education systems of the United Kingdom. The approach is predicated on *The Six Principles of Nurture* (TSPN) and was initially created by Holmes and Boyd (1999). However, the language in one of the principles changed from *self-esteem* to *wellbeing* to expand the intended impact of nurture practice for children (NurtureUK, 2020). As TSPN are mentioned throughout the thesis, they will be referenced with the updated version from NurtureUK. However, it is acknowledged that their original conceptualisation is attributed to the work of Holmes and Boyd (1999).

Due to the change in terminology, the nurture principles have evolved into the following list:

- Children's learning is understood developmentally
- The classroom offers a safe base
- Language is understood as a vital means of communication
- All behaviour is communication
- Transitions are significant in the lives of children
- Nurture is important for the development of wellbeing (NurtureUK, 2020)

Albeit these principles are used widely in UK schools as the foundation of nurture practice, there seems to be limited research on how teachers view them and what they mean for pedagogical approaches in the classroom. Most research on nurture practice, as found at the point of writing this thesis, tends to be on the effect of nurture group interventions on a small number of children who attend separate rooms for their social and emotional wellbeing needs (Hughes & Schlosser, 2014). Academic work where teachers' views are sought regarding nurturing approaches, often includes studies from nurture group teachers (Kearney & Nowak, 2019), rather than teachers who are in mainstream classrooms. To date, there seems to be little evidence of research that explores mainstream teachers' perceptions of TSPN and how they fit into a classroom teacher's day-to-day pedagogical approach.

This is an important point that requires further exploration because there has been a significant focus on developing the use of TSPN to create nurturing classrooms (Boxall & Lucas, 2012), nurturing schools (Education Scotland, 2017), nurturing cities (March & Kearney, 2017) and nurturing local authorities through initiatives such

as *Renfrewshire Nurturing Relationships Approach* (Carleton *et al.*, 2021; Education Scotland, 2022). In Scotland, government guidance on nurture practice, aligned with TSPN, in whole class and whole school settings, is an aspect of self-improvement evaluation for schools that choose to build the approach into their improvement plans and health and wellbeing curriculum (Education Scotland, 2017). Therefore, there is a focus on nurture practice at the whole class and whole school levels, with limited research on how classroom teachers use TSPN in their current classroom practice. A study that explores teachers' views on nurture practice should add to the academic field by highlighting the way nurture principles might be used in everyday teaching practice with large numbers of children, potentially demystifying the approach as it moves from small group intervention to a whole class setting.

1.2 Professional and academic impetus for the study

Supporting children's wellbeing has been central to my teaching practice over the last twenty years. Much of this journey has involved immersion in nurture practice, either as a nurture room teacher or as someone leading initiatives across whole school communities. In my current role, I lead local authority professional learning to support teachers in understanding the theory and practice of nurture. With this in mind, I am first to accept my potential bias towards the approach and associated principles which are steeped in my professional practice. However, this was not always the case. Previously my pedagogy was dominated by behaviourist approaches, which were strengthened through my experience during my Initial Teacher Education (ITE) qualification and habits learned in teaching placements as a student. I experienced the 'don't smile until Christmas' advice as a key strategy for

working with primary school-aged children. I was assured that this would help me maintain control of my classroom. However, I found out, very early on in my career, that it did not.

My “tipping point”, the stage at which I realised things could be different for me and the children in my classroom, came around five years after I qualified when I was asked to run a nurture room (Mowat, 2007, p.86). The experience opened my mind and transformed my thinking. Not to pedagogical practice that was perfect but to practice that was different for everyone. I became very interested in what TSPN meant for life beyond the nurture room. How could this practice impact children and adults in whole class settings across the school community? The change over time in my pedagogical approach was clear and resonated with some of the writers I have discovered while writing this thesis. Murphy (2009) suggested that changes in philosophy and pedagogy can occur throughout a teacher’s career, and this was a relevant and succinct summary of what happened to me. In my case, discovering nurture practice impacted my sense of agency and motivation to change how I taught and interacted with the children in my classroom (Priestly *et al.*, 2017).

In addition to my professional epiphany, I noticed that, over the past two decades, there had been a significant change in teaching practice towards a focus on wellbeing, which included the concept of nurture through Scottish Government initiatives and frameworks such as *Getting It Right For Every Child* (GIRFEC)(Scottish Government, 2008) and *Responsibility of All* (Scottish Government, 2014). I taught wellbeing lessons before the curriculum change to *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE) (Scottish Government, 2004). Based on my teaching

experience, I would argue that the shift raised awareness in Scotland of wellbeing in the curriculum as we moved from the *5-14 Curriculum* (Malcolm, 1997) to *CfE* (Scottish Government, 2004). This may be due to the prominence the term wellbeing was given through policy changes such as *Building the Curriculum 3* (Education Scotland, 2008). However, it should be cautiously noted that this observation was based on my professional experience of teaching both curriculum designs, and I accept that others may hold a different view.

From 2017 onwards, conversations took place in my school around whole school approaches to nurture practice, which was entirely predicated on TSPN. There seemed to be an expected shift in the use of nurture practice to include whole classrooms of children, not just those in small group interventions. This was a national expectation through the development of whole school evaluation approaches such as *Applying Nurture as a Whole School Approach* (Education Scotland, 2017). The national approach heavily influenced decisions made by the local authority in which I worked. This led to whole school nurture practice becoming a school improvement priority for senior leadership teams in the schools where I taught. However, this was a challenge because the same schools seemed to be led by behaviourist approaches, rules and routines (Wheldall, 2014), rewards and sanctions (Kohn, 2018), and, in the case of the secondary sector, pupil detentions.

I experienced these attempted shifts in whole school culture in the early years, primary and secondary settings. Having taken a school through the *How Nurturing is Our School* evaluation, I could see why it was a useful exercise at the time (Education Scotland, 2017). It generated thought, discussion, and ideas. It also created some additional questions as I worked with colleagues to establish how we

adhered to nurture principles as a team and what could be done to improve our practice. Due to my professional epiphany, I was sure a move from behaviourist approaches was a positive step, but supporting adults in a whole school community to reflect on their practice was challenging.

During the whole school evaluation process, I began to consider what nurture meant to teachers in mainstream settings and how they understood it in their classrooms. It became clear during the reflexive sessions I led that moving toward a teaching approach initially designed for small groups may not be straightforward and seamless for classroom teachers. Listening to practitioners in my school made me think about the issue on a wider scale, which questioned how if at all, TSPN could be encompassed in day-to-day practice for classroom teachers.

More importantly, how was a mainstream classroom teacher expected to adopt a set of principles that were perceived to be a specific teaching approach for a small group setting? I believed it was also important to find out how principles, which were not expected professional standards, could be embedded in mainstream classrooms. Including the term mainstream is important as I worked across mainstream settings in early years establishments, primary schools, and secondary schools. None of these educational settings were deemed specialist provisions by Scottish government definitions (Scottish Government, 2019). To add to the complexity of these questions, nurture practice was seen as a specialist intervention by a number of the staff in the schools where I worked. More often than not, it was also seen as 'soft' by colleagues who had had no experience of the practice. Therefore, finding out how mainstream classroom teachers understood nurture practice was of

significant interest to me, as was the likelihood that it was a more complicated change than simply embedding TSPN into everyday teaching practice.

1.2.1 Previous research experience

In 2016, I completed a MEd with Strathclyde University. The focus for the research was an exploration of resilience, self-esteem and the impact on children's mental and emotional wellbeing. The findings from the research detailed the crucial impact that positive student-teacher relationships could have on a child, through approaches such as nurture practice. The discovery of the positive wellbeing impact of relational approaches should not have been a surprise to me, given my experience of nurture practice, however it did take me by surprise because of the associated impact on emotional wellbeing concepts such as self-esteem and resilience (O'Neill, 2016).

It made sense that nurture practice worked both in and beyond the nurture room. Due to my experience as a nurture teacher, I made a point of adhering to TSPN in whole class lessons, in the canteen, in corridors, and most certainly when a child was in distress. However, I wondered what this meant for teachers who did not work in nurture groups. What about mainstream practitioners who did not have my understanding of the theory and practice of nurture? How would they use TSPN in their classrooms? How did they perceive the concept of nurture and the associated practice underpinned by the principles?

The same questions were developed simultaneously through my research experience and practical experience in school evaluations. Questions on how

teachers understood nurture in a whole class setting and beyond were beginning to form. Having decided to embark on the EdD, due to this ongoing niggle, I started to explore literature for the topic and hone in on specific research questions. I was strongly drawn to the suggestion that “research begins with something that we are genuinely surprised to find and look to understand further” (Reichertz, 2014, p.125). This explanation of the reason for research made sense to me when, during my literature search, I came across a seminal paper that, if I may be so colloquial for a moment, was my game-changer.

Discovering *A Case for a Nurturing Pedagogy* (Hayes, 2008) was a very important step in this study as it raised further questions about nurture practice as a possible pedagogical approach in education. It introduced a phrase that ignited my interest at a pedagogical level. Would such a phrase work to support nurture practice in the classroom? How might teachers understand it? Exploring whether teachers were already familiar with this term was of great interest to me and understanding how it was currently used in educational research and practice was a motivating factor in developing research questions for the study. The impact of Hayes’s (2008) paper is developed further in the next chapter. However, it is important to establish its placement in the impetus for this study as it had a significant influence on my exploration of a research gap. It set the foundation for the academic contribution of this study to the field of nurture practice and research.

1.3 Research aims and questions

The study aimed to explore classroom teachers' perceptions of the use and effectiveness of TSPN in their classroom. This included investigating nurture practice as a pedagogical approach, as originally theorised by Hayes (2008). An important aspect of the research aim was to hear and understand teacher views on the use of TSPN and their perception of the term nurturing pedagogy. Figure 1 shows the main and sub-research questions, which are colour-coded to align with the colours on the visual prompts used for data gathering. This will be further explained in Chapter 3.

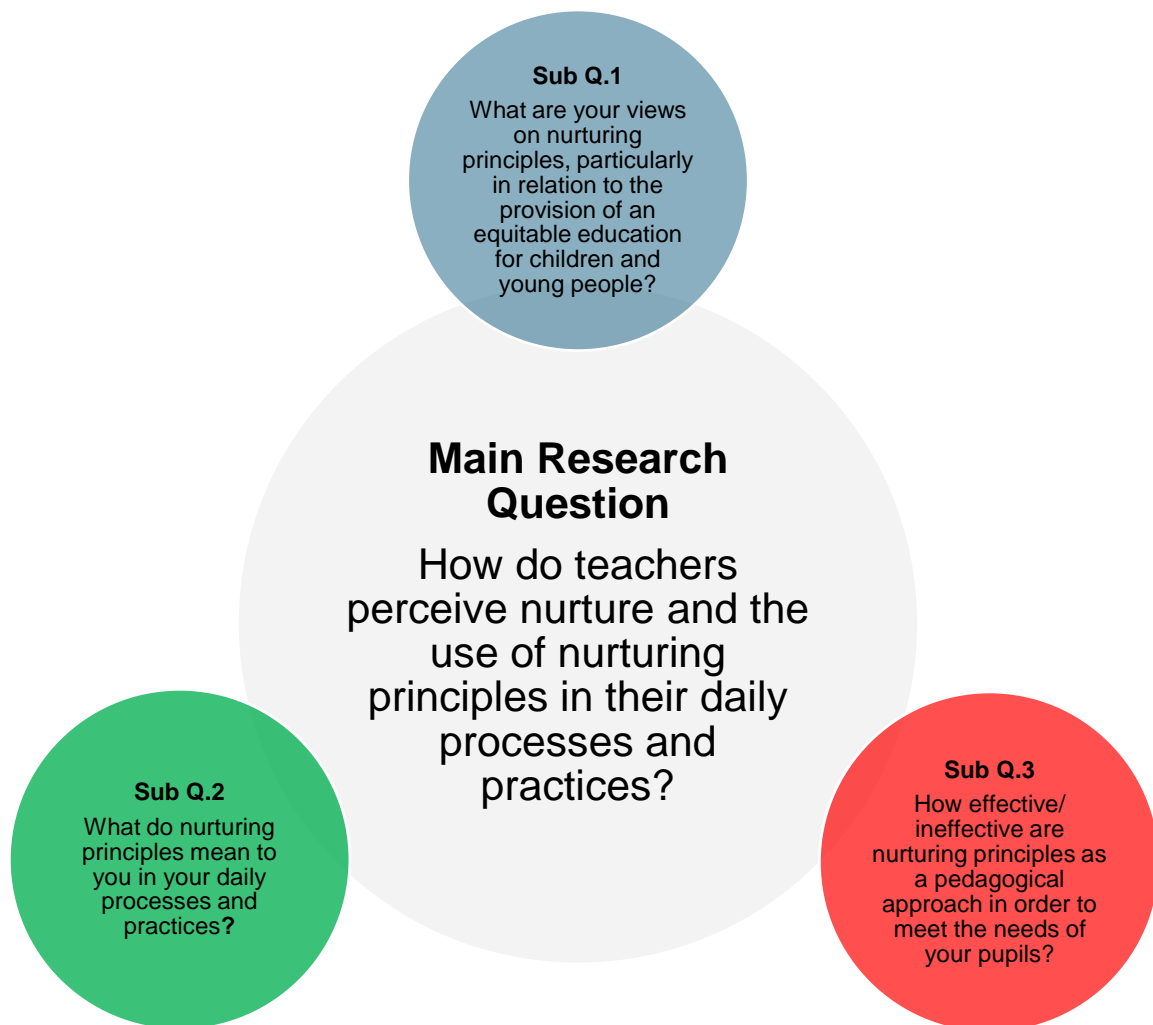


Figure 1: Main and sub-research questions

1.4 Overview of the thesis

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 provides a conceptual framework for the literature review. It consists of four sections: conceptualising nurture, nurture theory through education, nurture practice through education, and nurture through pedagogy. Given that the impetus for the study includes a theoretical paper on nurturing pedagogy, several pedagogical approaches are summarised and evaluated. Included is a specific focus on relational pedagogy to establish where Hayes's (2008) work sits alongside current theories of teaching and learning that are predicated on relational practice.

It would have been simpler to explore nurture and relational pedagogy in isolation. However, the addition of behaviourist pedagogy is deliberate. This is due to the strength of its position in the schools I worked with in 2019. I want to be clear that I am not suggesting an either/or position between behaviourist pedagogy and relational pedagogy because both are extremely complicated and, at times, could be useful approaches depending on the child, context, and situation (Cowley, 2014; Kyriacou, 2018). However, within this thesis, the purpose of focusing on specific pedagogies is to set the scene for a perceived dichotomy between relational and behaviourist pedagogy in participant's thinking, as might be exemplified by the microcosm of Twitter/X, when discussing nurture practice and supporting the analysis of findings in the data from Chapters 4 to 6.

In the final section of Chapter 2, nurture practice is explored through national and international studies. Specific research is discussed and critiqued to develop an

understanding of existing literature on nurture practice at the whole class and school levels. The limited literature on teacher perceptions, as they pertain to TSPN in the mainstream classroom, is explored.

Chapter 3 sets out the constructivist ontology, pragmatic epistemology, and case study design used in my research. It details data gathering methods, including visually mediated focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The chapter explains how data was analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Quality indicators, ethical considerations, and my reflections on the research limitations are included.

The next three chapters each discuss an overarching theme developed from the analysis process. In Chapter 4, the first set of findings is discussed under the overarching theme: Professional stance. It is supported by three sub-themes. They are:

- Sub-Theme One “It’s your bread and butter”: The basics of teaching
- Sub-Theme Two: Nurture practice as evolving
- Sub-Theme Three: Relational practice through care and empathy

Chapter 5 focuses on the second overarching theme: Professional behaviours for equitable practice, and is supported by two sub-themes:

- Sub-Theme One: “Don’t judge a book by its cover”: Understanding backgrounds to meet needs
- Sub-Theme Two: “Picking up on the wee things”: Environment as safety

In the third and final findings chapter, the overarching theme: Tensions and dilemmas in nurture practice is supported in Chapter 6 by the following sub-themes:

- Sub-Theme One: A behavioural lens on nurture practice
- Sub-Theme Two: The negative impact of nurture practice
- Sub-Theme Three: “In reality”: Tensions and contradictions to effective nurture practice

The concluding chapter summarises the study's findings. My contribution to the academic field is shown through the development of a Framework for a Nurturing Pedagogy, which is offered as a way to support teachers understanding of TSPN in the whole class setting. The implications for educational practice and policy are detailed and the chapter concludes with my personal reflections on the research experience.

1.4.1 A brief note on terminology

Throughout the thesis, some terms are used interchangeably. The terms *nurture practice* and *approaches* are used for variety and readability. However, they are viewed as similar where TSPN are used to underpin approaches to nurture practice.

The word *wellbeing* is used throughout the thesis and refers predominantly to children and young people’s emotional wellbeing. This is not to discount other aspects of wellbeing, such as physical health, but to clarify the parameters of nurture practice as targeted by this thesis. This is because nurture practice, using TSPN, is

often used to support children and young people with emotional wellbeing needs (Boxall & Lucas, 2012).

It is acknowledged that the thesis explores teachers' perceptions, and the definition of *perception* is about understanding something from a particular stance or viewpoint (Hamlyn, 2017). At times, the word *perspective* is used due to the close nature of the term with a view of a particular concept (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014) and to support a variety of language for the reader.

Children, and the fuller term, *children and young people*, means children of school age in Scottish primary (five to eleven years) and secondary schools (twelve to eighteen years). One word is sometimes used to cut down on word count. This is also the case with the phrase *visually-mediated focus groups* in the findings and discussion chapters. Therefore, it can be assumed that each time a data extract is detailed from School One or School Three with an indication of focus group data, it is visually-mediated.

The term *mainstream* is used and defined in the thesis as meaning children in classrooms of up to thirty pupils, where children are taught in an inclusive way (Florian & Beaton, 2018) with their peers to embed the "presumption of mainstream" for a range of children with additional support needs (Scottish Government, 2019, p.1). *Specialist* provisions or approaches are described in this research as meaning those that take place outside of the mainstream class environment. However, it is acknowledged that the terms *specialist* and *mainstream* are complicated (Shaw,

2017) and that labelling them is not a binary position when considering the nature of educational provision for children and young people (Burman & Miles, 2020). For this reason, the term *specialist* is used sparingly to illustrate participants' perceptions of nurture practice as something that happens elsewhere in the school rather than in their classroom.

Finally, the terms *behaviourism* and *behaviourist* are used briefly in Chapter 2 as part of a discussion on pedagogy. The reason for this is the link between the learning and psychological theories (Hatfield, 2003) and their influence on the development of terminology still used in schools (Kohn, 2018). I accept that this is a controversial position. However, it seems challenging to discuss perceptions of behaviour without acknowledging their origins. Phrases such as *behaviour support* (Wheldall, 2014) and *behaviour management* (Bennett, 2020) are used in the thesis to acknowledge behaviourist terminology adopted by adults in schools.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter will review and clarify various concepts directly associated with nurture, including the theoretical and practical implications of nurture through education.

Previous literature on teachers' views of nurture practice in schools is included to establish if research exists on teachers' views of *The Six Principles of Nurture* (TSPN) (Holmes & Boyd, 1999; NurtureUK, 2020) beyond the nurture group setting.

A review of pedagogy, particularly relational pedagogy and a theoretical representation of nurture pedagogy (Hayes, 2008), will conclude the chapter alongside a conceptual framework for the study.

2.1 Approach to the literature search

The literature search for the study included books, journals, online articles, and some cautious use of “grey literature” to get a sense of additional texts and recommended sources (Hart, 2001, p.94). Initial Boolean searches of university databases across the Educational Resource Information Centre (ERIC) and Google Scholar were used for each section of the literature review based on the key headings on each section. For example, multiple repeat searches for *nurture*, *empathy*, *attachment theory*,

attunement, wellbeing, nurture practice, teacher perceptions or views, and whole school nurture approaches were used with additional sub-searches regularly. This included further follow-ups for the analysis and discussion in chapters 4 to 6.

The original paper by Hayes (2008) was loaded into Connected Papers (2022), a visual online tool to support academic literature searches on key topics and seminal texts. Associated papers, relevant to the primary and secondary sectors, were followed up with Boolean searches on databases as detailed above. The ongoing search and review of literature was a multi-layered process that spanned the seven-year experience of creating the thesis.

2.2 Conceptualising nurture

In this first section, I will consider and refine the meaning of *nurture* as a concept linked to parenting and caregiving beyond the home. The theoretical framework of *attachment* is explored alongside two additional terms, *attunement*, and *empathy*, as they align with the definition of nurture for this study. A proposed definition of nurture will conclude the section.

2.2.1 Defining nurture

Nurture is “an action word” when considering the behaviour of adults responsible for the care and development of children (Solomon, 2016, p.8). It is a dynamic aspect of parental caregiving that influences a child’s environment, where the nature *or* nurture

debate has raged for several decades (Marshall, 1977; Wachs, 1992). The issue is still alive today (Tabery, 2023), and I do not intend to dive into it in detail as it is not the focus of my thesis. However, the debate should be mentioned as a starting point to understand nurture as once viewed in a binary position between the impact of the genetic disposition (nature) and the effect of the environment and actions of parents (nurture) on positive or negative outcomes for a child (Wachs, 1992). Whereas I acknowledge the position of nurture in this argument, I would agree with Bazalgette (2017), who suggested that consideration of *both* nature and nurture is essential and that “nature *versus* nurture is yesterday’s debate” (2017. P.79).

Nurture is strongly associated with good parenting (Riley & Bogenschneider, 2006; Smith, 2010; Steinberg, 2004). The parenting style a child experiences will significantly influence them throughout their life (Kirby, 2019). In her seminal text, Baumrind (1966) described three parenting styles: authoritarian, permissive and authoritative. Authoritarian parenting is firm parental control, where rules and expectations are paramount in raising children. Punitive measures are key to controlling behaviour, and the parent does not consider the child’s voice (Baumrind, 1966, 1978). Permissive parenting is “the antithesis to the [authoritarian] thesis” (Baumrind, 1966, p.889). Parents use non-punitive approaches to support their child’s development in this parenting style. The child’s voice is considered important, and parents consult with their child on challenges to work alongside their “impulses, desires and actions [where] explanation is given for decisions” (Baumrind, 1966, p. 890). The third option, provided by Baumrind (1966, 1978), is authoritative parenting. In this style, parents support their child in a:

“rational, issue-orientated manner...encouraging verbal give and take...sharing the reasoning behind [decisions and] solicits objections when the child refuses to conform. Both autonomous self-will and discipline conformity are valued by the authoritative parent. Therefore...they exert firm control at points of parent-child divergence but do not hem the child in with restrictions. [They] enforce [their] own perspective as an adult but recognise the child’s individual interests and special ways” (Baumrind, 1966, p.891).

Baumrind (1978) called this approach “authoritative control”, which she offered as an alternative to the either/or choice between authoritarian and permissive parenting styles (Baumrind, 1978, p.243). I would argue that nurture is likely to sit most comfortably alongside Baumrind’s (1966, 1978) authoritative parenting because of my experience as a parent and nurture practitioner. My professional reflection is that nurture is perceived as at the opposite end of the spectrum from punitive controlling approaches in the classroom and is often viewed as the softer option (Whitaker, 2021). However, I suggest that nurture more succinctly aligns with a parenting style that allows for growth and development alongside the guidance and attention of trusted adults.

As a set of parental behaviours in the child’s environment, nurture is associated with actions that meet a child’s needs, such as “bathing, feeding, clothing” (Gutman *et al.*, 2009, p.3). However, aspects of basic survival are insufficient to describe the term nurture (*ibid*, 2009). Gutman *et al.*’s (2009) argument is important because my experiences as a parent lead me to agree that there is more to nurture than meeting basic needs. I would offer an extension of the description provided to include “comfort...and sensitivity” (Eve *et al.*, 2014, p.120), “protection and strength” (Walsh,

2023, p.365), and relational connection to support the development of emotional wellbeing and secure attachments (Zeedyk, 2024).

Developing secure attachments is an important part of a child's relationship with their parents (Collins *et al.*, 2002; Steinberg, 2004; Layard & Dunn, 2009). Not all children can form secure attachments, and this stems from a variety of reasons. Parental death, ill health, addiction, poverty, and family breakdown can all interfere with the formation of strong bonds (Zeedyk, 2020). Many parents experience life challenges that make it hard to parent well. My professional encounters with such parents incline me to avoid speaking of 'bad parents', with its judgemental and moralistic overtones. Many of the families I have worked with throughout my career have tried their best for their children but have struggled due to their own experiences of family, school, and, in most cases, poverty. Nevertheless, children do experience poor parenting, leading to dysfunctional attachments, which, in turn, negatively impact their development.

An important consideration is how professional conceptions of 'good parenting' are influenced by cultural assumptions. For example, professionals may conflate nurturing parenting with the norms of the affluent middle classes. Dermott and Pomati's (2016) noted that:

"critiques of poor parenting have swiftly transformed into criticism of poor parents, reproducing negative images of working class families...[and that] researchers have highlighted that dominant ideas of good parenthood derive largely from middle-class perspectives" (Dermott & Pomatti, 2016, p. 2-3).

Viewing parenting as a culturally situated social practice is important when considering the concept of nurture. My professional experience has shown that teachers can make assumptions about poorer families and parents' capacity to 'nurture' their children. Rather than deterministic assumptions on bad parenting, viewing parenting as good enough could be an alternative position (Geddes, 2006), where the concept of good enough families (Winnicott, 1965) has been around for many years. The notion of good enough parenting might allow for the normal development of children at home (Riley & Bogenschneider, 2006). However, care should be taken when considering parental capacity for offering good enough parenting (Tregeagle *et al.*, 1997). Some writers in the field of parenting literature who have highlighted the importance of nurture for the growth and development of children have suggested that the view of good enough parenting lowers parents' expectations and leads to mediocre outcomes for children (Gutman *et al.*, 2009). This includes recent literature that explored the importance of nurture as a key to the success of strong, secure attachments in infancy, which impact overall wellbeing, development (Kirshenbaum, 2023), and connections throughout the child's life (Zeedyk, 2024).

2.2.2 Nurture and attachment theory

Attachment theory is closely associated with the concept of nurture. Bowlby (1969) first developed the term to explain the importance of parental care in a child's life and his original work focused on the impact of the home environment, the mother as primary caregiver, and the bonding process between infant and mother to provide a secure base for the growth and development of the child. Bowlby (1969) argued that an unresponsive mother could severely affect a developing child due to potentially

inconsistent responses to basic needs such as crying, eating, and sleeping. He posited that the behaviour of the primary caregiver had a lasting impact on a child's development, emotional wellbeing, and trust in adults. Bowlby (1969) suggested that unpredictable care responses caused a rupture in the child's natural attachment to their mother and negatively influenced them later in life due to fundamental, missing early nurturing experiences as an infant. This included the need for nurturing experiences in infancy to provide a secure base for children (Bowlby, 1988).

In addition to Bowlby's (1969, 1988) work, concurrent research to develop a further understanding of attachment bonding with mothers and babies was conducted by Ainsworth *et al.* (1978). They were interested in exploring the nature of the “bond, tie [and] enduring relationship between an infant and [their] mother” (Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978, p.17). The authors established three attachment styles between children and their mothers: *secure*, *insecure-avoidant*, and *insecure-ambivalent* (Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978). Main and Solomon (1990) later added *disorganised attachment*. However, disorganised attachment was grouped with the first three terms. The four descriptions are used in schools today when considering the impact of attachment needs and the importance of nurture on children and young people (Delaney, 2017).

Ainsworth *et al.* (1978) found that secure attachment was associated with a strong bond between mother and child. Responsive and sensitive caregiving, which allowed a child to be soothed and comforted if distressed, was directly related to developing trust, emotional security, and positive relationships. Insecure-avoidant attachment was linked with emotional detachment between the child and mother (Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978). Children with this attachment style were less likely to be distressed if their

primary carer was not in the room and avoided contact when the adult returned.

Parental caregiving, as associated with this attachment style, was deemed emotionally unresponsive to the needs of the child. Insecure-ambivalent attachment style was concluded as chaotic for the adult and child. In Ainsworth *et al.*'s (1978) research, babies were distressed when their mothers left the room but seemed to both seek *and* reject comfort upon the parent's return. Parental caregiving was found to be inconsistent and unpredictable. Disorganised attachment was offered by Main and Solomon (1990) as a style which highlighted anxiety or fear of a parent and was attributed to frightening or neglectful caregiving. The term is often used in educational practice to discuss children who have experienced trauma (Geddes, 2006).

Understanding the four attachment styles is helpful in education because I have used this information to develop staff knowledge and skills to help children in nurture groups. Bowlby's (1969, 1980) explanation of attachment is useful when working with school staff. However, I have found that sharing and using details on the four attachment styles complements and enhances adult understanding of the reasons for nurture practice in school.

Attachment is viewed as a connection (Zeedyk, 2024). Importance is placed on a person's need to be emotionally and physically close to others (Maté, 2022) through "attachment behaviour" (Jones *et al.*, 2015, p.236). A child's attachment to their primary caregiver will be dependent on the adult's parenting approach to create "relationally-rich experiences" (Cherry, 2021, p.8) where the adult goes beyond meeting the basic physiological needs of the child. This includes physical and

emotional safety (de Thierry, 2019), which circumvents emotional distress (Crittenden, 1992) for the child within their environment (Sargeant, 2012).

Literature that details the benefits of positive attachment experiences through good parenting has included the development of neuroscience knowledge (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000; Kirshenbaum, 2023; Zeedyk & Patridge, 2023). The neurological connections associated with strong, positive attachment for children support “development, learning, social competence and behaviours” (Cliffe & Solvason, 2023, p.260). Desautels (2020) argued that attachment and connection significantly impact a child’s physical and emotional brain development. Adults’ caring and nurturing behaviours are at the heart of healthy brain growth (Desautels & McKnight, 2019; Holmes, 2020). Interactions between parent and child to develop intersubjective and attuned interactions are important for emotional brain growth (Trevarthen, 2005).

The development of neuroscience, including the impact of nurturing and attachment-aware practice, has grown significantly in schools. This knowledge has been available for nurture practitioners for over twenty years and was first linked to nurture, parenting and educational practice by Bennathan & Boxall (2000). My first introduction to neuroscience as an argument for nurture practice was in 2008 when I attended a CLPL session to become a nurture practitioner in a school setting. At the event, I was shown pictures of MRI scans of Romanian orphans’ brains from research that was conducted less than a decade before (Oberhaus, 2023). The research showed details of a typically developing three-year-old’s brain and a three-year-old child from the orphanage. There was a significant difference in brain size,

with the typically developing child's brain being considerably larger. The impact on my colleagues and me was immediate. It was an incredibly visual way to explain the potential impact of neglect and lack of nurture. However, this led to some assumptions by my colleagues about some of the children and young people we taught, where they generalised about brain damage for children who had complicated home lives. My professional reflection on this time is that it was not helpful. I appreciate that ensuring we were aware of the potential impact of early experiences on children was important. However, the deterministic views that followed are something I would caution against based on photographs from one point in history.

Albeit a significant contribution to child development work in fields such as psychology, attachment theory has been criticised on a cultural level due to its direct link with Western approaches to parenting, where assumptions are made about what a baby might need (Erikson, 1994) with a strong focus on the mother as primary caregiver (Yip-Green, 2020). In a critique of the mother's position in the discourse on attachment, Cleary (1999) argued that a range of people in the family unit and beyond could provide physical and emotional security for children. The notion that biological parents are not the only adults able to take care of children is a common critique of early attachment research (Hoghughli & Speight, 1998). In more recent studies, the father's role as a key attachment figure was argued to be that of having an equal position and focus as a child's mother (Vrticka, 2024).

In her critique of attachment theory, the role of parents, and the concept of nurture, Harris (1998) suggested that children are not a product of their environment due to

the actions and behaviours of parents. She argued that “the nurture assumption” is misleading as children are more than a direct result of parental guidance (Harris, 1998, p.45). Harris (1998) contended that children become the adults they do due to the role of adults in wider society, peer influence, and the need for a sense of belonging outside the reach of their parents as they develop and grow. The influence of a child’s peer networks and social connections are considered equally, if not more, important to support young people as they mature due to the “strong susceptibility to peer influence” (Blakemore, 2018, p.31). Therefore, a sole focus on individual parenting through attachment theory is unhelpful when analysing children’s development and growth (Cameron, 2018). Bailey (2007) argued that attachment theory, as it aligns directly with the role of parents, is an “ill-defined concept” due to the deterministic thinking that can be attributed to outcomes for children from specific socio-economic backgrounds, where parents are judged because of societal perceptions of their home life (Bailey, 2007, p.17).

It is important to acknowledge the critiques of attachment theory while focusing on its position in discourse about nurture, mainly due to its influence on educational practice (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000). In addition to being directly associated with attachment theory, nurture, as defined in my thesis, links to two additional concepts: *empathy* (Joireman *et al.*, 2002; Stern & Cassidy, 2018; Xu *et al.*, 2022) and *attunement* (Geddes, 2006; Haft & Slade, 1989; Trevarthen & Malloch, 2009).

2.2.3 Nurture and empathy

Empathy originates from late nineteenth-century psychology, and initial conceptualisations described it as “feeling into others” (Segal, 2018, p.6). The link to

therapeutic practice means that empathy is prevalent in fields such as psychotherapy and counselling as “a way of being” to fully understand the suffering of others (Rodgers, 1975, p.2).

A review of extant literature on the definition of empathy led to varying discussions on three key terms: *cognitive empathy*, *emotional empathy*, and *empathic concern*. Cognitive empathy understands how someone feels by trying to understand things from the other’s perspective (Brown, 2018; Gilbert, 2009; Goleman, 1995; Gordon, 2009; Perry & Winfrey, 2021). To support understanding, cognitive empathy is described as “stepping imaginatively into the shoes of another person” (Krzmaric, 2014, p.3). Emotional empathy, sometimes known as affective empathy (Baron-Cohen, 2011), is understanding another person’s emotions (Goleman, 2017; Henshon, 2019) by being “tuned in” to the way they are feeling through awareness of their emotional state (Gordon, 2009, p.11). The third part of the “empathy triad” (Goleman, 2017, p.4) is empathic concern, which is having regard for the feelings and plight of others (Szalavitz & Perry, 2010) while having an awareness of what they might need from us (Goleman, 1995) and acting on those needs on behalf of the person we are trying to help (Henshon, 2019).

Empathy is essential for growth and connection (Bazalgette, 2017). If empathy is to be viewed as understanding perspectives, feeling others’ feelings, and having concern for and acting on the emotions of others, it is unsurprising that there is a strong link with concepts such as nurture and attachment (Delaney, 2017; Geddes, 2006; Marshall, 2014). This is because understanding and responding to the emotions and needs of children through an “empathic response” by adults is

important for healthy development (Delaney, 2017, p.27) at home and school (Geddes, 2006; Pearlman, 2020).

While reflecting on empathy as it aligns with nurture practice, I agree that it is important for teachers to understand the concept when caring for or working with children and young people. Being aware of empathy and the impact of considering an emotional or behavioural need from a child's perspective can be very powerful. However, I would question some of the assertions around it being an essential life skill (Bazalgette, 2017), as some adults I have worked with have managed to go through their teaching careers without demonstrating much empathy at all. Rather than viewed as essential, I agree with Henshon (2019), who suggested that empathy is an important skill to learn; as long as the person involved in the learning has life experiences that allow them to afford space to consider others' perspectives and emotions (Baron-Cohen, 2011; Marshall, 2014). This fits with Rodgers's (1957) concept of frame of reference, which associated empathy with having the capacity to understand another's point of view.

In addition to the three components of empathy discussed on page 38, Brown (2018) offered that one should "show understanding of another person's feelings and be non-judgemental" (2018, p.146). As a practitioner, I agree that these approaches are helpful. However, I would query the last point about judgment due to the values, attitudes, life experiences, and beliefs adults bring to their role as parents or teachers. Remembering that our early experiences, both positive and negative, influence and shape the adults we might become is important (Zeedyk, 2024).

The empathy triad model is a helpful way to understand the concept (Goleman, 2017). However, the extent to which someone can consistently offer all three aspects of cognitive empathy, emotional empathy, and empathic concern is open for discussion. Bloom (2018) argued that cognitive empathy is the most realistic component suggested in the triad because it leads to “rational compassion” to understand the perspectives and feelings of others as they link to sympathy rather than empathy (Bloom, 2018, p.40). In the case of this thesis, and when considering how adults might work in education, sympathy is defined as “being emotionally moved by the feelings of others” (Gilbert, 2009, p.222). I find myself in agreement with this definition due to my experience teaching some of the most dysregulated and marginalised children. My professional reflection would lead me to argue that sympathy is oftentimes the default position in schools, whereas empathy, as described above, is less straightforward. Assuming school staff can consistently link with a child’s emotional state is important, but from a practical point of view, I would argue it is unrealistic. This is because it is important to consider an adult’s emotional state, including how they feel about the child they are trying to support (Bloom, 2018). There is a likelihood of “mental exhaustion, compassion fatigue... [and] the development of preferential empathy” for a given child or situation when adults are called upon to display empathy at *all* times (Waytz, 2017, p.105). It might be fairer to argue that at different points in time, adults can show some or, on a good day, all aspects of empathy at home or work. This is because I would argue that it is a complicated concept that develops differently depending on experience, values, attitudes, and context.

My professional experience has taught me that there is recognition and choice in using empathy at work, as it takes time and effort. However, my personal experience has taught me that it should be an automatic response from a parent. Figure 2 shows the components of empathy and associated links to parenting and teaching, as defined in this thesis. Cognitive empathy is the foundation of the approach where parents and teachers *recognise* that a child is in need. Empathic concern is the *responsibility* of all adults to act upon the needs of a child. To make the distinction between parent and teacher, I would argue that emotional empathy is a teacher response choice but a *requirement* for parents and carers.

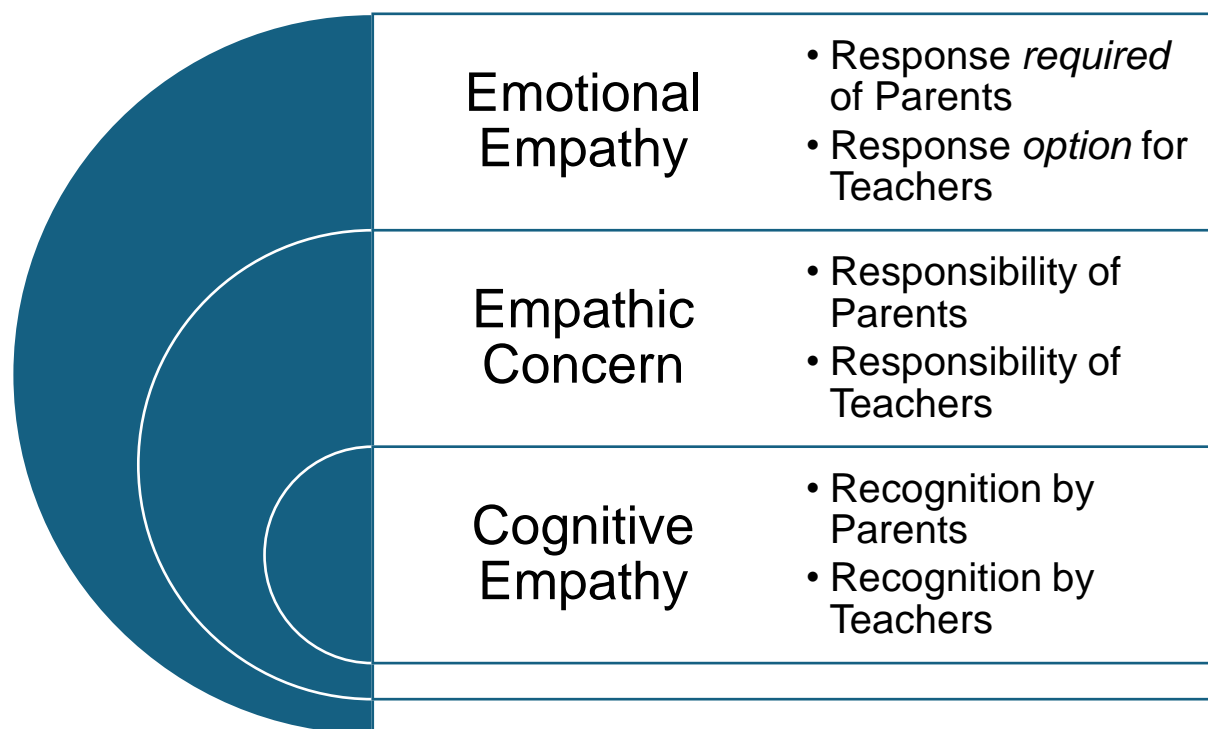


Figure 2: Empathy as recognition, responsibility, requirement, and choice in parenting and education

Empathy is often associated with the concept of attunement. At times, parenting (Gordon, 2009), child development (Zeedyk, 2024), and educational experts (Geddes, 2006) have meshed the words together to produce the term *empathic attunement* and highlight the importance of both empathy and attunement for the nurture and development of children and young people.

2.2.4 Nurture and attunement

“The process of what happens when an adult gets ‘in tune’ or ‘in synch’ with a child” (Bombèr, 2007,p.294).

Attunement is closely associated with nurture and attachment theory. It supports the development of adult-child, securely attached relationships through ongoing interactions between parent and child, which respond to need and supports connection and growth (Trevarthen, 2005; Van Der Kolk, 2014). Early literature on attunement detailed the role of the mother as a caregiver, with a key focus on interactions and parental responses to children’s physical and emotional needs (Haft & Slade, 1989; Stern *et al.*, 1987). The notion of being *in tune* or *harmony*, with another person permeates the key message of attunement as an approach to empathically understand, and respond to, the needs of others (Lipari, 2014). The impact of a parent’s attuned response to their child can reinforce emotional connection and empathy (Gordon, 2009). Attuned adults can support brain growth in babies, children, and adolescents by meeting their emotional needs (Marshall, 2014; Van Der Kolk, 2014).

Attunement behaviour strengthens bonds (Conkbayir, 2023), through attaching, soothing, and developing close relationships between children and adults (Seigel *et al.*, 2021). Equally important is the impact of “misattunement”, where parents and carers are unable to meet their child’s need for attachment and interaction (Goleman, 1995, p.101). Writers who highlight the necessity for attuned interactions discussed the impact of adults who do not respond in an empathic way to a child’s emotional needs (Perry *et al.*, 2009; Zeedyk, 2020), where infants can be left in “dismay and distress” if there is inconsistency in adult approaches (Goleman, 1995, p.101).

Attunement is a relational, educational approach often discussed in literature alongside nurture (Cubeddu & MacKay, 2017; Geddes, 2006; Reynolds *et al.*, 2009). Recent educational policy literature has broken the concept into specific *Principles of Attunement*, which include:

“being attentive through the use of eye contact and nodding etc.; encouraging interactions by actively listening and being emotionally available; readiness to receive information; being attuned together; guiding and supporting conversations and interactions and deepening the discussion” (Education Scotland, 2023, p.2).

This is a useful list, however additional clarity is needed for teachers as principles for attunement (Education Scotland, 2023), principles for nurture (NurtureUK, 2020), and principles for trauma-informed practice (Education Scotland, 2018) are prevalent in current educational policy guidance in Scotland. My reflection on these documents is that much of the guidance says the same thing, with nuances and suggestions for improvements in practice.

In addition to the definition of attunement principles detailed above, Scottish Government guidance on staff self-evaluation on attunement dovetails into whole school evaluations on nurture practice (Colley, 2024). This is important because it demonstrates the position of attunement as an aspect of nurture practice, albeit I would argue it is a lesser-known element alongside empathy. There is a relationship between nurture, empathy, attunement, and attachment and the way teachers are expected to demonstrate the approaches in the classroom.

2.2.5 Towards a definition of nurture

Nurture is as a concept traditionally linked to parenting. It is an action word and something that we can practise (Marshall, 2014). Nurture is closely associated with the behaviours of adults to develop positive attachments, attuned interactions, and empathy when responding to the needs of children. Therefore, I propose that nurture is understood as a deliberate action, to support the development of positive attachments with children, where the adults demonstrate empathy and attunement to provide physical and emotional security and meet a children and young people's needs. This definition will support further discussion on nurture as it is theoretically conceptualised and practised in schools in the next section of the chapter.

2.3 Nurture theory in education

For almost three decades, nurture has been an approach used in educational establishments on a national (Colley & Cooper, 2017) and international scale (Cefai & Cooper, 2011; Cefai & Spiteri Pizzuto, 2017; Lavoie *et al.*, 2017). The development and use of nurture practice in education is based on *The Six Principles of Nurture* (TSPN), which were first developed by Holmes & Boyd (1999) to support education professionals in the practice of nurture and embed relational approaches within schools. TSPN have their foundation in attachment theory, as conceptualised by Bowlby (1969) and Ainsworth *et al.* (1978). Understanding attachment theory and the impact of unmet needs for children is the basis of nurture practice in education (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000; Boxall, 2002). The first iteration of the principles, as defined in 1999, was slightly different from the list used today. The focus on the last principle changed from *self-esteem* to *wellbeing*. Figure 3 shows TSPN and includes both versions of principle 6.

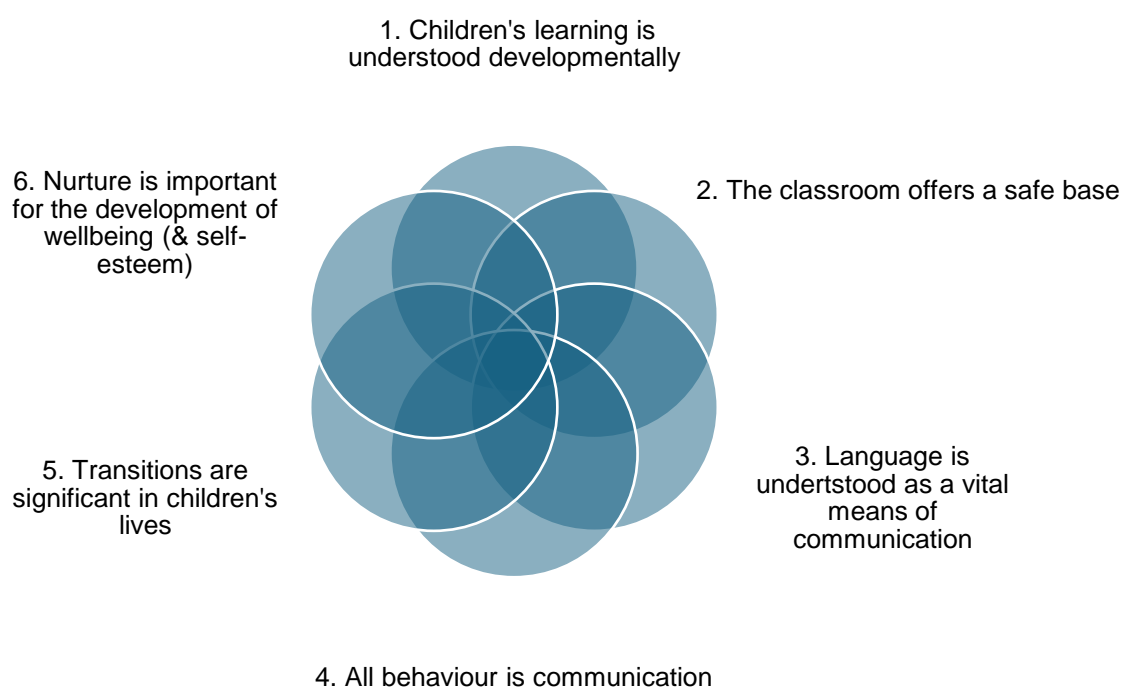


Figure 3: The interlinking relationship between TSPN, including the first and second iterations of principle 6 (Holmes & Boyd, 1999; NurtureUK, 2020)

In this section, I review each principle as the theoretical framework for nurture in education (Boxall & Lucas, 2012) and further clarify the concepts of *self-esteem* and *wellbeing* due to their placement in TSPN.

2.3.1 Children's learning is understood developmentally

The first principle shown in Figure 4 is directly associated with the main messages of attachment theory, that children's needs should be met to support their physical, emotional and cognitive development (Bowlby, 1969, 1988). Focusing on a child's developmental stage is interesting because it encourages teachers to reject assumptions about ability and capacity to learn based on chronological age (Colley, 2017). The premise of the first nurture principle is to encourage teachers to consider

that some children may not develop linearly due to varied early experiences (Boxall & Lucas, 2012).

Interpretations of a linear approach to learning can lead to overemphasis, assumptions, and expectations about children's abilities at different stages of their development (Babakr *et al.*, 2019; DeVries, 2000). Therefore, using Piaget's (1951, 1954) work as an example, he stated that there were four stages of cognitive development in children: sensorimotor (zero to two years), preoperational (two to seven years), concrete operational (seven to eleven years) and formal operational (twelve+ years). Piaget's theory has been used for decades to support teachers' understanding of how children grow and construct their learning throughout their school experience (Gillibrand *et al.*, 2016). I found it a useful theory to support me early in my teaching career but I learned that my assumptions about what a child 'should' be able to do were problematic.

Given my initial teacher training was centred on the child development theories of Piaget (1951, 1954) and Vygotsky (1978), my initial view and approach in the classroom now seem unsurprising. This first nurture principle supported a decisive shift in my thinking as a practitioner in nurture groups and I would argue that it is a key starting point in understanding children who require nurture through education. The principle encourages teachers to accept that learning should be appropriate to the child's developmental stage (Brawls & Ruby, 2023). It helps educators consider the child's experiences before they get to school and the impact those experiences could have on learning and development in the classroom (Boxall & Lucas, 2012). In practice, teachers' understanding children developmentally is supported by evidence

from assessments such as *The Boxall Profile*, which establishes where a child might need support and underpins which aspect of child development nurture practitioners should focus on when planning learning experiences (NurtureUK, 2020).

2.3.2 The classroom offers a safe base

Children should be emotionally, psychologically, and physically safe at school (Brooks, 2020). Their environment should emulate feelings of security to support their learning (Brawls & Ruby, 2023). The second principle from Figure 4 indicates that the classroom provides pupils with a strong sense of safety and belonging (Phillips *et al.*, 2020). The concept of the classroom as a safe base permeates emotional and psychological safety (Miller & Daniel, 2007) and is directly associated with the findings of Ainsworth *et al.* (1978) on secure and insecure attachment through the safety and proximity of caregivers. In the case of education, this often means the role of the teacher or other significant adult in the child's life at school (Colley, 2017).

The principle offers a view of safety, measured through strong, attuned relationships, thus allowing children to make mistakes in their learning without fear (Geddes, 2006). It encourages warmth and openness from practitioners (Whitaker, 2021) as well as consistency, predictability, routine, and flexibility to support the needs of pupils (Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Delaney, 2017). This includes freedom and safety for children and young people to play and grow in an environment where their developmental stage is understood and supported (Middleton, 2020).

2.3.3 Language is understood as a vital means of communication

Language acquisition supports learning and is an important aspect of child development (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000). The third principle shown in Figure 4 is used as a theoretical underpinning for nurture in education for various reasons. Language is central to developing and sustaining quality relationships (Colley, 2017). Supporting children to express themselves using their words, appropriate actions, and connections with other children and adults is a key part of nurture practice in education (Boxall, 2002; Boxall & Lucas, 2012). This is important because of the direct link with displays of dysregulated behaviour from children who find it hard to trust the intentions of adults (Chatterley, 2023). For those children who have not had their early needs met by their caregivers, lack of trust exacerbated by insecure or ambivalent attachment needs can cause outward expressions of behaviour, which is, in my professional experience, often frowned upon by adults. This is partially understandable, depending on the context and situation. I empathise with teachers who argue that dysregulated children can be challenging in a classroom setting. However, when teachers work with this principle in mind, research has shown that verbal and non-verbal communication can help children adapt their communication to improve their behaviour (Colwell & O'Connor, 2003). Nurture through education can help children learn the language or communication they need to regulate themselves (Bennathan *et al.*, 2010). The attunement behaviours of adults support a child's language development and enhance both relationships and behaviour in school (McNicol & Reilly, 2018). From my experience as a nurture practitioner, some examples included adults modelling appropriate language to support children to express emotions, cope with disappointment, deal with change and work through peer disagreements.

2.3.4 All behaviour is communication

Nurture practice in education supports the development of adult understanding of a child's emotional, social, and attachment needs (Colley, 2017). It includes the adult's deliberate and conscious pause when responding to distressed behaviour, allowing them to consider what a child communicates through their actions (Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Geddes, 2006). The premise of nurture principle 4 is that adults are curious (Zeedyk, 2020) and non-judgemental (Bates, 2021) about a child's behaviour rather than reactionary. It defines behaviour as "the way people communicate through words and actions" (Brawls & Ruby, 2023, p.25). Thus, it makes space for non-punitive approaches for children who find it hard to use language to express their feelings (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000).

As a practitioner who has gone full circle on behaviourist approaches in the classroom to embrace nurture practice entirely, I feel it is important to distinguish between the two when considering behavioural needs in children. I agree with writers advocating for nurture practice through TSPN in the classroom and the school community (Bennathan *et al.*, 2010; Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Brawls & Ruby, 2023; Warin & Hibbin, 2016). I know the positive impact it can have if the adults are on board with a curious and questioning stance around behavioural presentations in children. I agree with Bombèr (2007), who asserted that understanding behaviour as communication is a choice and a "way of relating" to a child (2007, p.50). My professional reflection is that it is not an easy path, but it works.

The link with empathy is evident for teachers who consider listening and curiosity to establish what has happened to a distressed child (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021). I

argue that it demonstrates the *recognition* and *choice* shown in Figure 2. If fully understood and enacted, the essence of the principle that *all behaviour is communication* (NurtureUK, 2020) encourages teachers to understand what is going on for a pupil from the child's point of view through cognitive empathy. If it is possible to feel what they are feeling in the moment through emotional empathy, then all is well and good. Being empathically attuned to a child is a helpful way for adults to understand what is being communicated (Amey, 2009; Geddes, 2006). It supports the development of relationships which strengthen healthy attachments to key adults in small group and whole class settings (Boorn *et al.*, 2010). My professional experience has taught me that this is an important choice for teachers, albeit I acknowledge it can be a challenge to consistently use this practice in classrooms with upwards of thirty children.

The nurture principle *all behaviour is communication* (NurtureUK, 2020), is particularly significant for my thesis because the concept of behaviour is often viewed as being in opposition to nurture practice. In my professional experience, teacher discourse around TSPN usually leads to discussions on behaviour. This point is explored further in the section 2.5 of the chapter.

2.3.5 Transitions are significant in children's lives

During the development of TSPN, Holmes and Boyd (1999) considered the impact of transitions across the school day and the support children would need to cope with ongoing changes. Transitions are viewed as a range of changes from leaving home to attend school (Colley, 2017), moving between classes at break and lunchtime (NurtureUK, 2020), moving between whole class and group settings (Delaney, 2017),

and moving between schools, such as the transition from primary to secondary education (Brawls & Ruby, 2023). Teachers using this principle understand and plan for the impact of transitions on children who may already be overly cautious regarding different people, environments, structures, and routines (Boxall & Lucas, 2012). Included are the daily “micro transitions” that children face in school, in their classroom, and within small group settings with peers, such as moving from one task to another (Brawls & Ruby, 2023, p.24).

Consistency and support for transitions across a child’s life at school develop their sense of psychological and emotional safety to create space for growth and learning (Moore, 2022). Children who require nurture through education often need a calm, composed adult who explains what and when something will change, as much as any transition can be controlled in this way (Lucas *et al.*, 2006). An example of a significant change would be the move from primary to secondary school. However, transitions, as linked to this principle, also include substantial changes in a child’s life at home, such as the death of a loved one (Delaney, 2017) or other significant loss (Rae, 2014). Nurture practice, using this principle, can support the emotional wellbeing of pupils through reduced anxiety and lessen distressed behaviour through planning, preparation and support for change (Colley, 2009).

2.3.6 Nurture is important for the development of wellbeing (and self-esteem)

In the following two sub-sections, I will consider both self-esteem and wellbeing as important to the final nurture principle and clarify their meaning in this study. Both concepts hold an important position in the discourse on TSPN, and it would be easy to focus specifically on today’s iteration, which highlights nurture as important for

wellbeing development (NurtureUK, 2023). However, a review of the link to self-esteem (Holmes & Boyd, 1999) is helpful for this thesis to ensure the concept is recognised for its significance and contribution to TSPN. Earlier versions of this final principle focused on nurture through education as a way to raise children's self-esteem (Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Colley, 2009; Colley, 2017).

2.3.7 The placement of self-esteem in nurture practice

Positive or negative early attachment experiences can influence a child's self-esteem (Kirshenbaum, 2023). Adult support to continually impact children's self-esteem positively is an important aspect of nurture practice in education (Brawls & Ruby, 2023). The development of positive self-esteem in children and young people is associated with the nurture, connection, attunement, empathy, and encouragement they receive from parents and caregivers (Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Branden, 1994; Zeedyk, 2020).

There are various definitions of self-esteem (Bailey, 2007). This can create confusion due to the "lack of consensus that permeates the field" (Miller & Daniel, 2007, p.607). Initially conceptualised by James (1890), self-esteem was defined as feeling what one *could* be (as cited in Miller & Moran, 2012), where feeling good about oneself was enough to raise self-esteem in an individual (Koruklu, 2015). In addition to being considered a feeling, a person's self-esteem is influenced by the views of others in their lives. For example, the role of parents, carers, friends and teachers is important when considering how a person sees themselves because it contributes to developing positive or negative self-esteem (Bridgeland *et al.*, 2013; Sowislow & Orth, 2012).

Self-esteem, as constructed from a person's belief in what others think of them (Coopersmith, 1967), is challenging due to the pressure of seeking approval through the opinions of others (Ellis, 2005). My professional reflections would lead me to agree with Ellis (2005), particularly considering my experience in secondary school settings. Teenagers are constantly seeking approval. It is an important developmental step for most young people, where their peers become as important as family, if not more so (Blakemore, 2018). For the young people I have worked with, this can work either way and negatively impact their self-esteem as they attempt to blend in with their peers.

Literature often discusses self-esteem within a model with self-concept (Gurney, 1986), self-image, and ideal self (Lawrence, 2014; Miller & Moran, 2012). A visual representation of these concepts is in Figure 5 on the following page.

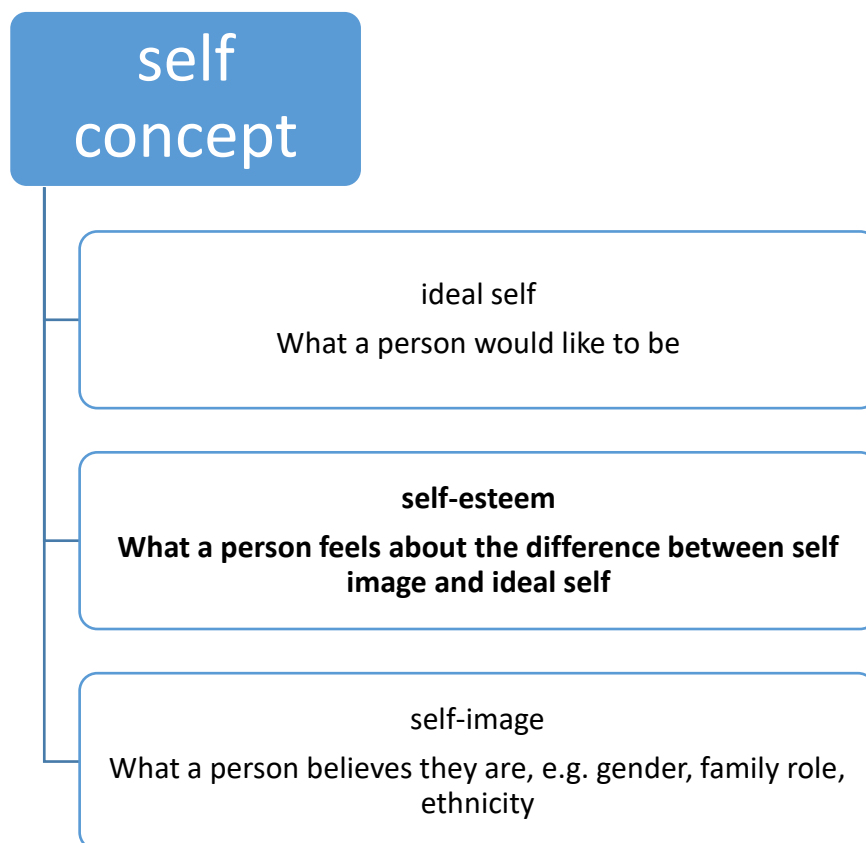


Figure 4: A visual representation of self-esteem within the model of self-concept based on the work of Lawrence, 2014 and Miller & Moran, 2012

Figure 4 is a helpful model for informing nurture practice because it supports the position of self-esteem alongside the child's view of who they believe they are and who they might be. For children with low self-esteem, the gap between self-image and ideal self, linked to a "subjective evaluation" of worth, tends to be wider than for children with high self-esteem (Orth & Robins, 2014, p.3). In my experience of working with TSPN, teachers should consider this important point when influencing a child's self-esteem with reward charts and stickers. It takes more to narrow the gap for children with social and emotional needs who require nurture through education. My professional view is that rewards tend to have a short shelf life. In contrast, ongoing positive noticing and praise (Brawls & Ruby, 2023), strong relationships

(Boxall & Lucas, 2012) and empathy (Henshon, 2019) from adults can make a more significant difference. In my experience, the nurturing actions of adults are key to supporting a child who measures their subjective worth and success compared to others. It is challenging to impact a child's self-esteem without taking the time and effort to understand what is being supported. For example, I felt ill-equipped to support children with their self-esteem when I first started working in nurture groups. I felt my colleagues, parents, carers, and partner agencies viewed it as my responsibility to 'fix' low self-esteem in a child. Upon reflection, I was working at a surface level when trying to effect change with discussions of 'feeling good' to impact children's self-esteem positively.

Viewing self-esteem as an entirely positive concept is problematic because negative views of self (Stets & Burke, 2014) and inflated self-esteem can damage an individual (Seligman, 2007). I have yet to meet a child in a nurture group with positive self-esteem. To clarify, some children and young people I have worked with had a highly negative view of themselves and found it challenging to consider their ideal self as something to work towards. I agree that self-esteem is linked to emotions, but more details are required for education staff. My professional experience has taught me that teachers need more information on self-concept, ideal self, and the narrowing or widening of the self-esteem gap, as any change for children and young people takes time. This point is significant when considering a change to support positive self-esteem.

In addition to understanding the gap a child might have around how they feel about themselves, often regarding their subjective comparison to others (Kavanah &

Scrutton, 2015), self-esteem within TSPN is used to support achievement and build children's confidence in their abilities to master their learning (Dweck, 2000; Perry *et al.*, 2009). Building self-esteem is done through the development of self-efficacy, which is a belief in one's ability to complete challenges in learning that lead to the child's notion of ideal-self (Bandura, 1993; Branden, 1994; McLeod, 2015; Marshall *et al.*, 2014) with the support of others (Bissessar, 2014; Ghilay & Ghilay, 2015). Academics have suggested that positive self-esteem is a consequence of self-efficacy (Marshall *et al.*, 2014; Mowat, 2015). However, I would argue that, in practice, this depends on the positive and safe experience of the learning environment, the actions of adults to understand the child, and the nature of the learning experience.

In nurture education, self-esteem is often positively impacted through domain-specific tasks within a teacher-led context (Plummer, 2014). Focusing on domain-specific learning tasks is a helpful strategy to support children who find it challenging to try new learning experiences (Colley, 2017). My experience as a nurture room teacher was predicated on small 'wins' for children and young people who found it difficult to learn something new. Gradual steps towards success, in a controlled and comfortable way, was often the only strategy that worked to build a child's self-esteem within the safety of my nurture room. I believe it was a sensible approach because there is an expectation that adult scaffolding of learning can also positively impact global self-esteem within the learning context (von Soest *et al.*, 2016). However, this can only be achieved if adults are aware of their "tact" when considering how they approach the development of a child's self-esteem to impact

learning across the child's educational experience at school (Friesen & Osguthorpe, 2017, p.3).

To understand the placement of self-esteem in nurture practice, I offer that self-esteem, is defined in three specific ways: the way children feel about themselves, the role of adults in affecting this, and the impact this has on their capacity to learn across their school experience (Dweck, 2000; McLean, 2003; Perry *et al.*, 2009). Although self-esteem is no longer a key focus for TSPN due to the change in terminology from *self-esteem* to *wellbeing* in principle six, I believe it is still an important concept for adults to understand when affecting change for children and young people.

2.3.8 The placement of wellbeing in nurture practice

Over the last decade, the focus of the sixth nurture principle has shifted from the development of children's *self-esteem* to *wellbeing*. Therefore, clarification on *wellbeing* is helpful, as it pertains to my thesis, because it is a catch-all term in education, expressed as having a range of meanings.

Supporting children and young people's overall wellbeing is vital to education (Spratt, 2017). Awareness of wellbeing and a teacher's impact in supporting it is a key consideration for educators (Breslin, 2021; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2021). Ensuring children's needs are met through positive experiences and opportunities to develop and thrive is a priority for national (UK Government, 2015) and international governments through the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*

(UNCRC) (UNICEF, 1989). At an international level, wellbeing is defined as “a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (World Health Organisation, 2019, p.1). Although criticised for using the word ‘complete’, the World Health Organisation (WHO) set the agenda on bringing physical, mental, social, and emotional wellbeing into the public arena with their definition (Spratt, 2017). It led to international guidance regarding using the term for children’s rights (UNICEF, 2022). The meaning has been adopted by and linked to organisations such as *the United Nations Children’s Rights Charter* (UNICEF, 1989) where wellbeing is measured across five key areas of wealth, health and safety, education, behaviour and risks, housing and environment (UNICEF, 2013). The latest *Innocenti Report Card* highlighted the significance of positive emotional wellbeing for children and young people (UNICEF, 2020). However, caution should be exercised given the coincidence of the publication with a worldwide pandemic in 2020.

The WHO definition is helpful but quite stark regarding what education practitioners are expected to impact day-to-day in a school environment. When working with TSPN in education, I found it very overwhelming to consider my responsibility as a teacher to impact every area of a child’s wellbeing. This is potentially because I was unsure how to define it, despite policy guidance through *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE) on my responsibilities as a teacher (Scottish Government, 2004).

A dilemma often commented upon by academics in wellbeing education is the myriad of terms used to define it (Dodge *et al.*, 2012; Watson *et al.*, 2012). For example, concepts such as resilience (Masten, 2014), self-esteem (Collins-Donnelly,

2014), mental health (Bradshaw, 2011; Spratt, 2017), quality relationships (Henderson & Smith, 2021), connectedness and nurture (Bombèr, 2016) are often used alongside wellbeing. It is directly linked to key psychological theories such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), positivity and happiness (Scottish Government, 2019), self-worth, vitality and optimism (Weare, 2016), fixed and growth mindsets (Dweck, 2000) and empathy (Gordon, 2009). This is not an exhaustive list, and each concept could be presented in several paragraphs in its own right. Therefore, it is imperative to establish precisely what aspects of wellbeing the last nurture principle addresses in this thesis.

Recent literature on TSPN suggested that nurture is essential for developing children's wellbeing through "respect, reciprocity... [and] being valued...where [adults] notice and praise achievements" (Brawls & Ruby, 2023, p.25). The importance of adults being connected to children to impact their sense of wellbeing positively is clear from this extract. It supports the theoretical premise of TSPN and links with attachment theory, where building strong relationships is important for children (Colley, 2007) to develop cognitive skills and emotional wellbeing (Delafield-Butt & Adie, 2016). From the definition provided by Brawls & Ruby (2023) above, there is also a clear link to self-esteem due to the suggestion of noticing and commenting on achievements.

Nurture through education and TSPN supports the whole child's wellbeing and considers environmental and ecological factors at school and home (Sloan *et al.*, 2020). This is important as wellbeing is often viewed as something within an individual, particularly in psychology (Das *et al.*, 2020). Faulconbridge *et al.* (2019)

suggested that wellbeing is “a level beyond the individual” (2019, p.192). I would partially agree with this and offer that wellbeing is viewed as a few levels beyond the individual, where an ecological model of wellbeing is used to support teachers' understanding of the impact of family, school, friendships, society, and culture (Bradshaw, 2011), and changes over time that can impact the wellbeing of a child (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007).

Viewing wellbeing using an *Ecological Systems Model* (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) within schools, particularly in Scottish education, aligns with policy developments such as *Getting It Right For Every Child* (GIRFEC) (2008; 2022). Consideration is given to the support systems around the child, which maintain success, foster development and support positive experiences across family, school, and community. An ecological model of wellbeing allows teachers to consider the micro-level of the pupil, including any individualised wellbeing needs; the macro level of the classroom and the impact of teacher-student and student-student relations through universal support; and the meso-level of the whole school community, and the extent to which the chrono-systems and proximal processes impact on young people (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007).

The use of the chrono-system and proximal processes, which detail changes over time for children and young people, is worthy of attention due to the connotations with wellbeing education and the likelihood of children requiring different support at key points in their lives (Shelton, 2019), such as adolescence (Blakemore, 2018). Children's physical or emotional wellbeing needs will shift as they develop and grow. Therefore, understanding that wellbeing is not static over time is important for

educators (McGregor *et al.*, 2003) and that a range of approaches may be required to positively impact children's wellbeing through different stages and experiences in their lives (Spratt, 2017).

Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2007) *Ecological Systems Model* is a useful way to conceptualise wellbeing and enhance professional awareness of what a child needs from their environment to succeed at school (Gonzales, 2020). It is also helpful to consider nurture, attachment (Boxall, 2002), and the impact of nurturing relational practice (Henderson & Smith, 2022) in an ecological model of wellbeing. Reflecting on my career as a teacher, I would argue that nurture, as defined in the first section of this chapter, permeates all aspects of Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2007) model. Knowledge of nurture, attunement, empathy and awareness of attachment are needed by many people in a child's life. The impact of the chrono-system is of particular interest to me as I reflect on my approach in schools before I had this knowledge. As a mainstream classroom teacher, I made some mistakes in my practice because I was unaware of the importance of nurture for the children and young people I taught. I was even less aware of the impact of nurture and the change it could bring at key times in a child's life. A visual representation of the model and my interpretation of the associated connections with wellbeing is shown in Figure 5.

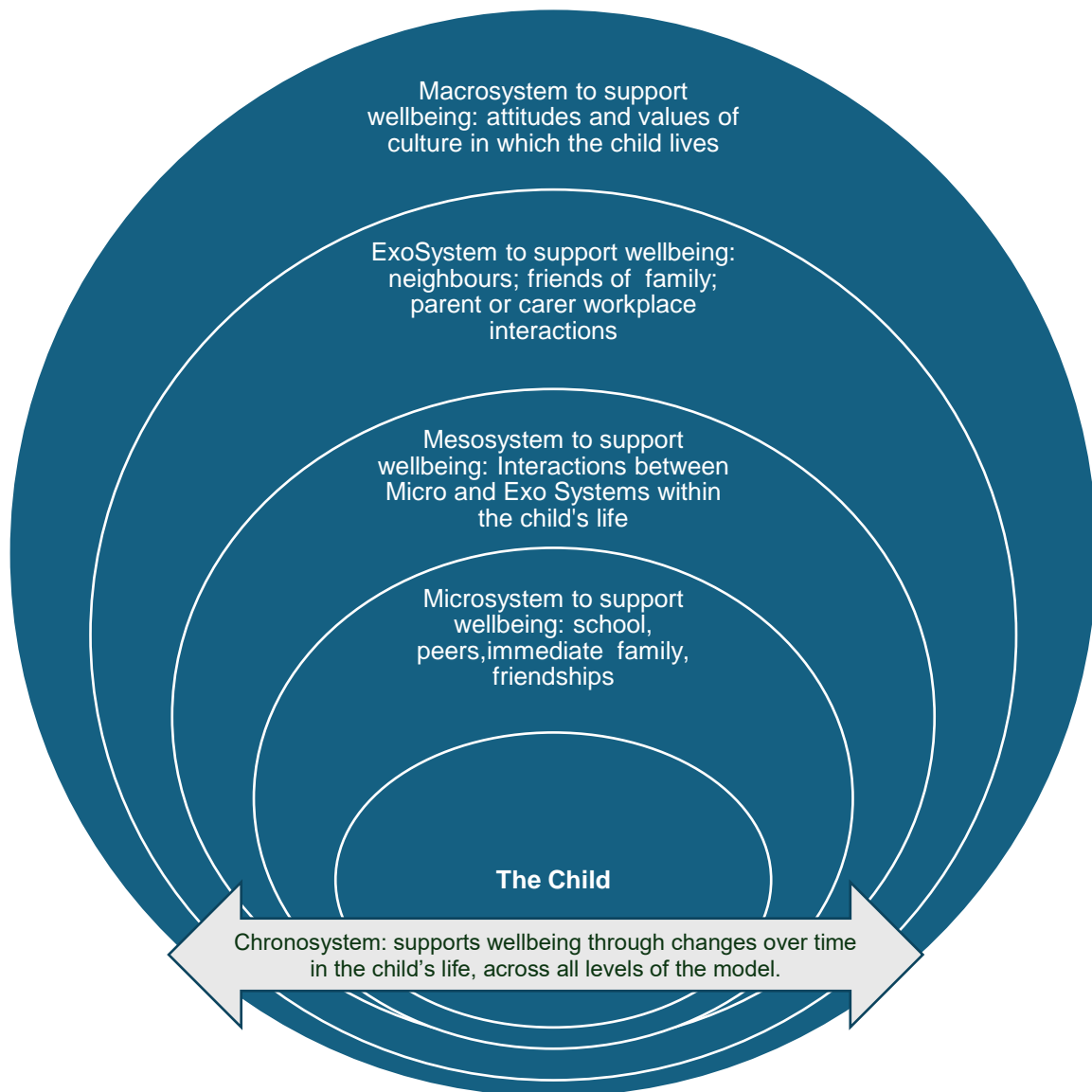


Figure 5: Brofenbrenner and Morris's (2007) Ecological Systems Model and potential links to supporting children's wellbeing

I acknowledge that this model faces critique for not focusing enough on an individual's needs (Tudge *et al.*, 2009) and omitting the biological and psycho-social aspects of development offered in other models (Cefai, 2024; Fisher, 2021).

However, as a teacher, it supports my understanding of the impact I can make on a child in my care because it sheds light on the people, connections (Pollard, 2014),

systems, and contexts around a child as well as raises awareness of the needs of the child at the centre of the model (Shelton, 2019).

Wellbeing, as defined in this study, is a concept that supports the growth and development of children and young people. Adults working in education can understand the wider impact of wellbeing needs in children through an ecological model that supports teachers to view wellbeing as more than the individual needs of a child (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Thus, the impact of the wider school environment, home, friendships, society, culture, and changes over the child's life span on their wellbeing and development should be considered (Pollard, 2014; Shelton, 2019).

In addition to Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2007) model being a valuable reference for teachers' understanding of wellbeing, I would argue that it demonstrates the complexity of a teacher's capacity to impact wellbeing. From my professional experience as a classroom teacher and nurture practitioner, I suggest that the multiple layers and connections that could impact a child's wellbeing can be understood but not entirely impacted in a classroom. What happens in school is just one part of the model. Nurture through TSPN is a good starting point, and it makes sense to me that nurture practice reaches beyond the aforementioned singular concept of self-esteem because there is an expectation in Scottish education that wellbeing can be impacted in the classroom by *all* practitioners through policy guidance such as *Responsibility of All* (Scottish Government, 2014). Due to the recognition of these complications, I tentatively offer, for now, that Bronfenbrenner

and Morris's (2007) model is a useful starting point for understanding how wellbeing is impacted and supported for children and young people at school.

2.4 Nurture practice in education

In this section, I review the emergence of nurture practice in education, from targeted group interventions to whole school approaches and beyond. In addition to discussing the origin and function of nurture groups, I consider critiques of nurture practice. There is an ongoing debate around nurture as a therapeutic intervention and whether or not it constitutes inclusive practice. Therefore, it is important to pause and clarify the meaning of inclusive education as it aligns with this study. I accept that any work on inclusion could be an additional thesis in its own right. However, it is crucial to be clear on the dilemmas surrounding nurture practice as they are debated through a discourse on inclusive education. The section concludes with a review of nurture through whole class, school, city, and local authority approaches.

2.4.1 Nurture groups

Nurture group practice, using TSPN is predicated on attachment theory and its educational application (Johnson, 1992) to support children's missing early life experiences (Boxall, 2002). Nurture groups emerged in East London schools in the 1970s as an early intervention framework for "the most unsettled and vulnerable children in the country" (Lucas, 1999, p.14). Nurture groups were designed to repair

“impoverished early nurturing [which led to] difficulties in forming trusting relationships with adults or responding appropriately to their peers” (Reynolds *et al.*, 2009, p.104). The intervention was designed to develop children’s readiness to learn by providing emotionally, socially, and developmentally appropriate learning experiences in the nurture room (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000), where they could take risks and build their self-esteem (Boxall & Lucas, 2012). The practice demonstrated the role of a caring adult in a child’s life and created healthy, trusting educational attachments to adults in school (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007; Seth-Smith *et al.*, 2010). Caring and responding to a child’s needs is still an important aspect of nurture practice (Boxall & Lucas, 2012), which supports the children’s wider attachments across their mainstream classroom and school (Sloan *et al.*, 2020).

In addition to understanding a child’s developmental stage and their attachment experiences with adults, Cooper and Whitebread (2007) suggested that sociocultural theories of education are a key component in nurture practice through the work of Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1985), where children learn from and with others, through scaffolding. The authors argued that the practice supports a crucial bridge to mainstream learning for the children involved in group interventions (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007). I agree that this is a key aspect of nurture practice in group work. Supporting children to work together and learn from each other is a significant aspect of the role of the adult in a nurture group. My experience has shown me that this is because children in nurture groups can find it challenging to work together. Getting the group to open up, trust each other, and then work together was a more realistic expectation from my experience.

The nurture group model, which usually includes up to ten pupils and two adult role models in a separate room or space, is used in several countries and is an expanding entity across educational settings worldwide (Cefai & Cooper, 2011; Cefai & Spiteri Pizzuto, 2017; Lavoie *et al.*, 2017). There is a focus on trust and building relationships through shared experiences that emulate a home environment, such as sharing food and talking about emotions. A child's learning experiences in a nurture group are tailored to positively impact attachments with adults and peers (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000; Lucas *et al.*, 2006). As a result, several research papers have demonstrated the success of nurture group interventions to support pupils' wellbeing and capacity to learn in school (Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Cooper *et al.*, 1999; Cooper, 2011; Cooper & Whitebread, 2007; Reynolds *et al.*, 2009).

Whereas attachment needs were initially the primary indicator for a child's involvement in a nurture group, the approach has been developed over the last few decades to allow for the inclusion of a broader range of children and young people in need of social and emotional wellbeing support (Cefai & Spiteri Pizzuto, 2017). This has included neurodiverse children (Symeonidou & Robinson, 2018). In addition to the change in criteria for entry to the group, there has been a shift from the original model of nurture group practice as a part-time intervention (Warin & Hibbin, 2016). A variety of models ranging from "part-time groups...to a shared resource between a group of schools" have arisen to meet the needs of children and young people with social, emotional, and behavioural needs across the U.K. (Boxall & Lucas, 2012, p.14). The change in provision has included the creation of off-sight groups, often referred to as 'nurture hubs', which place a full-time nurture group within the hands of a local authority so that schools can access the hub as a resource for children from a

range of primary and secondary school settings (NurtureUK, 2018). More recently, hubs have evolved to be called “Nurture Plus...[offering] a graduated approach to nurture for the most vulnerable children and young people” (NurtureUK, 2023, p.1). Models of nurture groups have also expanded beyond their initial target groups for early primary school children to include secondary school-aged pupils (Coleman & Cooper, 2017).

The nurture curriculum is predominantly, although not exclusively, linked to work that supports a child’s emotional and social wellbeing (Bennathan *et al.*, 2010). It is led by adult connection, respect, attunement, and empathic behaviours (Brawls & Ruby, 2023; NurtureUK, 2023). Therefore, there is a significant focus on helping children understand their feelings (Colley, 2017), build relationships (Boxall & Lucas, 2012), and develop skills that may have been expected learning in their earlier years (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000). As a result, the practice has come under significant criticism in recent years.

In a review of therapeutic practice through education, Ecclestone and Hayes (2008, 2019) discussed the notion of “concept creep” in schools to argue that there has been an overemphasis on emotional wellbeing initiatives over the last few decades (2019, p.10). They suggested that there is little evidence of real progress for therapeutic interventions in schools and that education is not the place for these approaches to dominate (2008, 2019). Ecclestone and Hayes (2008, 2019) acknowledged that the concept of nurture group practice was a positive step by Boxall (2002) to address stigmatisation and pathologisation of children because of their social, emotional, and behavioural needs. However, the central premise of their

argument on nurture groups is that schools are not set up for therapeutic practice but for education. As well as raising concerns about an increased focus on therapeutic interventions in primary school, Ecclestone and Hayes (2019) discussed their concerns over the “dismantling of subject knowledge” for secondary school teachers who are increasingly encouraged to support pupil’s emotional wellbeing in addition to raising attainment in their chosen specialism (2019, p.52).

As someone who spends much time in primary and secondary schools, I hear this argument repeatedly in my current role as a Principal Teacher of Health and Wellbeing. Therefore, I understand teachers are being asked to do much more. The introduction of policy guidance such as *Responsibility of All* in Scotland is an example of this because of the onus on classroom teachers to view aspects of learner wellbeing as important as the curricular subject matter (Scottish Government, 2014). I work with Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) and experienced teachers throughout the year. It is rare to hear people embrace the responsibility of the wide-ranging learning outcomes of “...behaviour...relationships... responsible choices and planning for change” within curricular documents (Scottish Government, 2014, p.1). It is even rarer to hear secondary school teachers accept them due to their focus on the subject and attainment expectations of national qualifications.

Ecclestone and Hayes (2008, 2019) questioned the role of the nurture group practitioner as someone who could, or should, take a deep dive into children's emotions by scrutinising their early experiences and family background. Bailey (2007) offered a similar argument in his review of nurture groups, where he suggested that assumptions about children’s ongoing needs because of their

background are challenging. Bailey (2007) argued that nurture practice fuels deterministic views of self and family due to the emphasis on what happens to a child before they get to school and the impact this can have on the person they might become.

The focus on determinism is a key argument against therapeutic approaches in school (Furedi, 2004; Ecclestone & Hayes, 2008, 2019). Deterministic views of children's family experiences apportion blame on parents when a child's behaviour is challenging for teachers (Burman, 2017; Peck *et al.*, 2015), mainly if concepts such as attachment theory dominate the narrative around children's needs (Serling, 2019). Despite the best intentions, where teachers are encouraged to check their "bias and assumptions", they may adopt the view that children with challenging early experiences are unable to learn and succeed in the same way as their peers from different home environments (Major & Bryant, 2023, p.75). When this issue occurs, teachers must review and reject potential deterministic views of their pupils to ensure full inclusion and participation in the classroom (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

As a keen advocate for nurture practice, I feel uncomfortable with these critiques but understand them. Over the years, I have faced many criticisms from colleagues who argued that the approach in my nurture room was 'soft' and that I was creating 'snowflakes'. These views were mostly from people who did not understand the practice, and in the secondary school setting, there was a lot of adult anxiety about missing Maths or English lessons. I understand and accept that this is a valid concern due to the time some young people spent in my nurture group. However, my professional experience leads me to argue that the false dichotomy between

therapeutic approaches and academic learning offered by Ecclestone and Hayes (2008, 2019) is too simplistic. I disagree that there is an overemphasis on therapeutic practice in the nurture room based on my own experience, unless the emulation of a home environment is viewed as such. There is undoubtedly a focus on emotional wellbeing. However, it is not the only focus for learning, and I believe it is possible to include academic and wellbeing support because children often need both. In practice, the complexity of wellbeing support *and* academic support weaves throughout the nurture room curriculum. A balance of care, connections, and educational learning, which is scaffolded to support success, should support the child's wellbeing. I accept that it may be the case that other practitioners do things differently as I can only comment on my career across early years, primary and secondary schools, in one local authority in Scotland. My guide and rationale for my practice in the nurture room was led by the work of Boxall and Lucas (2012), which emphasised learning alongside wellbeing support.

In addition to the critique that determinism brings to nurture group practice, there is a broader debate around nurture practice as inclusive (or exclusive) education (Ronnerman *et al.*, 2008; Rouse & Florian, 2012). The concept of inclusion will now be discussed and clarified by further exploration of key tensions and dilemmas for nurture practice.

2.4.2 Nurture practice as inclusive education?

As an aspect of children's rights, according to the UNCRC, inclusion in education is an important focus for educators worldwide (UNICEF, 1989). At a world convention on special needs education, a "sea change" around the concept of inclusion and,

more specifically, inclusive education was brought to the global stage (Beaton *et al.*, 2021, p.3). *The Salamanca Statement* (UNESCO, 1994) called for a focus on educational “support and provision” rather than the individual needs of the child (as cited in Barrett, *et al.*, 2015, p.4). The UNCRC offered an explanation of inclusive education which included:

Integration... in mainstream educational institutions [and classrooms] with adaptations as and when required for the student... [Inclusive] education environments that adapt the design and physical structures, teaching methods, and curriculum as well as the culture, policy and practice of education environments so that they are accessible to all students without discrimination” (UNCRC, 2017, p.4).

Perhaps, more importantly for this thesis and the debate on separate group interventions in education, they stated that inclusive education was not:

“Exclusion, [where] students with disabilities are denied access to education in any form or... segregation [where] education of students with disabilities is provided in separate environments designed for specific, and in isolation from students without disabilities” (UNCRC, 2017, p.4).

Definitions of inclusion through discourse on exclusion are interesting (Razer *et al.*, 2012), particularly when considering nurture group practice. This is because the practice involves a specific, separate space for learning that can be a loophole for schools to avoid external exclusions (Middleton, 2022) by creating a form of internal exclusion in the building (Power & Taylor, 2018). Children and young people who require alternative space for learning, rather than their mainstream classrooms, are informally excluded under the guise of support (*ibid*, 2018). I have experienced this

approach in my career, and if entirely predicated on the point made by Power and Taylor (2018), it is very difficult to support. However, I often found that there was a hidden reason, which included space for and consideration of the teacher and students in the mainstream classroom. I did not always agree with this approach, but I understood the complexity of the situation for everyone involved. More importantly, in my experience, a decision to offer group support to a child was about meeting needs, particularly if they could not sustain a mainstream classroom environment for a short period. Webster (2022) argued that children's removal from mainstream classrooms through group work, although acknowledged as well-meaning and perceived as an equitable solution for the pupils, could be described as "structural exclusion" where removal is assessed, planned, and adhered to by school leadership teams who are required to manage the expectations of adults as well as the needs of children (Webster, 2022, p.75). I agree that this could be viewed as exclusion, but I wonder if it is. Perhaps there is another consideration here about the motivation, values, attitudes, and school culture that drive these decisions. In my professional experience senior leadership teams who make decisions based on the wellbeing of children and adults to ensure a positive experience for all are different from a culture of blame, shame or fault. This is important when schools strive for inclusive educational approaches for vulnerable children who require support at school (Mowat, 2022). Thought should be given to ensure that adults are supporting children to meet their needs rather than "treating them differently from others" without a robust rationale for the decision (Florian & Beaton, 2018, p.870).

Despite policy guidance for teachers in Scottish education through frameworks such as GIRFEC (2008, 2022) and *Included, Engaged and Involved* (Scottish

Government, 2017), there seems to be ongoing confusion over what it means to have children fully included in the classroom, school and beyond. I understand the academic arguments around nurture groups as exclusion. However, I have worked with some very vulnerable children who may not have sustained a mainstream placement had it not been for the opportunity to obtain a customised timetable, which included small group work as part of their week. Therefore, I agree with the views held by Bennathan and Boxall (2000), who suggested that some children need specific support in the form of nurture group intervention, whereas others may not. They argued that the transition from mainstream classroom to nurture class can be carried out with discretion, care and “if done without hostility...where [the practice] is integrated into the culture and fabric of the school [it can be successful] for children who would otherwise be written off” (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000, p.134).

The issue of whether children should be educated in their mainstream classroom has been in the spotlight for many years. The concept of placement and engagement in education was raised by Warnock (1978). She questioned the idea of inclusive education as defined by all children being taught in the same environment, instead opting for an approach that allowed engagement in education wherever the child learned best (Warnock, 1978). Although the report has been criticised for the focus on individual labels for children as a way of understanding needs, a point raised by Warnock in later reflections of her work (Warnock *et al.*, 2010), it supported the view that some children might need alternative options out with the mainstream classroom or school to succeed in education. This is an interesting point and supports the provision of nurture groups through on-site and off-site groups, albeit I agree that

there should be some balance in supporting children where they learn best.

Reflecting on my practice, I tend to agree with Goodall (2020), who offered that:

“Inclusion is a feeling, not a place....belonging, being valued and wanted as a person by teachers, of fairness and of being afforded the necessary support to access and thrive in education.” (2020, p.1285).

Children and young people who attended the nurture group in my schools often described it as a place where they felt they belonged. Therefore, I would argue that inclusive education is more than being in a mainstream classroom; it is directly associated with meeting children’s needs in an environment where they can thrive.

Some academics have suggested that being taught out with the mainstream classroom is not a rights-based approach to education as children should be taught in their mainstream classroom (Ainscow, 2020; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian *et al.*, 2017; Hodkinson & Vickerman, 2009; McCluskey *et al.*, 2014; Parsons, 2005; Slee, 2018). There seems to be an ongoing dilemma over the issue of removing children from their mainstream setting for group work (Slee, 2018). I understand the concerns and complications around this issue. However, I would argue that Norwich (2013) detailed the issue succinctly through his offer of a “continuum of needs” for inclusive education rather than an all-or-nothing approach (2013, p.5). Norwich (2013) proposed that a flexible strategy to supporting children with additional support needs is more conducive to addressing the tensions surrounding inclusive education rather than seeing it as one enduring entity (Norwich & Kousouris, 2017). As a teacher, I believe this view chimes with the guidance around the presumption of mainstream in Scottish education (Scottish Government, 2019). The policy suggests that children should be educated in the mainstream

setting unless “there is a strong argument” for alternative provision (Beaton & Spratt, 2017, p.168).

Although advocating for a range of supports with a balanced view, Norwich (2013) warned against using interventions that may be viewed as stigmatising for children and young people. In practice, I find this balanced view very sensible, as is professional caution around explicitly considering the pupil's views. Whilst working in secondary schools, I noticed that the nurture group was like Marmite for teenagers. They either loved it or hated it. Some of the reasons the young people gave for not attending the group were linked directly to the point Norwich (2013) details in his work around stigmatisation. I found that when a pupil voiced their concerns about joining a nurture group, it was important that they could choose what was right for them, despite what an adult felt about the matter. Parents and carers have also expressed this issue to me across early years, primary and secondary school settings when I worked with younger children in nurture group interventions.

In addition to viewing nurture practice and inclusive education as a way of meeting children's needs through a continuum of support, it is important to highlight the role of the adults. The responsibility and capacity of the teacher to provide an inclusive experience is an important consideration in the discourse on nurture through education. Research has shown the importance of teacher adaptation of pedagogical practice to meet the needs of children in the classroom (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). However, teachers can only do this if they have resources and professional development (Leonard & Smyth, 2020). I agree with this point, particularly regarding more nuanced and specialist educational approaches, such as nurture practice using

TSPN. If teachers are given professional development, ongoing support, and space to practice various inclusive pedagogical approaches, I believe they can succeed. This view ties in with Florian and Beaton's (2018) concept of "craft knowledge", where teachers are trusted to use their skills and professional judgment to meet the needs of children in their classrooms through adaptations to their pedagogy (2018, p.873).

Inclusive education, as it aligns with nurture practice, is twofold. Firstly, it can be viewed as a continuum of support, which is provided for children through clear justification and planning, and involves the child's voice and that of their parent or carer to acknowledge concerns and avoid stigmatisation for pupils (Norwich, 2013). Inclusive education can also be enacted through a pedagogical responsibility in teachers who have had a range of professional learning and development experiences to allow them to adapt their pedagogical knowledge to respond to the needs of their pupils. This second point is important because nurture practice continues to be promoted and used in schools, from group settings to whole classes and beyond. Therefore, questions arise regarding how classroom teachers should be supported to provide a learning experience predicated on specialist group practice using TSPN. Understanding how teachers perceive the effectiveness and use of nurture principles in their classroom is an important area for consideration.

2.4.3 Nurture practice beyond the group

Using TSPN within mainstream classrooms and across whole school communities has been championed by original contributors of nurture group practice due to the associated positive impact on children's overall wellbeing (Boxall & Lucas, 2012). However, the impact of nurture practice across whole classes and school settings has been mixed (Sosu & Ellis, 2014). The extent to which new pedagogical practice, such as a whole class approach using TSPN, is successful varies from school to school and success can be dependent on many factors such as teacher agency (Biesta *et al.*, 2015; Priestly *et al.*, 2017), opportunities for professional learning (Bennett, 2020), teacher-child relationships (Riley, 2011) personal beliefs, values, and experiences (Cameron & Moss, 2011; Kaska, 2015; Olsen, 2008). I would argue that to make use of a new approach in the classroom, teachers should be given space for "meaning making...to internalise ideas and to relate them to their own set of circumstances" when considering new methods for their pedagogical practice (Mowat, 2007, p.86). Reflecting on my move from classroom teacher to nurture teacher has shown me that using TSPN in the mainstream classroom takes consistent effort. My interpretation of the principles on any given day impacted my capacity to do this, based on how I felt and whether I could avoid reverting to a behaviourist stance from my early teaching career.

In Scotland, self-evaluation documentation such as *Applying Nurture as a Whole School Approach – A framework to support self-evaluation* has been developed by Education Scotland to support primary and secondary schools to create whole school implementation and improvement plans towards a nurturing school (Scottish Government, 2017). Schools are encouraged to aspire to a culture where nurture

principles are embedded in the ethos of the classroom, school community and beyond (Colley, 2024) and support children to gain a sense of universal belonging and connectedness across all aspects of their school experience (Mowat, 2022).

In some Scottish local authorities, the bid to go beyond the school environment is evident, with Glasgow City Council committed to developing a “nurturing city” as part of their long-term strategic plan for all children and young people in their educational establishments (Grantham & Primrose, 2017, p.220). More recently, Renfrewshire Council has initiated the *Renfrewshire Nurturing Relationships Approach* (RNRA) across the local authority, where schools are supported through coaching, training, and exemplars of good practice in the implementation of TSPN in all educational settings (Education Scotland, 2022).

The notion of moving from individual nurture groups or classes to whole school development of nurture in education using TSPN has been under consideration for several years, and the expectations of schools, through the role of the classroom teacher, were succinctly defined by Boxall and Lucas (2012), who stated that:

“A Nurturing School values people and seeks above all to understand and respect them as unique individuals...the essence of Nurture Group practice is the belief that teachers have within them the capacity to relate to children from the fullness of their human nature, that is, they are free to recognise and to develop their intuitive responses to the deepest needs of all their pupils.” (Boxall & Lucas, 2012, p.14).

This is an interesting point regarding the use of nurture practice in a whole class setting because it suggests that teachers should be able to meet the needs of all

children by using nurture practice and TSPN. However, Boxall and Lucas (2012) are key founders of nurture practice in schools. Although the sentiment is clear and commendable, my experience has shown that the way teachers implement nurture principles in their classrooms is not entirely clear. As a teacher, I fully accept that part of my role is to meet the needs of children. I agree with and quite enjoy the thought of supporting them with the “fullness of their human nature” but find it challenging to establish what the phrase means (Boxall & Lucas, 2012, p.14). My current interpretation is that nurture practice, within a whole class setting, supports children's wellbeing, and I would encourage colleagues to view the practice similarly. If I am confused about the implementation of TSPN in the classroom setting, I would argue that it might be more challenging for teachers who have not worked in nurture groups and led whole school evaluations on nurture practice. This is an important consideration because I am steeped in nurture practice. Therefore, I should know *precisely* what this means.

To support teacher understanding of TSPN in the classroom, Nurture International (2024) has recently developed guidance around *The Six Principles of Nurture for Learning*. This is a helpful addition to classroom practice, but the information developed by Nurture International (2024) is from a learner's point of view rather than teacher pedagogy. It is important to understand how teachers interpret their role in the practice of nurture and if they can engage in the approach on a pedagogical level. Exploring perceptions of nurture practice through TSPN and what they mean in the everyday pedagogical instruction of teachers would enhance the body of nurture literature already available.

The nurture principles are meant to permeate school culture and beyond, especially if wholeheartedly adopted by school leaders (Brawls & Ruby, 2023). If embedded fully and, perhaps more importantly, if embraced by all staff working in the school, TSPN are argued to enhance relationships and support children's wellbeing within the school context through the development of a nurturing ethos (Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Cooper, 2017; Coleman & Cooper, 2017; Davis & Cooper, 2021). The overemphasis on the word *if* is important and deliberate because my experience has taught me that it takes a lot to embed TSPN in the culture of a school. Indeed, I would argue that it takes a lot to move from a group setting to a classroom in a way that supports the children and the teacher in understanding how to use TSPN. Reflecting on why this may be, I have concluded (for now) that teacher perceptions of TSPN can be very wide-ranging.

The adoption of nurturing approaches for schools and local authorities also involves choice. The decision to embark on a change of this nature invariably comes from the top. However, teaching staff often have limited choices when senior leadership teams introduce the practice into their school communities. It would also appear, perhaps helpfully for this study, that there is little evidence of how mainstream teachers understand practice linked to TSPN in their classrooms. Another important aspect of the phrase TSPN is the word *principle*, which is defined as "a moral rule or strong belief that influences your actions" (Oxford Dictionary, 2007). This is interesting because my experience has shown that despite the list of nurture principles detailed in Figure 4, their use in classrooms is open to interpretation based on how teachers do or do not understand them. I would suggest that this will impact the implementation of TSPN in the mainstream classroom because more often than

not, TSPN are referred to as an 'approach' linked to strong beliefs, where suggestions, rather than details, for their practical application are offered to teachers (Brawls & Ruby, 2023).

To support the implementation of nurture practice beyond the group setting, recent educational policy documents in Scotland have brought the concept of nurture to the fore in an attempt to raise awareness of associated terms that impact children's wellbeing, such as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), Trauma-Informed Practice (TIP) and nurturing approaches (Education Scotland, 2018). The purpose of the Scottish Government guidance document, which highlights the necessity of nurture through relational approaches to teaching, is to assimilate the terminology around teaching methods and raise awareness of the need for such practice through summaries of previous and current terms regarding difficulties which are likely to impact a child's wellbeing (Education Scotland, 2018). Nurture practice through TSPN has been highlighted as an ongoing feature of good practice within the Education Scotland publications regarding ways to support ACEs, TIP, and attachment needs for children and young people (Education Scotland, 2018). However, they are still described as principles in guidance documents. Therefore, it might be useful to explore how teachers perceive them as an aspect of their practice in the classroom. This is an important step for practitioners in classroom settings who are out with a nurture group and not deemed experts in the practice.

Existing academic literature on mainstream teachers' views of nurture practice seems limited. Research on nurture practice and TSPN, including teachers' views on the intervention's impact, is available primarily through academic writing and

evaluations of nurture groups (Coleman & Cooper, 2017; Cubeddu & MacKay, 2017; Roffey, 2016). From the literature reviewed so far for this thesis, it seems that very few studies consider mainstream teachers' perspectives on pedagogical practice, which is directly linked to TSPN in their classrooms. Self-evaluation processes such as *How Nurturing is Our School* in Scotland (Education Scotland, 2017) and *Nurturing Schools Award* across the UK (NurtureUK, 2023) take account of teacher understanding of nurture practice as an aspiration for schools. In Scotland, the information gathered tends to be from large-scale quantitative questionnaires (Education Scotland, 2017). This is entirely understandable for the purpose of time and resources, but exploring teachers' perceptions of TSPN seems important as I would argue that it is a missing link in the literature on nurture practice. Understanding *how* teachers perceive nurture principles is key to establishing the way they might use the approach in practice.

Exploring teachers' views based on professional and personal experiences is important. It might establish how practitioners will respond to a suggested change to their pedagogical approach, assuming teachers consider that there is a need to change their practice at all (Priestly *et al.*, 2017). Encouraging education practitioners to explore and question their views around pedagogy, which might result in change, is important for staff development (Mowat, 2007). This point is relevant if teachers have taken a pedagogical stance that may seem at odds with nurture practice (Parker *et al.*, 2016; Kearney & Nowek, 2019) and school leaders expect a cultural shift across the school community.

Thinking about my professional experience, I agree with Orland-Barak and Maskit's (2011) suggestion that asking mainstream teachers to adopt a set of potentially very different principles in their classroom can be challenging as it involves requesting they consider their practice from an unfamiliar perspective. This point is especially relevant if the teacher's natural pedagogical stance does not sit comfortably alongside nurture practice. Therefore, teachers must be "provided with opportunities to examine their own beliefs, pre-conceptions, attitudes and preferences...in order to affect change in young people in their care" (Rae *et al.*, 2017, p.202).

Despite national and local government expectations around the use of nurture practice as an approach in classrooms, research on teacher perceptions tends to centre on nurture room staff and is heavily weighted towards the primary education sector (Colley, 2007). When considering the views of teaching staff using TSPN, another complication might be that nurture room practitioners have voiced concern over mainstream practitioners' capacity for pedagogical change and adoption of TSPN (Sanders, 2007; Waring & Evans, 2014). In a small-scale case study on the differences between nurture group and mainstream teachers' understanding of nurture and attunement, Cubeddu and MacKay (2017) established that pedagogical behaviours of four mainstream staff were considerably different to the nurture group practitioners. Classroom observations and frequency counts of key behaviours demonstrated that, on average, classroom teachers were up to 28 per cent less likely to use TSPN with children in their lessons (Cubeddu & MacKay, 2017). Whereas this is a small study, a point acknowledged by the authors, it is interesting and raises the question of *how* teachers understand TSPN beyond the nurture room. Exploring teacher perceptions and interpretation of TSPN and how they are used

and interpreted in the teacher's chosen setting would add to the existing body of literature.

Previous research studies exploring the impact of nurture practice in education settings in Scottish schools tend to use large-scale quantitative studies across local authorities (Kearney & Nowek, 2019) or small-scale interview studies (Gibb & Lewis, 2019) to establish practitioners' perceptions of nurture practice and TSPN. The majority of papers reviewed for this study to date, make use of key quantitative data gathering tools such as Boxall Profiles (NurtureUK, 2023), Standards and Difficulties Questionnaires (Goodman, 2001) and Behavioural Indicators of Self-Esteem (Burnett, 1998), to develop understanding on pupil, parent, and nurture teacher views of children within the nurture group (Coleman & Cooper, 2017; Grantham & Primrose, 2017; Rae *et al.*, 2017; Reynolds *et al.*, 2009; Shaver & McClatchey, 2013). At times, group interviews and individual, semi-structured interviews have been used to collect pupil and teacher views on the impact of a nurture group intervention on children's attainment and behaviour (Hughes & Schlosser, 2014). These are helpful and interesting studies. However, there seems to be a gap in the literature regarding mainstream teachers' views beyond the nurture group setting. In particular, how the practice impacts teacher pedagogy in the classroom and what TSPN mean to them. As previously highlighted, teachers included in the aforementioned research tend to be nurture group practitioners. This reinforces that there is a gap in the literature regarding data on mainstream classroom teachers' perceptions of TSPN, to include all educational sectors from early years to the secondary sector. Until recently, it appeared that life beyond the nurture group was rarely considered unless it was directly linked to improvements in children's social

and emotional wellbeing during the transition from a nurture provision to the primary mainstream classroom (MacPherson & Phillips, 2021). Therefore, based on identifying a gap in the research, I would suggest that there is scope for a more detailed look at mainstream teachers' understanding of nurture practice and its associated principles. My research proposes to contribute knowledge that will support understanding of the use of TSPN beyond the nurture room setting.

Another important point is that the majority of articles within the current research literature have reviewed the impact of nurture practice from the perspective of the primary school practitioner (Gibb & Lewis, 2019). However, work by Grantham and Primrose (2017) investigated the “fidelity [of] variant nurture group models” across Glasgow City Council and included seven secondary schools (2017, p.221). The authors sampled seventeen staff and twenty-four pupils. Staff interviews were conducted with nurture group staff (class teachers and pupil support assistants) to find out how adults could be supported to better understand nurture principles within the school. Participants reported that a clearer view of the benefits of TSPN across the whole school helped counteract teacher attitudes towards pupils missing subjects due to time spent in the group, which led to “disgruntled staff who felt that students should be attending class” (Grantham & Primrose, 2017, p.228). The study identified that nurture group staff felt a lack of understanding of nurture practice on the part of mainstream staff was a barrier to whole school development, and the authors highlighted it as one of their main themes through thematic analysis (*ibid*, 2017).

Grantham and Primrose's (2017) study is useful, but I would argue that mainstream teachers need to be offered an opportunity to express what they feel and believe about implementing TSPN in their classrooms. Therefore, I suggest that this study will make a new contribution to the field by focusing on mainstream practitioners' perceptions of nurture in the classroom and school setting. This is a unique perspective, as it is a progression from papers that centre on nurture group studies and the voice of nurture group practitioners. It is also an opportunity to establish mainstream teachers' perceptions of TSPN through a broader context incorporating primary and secondary educational sectors within the same study.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that, in some limited cases, teacher views have been gathered through mixed methods and qualitative case studies, ranging from one child to multiple educational authorities, although the general pattern remains that the bulk of the data originates from nurture group staff (Cooper & Tiknaz, 2005; Cefai & Pizzuto, 2017). Where mainstream staff were included in a few case study analyses, members of the senior leadership team were often interviewed, rather than classroom teachers (Hughes & Schlosser, 2014; Shaver & McClatchey, 2013). Therefore the perceptions of mainstream teachers are still required to gain insight into their understanding of TSPN and what the practice means for pedagogy in the classroom. A gap this study aims to fill.

2.5 Nurture through pedagogy

Pedagogy, as it is used in this study, is concerned with *how* teachers approach the practice of teaching (Corbett & Norwich, 2005), including potential influences on their choice of approach in the classroom. Pedagogy is the “philosophical approach underpinning the instructions of teachers”, which can change based on a range of factors (Grimmer, 2021, p.3). In addition to a philosophical foundation for teaching, pedagogy is influenced by societal, cultural and personal interpretations, which impact the approach taken by teachers at different stages of their careers (Alexander, 2004) and the stance they hold regarding their chosen behaviours in the classroom (Roberts, 2023).

Although teachers tend to be introduced to pedagogy early in their careers, they require ongoing support that continually links theory and practice to improve teaching in the classroom across a range of curricular areas (Flores, 2018). Teachers’ approaches to delivering key curricular subjects are often based on their preferred pedagogical stance (Flannery *et al.*, 2016). Teachers’ understanding of their positionality in teaching and learning approaches, who they are in the world, how they have been taught to teach and what teaching means to them, are of significant importance when considering how lessons are taught and what approach they bring to their classroom (Olsen, 2008; van Manen, 2015). This includes their position as educators and their perceptions of the impact of specific pedagogical approaches (Waring & Evans, 2014), as well as awareness of their choice of *how* to be in a class with pupils (Kareepadath, 2018).

A mixture of pedagogical theories and methods is necessary to ensure a holistic and varied learning experience for pupils across a range of contexts (Saxena *et al.*, 2021). Teachers are expected to understand the needs and abilities of their pupils by adapting their pedagogy to create equitable educational experiences for all children in the class (Shah, 2021). Awareness of various pedagogical approaches is important because the concept of pedagogy shifts over time and across cultural contexts (Murphy, 2009). This is an evolution that I would argue is necessary to support children and young people's learning and wellbeing. I believe that pedagogical flexibility is important for teachers as they develop and grow throughout their careers. It was helpful for me as my pedagogical philosophy matured throughout my various roles aligned with nurture practice and health and wellbeing education.

Many versions, definitions, and views of pedagogy are used in schools, and I do not aim to discuss every aspect and connotation of pedagogy. Instead, I believe it is important to consider relational pedagogical approaches, which will help map a course to Hayes's (2008) work and its relevance to my study. In addition to a focus on relational pedagogy, I review behaviourist pedagogy due to the perceived dichotomy that exists in practice. Throughout my career, I have regularly experienced an either/or position when talking to colleagues about TSPN and nurture through education. Nurture versus behaviourist practice is a regular debate in my everyday role supporting teachers. I accept that the situation is much more complex and nuanced than a binary position. However, understanding the difference between relational and behaviourist pedagogy is important for this thesis because of the perceived dichotomy in practice and academic work.

2.5.1 Behaviourist pedagogy

As discussed in Chapter 1, behaviourist pedagogy is deliberately positioned within this literature review because it is a common and currently used approach to teaching and learning. It has its roots in behaviourism and is associated with systems of rewards and sanctions within the classroom environment to elicit specific behavioural responses from children (Wheldall, 2014). As a pedagogy, it is predicated on creating a classroom culture of positive behaviour, with the expectation that this will support children's learning experience and allow teachers to maintain control of their classrooms (Bates, 2021). In schools, behaviourist pedagogy is still commonly used nationally (Bennett, 2020) and internationally (Armstrong, 2018).

Behaviourist pedagogy has been identified in the literature as just one of many methods that should be used by teachers as a way of supporting children's behaviour and sense of achievement at school (Ansar *et al.*, 2021; Saxena *et al.*, 2021). However, the approach has come under scrutiny and criticism in recent years due to the use of rewards and sanctions to support children's learning, especially from academics concerned with the difficulty of applying experimental psychological approaches to human learning (Kohn, 2018; Saari, 2019). This is because of the association between the theory of behaviourism and early psychological experiments that link environmental changes with specific behavioural responses in animals (Hatfield, 2003). At times, using behaviourist strategies in classrooms can lead to "punishment by rewards" due to the stigma attached to star charts and other public, visual behaviour management strategies when a child is unable to meet the expectations of the adult in the classroom (Kohn, 2018, p.10). As previously

discussed, I agree with critiques of behaviourist pedagogy in the classroom. I have rarely known it to work for children with social, emotional, or behavioural needs, and my experience has shown me that it does not positively impact children with attachment needs. Kohn (2018) suggested that behaviourist pedagogy does not work to motivate and support children. The competitive, exclusionary nature of striving to be a “good person” can rupture relationships and cause division rather than create relational harmony or community in a classroom environment (Kohn, 2018, p.54). As a pastoral support teacher in a secondary school, I saw this with the merit/demerit system in place. Learners received merits for good behaviour, organisation, respect, etc. Conversely, they received demerits and referrals for bad behaviour, and staff brought a range of different perspectives as to how ‘bad’ was interpreted. At the end of each term, lists of young people allowed to attend the school trip were displayed outside the pastoral base. Those with lots of merits inevitably made it onto the list. Those with few merits or a wide range of demerits did not. Given that my group of young people were those with the most distressed behaviour, they very often missed the mark. In some cases, they would shrug it off. In other cases, they verbally or physically fought with pupils who had been added to the list. Either way, the list reminded them they were not good enough, which influenced relational harmony with peers. I reflect on this practice as a public display of shame. It was difficult to watch and even more challenging to justify to young people who wanted to be connected and accepted but found it challenging to do this through a public reward system.

The decision as to what is or is not positive behaviour is often led by various views on how children should behave in school (Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Bombèr, 2020).

Critics of behaviourist pedagogy have described it as an approach to teaching which does not consider an understanding of “beliefs, desires, intentions, experiences and attitudes” (Wheldall, 2014, p.173) of children. Nor does it account for the reason behind the presenting behaviours of children (Chatterley, 2020, 2023; Dix, 2017). Therefore, I believe there are questions about an approach that seems to discount the possibility of children being more complex than a reward system, sticker chart (Kohn, 2018), or merit/demerit system. The extrinsic motivational aspect of behaviourist teaching strategies means they are a short-term fix when supporting children to master their learning in the classroom (Dweck, 2000).

Given the critique of behaviourist approaches, concerns have been raised regarding the potential and perceived dichotomy between behaviourist pedagogy and alternate approaches such as relational pedagogies (Rodgers, 2015). This may be because of the current debate on social media platforms, which seem to advocate for (Chatterley, 2023; Dix, 2017) and against (Bennett, 2020; Lemov, 2021; Wheldall, 2014) an increased focus on relational approaches in the classroom. I am not suggesting that a dichotomy exists in practice. An either/or position is too simplistic for such a complicated issue. However, I would suggest that the values, thoughts, and experiences of teachers engaged in behaviourist pedagogy might differ from those who favour a relational, nurturing approach.

An example of this was shown through a study that evaluated *The Incredible Years Programme* in New Zealand, where behaviourist pedagogical approaches were discovered to be incompatible with the relational, cultural and values stance required for early years pedagogy in Māori populations (Ritchie, 2016). The study found that

using a behaviourist pedagogical approach to support children in the early years was “devoid of empathy” as context and culture were often misunderstood (Ritchie, 2016, p.120). Indeed, much criticism for behaviourist pedagogy has originated from early years research where practitioners were concerned with the lack of relational focus, empathy and care in behaviourist pedagogy (Clark, 2023; Conkbayir, 2023; Grimmer, 2021; Hayes, 2008; Hayes & Filipovic, 2018). The questioning of behaviourist methods by academics and educational establishments across early years suggests a growing awareness of alternative pedagogical approaches that support children and young people's learning. An aspect of critical, reflective practice that is important in teaching (Ansar *et al.*, 2021; Waring & Evans, 2014).

2.5.2 Pedagogies for relational practice

Pedagogical approaches based on relational practice positively impact children's wellbeing (Geddes, 2006; Gravett *et al.*, 2021; Hayes, 2008; Hayes & Filipović, 2017; Hedges & Cooper, 2018; Noddings, 2012). Relational approaches are particularly relevant regarding professional responsiveness within a framework that supports equity in education (Gorski, 2016). Relational pedagogy supports the development of professionally mediated, positive relationships in the classroom through “trust...care...closeness and support...and a sense of power and agency” (Crownover & Jones, 2018, p.21).

The extent to which a relational pedagogy can be viewed as a learning and teaching approach is often open to the teacher's personal interpretation, belief, and agency (Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2008; Waring & Evans, 2014). Taking a relational approach is a choice for teachers when considering how they might enact their

pedagogy in the classroom (Hayes, 2004). This is an interesting point when pondering teacher choices around national or school-led pedagogy, such as those suggested through evaluation and improvement activities for whole school nurturing approaches.

In Scotland, teaching strategies, research, and whole school evaluations linked to relational pedagogical approaches feature in policy documents such as *Better Relationships, Better Learning, Better Behaviour* (Scottish Government, 2017), the *National Improvement Framework* (Scottish Government, 2023) and the suggested outcomes from the *Additional Support for Learning Review* (Scottish Government, 2020). The GTCS has stated that teachers must build “nurturing, caring..., supportive and purposeful relationships” in their classrooms to ensure learner engagement and participation (GTCS, 2022, p.10). Therefore, there is an expectation that relational approaches will be part of the everyday actions of teachers in Scotland across all educational sectors.

The key term in Scottish national government documentation, however, is *guidance*. Policy documents that guide relational or pedagogical approaches are helpful. However, at the time of writing this thesis, there seems to be no specific framework or implementation approach associated with relational pedagogy. The lack of a framework to support relational practice might be due to the complexity of positive relationships as a requirement in teaching. My professional experience has taught me that it is challenging to fully mandate such an approach with teachers.

In UK schools, relational approaches may sometimes be predicated on TSPN and are used for small group interventions for children with social, behavioural and emotional wellbeing needs (Cefai, 2024). In Scotland, evaluation documents such as *How Nurturing is Our School* (Education Scotland, 2017) support the development of relational approaches across whole school communities. More recently, guidance and support from Scottish local authorities, such as Glasgow City Council, extended the contribution to relational practice in schools by creating the *Glasgow Restorative Approaches Framework*. An approach intended to support whole school restorative, nurturing practice and encourage a shift away from behaviourist approaches (Glasgow City Council, 2024).

In addition to the policy and practice complications, the language used in academic literature to describe relational pedagogy can vary and has included terms such as *nurturing pedagogy* (Hayes, 2008; Hayes & Filipović, 2017; Gleasure *et al.*, 2024), *relational pedagogy* (Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2008; Henderson & Smith, 2022; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009; Reeves & Le Mare, 2018); *care pedagogy* (Noddings, 2012a; Velasquez *et al.*, 2013); *love pedagogy* (Grimmer, 2021) and *slow pedagogy* (Clarke, 2022). The purpose of this literature review is not to mesh all the above terms together, as it is recognised that each is important across specific contexts and time, as proposed by the authors. However, what is important and worthy of attention is a focus on the wide range of terminology used to discuss relational practice across educational settings. Whether teachers are familiar with some or all of these terms describing their practice does not seem fully known. To bring these concepts together and look at them more closely, the differences of the central message for each pedagogy are shown in Table 1. Although the terminology

for the title of each practice differs, there is a common theme regarding the adult-child relationship and the relational approach used in each definition (Shin, 2015).

Table 1: Relational practice and associated pedagogical approaches

Pedagogical Approach	Central Message
Nurturing Pedagogy	A theoretical framework where concepts of care and education combine in early years settings. A move from didactic teaching approaches with relationships (Hayes, 2008; Hayes & Filipović, 2017) and care (Gleasure <i>et al.</i> , 2024) at the core of practice.
Relational Pedagogy	<p>Quality interactions with adults are key, including an awareness of the importance of positive relationships in a child's life (Reeves & Le Mare, 2018).</p> <p>Relationships between children and adults are central to positive social, emotional, and cognitive development (Henderson & Smith, 2022).</p> <p>Adult's relational epistemological stance underpins relational pedagogy in practice (Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2008)</p> <p>The teacher's ontological stance, which includes values and experiences, supports child-centred learning experiences predicated on relationships within the child's environment (Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009).</p> <p>"The intentional practice of caring teachers interacting with students to build and sustain positive relationships that cognitively and emotionally support their students throughout their journeys together" (Adams, 2018,p.9)</p>
Care Pedagogy	<p>Argues for a focus on learning environments that move from technical aspects of education, such as attainment, to caring, "human aspects" (Velasquez <i>et al.</i>, 2013, p.162).</p> <p>Conceptualisation of care as a professional responsibility for educators encapsulates the idea of "natural care" through listening, attention, reciprocity, and empathy (Noddings, 2012a, p.54).</p>
Love Pedagogy	A focus on love as an approach to teaching and learning in the early years is predicated on understanding the psychological theories of Maslow and Bowlby in order to build trusting relationships for growth and development in young children (Grimmer, 2021).
Slow Pedagogy	Based on the pace that developing children need, through connections and attunement of adult-child relationship, rather than "performativity for results and baseline assessments" (Clark, 2022, p.4)
Social Pedagogy	<p>Foregrounds the impact of relationships in people's lives through multiple interactions with their environment (Smith & Monteux, 2019).</p> <p>Associated with "haltung...[which means] inner anchor" of the professional to connect with people they work with and support. (Kaska, 2015, p.19).</p>

As a strong advocate for nurture practice, I am highly invested in relational pedagogy and enjoy the nuances of each version detailed in Table 1. I am aware of the critiques of this practice that relationships are not enough in the classroom and would argue that they partially make sense (Bennett, 2020; Lemov, 2021). Suppose the only pedagogical approach used by teachers is based on positive relationships. In that case, they might find it challenging given the expectations for raising attainment, meeting targets, and helping children succeed.

Relational pedagogy can sometimes be seen as an “empty signifier” for adults (Hickey & Riddle, 2023, p.822). I agree that teachers are confused about the terminology. However, the extent to which teachers understand how to enact relational pedagogy in the classroom depends on how clear definitions and guidance are, and how it is interpreted. For example, in Table 1, Clarke (2022) wrote about the importance of slow pedagogy to connect with children in early years education. She advocated moving away from performative attainment measures for very young children. This seems reasonable as long as it is balanced with a range of learning experiences that build the child’s knowledge *and* allow them to work at their own pace (Hinsdale & Ljungblad, 2016). Maintaining a balance between relational practice and other pedagogical choices is important. It is a key point I would make because no literature I have reviewed suggested disregarding other aspects of pedagogical practice in the classroom in favour of a sole focus on relational pedagogy.

An additional example from Table 1 includes the development of social pedagogy, which has its roots in nineteenth-century Germany and is now a significant approach

in schools across various Western European countries (Cameron, 2018; Moss & Petrie, 2019). It foregrounds the impact of relationships in people's lives through multiple interactions with their environment (Fox & Thiessen, 2019; Smith & Monteux, 2019). Social pedagogy is predicated on the practitioner's values, beliefs, ethics, and moral stance, as well as the practical implication of their skills when working with others in their field (Charfe & Gardner, 2019). It is derived from the German term *haltung*, which has no direct translation but covers core values such as the professional's self-awareness, personal views, and "inner anchor" (Kaska, 2015, p.19). *Haltung* is linked to self-reflection, self-evaluation, and a degree of relational and emotional intelligence when working with others (Hatton, 2013).

Social pedagogy has been associated with "care and welfare; inclusion; socialisation; academic support and social education" (Kyriacou, 2009, p.101). In international studies which included the views of student teachers, social pedagogy frameworks have been explored as a possible approach to support schools in understanding their priorities around the development of wellbeing education, attainment (Kyriacou *et al.*, 2013), and pastoral care (Barrow, 2013) as an equal consideration for teachers. Thus, wellbeing and attainment should be aligned as equal priorities for teachers.

Social pedagogy is an interesting consideration for relational pedagogical practice. As a theoretical framework, it makes sense from my perspective, especially as I am always keen to discover alternative pedagogical approaches to those I was initially trained in as a student. An approach that links a teacher's values, stance, and "inner anchor" is of significant interest because the term intrigues me (Kaska, 2015, p.19). I

agree with the connection made by Barrow (2013) to roles such as pastoral care, as they seem the most obvious place for this type of pedagogy.

Reflecting on the list of pedagogies detailed in Table 1, I would offer that they complement rather than be exclusionary alongside a teacher's pedagogical approach. This view links to the teacher as a professional who can balance a relational approach with other demands through their craft, as discussed earlier in this chapter (Florian & Beaton, 2018). Therefore, teacher' understanding of what works in their classroom for their pupils is essential when considering pedagogical approaches (Biesta, 2017). It includes the strength of the teacher-student relationship to allow for a shift back and forth between different pedagogies (Riley, 2011).

The pedagogical triangle is an important and well-used model for understanding teaching practice in the classroom (Friesen & Osguthorpe, 2017). The model offers a view of the main teaching interactions in a classroom environment: student-teacher, teacher-content, and student-content. Figure 6 shows a visual example of the basic version of the triangle.

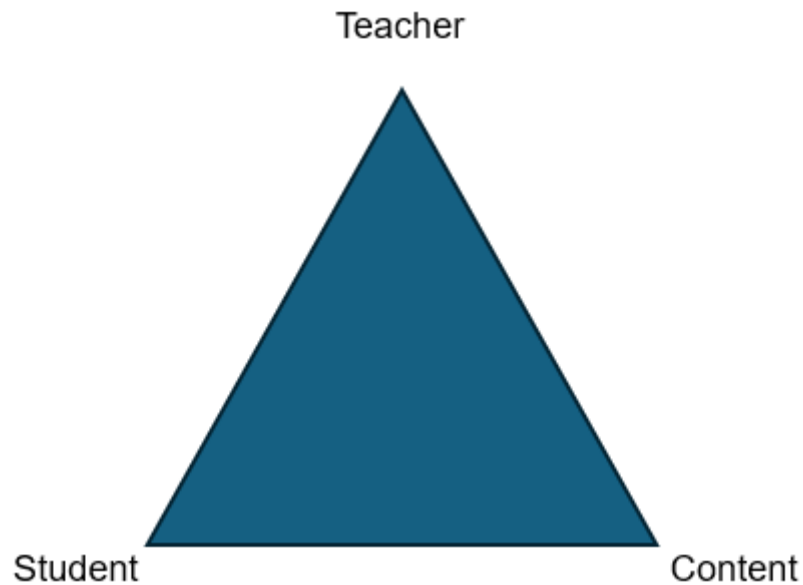


Figure 6: The pedagogical triangle

The triangle has been used for many years as a model for understanding the pedagogical connections between students, teachers, and curriculum content (Barrow *et al.*, 2001). However, critiques of the model suggested that it is too focused on knowledge construction, with limited evidence of a relational element for connection and communication between students and teachers (Bertrand, 1994; Herman & Gwaltney, 1999).

Higgins (2010) developed the pedagogical triangle to include a wide range of interactions in the classroom between teacher, student, other students, and curriculum content. He argued that teaching comprised “the full complex of pedagogical relationships” (Higgins, 2010, p.440). However, I would suggest that pedagogical interactions between students, teachers, subjects, and other pupils are not the same as relational pedagogy. This is because relational pedagogy is a *foundation* of what should be happening in a classroom between people. As detailed

in Table 1, care, trust, attunement, empathy, and connection are key aspects of relational pedagogy. Aspects of practice that I would argue are essential for and between people prior to a consideration of curriculum or subject knowledge.

The original model of the pedagogical triangle is transactional, a term directly linked to the triangle in some of the work reviewed for this study (Barrow *et al.*, 2001; Friesen & Osguthorpe, 2017). The focus on transactions between teacher and pupil seems mostly concerned with knowledge production (Skog, 2022). I believe there should be more emphasis on the relational component of interactions in the classroom, and some writers suggest that the student-teacher connection has been highlighted as a key component in the success of pedagogical practice (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012; Loughran, 2013) where the relational connection with students is as important, if not more so, than attainment (Henderson & Smith, 2022; Reeves & Le Mare, 2018; Clarke, 2022). My professional reflections would lead me to agree with this assertion however I would add Comer's (1995) view that relationships are not only important for learning, they are essential. I have rarely been able to impact a child's learning without trusting, caring relationships as the foundation for my practice. It took me several years to realise that this was as important as my skill in teaching literacy or numeracy.

The balance between relational practice in the classroom and the drive for attainment success is something I often reflect upon. Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006) argued that teachers need to be aware of their relational practice in the classroom amid the focus on assessment data. This is not to suggest that I believe attainment to be unimportant. Of course, I understand the essential position it holds

in education. After all, it is the core business of a teacher to educate children and young people. However, my experience in the classroom has taught me that children need to feel attached to their teacher. I would argue that the impact of a strong, positive connection through relational practice creates a secure environment and supports comfortable learning experiences. I know this can be challenging in classrooms of over thirty children, but I would suggest that it is an essential component of an effective classroom.

In her work on attachment and the pedagogical triangle, Geddes (2006) developed the model to include teacher-student and student-teacher attachment to support relational pedagogy and develop trust and relationships in the classroom. She offered that the triangle should be an interactive, two-way flow of information between the people involved to develop connections that influence learning. An adapted version of the triangle, based on the work of Geddes (2006), is shown in Figure 7.

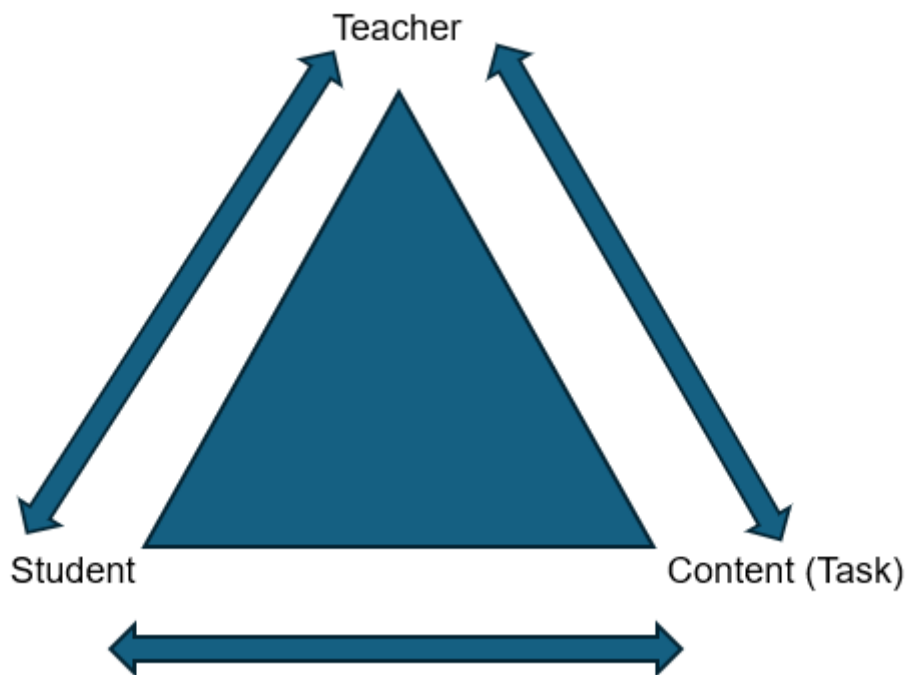


Figure 7: An adaptation of the pedagogical triangle to include the work of Geddes (2006)

The 'serve and return' nature of the interactions shown in Geddes's model (2006) is more conducive to a relational approach. It supports attachment-aware interactions in the classroom between the teacher and student (Delaney, 2017). This conscious decision by the teacher is essential because it is associated with a teacher's capacity for concepts such as empathy (Hen & Sharabi-Nov, 2014; Stojiljković *et al.*, 2012). Empathy has already been identified as a critical concept in the first section of this chapter on nurture and through the theoretical and practical elements of TSPN. It is identified in the literature as an essential skill for teachers who favour a relational pedagogical approach (Barr, 2011; Bouton, 2016). However, there is another aspect of the argument for empathy as a component of relational pedagogy because teachers who use it know their duty to meet children's needs (Goroshit & Hen, 2016). I believe the decision, conscious or otherwise, to engage with children on a relational level is a professional responsibility for teachers which should be a foundational

aspect of teaching practice. My reflections on the pedagogical triangle have led me to consider it from a different angle, allowing for relational practice to underpin the interactions between students, teachers, curriculum content and all the other interactions in between. My reconceptualization of the pedagogical triangle, to include a foundational depth of relational practice, is shown in Figure 8.

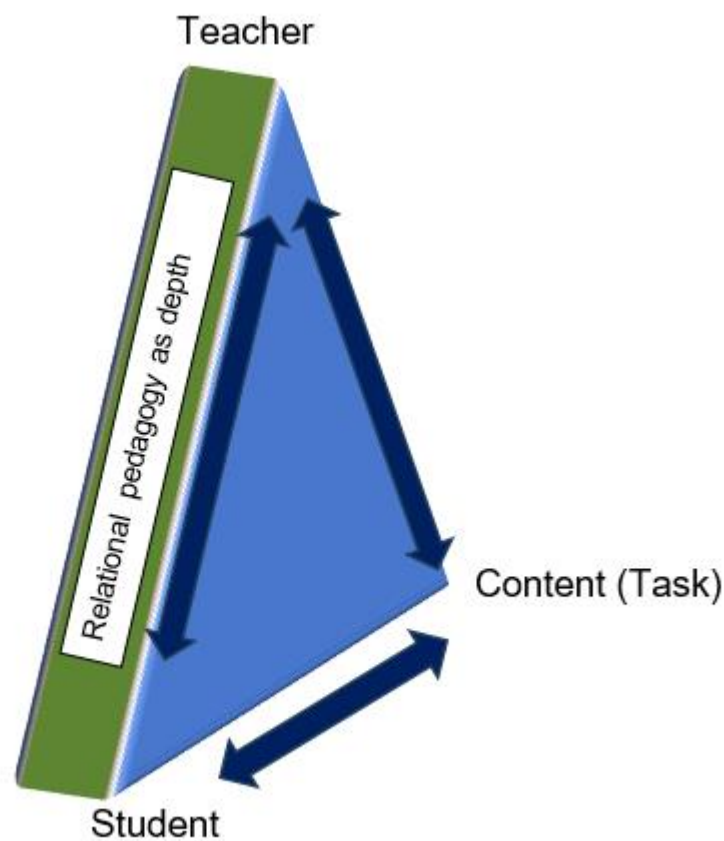


Figure 8: Relational depth in the pedagogical triangle

Campbell (2013) suggested that there is a professional obligation and ethical stance involved in “engaging with alternative pedagogies” (2013, p.415) to support children’s learning. Relational pedagogy can assist relational growth through intersubjective interactions between students and teachers (Joldersma, 2013;

Murphy & Brown, 2012). These connections and interactions can sometimes feel unusual for teachers who spend their careers using alternative strategies. I was one of them, as discussed in Chapter 1. I used to be a behaviourist and *only* a behaviourist. Therefore, I appreciate the discomfort that comes with change. In her work on relational practice in higher education settings, Gravett (2023) summarised this feeling very succinctly as a “vulnerability in relational pedagogy” (2023, p.38). I felt very vulnerable when considering changing my pedagogical approach in the classroom to include a focus on relational practice. However, I would argue that this is an essential aspect of teaching because, in addition to considering what is right for pupils, teachers owe it to themselves to adopt an approach in their classroom that supports who they are as people (Higgins, 2011). Suppose building relationships is inherent in a person’s approach to life. In that case, the impact of attuned and empathic connections is likely to be a positive force in the classroom (Joldersma, 2013), where pivotal moments happen for children’s learning (Hickey *et al.*, 2021).

Most academic work on relational pedagogies, as discovered for this study thus far, is linked with early years practice, as the approach is more accessible to implement with younger children because of the focus on attachment, attunement, and building connections (Cliffe & Solvason, 2023). However, a few key studies explored the impact of the practice on older primary-aged children (Gidlund, 2020) and students in higher education (Motta & Bennet, 2017). This would suggest limited research on the impact of relational pedagogical approaches such as nurture in whole class settings. Equally important is the lack of research evidence on teacher views of these concepts.

2.5.3 A closer look at existing research on relational pedagogical practice

Previous research on relational pedagogical practice has ranged from specific foci on bullying and adult responses to the problem (Crownover & Jones, 2018) to teacher perceptions of relational teaching methods (Swan, 2021). In an American study that explored the perceptions of newly qualified primary teachers, researchers sought to establish the impact of “warm demander” pedagogy. It is an approach that considered relationships with students as a starting point for teachers to positively impact classroom ethos and learning experiences (Zachos & Akouarone, 2020, p.347). Concepts of care, love, “insistence”, and understanding of children’s behaviour were prominent in the findings of the qualitative case study that used questionnaire data ($N=40$) and five unstructured interviews (Zachos & Akouarone, 2020, p. 350). This is an interesting study as it demonstrated that participants felt relational practice was important in the classroom. However, the research found that insistence was a challenge for the new teachers as they were unclear how insistent or, as they perceived it, “assertive” to be when trying to develop a warm demander culture in their classrooms (*ibid*, p.365). The study identified a possible confusion over the use of relational practice as at odds with expectations in the classroom and across the school community linked to rules and behavioural pedagogy. The tensions in this study reminded me of Clarke and Dawson’s (1998) advice on the “nurture/structure highway” (1998, p.84). It is an approach to nurture offered to parents to provide care and control in equal measure (Clarke & Dawson, 1998). Albeit the word nurture was used, I was consistently reminded of behaviourist approaches associated with the authors’ advice, similar to the critique of the warm demander approach. I am not suggesting these approaches do not work. However, I am suggesting that, in practice, being a ‘warm demander’ in the classroom makes

sense as long as there is a balance between adult demands and a focus on building relationships to support children and young people meet those demands.

Similar concerns over the balance between teacher expectations and developing relational practice were detailed in a small-scale Canadian qualitative study of elementary school teachers ($N=3$), which explored participant views of relational pedagogy (Reeves & Le Mare, 2018). The study aimed to support children's emotional wellbeing and raise awareness among teachers of a relational approach to their practice (Reeves & Le Mare, 2018). The research found that teachers had a raised awareness of the importance of relational pedagogy, further to a range of professional learning opportunities to understand theory around attachment, trauma, and social and emotional wellbeing needs (*ibid*, 2018). However, participants also had mixed views on the usefulness of relational pedagogy due to the senior leadership team's competing priorities and the realisation that a whole school approach was needed to make it work effectively (*ibid*, 2018). Although the study was small-scale and relied on self-reported journals, limitations acknowledged by the authors, the theme of whole school leadership support and guidance around relational pedagogical approaches was a common finding from the data.

Additional research studies have discovered that school-wide policies and approaches require direction from school leadership teams to support practitioner understanding of how and why a relational pedagogical approach is important for the wellbeing and learning of children and young people (Hickey *et al.*, 2021). Previous research has shown that whole school approaches often start with the vision of the head teacher, where actions, behaviours, role modelling, and adaptations to practice,

as adopted by the school leadership team, are found to be key to the success of implementing relational pedagogy across a school community (Shin, 2015).

A pedagogical approach based on positive relationships lends itself to teachers developing a “regard...[and] a desire for others’ wellbeing” (Velasquez *et al.*, 2013, p.166). This message seems consistent with the literature on education practitioners’ responsibilities regarding the importance of relationships in schools (NurtureUK, 2020; Swan, 2021). The role of adults in leading pedagogical change, which moves towards relational practice, is part of the motivation and impetus for this study.

2.5.4 Existing research on nurturing pedagogy

In a theoretical review of teaching and learning approaches in early years education and Irish junior classrooms, Hayes (2008) identified that there was a need for a shift from the “adult-centred, traditional, didactic manner” in infant classes to a more unstructured and relaxed approach to teaching and learning (2008, p.434). Hayes argued that the use of the term “nurturing pedagogy... [in order to] reconceptualise care” was a way to fill the professional gap between traditional didactic pedagogical methods such as behaviourist pedagogy and a pedagogy of nurture (Hayes, 2008, p.433). At the time of writing her paper, Hayes (2008) also argued that the concept of care in early years education in Ireland was problematic due to the connotations with parenthood, which led practitioners to be seen as an extension of the child’s parent or carer. Hayes (2008) recognised that teaching experiences in early years establishments were led by adult-led interactions, which, she argued, was a “difficult approach” for very young children (2008, p.433). Hayes suggested that having a pedagogical stance in early years education, where “care and education integrate”

through the term “nurturing pedagogy,” allowed for a new teaching approach, which could be aligned with nurturing learning experiences in the child’s environment (2008, p.430). The paper argued that moving to an approach that included the term *pedagogy* would recognise early years educators' important role in teaching and learning while ensuring that the method used was linked to the concept of nurturing care in education, as opposed to adult-led instruction.

Hayes (2008) coined the phrase *nurturing pedagogy* to develop a holistic approach to working with children in the early years and create a philosophical stance for early years practitioners predicated on strong relationships. Moreover, an interesting point was made regarding using *pedagogy* rather than *teaching* when considering nurture practice. Hayes (2008) contended that:

“connecting the term nurture with pedagogy is intended to focus attention on the implications for practice...because pedagogy captures the multi-layered and dynamic practice necessary to support children’s holistic development.” (Hayes, 2008, p.436)

The paper is an essential seminal text for my study. It set the scene for an approach that embodies nurture practice in an early years setting to support young children's social and emotional development needs and wellbeing by balancing direct adult instructions with “care concepts” (Hayes, 2008, p.432). The theorisation of a new term by Hayes (2008) is important to my study due to its influence in creating the main research question and associated sub-question 3, which sought to understand teachers' understanding of nurture practice as a pedagogical approach. My discovery of Hayes’s (2008) work is why questions were asked in the study

regarding the term *nurturing pedagogy* and to what extent teachers understood it within their current practice.

Hayes's (2008) work on relational practice and the term *nurturing pedagogy* has developed since the initial creation of the phrase. It has been used to conceptualise a pedagogical approach to support children and young people's wellbeing through strong, positive relationships with key adults. This included later work with colleagues, which aligned pedagogical practice and child-centred teaching within an ecological framework to explain the importance of nurturing pedagogy to education professionals (Hayes & Filipović, 2017). In recent studies from Irish educational establishments, the term *nurturing pedagogy* has evolved to include care practice and alternative learning and teaching approaches during the Covid-19 pandemic (Gleasure *et al.*, 2024). However, despite their usefulness for discussing the phrase *nurturing pedagogy*, most papers exploring the concept are directly associated with early years practice.

Beyond the early years setting, international research has led to the development of specific teaching programs for primary school-aged children in America to support teachers to become "no-nonsense nurturers" and change their pedagogical practice in the classroom (Borerro, 2018, p.2). Despite Borerro's (2018) use of the term *nurture* to aid adults in understanding what is behind specific behaviours for children, the paper used behaviourist language. Using the phrase 'no nonsense' is interesting because my first impression made me critically evaluate it as more behaviourist than nurturing due to the language used to describe adult-led expectations of what is and

is not acceptable in the classroom through the discussion of rewards and sanctions (Borerro, 2018).

I agree with Rodgers (2015), who argued that language is important when discussing pedagogy (Rodgers, 2015). From my experience, a response in practice to a distressed child can look the same from a nurturing or behaviourist view. However the language used by adults involved in supporting a child can give the approach very different meaning. For example, children who have been upset in the playground and need to return to the school building can be supported, co-regulated and given space and time to feel better. Alternatively, they can be chastised by an adult, judged and given a punishment to stay in at the next break. The language adults use often indicates a specific pedagogical stance (Chatterley, 2023). Therefore, in the case of Borerro's study, I would argue that the use of terms such as rewards and *sanctions* within their paper on nurturing pedagogy might be evidence of a behaviourist approach (Kohn, 2018).

Although it is helpful to highlight the tension in the previous study, understanding the function of behaviour is a key aspect of practice for proponents of nurturing pedagogical approaches (Boxall, 2002; Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Cooper & Whitebread, 2007). Encouraging teachers to think of behaviour as a form of communication is an interesting concept as it impacts how teachers act in their classrooms when supporting children (Ugwuozor, 2020).

Teacher behaviours, as they are viewed to relate to nurturing pedagogy, have been defined as:

“Simply... those actions of teachers, school practices and classroom acts that are most likely to foster not only the intellectual life but also the social, political, emotional and spiritual life of every student...rooted in interactions and relationships.”
(Ugwuozor, 2020, p.178).

As a teacher who fully engages in relational practice, I find Ugwuozor’s (2020) definition of nurturing pedagogy helpful in considering the foundation of relational practice. However, more detail on what this entails in a classroom would be helpful, as the context in which I work is predicated on TSPN. Therefore, a study that explores teacher perceptions of nurture principles and the concept of nurturing pedagogy would be a valuable addition to the academic field of nurture practice.

2.6 Conclusion and research aims

This chapter sought to clarify key concepts for the study. Nurture was defined as good parenting, where adults consciously develop positive attachments with children through attunement and empathy. These concepts are inherent in the theoretical framework for nurture in education through nurture principles. Additional definitions were offered for self-esteem and wellbeing, which align with nurture practice and TSPN.

Nurture through education was explored using research studies on group practice, whole class, and whole school approaches. The research reviewed for this thesis shows a gap in the extant literature on mainstream teachers' perceptions of TSPN and how they are viewed and practised in the classroom. There was also consideration of nurture groups as inclusive or exclusive education and the associated tensions surrounding the debate.

In the final section of the literature review, I considered the placement of nurture through pedagogy to explore the options for nurture practice beyond the group setting. This included a review of nurturing pedagogy as theorised by Hayes (2008). My focus on relational pedagogy was important because nurture practice through education tends to be directly associated with a relational approach. However, there is limited research on teacher perceptions of relational pedagogy, particularly TSPN in the mainstream, whole class setting and what it means for pedagogical practice. My view of the conceptual framework for the literature review is shown in Figure 9.

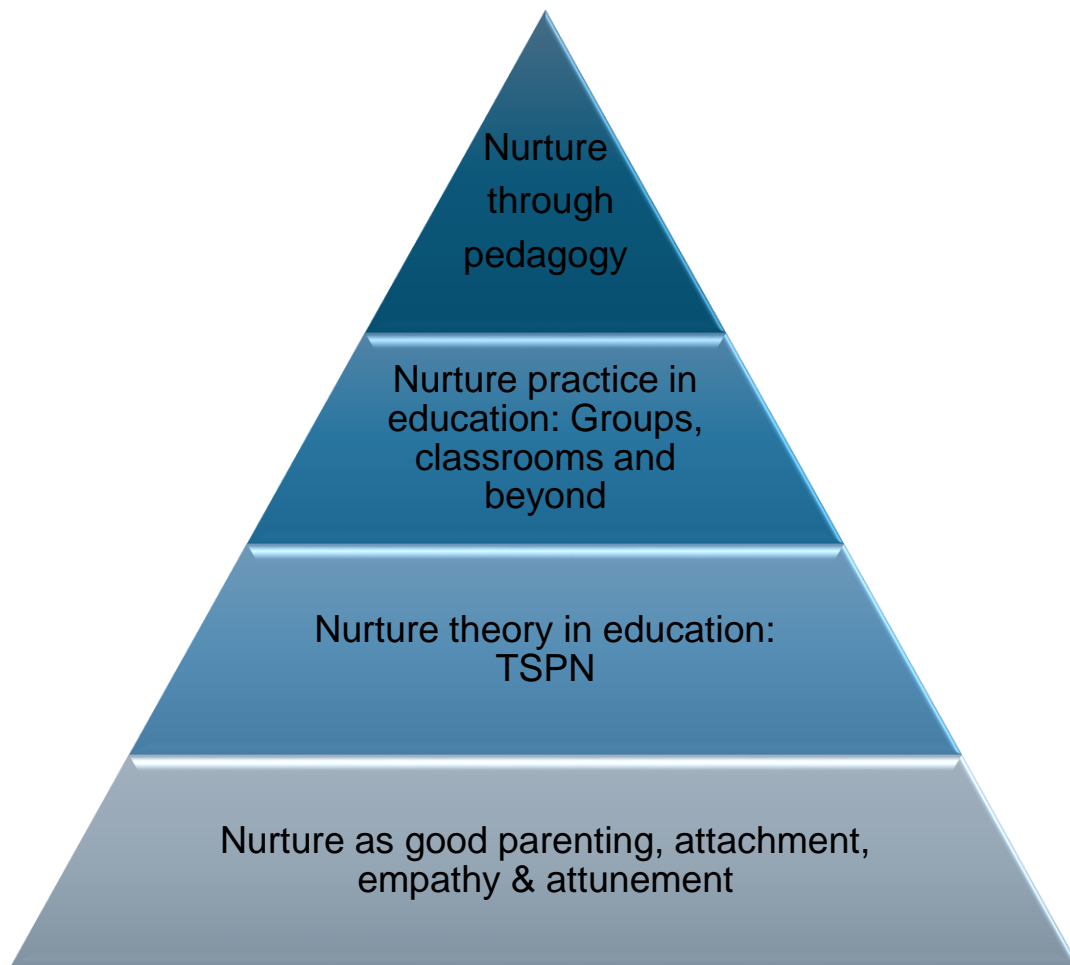


Figure 9: Conceptual framework for the literature review

This literature review identified that additional research into how teachers perceive TSPN would support mainstream practitioners make sense of a pedagogical method primarily used in small group settings. Creating knowledge of teachers' understanding and interpretation of nurture principles to support the development and implementation of nurture practice in the whole class setting would add to the body of literature already available. Finding out if teachers perceive nurture practice to be effective or ineffective would deepen understanding of the concept for primary and secondary school mainstream teachers, as a significant number of papers found in the literature review for this study focus on the views of nurture teachers.

Exploring teachers' understanding of the term *nurturing pedagogy* and what it means to them would be a helpful addition to the existing literature on the matter, which is currently understood from the view of early years education. Establishing if Hayes's (2008) term is known and/or relevant in other educational contexts would be a valuable area to explore, mainly due to the current national and international focus on relational practice in schools and the debate around a perceived dichotomy between relational versus behaviourist approaches. Given that the phrase nurturing pedagogy originated from experts in the early years in Ireland, it is important to establish if teachers in other settings, sectors, and countries understand it as a teaching method to underpin pedagogical approaches across whole class settings.

Therefore, my research aims to explore teachers' perceptions of nurture practice through TSPN, and establish how they view the approach in everyday practice. The existence of a nurturing pedagogy will be investigated alongside teacher perspectives of nurture practice as a possible approach to providing equitable education in their classrooms.

Chapter 3

Methods

This chapter covers the study's ontological and epistemological basis. It reiterates the research aims and questions and explains the rationale for a qualitative case study design with a visual data-gathering methodology. The data analysis strategy is explained, and quality indicators and ethical considerations conclude the chapter, along with a reminder of the research questions.

3.1 Ontological and epistemological positions for the study

The ontological position for the study was constructivism. Over the last few years, while wrangling with my thoughts to discover my worldview, I have come to understand that a constructivist ontology details knowledge as relative (Gray, 2014). It allows for a variety of perceptions to be considered, as opposed to the notion and existence of one truth, waiting to be discovered (Bryman, 2012). At the beginning of my research journey, I was inclined to agree with Pring's notion of a "false dualism" between positivist and interpretivist views where "an either/or position is mistaken" (2000, p.248). However, I have gradually realised that I believe in an ontological framework where knowledge is interpreted and constructed by those involved on a

social and contextual level based on the previous experience, values, and multiple perspectives of participants (Kara, 2017). Therefore, I have tentatively accepted that constructivism was the most relevant choice of ontological framework for a study on multiple perceptions of a concept.

It should be clarified that the term constructivism, as used throughout this study, is concerned with how individuals construct meaning and understanding from previous learning and experiences (Marshall *et al.*, 2005). This is important because I am immersed in learning theories due to my role as an educator. Perhaps this is why I chose an ontological position which included knowledge production through learning built on multiple perceptions and experiences (Pfadenhauer & Knoblauch, 2019). However, there is an acknowledgement of *constructionist* terminology as both are often used interchangeably (Burr, 1995). The latter details the importance of social interaction in the creation of understanding (Noss & Clayson, 2015; Pfadenhauer & Knoblauch, 2019). I recognise that a study exploring teacher perceptions of a concept may have been based on both terms.

The constructivist ontological position in this study acknowledged the essence of social interaction between participants and my interaction with respondents, as both a researcher and their colleague. Indeed, interactions and transactions between participants were crucial in forming knowledge for this research (Hothersall, 2019).

A constructivist paradigm is not without its critics, namely from realist ontological experts who consider that multiple realities cannot lead to a general understanding of

new knowledge, as each interpretation is treated equally and with as much weight as the next perception of reality (Marshall, *et al.*, 2005; Buch-Hansen & Neilsen, 2020). This is a historical and ongoing critique of the constructivist ontological position. Willig (2016) suggested that constructivism may be untenable as an ontological position for knowledge development, as most constructivists are critical realists at heart. She argued that there must be some theoretical framework that allows for a conceptualisation of reality and ensures useful knowledge is constructed from a pre-existing view of reality, albeit that different perspectives exist and should be considered (Willig, 2016).

Questions about who decides what useful knowledge is and how it can be explored are very important (Noss & Clayson, 2015). It was not the purpose of this study to make the case for and against every ontological and epistemological position currently known. At this point, I could explain that I almost located my research as a critical realist study as there was a clear link to the concept of perspectives and multiple views of reality (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2010). However, this study was about teachers' perceptions, exploring how TSPN are understood and seen. In addition, I would argue that I am surrounded by educational theories that link to constructivist approaches to knowledge production through experience of, and with, others (Pollard, 2014). In the choice between the either/or position of ontology, I found myself drawn to a philosophical position which allowed for an exploration of in-depth understanding on an issue close to my constructivist, practical and professional roots.

The study's epistemological position was pragmatism. In this research I gravitated towards a theoretical stance which led to the creation of knowledge for practical purposes and allowed for methodology that helped answer the research question. This is because I have realised that practical solutions to educational problems influence me.

Pragmatism is an important epistemological lens because it focuses on the practical uses and consequences of new knowledge created from research (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). A pragmatic paradigm is concerned with a fallibilist view of knowledge, which suggests that new knowledge is temporary and only valid if it can be used practically (Bacon, 2012). This is an important consideration for the ongoing development and change in educational practice (Biesta, 2014). Although initially conceptualised by William James and Charles Sanders Pierce in the nineteenth century, pragmatism was developed by some philosophers who believed that research inquiry and knowledge creation were a way for practical improvements to be made in people's lives and that the strength of knowledge produced was in its problem-solving ability (Bacon, 2012; Weaver, 2018).

Central to the pragmatic epistemological position of this study and the decisions made for methods and design was John Dewey's (1908) philosophy of knowledge and education. Dewey's (1908) work on knowledge development was based on the importance of transactions between children and adults, which led to experiential learning within the school environment (Bacon, 2012; Biesta, 2014; Hickman *et al.*, 2009). The philosophy offered that context, experience, transactions through language, and the time the knowledge was produced were key elements in

knowledge production for practical purposes (Biesta, 2014; Kivinen & Ristela, 2010). A valuable consideration for this study was that Dewey (1908) developed an epistemological approach that focused on the importance of the transactions between those involved in knowledge production whilst considering the depth that context and participant experience brought to developing new knowledge (Biesta, 2014).

At the core of transactions, as an aspect of pragmatic epistemology, there is a link to the constructivist ontological position where interactions with social actors in their environment support the production of new knowledge on a specific issue (Vanderstraeten, 2002). This approach allows for many views, experiences and perceptions of a concept to be explored to support the development of educational practice (Weaver, 2018).

Dewey (1908) contended that finding an absolute truth or reality of knowledge was challenging due to the range of influences on the research outcome. Therefore, moving towards the best option for effective educational practice was important (Capps, 2018). This view on multiple perspectives and their complicated nature dovetails with a constructivist ontology (Vanderstraeten, 2002). A combination of ontological constructivism and epistemological pragmatism is helpful to address the “dilemma of relativism” and the assumption that all perceptions are equally valid in relation to knowledge production (Marshall *et al.*, 2005, p.3). It is important because it fits the pragmatic view of using useful research findings for educational practice (Talebi, 2015). This approach is highlighted to be especially helpful within educational research to problem-solve and improve approaches to

teaching and learning (Biesta & Burbules, 2003).

I propose that the thread running through my research is a constructivist ontology, which will explore multiple perceptions of TSPN, and a pragmatic epistemology that will consider the usefulness of the knowledge produced for future educational practice. This combination relates to my professional view on teaching, reflexive practice, and teaching approaches (Pollard, 2014). However, I am not rejecting one philosophical stance over another. I fully agree with Adams St. Pierre's (2006) suggestion that dismissing one view over another is a dangerous approach as it justifies excluding philosophical positions that may be equally valid for research purposes. As a novice researcher, I am merely allowing myself to be drawn toward a worldview that fits with my experience of teaching, learning, and working with and including the voices of others to improve educational practice. It is a worldview that is heavily influenced by my practice in the classroom and my experience of Deweyian pragmatism as an approach to teaching and learning. My practitioner-academic stance led me to choose the most relevant theoretical framework, methodology, and design to answer the research questions and develop knowledge to improve practice (Biesta & Burbules, 2003; Bryman, 2012; Gray, 2014). Ontological, epistemological, methodological and design choices for my study are detailed in Figure 10.

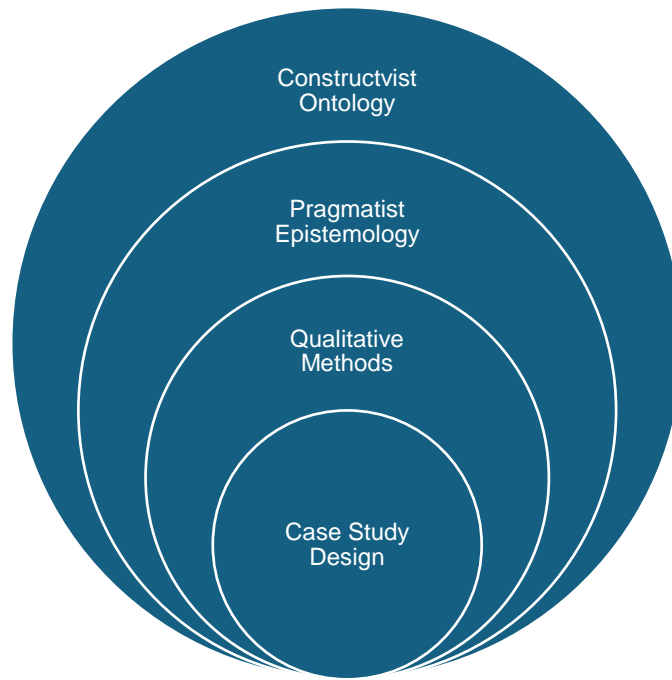


Figure 10: Ontology, epistemology, design and methodology for this study inspired by the work of Hall & Wall (2016)

3.2 Research design

The research design was a qualitative case study, focusing on teacher perceptions to allow for the construction of knowledge from multiple perspectives and support the improvement of educational practice (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Participants were recruited from a cluster of schools in one Scottish local authority, which allowed for a unique perspective. In this case, ‘cluster’ refers to three primary schools and the link secondary school. This meant the study investigated a “single, distinctive entity, which could be explored from a number of different angles” (Biesta & Burbules, 2003, p.81).

A case study design allowed for customised research that focused on the cluster of schools as a unique case. It was an appropriate design due to the practical advice on using case studies for *how* questions and the option of investigating one concept from multiple viewpoints (Bryman, 2012; Cohen *et al.*, 2007; Gray, 2014; Thomas, 2016). The design allowed for the examination of teacher perspectives within a “bounded system” of one local authority cluster of schools (Creswell, 1998. p. 62). The concept of a “bounded system” (*ibid*, 1998) is interesting for this study, partly due to the unique socio-economic background of the town in which the schools were placed. Relative to other school clusters within the local authority, there was higher poverty and deprivation across the demographic for the case study schools.

The four schools in the local authority cluster were included and defined as the case (Silverman, 2010). The case study design is detailed on the next page in Figure 11, along with each school nested within the wider case (Gray, 2014), and the embedded units of analysis are shown as linked to each school (Yin, 2009).

Exploratory Case Study Design with Embedded Units of Analysis (Gray, 2014; Yin, 2009)

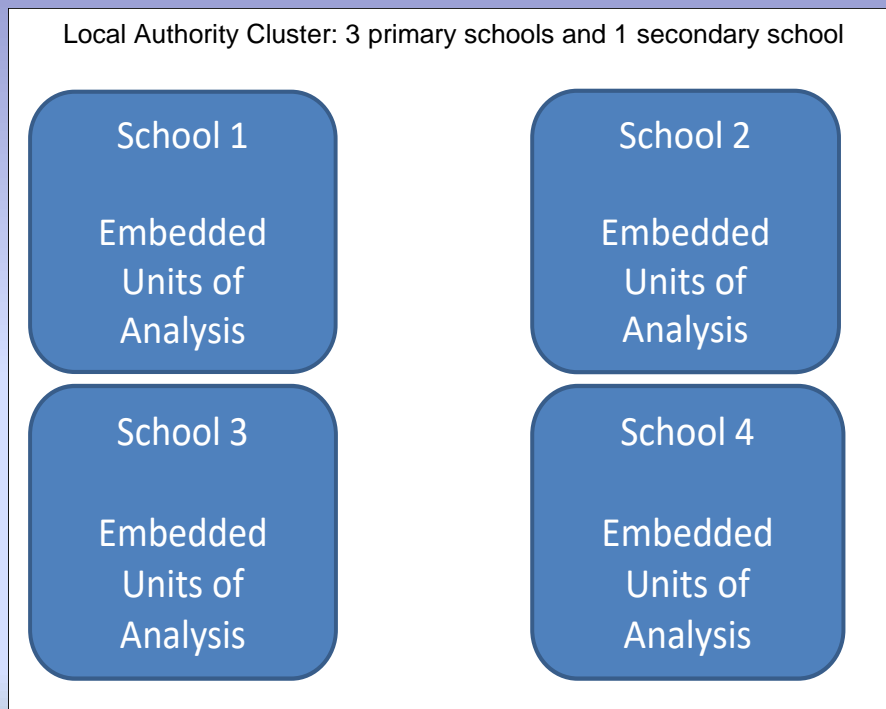


Figure 11: Case study design with each school represented as embedded units of analysis (Gray, 2014; Yin, 2009)

The case study design was exploratory due to the nature of the research questions and the aim to discover *how* teachers perceive TSPN (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). It was also instrumental because of the intended suggestions for change, either to policy or practice, as a result of the research findings (Stake, 1995). Bassey (1999) described such a research study design as educational due to the focus on improving teaching practice. Given the pragmatic philosophy underpinning knowledge development for my thesis, this is an important way to define the case study.

3.3 Participant information

Participants in the study were from primary and secondary school settings within the wider case. In each of the four schools, all practitioners were invited to participate via an email communication in an attempt to develop a “generic, purposive” approach to the participant recruitment (Bryman, 2012, p.422). The inclusion criteria for participation in the study were:

- Participants from the cluster group of schools
- Secondary, primary, and early years teachers: both classroom and promoted staff
- Part-time nurture group teachers: part-time between nurture room and mainstream
- Specialist teachers :e.g. Additional support needs practitioners with mainstream teaching experience
- Student teachers and newly qualified teachers (NQTs)

The exclusion criteria for participants in the study were:

- Pupil support assistants (PSAs)
- Child development officers (CDOs)
- Pupils
- Parents
- Full-time nurture group teachers

To gather as wide a range of views as possible about nurture practice, I proposed to initially conduct one focus group session per school, with a sample of six to eight participants, a number which is deemed ideal for exploratory focus group work (Fern, 2001; Silverman, 2010). In reality, changes had to be made to the approach to include semi-structured interviews as an additional choice for all schools. This was to accommodate the needs and schedule of each school calendar, the expectations of the head teachers and the schedule of the teachers taking part. The majority of the focus group activity came directly from one school (School Three) where the head teacher was able to set aside time during an in-service day to allow for the research to take place.

The number of responses for interviews was higher than those for focus groups. Six out of the eight interview participants preferred one-to-one interviews due to personal commitments and calendars. Two respondents, Grace and Emma, explained that they would rather be interviewed together as it made them feel more at ease. The details of focus groups and interview responses from each school are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Source of focus group and interview data across all schools

School	Focus Group (FG)	Individual Interviews	FG and Interviews
School One	Pilot FG (<i>N</i> =5)	<i>N</i> = 3	1 Group, 3 Interviews
School Two	No FG	<i>N</i> =4	-
School Three	3 FG (<i>N</i> =14)	No interviews	-
School Four	No FG	<i>N</i> =1	-

In total, 27 teachers participated in the study across focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews. School One allowed for a pilot focus group, and School Three responded and offered an in-service event for all staff for focus groups. Therefore, all teaching staff who met the inclusion criteria and consented to their involvement participated in the study. School Two and School Four were involved through individual semi-structured interviews. School One provided both focus group and interview data for the study.

3.3.1 Focus groups: Participant details and sampling information

School One (Secondary Sector)

The pilot group, which was conducted in May 2019, consisted of secondary practitioners ($N=5$) with varying degrees of experience. Their subject backgrounds were Social Subjects, English, and Physical Education. Each group member was also a pastoral support teacher, and this was the common link between participants involved from School One. Additional detail for participants in School One included their attendance at whole school training on attachment theory and nurturing approaches, which had taken place on in-service days in the previous two years. Therefore, they were familiar with the theoretical background and practice of nurture, including TSPN.

School Three (Primary Sector)

The remaining focus groups took place in School Three on an in-service day in May 2019. The head teacher allowed protected time for teaching staff to participate in the study. However, all participants were voluntary in the sense that they were given the

opportunity to opt out of the study, which no one chose to do, and everyone consented to their involvement. The group consisted of teachers ($N=14$) with a variety of teaching experience, from NQTs to individuals with over thirty years of teaching experience.

The staff were split into three groups of five, five, and four. Ten out of the fourteen chose to add their personal work history details (length of service) to the back of the mind maps and lists that were produced. This data was gathered for focus group participants because the interview participants were asked for their work history and information to start the conversation. In the interest of parity, focus group participants had the same experience at the start of the session. Detailed demographics for focus group participants are shown in Table 3 on the next page.

Table 3: Individual participant information for focus groups

School	FG number	Number of Participants	Sector	Mean No. of Years Teaching Experience per group (n=)	Individual Teaching Subject and Years Experience
School One	1	N=5	Secondary	n= 10.2 years	English and Pastoral Support: 13 years
					Geography and Behaviour Support: 5 years
					History and Pastoral Support: 9 years
					English and Pastoral Support: 15 years
					PE and Pastoral Support Teacher: 23 years
School Three	3	N=5	Primary	n=17.4 years	Class Teacher: 3 years
					Class Teacher: 26 years
					Class Teacher/ Nurture Teacher: 26 years
					Class Teacher: 29 years
					Class Teacher: 3 years
		N=5		n= 11.4 years	Student Teacher: 0 years
					Class Teacher/ ASN specialist: 37 years
					Class Teacher: 12 years
					Class Teacher: 7 years
					NQT: 1 year
		N=4		Not available	Class Teacher
					Class Teacher
					Class Teacher

3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews: Participant details and sampling information

Individual teachers (N=8) chose to participate in the study through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. Six interviews were individual, and one was a joint interview between Emma and Grace, as both participants requested to work together because this approach put them at ease. Pseudonyms were given to interview participants to protect their identity. Details for each interviewee are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Interview participant information

Participant Pseudonym	School	Sector	Role	Number of Years Teaching Experience
Anne	One	Secondary	Additional Support Needs Teacher/ Art Teacher	17
Jane	One	Secondary	Social Subjects Principal Teacher	23
Emma	Two	Primary	Additional Support Needs Teacher	12
Grace	Two	Primary	Primary Classroom and Early Years Teacher	26
Sally	Two	Primary	Principal Teacher	16
Rose	Four	Primary	Depute Head Teacher/ ASN Co-ordinator	18
Lily	Two	Primary	Additional Support Needs Teacher	12
Daisy	One	Secondary	Depute Head Teacher	38

3.4 Data collection

Data for the study was gathered over two months, from May 2019 to June 2019, inclusive. The procedural information and materials used are detailed in each section separately as they are discussed. This is because the process and materials differed for focus groups and interviews. In the initial plan for the study, I intended to work with policy documentation from the associated schools if there was not enough data from teachers. This was not necessary due to the responses from focus group and interview participants.

3.4.1 Focus groups and visual methods: The reasons why

The decision to use focus groups was based on several reasons. They foreground the views of participants rather than the interviewer, as participants interact with each other to allow their views to develop (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). The approach is useful when researching concepts that have rarely been explored (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Focus groups generate discussion on a range of points where “collecting unique thoughts... [on]...everyday knowledge is the sole concern” (Fern, 2001, p.152). This was a key issue in developing a clearer picture of mainstream teachers’ interpretations of nurture practice and how they view it in their day-to-day role.

My professional reflection is that collaboration and teamwork are a daily occurrence in education. Teachers share opinions, views, and thoughts on aspects of their professional practice as a matter of course. This is sometimes during formal meetings and collegial commitments (Datnow, 2011; Hargreaves, 1994). However, group discussions during unstructured times or staffroom interactions can develop a culture of support among teachers (Rahman, 2018). Focusing on formal and informal practitioner knowledge and understanding through transactions between teachers was one of the main goals of this study. The focus group approach made sense as it supported my experience of teachers sharing information and discussing educational practice in a group setting.

Focus groups allow participants to feel at ease within a wider group and offer opportunities for group reflection and feedback (Fontana & Frey, 2000). However, caution should be exercised because this can lead to dominant voices (Barbour, 2007). Data gathering through focus groups can encourage participants who may

find an individual interview more challenging and give voice to those who require support to express their views (Gray, 2014). Considerations had to be made for all schools involved in relation to time, priorities from school improvement plans, evaluation from quality assurance calendars, and staff cover. Essentially, it was important to be flexible to meet the needs of the school and the staff. This included the number of participants schools could release to participate in a focus group at any time.

Teachers were more agreeable to involvement in the study during the school day. Therefore, in-service days were an obvious choice for focus groups as they allowed for protected time during the working day. There was an expectation that focus groups would allow more teachers to be involved and that the approach would benefit in relation to time, resources, and personnel (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Bryman, 2012). I accept that there are arguments to the contrary regarding concerns over the dominant voices of specific participants and the importance of inclusivity for all views (Barbour, 2007; Gray, 2014). However, concerning teacher time, which is precious at the best of times, the focus group data collection plan seemed a viable and reasonable choice for this study.

Quantitative and qualitative questionnaires were an alternate option to gather multiple teachers' perceptions on TSPN. A mixed methods approach would also have tied in with the pragmatic epistemological stance of this study. However, in the spirit of making connections and relationship-building, I believe interactions *with* and *between* practitioners are essential. This is a direct result of my pragmatic, practitioner worldview and Deweyian transactionalist lens (Vanderstraeten, 2002).

Focusing on direct participation, collaboration, and teacher perspective of educational practice was important in collecting data on teacher views (Kirk & Macdonald, 2010). In my professional opinion, the development of in-depth descriptions of teachers' perceptions of an educational concept is more likely when people interact with each other (Bryman, 2012). Through detailed transactions between teachers, I also hoped to "identify needs, expectations and issues" around the research topic for improvement of educational practice (Fern, 2001, p.152), and focus groups were an ideal setting to develop this depth and level of knowledge (Barbour, 2007; Fern, 2001; Thomas, 2016).

I acknowledge the reported disadvantages to using focus groups, such as those detailed previously (Barbour, 2007; Bryman, 2012; Gray, 2014; Fern, 2001). However, I believe that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages in this case study, particularly in relation to timeliness for people who are very busy. Moreover, the epistemological relevance of answering questions and exploring educational concepts through discussion and interaction allowed teachers to collectively air their views and explain their understanding of a topic which can, in my professional opinion and practical experience, cause some angst for teachers who have an alternative pedagogical stance. Difficult topics can be supported through group discussions, which are more likely to put participants at ease (Barbour, 2007; Silverman, 2010). The reasons for using focus groups in this study, through consideration of suggested advantages and disadvantages, are shown in Figure 12.

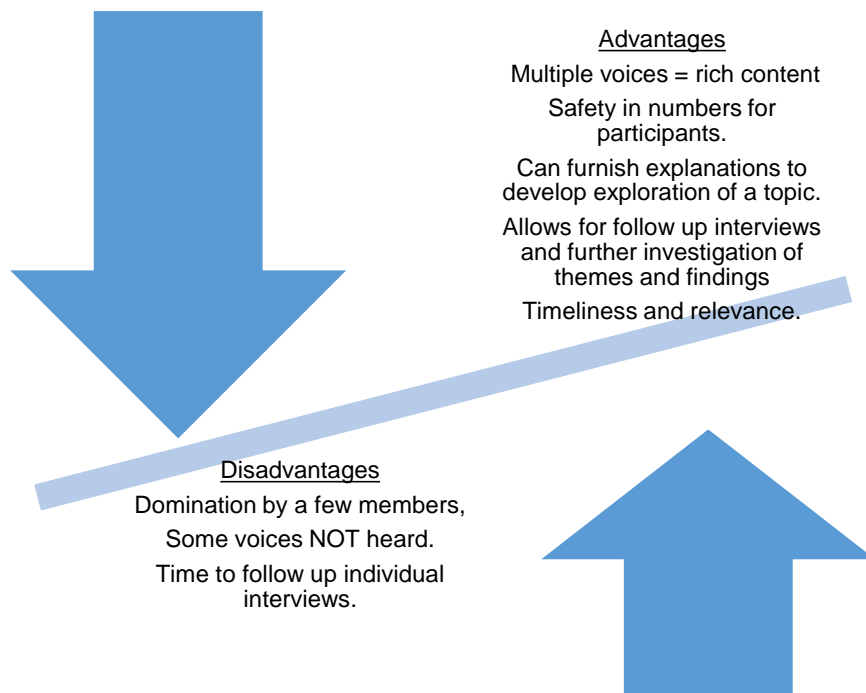


Figure 12: Advantages and disadvantages of focus groups as a method of data collection (Barbour, 2007; Gray, 2014)

Focus group data was gathered through the use of visual methods, in particular, techniques described as a “toolbox approach...[such as]...spider diagrams, concept maps, and mind maps” (Clark *et al.*, 2013, p.14). My initial aim was to focus solely on mind maps however visual methods experts advise that having a variety of visual options for data gathering within a focus group takes account of the needs of participants and permits a “flexible approach [which] allows...[them]... to design a diagram that they feel reflects their thoughts on a subject area” (Clark *et al.*, 2013, p.14). As a result, two out of the four groups used a colour-coded list rather than a mind map, as it was the agreed choice of the group. An example of a colour-coded list gathered for the study is shown in Figure 13.

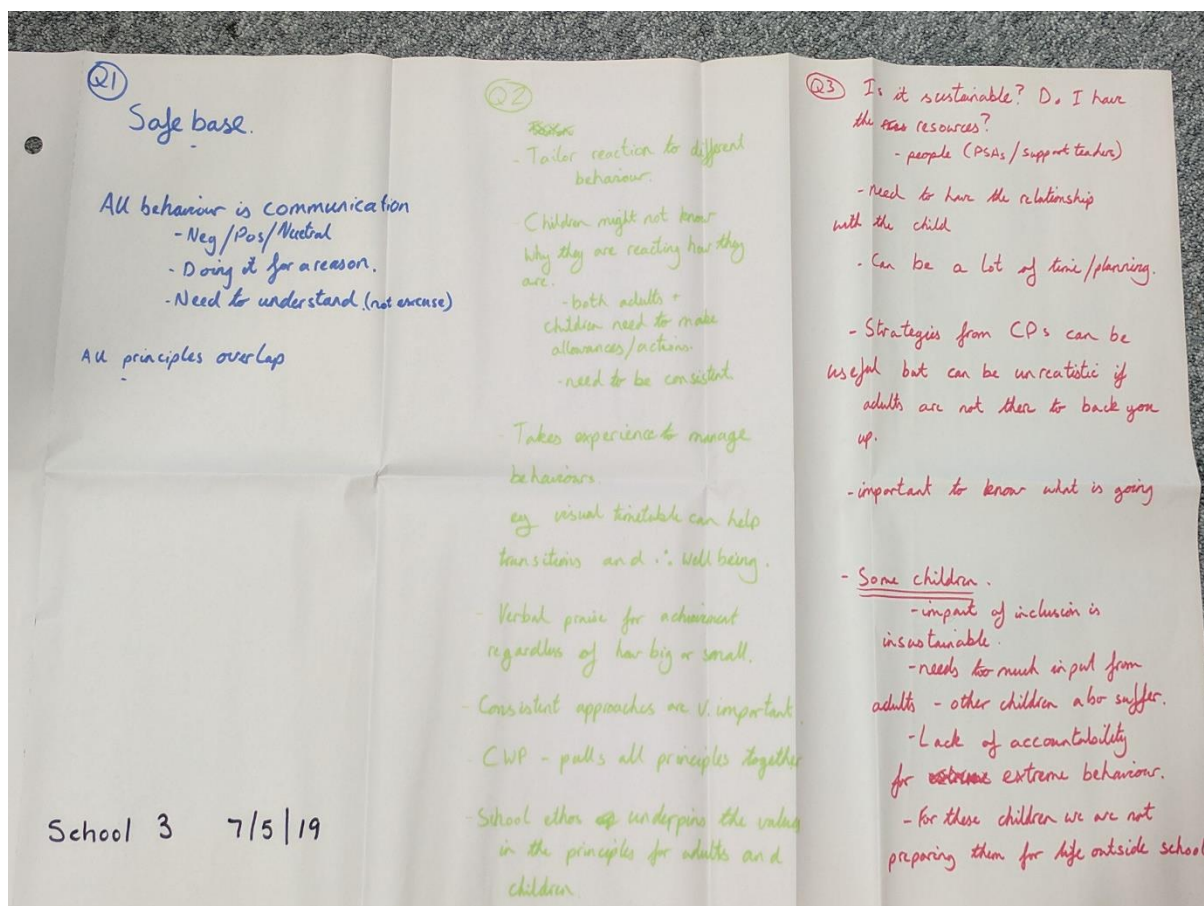


Figure 13: Alternative visual choice for focus group participants

Proposing the use of visual methods was a unique contribution to knowledge. At the time of data gathering for this study, the combination of visually mediated focus groups and case study analysis of mainstream teacher perceptions on TSPN in a Scottish local authority cluster had not been attempted. To date, there does not seem to be qualitative or quantitative research literature that covers all aspects, particularly concerning qualitative research and visual methodology.

Wall *et al.* (2013) suggested that schools are visual environments, so the use of visual methods tends to be a favourable approach when working within an education setting for both children and adults. I agree with this view. Utilising visual diagrams is

a positive step as they are colourful, engaging, and participatory and have been shown to support the development of learning in children and adults (Buzan, 2005).

Visual stimuli are familiar to teachers as an everyday pedagogical approach when working with children and young people (Anderson *et al.*, 2015; Hassett, 2016).

Teachers use visual prompts as support and motivation for students as a matter of routine. This is particularly useful when children are constructing their learning as a social experience through interactions (Daniels, 2016), problem-solving and exploring together (Kirschner & Hendrick, 2020) and learning from and with others within the context of the classroom (Pendergast & Main, 2019). I hoped that gathering data in a collegiate way was supportive of participants and conducive to an enjoyable experience for the teachers involved in the focus groups. Therefore, I was keen to try an approach that was familiar to the participants due to their experience as teachers. It was also important to ensure participants were comfortable whilst using an engaging method that moved away from “word-based research” in the form of group interviews and took advantage of the benefits that image-based research can bring (Prosser, 1998, p.99).

Previous research on visual methods has shown that participants will “volunteer more readily and stay longer” if faced with a familiar and interesting approach (Hall & Wall, 2016, p. 211). I intended for a group diagram to be a stimulating and diverse way to elicit practitioner perspectives on a topic as it is an approach, in my practical experience, which is often used to gather teachers' professional views and ideas on in-service days and training courses. Visually-mediated data gathering approaches allow group members to share their views by creating something in common (Biesta

& Burbules, 2003). It has been argued that visually-mediated focus groups allow for the development of group dynamics where:

“Authentic shared understandings can be reached [and] participants...can get a sense of ownership over the research data, and get the sense that their knowledge and experience are valuable. This changes the balance of control or power between the researcher and the researched” (Clarke *et al.*, 2013, p.16).

This is an important consideration for me on an ethical, epistemological, and professional level as I believe that research needs to be carried out in collaboration with participants to focus on the educational questions and problems, not done to them.

3.4.2 Focus groups and visually-mediated methods: Procedure and materials

Visually-mediated focus groups were used to collect data in School One and School Three. Teachers were invited to participate via email, which was sent via the quality improvement officer for local authority research, to the head teacher of each school in the cluster. Participant information and consent forms were included in the pack for all four schools. Examples of these can be seen in Appendices A and B.

Appendix C shows the information sheet and consent form for teachers. Consent was obtained and agreed in line with the university ethics guidelines and associated ethics form for the study. Each teacher was asked to complete a consent form prior to taking part in a visually-mediated focus group.

In School One, data was collected over one school period (approximately 50 minutes) with one scribe. The room used was familiar to the teachers involved and everyone was asked if they felt comfortable enough to proceed. I gave a short presentation, detailing the background and aims of the study. A copy of the presentation is shown in Appendix D. The group was then shown the research questions and the associated suggested colour coding for each question. The colours shown correspond with the blue, green, and red detailed in Figure 1, on page 21. An example of the visual prompt detailing the colour-coding for the responses to research questions is shown in Figure 14.

- Q.1 What are your views on nurturing principles, particularly in relation to the provision of an equitable education for children and young people?
- Q.2 What do nurturing principles mean to you in your daily processes and practices?
- Q.3 How effective/ ineffective are nurturing principles as a pedagogical approach in order to meet the needs of your pupils?

Figure 14: Suggested colour-coding for research questions used in visually-mediated focus group data collection

The reason for colour-coding was to clarify which research question participants were answering when creating visual representations of their responses. This was because the data collection was visually mediated with mind maps, lists, and diagrams. Understanding which questions participants were answering through the

use of colour-coded visuals was especially important in School Three, where three groups were taking part at the same time, and my role was that of facilitator for all groups rather than sitting with one group of teachers. Each group of participants in the study chose to use the suggested colour coding for their lists, mind maps, and diagrams to link their responses with the questions detailed in Figure 10. However, it was explained that the groups could record their responses to the questions in any way they felt useful.

During the pilot group session in School One, I asked respondents for feedback regarding the process. As a result of the evaluation, there was a request to have TSPN on display to jog participants' memories of what they were. This point is interesting to the study because the participants in the group were confused about which principle was which. It proved to be a helpful suggestion because subsequent visually-mediated focus groups and interview participants were allowed to view the nurture principles whilst taking part in the research. This ensured fairness for all. A display of TSPN also allowed respondents an additional visual prompt to guide their conversation when asked about the nurture principles and their influence on their daily practice. The visual prompt of TSPN, as used for subsequent visually-mediated focus groups and interviews, is shown in the last slide in Appendix D.

During the data-gathering process for the visually-mediated focus group in School One, I took notes of the discussion happening around the table when each research question was being considered. My intention to do this was made clear to the participants prior to starting the process so that everyone was at ease and knew

what to expect. The reason for notetaking was because the session was not recorded, due to hesitancy from one of the participants.

In School Three, the head teacher suggested that all teaching staff participate as a larger group in one room. The practitioners involved were asked if they would rather stay as a whole group, and the consensus was to do so. The teachers were split into three smaller groups due to the numbers, and each group sat around their table. Logistically, this meant that it was difficult to use recording equipment because of the amount of interaction and conversation in the room. Therefore, as before, I took observational notes throughout the session to gain further detail on what participants were discussing and how they were interacting with each other whilst responding to the research questions. I circulated the groups and spent time with each set of participants. Albeit a difficult process, it worked as well as possible given the logistical challenges that arose because the whole teaching staff was in one room. Recording equipment would have been preferable. However, this was not possible. As it was important to respond to the needs, time, and capacity of the participants, I had to work with the room and setup suggested by the head teacher of School Three on the day.

A presentation detailing the background and aims of the study was given to teachers in School Three. A visual reminder of TSPN was on display, as detailed in feedback from the pilot group in School One. Each smaller group in School Three allocated a scribe, and the aforementioned suggested colour-coding for each question was shown and explained prior to data collection, which all participants used. An example of this is shown in Figure 15.

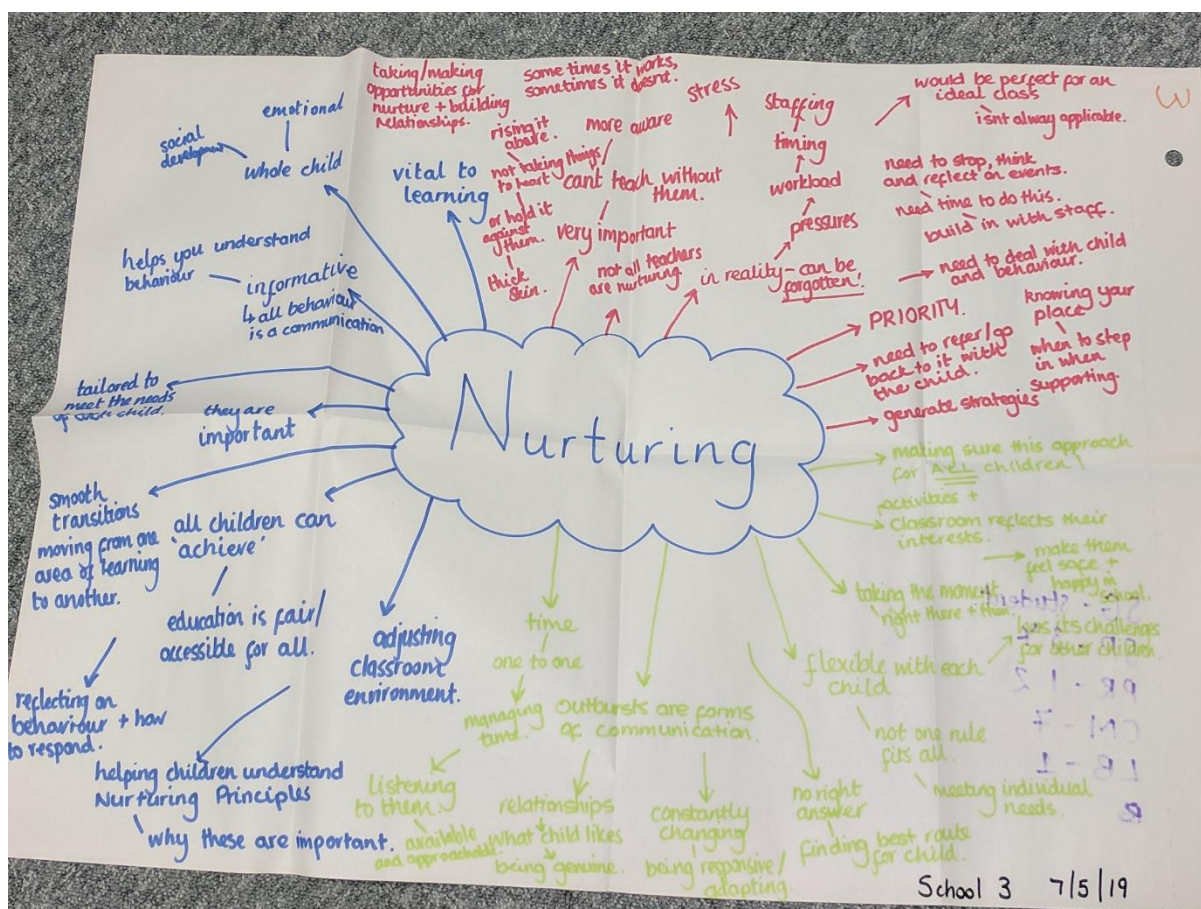


Figure 15: Sample of visually-mediated focus group data from School Three

A positive outcome of the visually-mediated focus group session with School Three was that teachers were in the familiar setting of their school, with dedicated time during an in-service day. This seemed to put them at ease. In addition to this, the senior leadership team for School Three left the room, which seemed to have an impact on the motivation of staff to participate. Time was kept as tight as possible to align with the school day and an average in-service day session. Therefore, approximately 1.5 hours were allocated to the data collection activity.

3.4.3 Equipment for visually-mediated focus group data collection

Specific apparatus required for data collection with the visually-mediated focus groups included:

- PowerPoint presentation and introduction to the study (Appendix D)
- Participant consent forms (Appendix B)
- A1 flip chart paper
- Coloured pens (multiple packs)
- Notepad
- Pens
- Visual display of TSPN

At the end of each focus group session, participants were thanked for their involvement in the study and reminded that they could contact me should they have any further questions. Contact details, including email and phone numbers, were displayed on the screen as the teachers left the room.

3.4.4 Semi-structured interviews: The reasons why

Semi-structured interviews were important as they allowed participants to discuss their views at length and in-depth (Kvale, 2007). Individual interviews provided choices for teachers who felt more comfortable in the privacy of a one-to-one setting (Gray, 2014). Semi-structured interviews were offered for staff who wished to participate in the study but could not attend an organised focus group due to commitments outside of the school day. Some participants required an option that worked with their own diary rather than a pre-arranged event.

Interviews are popular for qualitative research studies as they allow for a detailed account of the issue being explored (Bryman, 2012). Using a semi-structured interview approach was useful in maintaining a framework linked to the research questions while allowing for flexibility in format and scripting (Gray, 2014). There was scope to vary the interview questions to respond to answers given by participants and explore their views further, where I had “latitude to ask further questions in response to what [were] seen as significant replies” (Bryman, 2012, p.212). Flexibility was a valuable aspect of the process for participants and the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It supported the gathering of multiple practitioner views for the construction of new knowledge in educational practice (Mojtahed *et al.*, 2014).

A semi-structured interview framework was used as the research and interview questions were largely “predetermined and binding” due to their relationship with the main and sub-research questions (Kvale, 2007, p.57). However, there was scope for further investigation by the interviewer and participant to elicit additional information whilst gathering data on perceptions of nurture and TSPN. Interviewees were provided the opportunity to include “specificity, range, scope and depth of personal context” with their responses to each question (Cohen *et al.*, 2007, p.379). Exploring a range of personal contexts and practical experiences was very important for the study's constructivist ontological and pragmatic epistemological framework (Biesta, 2014).

The interview questions used in the study were tailored from the main and sub-research questions shown in Chapter 1, page 21. Details of the visually-mediated

focus group research questions and associated semi-structured interview questions used in the study are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Link between main research question, sub-questions used in visually-mediated focus groups and semi-structured interview questions

Main Research Question	Sub Research Questions used in Visually-Mediated Focus Group Sessions	Questions used for Semi-Structured Interviews
How do teachers perceive nurture and the use of nurturing principles in their everyday practice?	What do nurturing principles mean to you in your daily processes and practices?	What is your understanding / perception of nurture, within the context of your role as a teacher?
		What is your understanding / perception of nurturing principles?
	What are your views on nurturing principles, particularly in relation to the provision of an equitable education for children and young people?	What is your perception / are your views of nurturing principles in relation to providing an equitable education for children and young people in your classroom?
	How effective/ ineffective are nurturing principles as a pedagogical approach in order to meet the needs of your pupils?	What do nurturing principles mean to you in your daily processes and practices as a teacher?
		In your view, how effective / ineffective are nurturing principles as a pedagogical approach in order to meet the needs of children (young people) in your classroom?

3.4.5 Semi-structured interviews: Procedures and materials

Teachers were invited to participate in interviews through email, which was sent via the quality improvement officer for local authority research and then on to the head teacher of each school in the cluster. Participant information and consent forms were included in the pack that went to all four schools. Examples of these can be seen in Appendices A and B. Appendix C shows the information sheet and consent form for

teachers. Consent was obtained and agreed in line with the university ethics guidelines and associated ethics form for the study. Each teacher was asked to complete a consent form before participating in an interview.

At the beginning of each semi-structured interview, participants were advised of the nature of the study, and there were some general 'settling in' questions that asked them to talk about their career to date. This included previous experience, their current role, and how long they had been teaching which helped ease participants into the interview process. To ensure fairness for every teacher involved in the study, in line with the feedback given at the pilot focus group session and the subsequent approach with all visually-mediated focus groups, TSPN were displayed on the table in front of the interviewees. A copy of the interview questions was available for participants who preferred to read and take time to process the questions before they answered. These can be found in Appendix E.

Participants were made aware that I intended to record the interview through the participant information sheet and consent forms. This was reiterated at the beginning of the session to remind the teachers that recording was taking place and to ensure they were aware of their choices about recorded sessions. I advised participants of the rules around confidentiality for pupils and staff, should they deem it necessary to discuss particular situations. I explained that this approach was welcome but that anonymity was paramount. At the end of the formal interview, participants were able to ask any additional questions or add to their responses. They were thanked for their participation and reminded how to contact me if they had any further questions or comments relating to the research. The average interview time was twenty

minutes. My first thought regarding this was that it was too short. However, upon reflection, I now realise that it was important to get through the questions at a pace that suited the interviewees. This is because each session took place at the end of the school day, and I now realise I was lucky to have people involved who could commit their time to the study. Teachers are very busy, and when travel was factored in, my colleagues added an extra hour to the end of their day. The questions were answered as fully as each participant felt appropriate. Therefore, it was important to respond to their needs in this instance. Further reflection on this process would include the future use of online interview tools to save participant's time with travel (Hanna & Mwale, 2017). This is something I would change, should I conduct future research of this nature.

3.4.6 Equipment for semi-structured interview data collection

Apparatus for the semi-structured interviews included:

- Individualised accommodation for privacy
- Dictaphone recording devices: original and backup
- A4 copy of TSPN
- A4 copy of the interview questions
- Pens and paper

Although I originally planned to use semi-structured interviews as an additional opportunity to explore findings from the visually-mediated focus group data, it proved simpler to offer individual teachers a choice between interviews and focus group work. This was linked to personal preference from participants and follow-up queries from emails about the intended time and location of groups. Some participants asked

if interviews were an option rather than being part of a group. It made sense to adjust the approach to allow participants to take part in a way that suited their needs. As previously mentioned, cognisance had to be taken regarding participants' contributions and what they would or would not say in a group setting. It became evident that individual interviews were a popular choice, and some practitioners preferred the opportunity to express their views in the privacy of a one-to-one session.

3.5 Analytic strategy

Braun and Clarke's (2021) Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) approach was the analytical framework for the study. RTA was a clear choice for analysing interview and focus group data in the case study as it is flexible, atheoretical, and can be used with a variety of ontological and epistemological positions, including constructivism and pragmatism (Braun *et al.*, 2019).

The six recursive steps of RTA: familiarisation, coding, generating initial themes, reviewing and developing themes, refining, defining and naming, and writing up was a useful strategy to find themes across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The stepped approach provided me with support and guidance as a novice researcher in qualitative work (Bryman, 2012; Lyons & Coyle, 2016). The emphasis on *reflexive* thematic analysis was crucial to ensure awareness of the values, skills and context I brought as a researcher to the analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This

included awareness of my professional experience and personal positionality in relation to the research topic (Dean, 2017; Terry & Hayfield, 2021).

RTA immerses the researcher as part of the data analysis, and it is an approach that I recognise when considering my position in the process (Braun & Clarke, 2021). All the participants were colleagues with whom I have worked for over twenty years. I am also a keen advocate for nurture practice. Therefore, an awareness of my professional views on the data was an important aspect of the analysis process.

The main reasons for choosing RTA as a method of analysis for this study were:

- It is A-theoretical and can be used with a range of ontological, epistemological, and methodological frameworks;
- It is a full, step-by-step guide for the analysis of data;
- I am a novice researcher; therefore, a clear analytical framework was of benefit to my development and understanding of data analysis;
- The nature of the framework allowed for analysis across a range of data sources to ensure the whole data corpus was analysed with the same quality;
- One analysis method across different data sources was useful for case study research.

Data analysis was driven by both the pragmatist epistemological framework for the study as one of the benefits of RTA as an approach is its capacity and flexibility to sit comfortably with a variety of ontological and epistemological frameworks (Braun *et al.*, 2019). The construction of codes and generation of themes to detail teachers'

perceptions of TSPN about their everyday classroom practice was important and allowed for patterns to be discovered across the visually-mediated focus groups and semi-structured interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Generating themes across the study's data set was an important aspect of RTA, as the method can be used to analyse a range of data sources (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Therefore, each school was nested within the wider case (Gray, 2014), and the embedded units (Yin, 2009) of visually-mediated focus group data and semi-structured interviews were analysed across the wider case of all four schools.

The analysis process was literally hands-on. Raw data sources from the visually-mediated focus groups were used to find initial codes, which evolved over 18 months from April 2021 to October 2022. Post-it notes, highlighters and coloured pens supported the initial process, which was messy and raised more questions than answers in the first instance. Once notes with codes were collated across each mind map or list, they were then moved to another A1 sheet, which had a link to initial thoughts around possible themes for the study. An example of this analysis behaviour is shown in Figure 16.

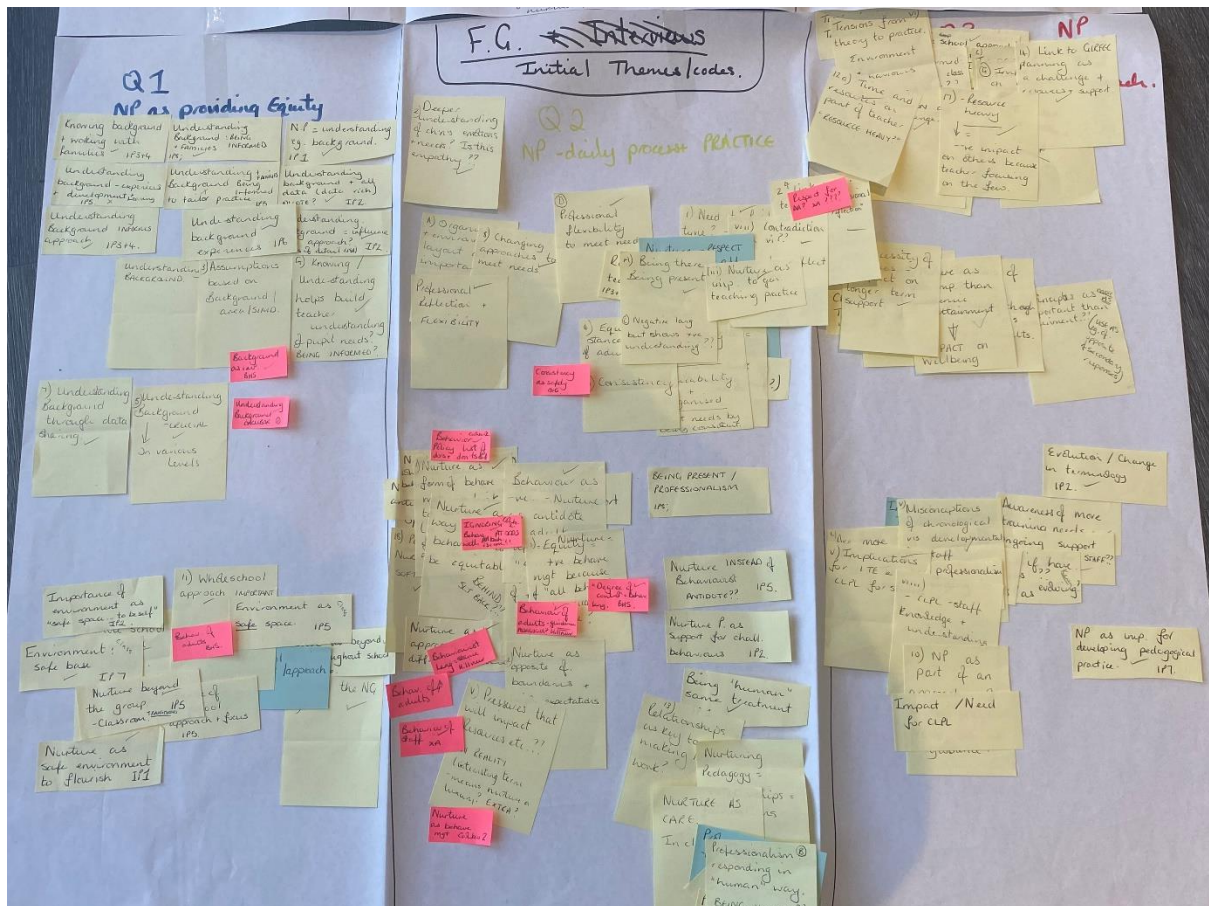


Figure 16: Example of initial analysis behaviour and coding for visually-mediated focus groups

Data was analysed on multiple levels, and in the case of the semi-structured interviews, this started with the transcription process, which is an important part of the analysis process (Kowal & O'Connell, 2014). The transcription process includes the significance of ensuring validity in the written version of the recording (McLellan *et al.*, 2003). I would hope that I achieved this to fully reflect the views and language used by participants. However, some experts argue that transcription is rarely free from bias as it is a "selective" process (Kowal & O'Connell, 2014, p.66). As with the data items from the visually-mediated focus groups, the transcriptions from the semi-structured interviews were printed in hard copy and set up on A1 paper to allow a

tactile approach to the code generation process. An example of this step is shown in Figures 17 and 18.

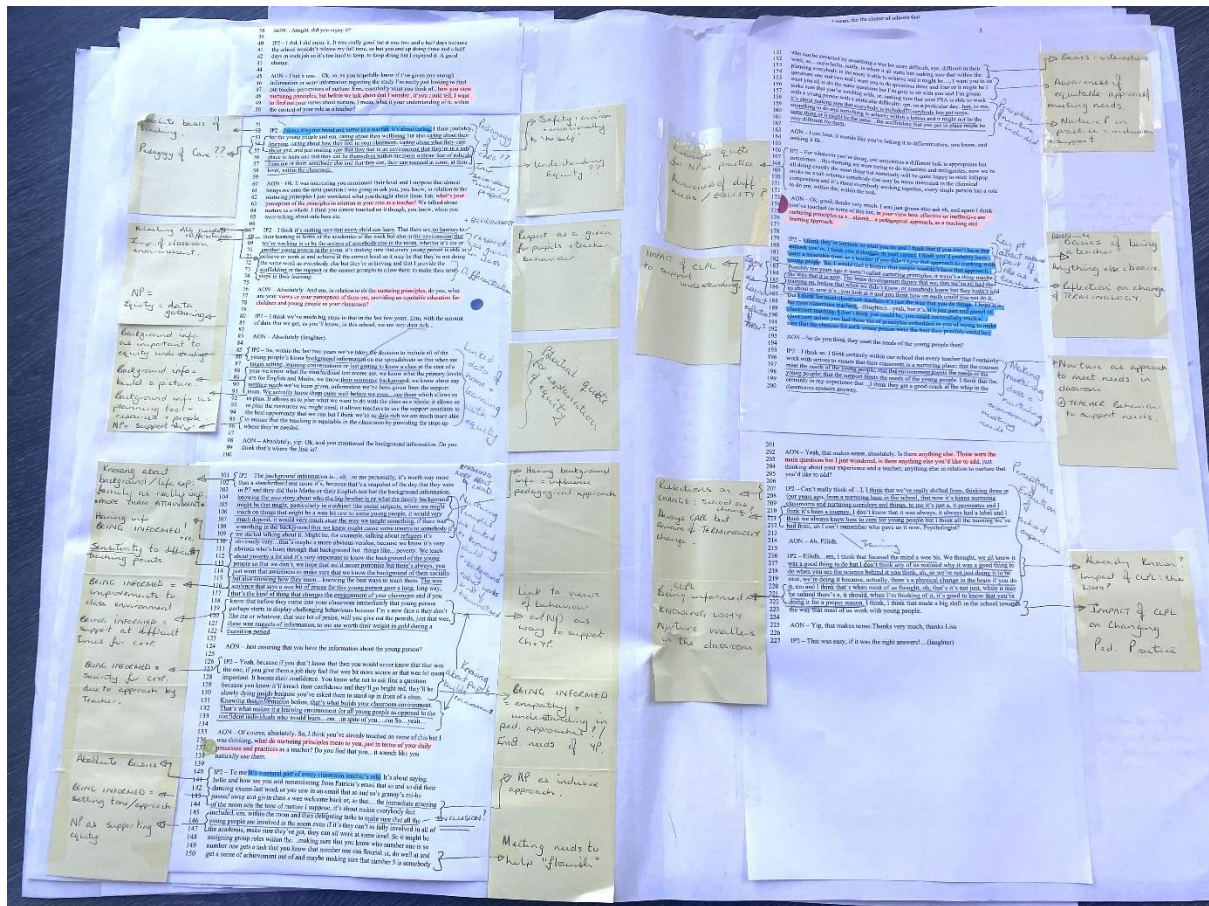


Figure 17: Example of early analysis step for code generation with semi-structured interviews

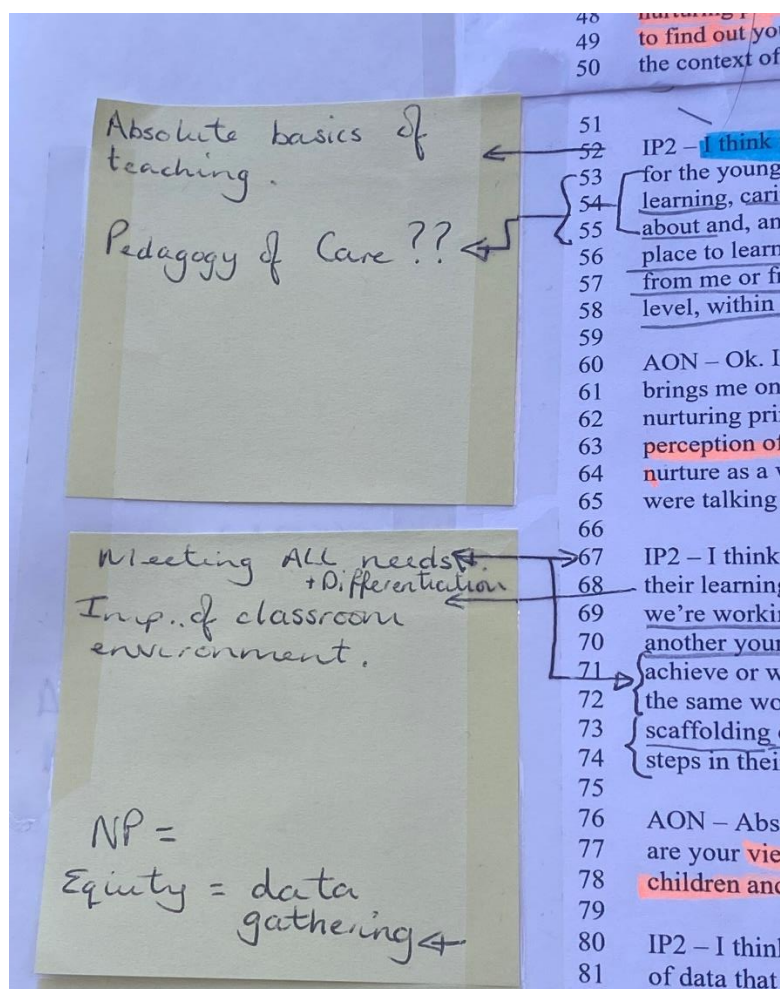


Figure 18: Detail of some initial codes from semi-structured interviews to demonstrate analysis behaviour

To make the data from visually-mediated focus groups and semi-structured interview transcripts comparable, an Excel spreadsheet was used to gather initial codes from each data source. Multiple versions of the spreadsheet were created as themes and sub-themes were generated and refined. An example of this is shown in Appendix F.

The six-step analysis process was followed in terms of the framework it provided for the coding and initial generation of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Sematic and

latent codes were identified to ensure “zooming out and zooming in” in an attempt to find themes and make sense of the data (Terry & Hayfield, 2021, p.41). More specifically, values, culture, context, and experience were at the forefront of my mind when analysing the data set and developing themes from both the participant’s perspective and my own (Braun *et al.*, 2019).

Once data for visually-mediated focus groups and semi-structured interviews was analysed, I completed a cross-data analysis of the whole data set. This was in keeping with the advice for RTA, which advocated analysis of the full data corpus (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis step allowed for a full view of the case study (Thomas, 2016). A summary of the data analysis approach, as well as my own analysis behaviours linked to the data set for the study, are detailed in Figure 19.

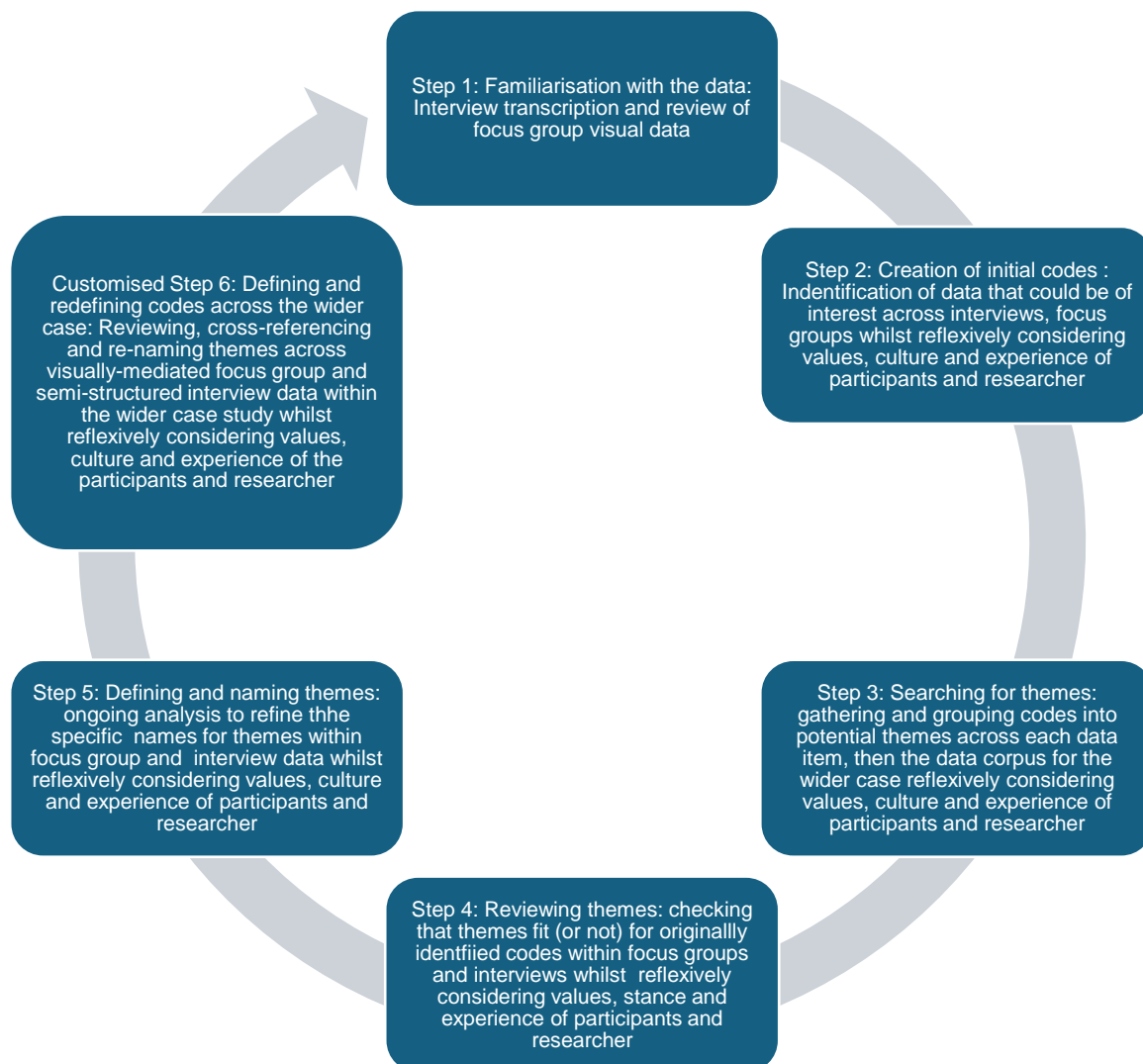


Figure 19: Visual representation of Braun and Clark’s Reflexive Thematic Analysis with a direct link to my own research behaviours (Braun *et al.*, 2019)

The data analysis process led me to look for outliers or “black swans” in the data (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p.11). Indeed, I actively sought them out as my initial belief was that they were present within some of the schools across the local authority cluster. I welcomed the opportunity to investigate what Silverman (2010) refers to as “deviant

cases” as it provided the opportunity for an additional perspective and added uniqueness to the embedded units within the wider case study (Silverman, 2010, p.141). An example of this would be the findings from Daisy in Chapter 5, where she discussed nurture practice as including an awareness of children who might fall under the radar, as opposed to those who are displaying outwardly distressed behaviour (Daisy, School One).

Throughout the analysis process, both inductive and abductive reasoning were used (Bryman, 2012; Gray, 2014). Abductive reasoning allows for the best possible option or meaning from data (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). This is useful if there is an element of uncertainty in using inductive reasoning approaches (Gray, 2014).

Experts suggest that abductive reasoning can support the understanding of unexpected findings and explore the “new and surprising” (Hall & Wall, 2016, p. 214). It can allow for flexibility when faced with unanticipated outcomes and the need to consider what is best for educational practice (Biesta, 2014; Bryman, 2012; Thomas, 2016). This includes consideration, on a pragmatic level, of the usefulness of the findings for change and improvement in educational practice.

Albeit abductive reasoning was part of the analysis process, inductive reasoning, specifically based on exploratory research, where findings are developed from the data set, was primarily used to construct meaning for the study (Gray, 2014).

Deductive reasoning, which is based on a hypothesis and pre-existing theoretical framework, was not part of the analytical strategy for this study, predominantly due to the exploratory nature of the research (Bryman, 2012).

Abductive reasoning is useful for data analysis as it allows for a pragmatic interpretation of qualitative data, whether it is based on an outlier or an “abductive leap” deemed necessary to connect two presenting ideas (Hall & Wall, 2016, p. 209). It is an analytical approach that is a “cognitive logic of discovery...a mental leap that occurs in a kind of a flash” and makes associations and connections between two things that would otherwise be unexpected (Reichert, 2014, p.126). Whereas this is an aspect of the analysis process I would tend to agree with; I was cognisant of ensuring a reflexive approach at each step of the analysis process, particularly as a researcher with a bias towards nurture practice as my default position (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3.6 Quality and ethics

There were two aspects of quality assurance that were addressed within my research:

- Reflexivity and personal positionality
- Trustworthiness

3.6.1 Reflexivity and personal positionality

Given that my research took place within schools in a local authority cluster where I have been teaching students in nurture groups for the last twenty years, I believe that reflexivity and personal positionality were of utmost importance in relation to my professional and personal views of classroom teachers’ interpretation of TSPN.

I have spent a significant amount of time working directly with teaching and support staff in professional development activities, which demonstrate the benefits of nurture practice. I believe this clearly indicates that there needs to be transparency about my role and professional stance. My position within the context of the study is important (Dean, 2017). This was one of the main reasons I chose an analytic strategy that centred on reflexive practice, which allowed me to comment and reflect as I wrote the thesis and analysed data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). To support me in this process, I kept a reflexive research journal, which Braun and Clarke (2021) suggested as an important part of the RTA research process. However, I was originally skeptical about keeping a research journal as I was unclear on what it might achieve. Given that it was a specific suggestion from the authors of RTA, I decided it was something that had to be done (Braun & Clarke, 2021). As I spent time analysing data, I realised it was actually something that needed to be done. Looking back on the journal entries made me realise that I was constantly questioning my views, professional stance, thoughts, and positionality within the research process. Asking 'why' became a standard part of the process.

When it became obvious (I use this word with extreme caution and awareness that it probably was not obvious) that I had found a theme, I took a step away, scribbled down a range of thoughts around my proposed direction, and tried to be clear on the reason for the decision. My role as a principal teacher for the local authority was at the forefront of my mind most of the time. At times, I felt I was moving away from the findings and ring-fencing myself to try and open my mind to other possibilities in the data. I was aware that the first decision for a theme title should be questioned as

thoroughly as I could at the time, as this extract from my diary highlights when I analysed Sally's interview:

"What is my position in this? I can't pretend I do not advocate for nurture practice. I can't pretend to the interviewees that I don't hold that position? All I talked about when I worked in both schools [School One and Two] was nurture! Did this have an impact on the responses given by my colleagues? How did I put them at ease?" (Reflexive Journal Entry 1st April, 2022).

I found myself agreeing with the participants. At first, I was unsure if this was ok, but I realised my questioning response meant that it probably was. Being aware of my position became easier, although I regularly checked myself along the way. This was difficult. Being aware of my positionality was a gradual process but it developed as time passed. One of the most impactful quotes in this sense was from Rose who described her experience of nurture as:

"a professional journey" (Rose, School Four).

This view stood out to me from the first reading of the transcript in 2019. It stuck with me throughout my experience and is probably the best description of my research journey to date, particularly around the necessity to question my lens on the study.

3.6.2 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a key quality indicator in qualitative research (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Lincoln and Guba's (1985) notion of ensuring trustworthiness was vital in my research to ensure that quality criteria were linked with the research questions, epistemology, and a focus on hearing teachers' voices on their perceptions of TSPN.

Trustworthiness consists of four key components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The impact of each of these components in relation to this study is demonstrated in Figure 20. On the concept of confirmability, it is the case that I tried to be as reflexive as possible with my position in the study. However, the absolute nature of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) definition regarding values is something I would be cautious about and might suggest was not entirely possible due to my history and experience with the research topic and respondents.

In addition to the four components of the quality model, member checking was deemed an essential quality check by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to support their concept of dependability. However, Braun *et al.* (2019) have suggested that member checking is not entirely necessary in qualitative research. After careful consideration of both views, interview transcripts were sent to study participants to allow for additional comments, thoughts, and answers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Three out of the eight interview participants responded to say the transcripts were a full and fair reflection of their interview. Anne was the only interviewee who suggested a few minor changes to the terminology she used when discussing pedagogy. The other four interviewees did not respond. During the visually-mediated focus group

sessions, participants were requested to review their mind maps and lists at the end of the data collection activity on the day to check for the authenticity of their views. Each area of the Lincoln and Guba (1985) model fits within the quality assurance framework of my research project. It is detailed further in Figure 16, along with my interpretation of their inclusion of an additional quality indicator, authenticity, which surrounds and enhances the other areas. Authenticity is important on levels of “fairness, ontological authenticity, and educational authenticity” (Bryman, 2012, p.393).

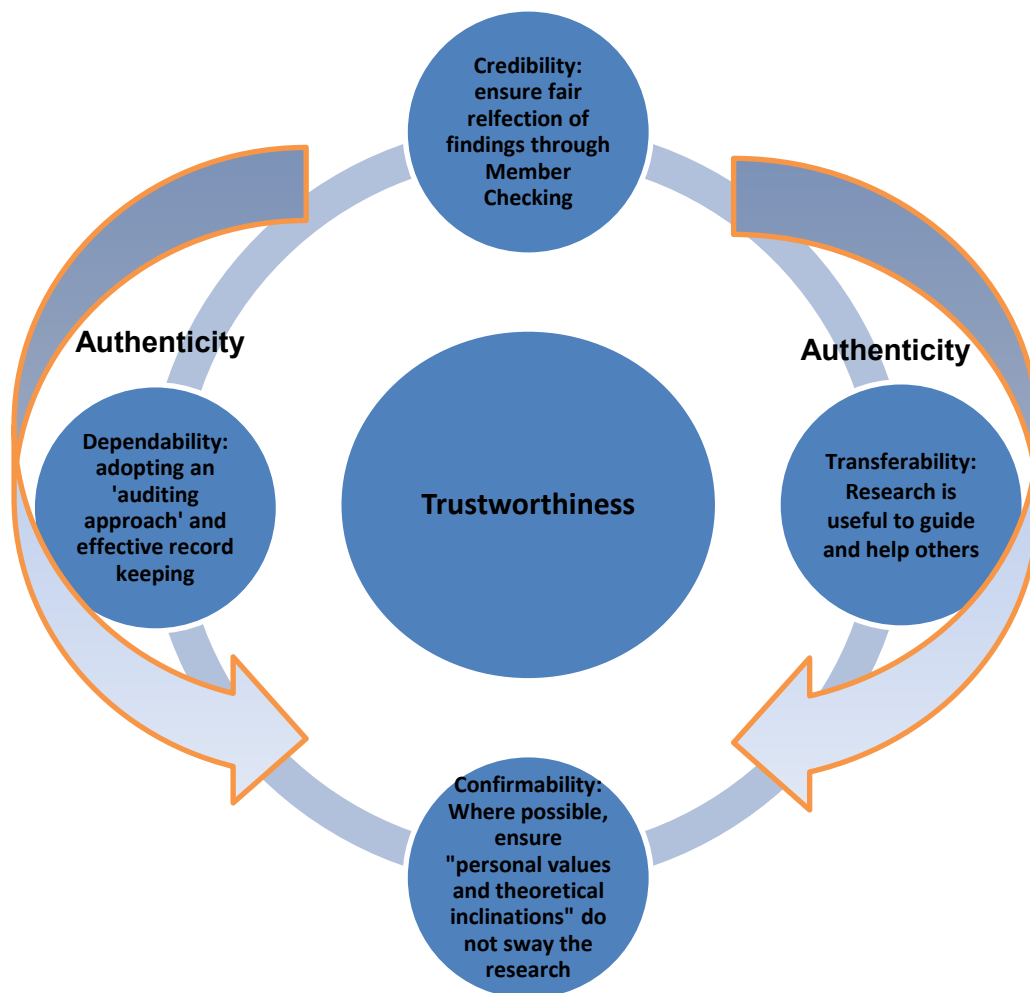


Figure 20: Lincoln and Guba's Trustworthiness criteria and my interpretation of the placement of authenticity, which surrounds the original model (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Bryman, 2012, p.392; Gray, 2014)

Authenticity, as shown in Figure 20, is rooted in fairness when considering quality indicators for research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The awareness of the researcher to find “the multiple voices contained within the data and the subtle, sometimes conflicting realities within it” is important for all participants (Gray, 2014, p.186). Where respondents’ views differ greatly, I believe it is the responsibility of the researcher to ask questions to gain further information and understanding, essentially establishing why. A key focus for me was ensuring that all voices were heard and given a place in the findings as a matter of inclusion and fairness, whilst balancing the tensions that arose with a pragmatist epistemological stance.

3.6.3 Ethical considerations

Ethical consent was granted by the School of Education Ethics Committee at the University of Strathclyde in December 2018. Two further amendments were made in February 2019 to obtain information from participants regarding their length of service. This was granted in March 2019 and data collection commenced in May 2019. Participant consent and recruitment procedures were followed as previously detailed, including the option to withdraw from the study up to the point of writing up, which commenced in November 2022.

The intent of the study was shared with participants on the participant information sheet, as shown in Appendix A. This included details of where their data would be stored. Initially, digital copies of all data were stored on Strathcloud, then moved to Office 365, further to the change in university guidelines in 2023. Hard copies of mind maps and lists, as shown in Figures 9 and 11, were locked in a filing cabinet. All raw data and electronic files were destroyed once the thesis was fully written up.

No schools were named in the study nor were participant details released to any other organisation. Participants and schools were not identified in any reports or publications arising from the research. Teacher identity and participation in the visually-mediated focus groups and semi-structured interviews were protected through anonymity, confidentiality, and the use of pseudonyms (Rose, 2013). The anonymity of children and young people was also a significant factor in the study. It was explained that data would only be retained for future research where there was continued value to the researcher, but this would be for no more than ten years.

A summary copy of the research was made available for participants who wished to receive it. Additionally, participants were welcome to request a copy of the completed written thesis, which their data contributed towards, or access the thesis when published online. The thesis is the finished product of the research process and clearly articulates how the participant data helped to inform conclusions.

The research outcomes contributed to the completion of a thesis to meet the requirements of doctoral study at the University of Strathclyde. Any data about participants, schools, and the local authority was anonymised in the EdD thesis and will continue to be anonymised in any other publications arising from the study. Participant, school, and local authority identities were confidential and not shared for public consumption. Full ethical procedures were followed throughout the research process in accordance with the University of Strathclyde guidance and supervision from my supervisors, Professor John Davis and Professor Kate Wall.

3.7 Study limitations

3.7.1 Data gathering

A few key limitations were evident in the study and are highlighted as areas for improvement in future research. One school in the case study heavily influenced data gathered through the visually-mediated focus groups. It is recognised that School Three represented over three-quarters of the number for focus group participation. As previously mentioned, this was due to the timescales proposed by the head teacher on an in-service day. However, a wider sample, including Schools Two and Four, may have added balance to the study.

Similarly, School Three was represented solely through visually mediated focus group data, and following up with individuals to participate in an interview might have added depth to the data gathered from School Three. In future research of this kind, follow-up interviews might be a standard step when focus groups are the main data-gathering method.

The practical logistics and room setup for the data-gathering process with School Three meant that the sessions could not be recorded. This was also the case due to a participant's views with the group in School One. Written notes, mind maps, and lists were the sole sources of data. Overall, this was manageable, given the number of visual data sources gathered. However, compared with the detail given in the recorded interviews, it is clear that future research would benefit from a record of all voices in all groups.

The number of interviews expected from the study was less than had been hoped for; therefore, there is a focus on key respondents from the interview data in some cases. This is acknowledged as an area for improvement in future research studies. However, in each theme identified, the range of sources covered all four schools to ensure there was representation across the data corpus.

I acknowledge that the study's findings are restricted to a specific cluster of schools in one local authority in Scotland, an area which, as has been reviewed, does not fit with the wider local authority picture. This is because the schools in the case study were from areas with increased poverty, deprivation, and lower Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) scores. This potentially makes for a unique picture that might not align with perceptions of nurture practice beyond the cluster of schools that participated in the study.

3.7.2 The pace of change in relational practice terminology

This research was primarily concerned with teachers' views on using nurture principles in the whole class setting. When the data was gathered in May 2019, TSPN were still discussed regularly in the cluster of schools participating in the study. In my professional experience, they still are to a large extent. However, there was some overlap with terms such as ACEs and TIP. This meant that the language around all three concepts was somewhat connected as they meant the same thing. This study attempted to show the link between the three as participants discussed them. However, it is acknowledged that there is scope to distil these terms further so that teachers are clear on their use for day-to-day pedagogical practice. This is an important consideration for future research because despite policy guidance to

support teachers in understanding the links between the terms through documents such as *Nurture, Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma Informed Practice: Making the links between these approaches* (Education Scotland, 2018) there seems to be ongoing use and overlap of these terms which have their own origins and research input.

The overall shift in language towards trauma-informed practice (de Thierry, 2021), trauma-responsive practice (Perry & Winfrey, 2021), trauma-informed approaches (Maynard *et al.*, 2019), trauma awareness in classrooms (Stokes & Brunzell, 2020), trauma-restorative schools (Brummer & Thornsborne, 2021) and trauma-informed teaching (Naish *et al.*, 2023) can be confusing for practitioners who are currently trained in nurture practice. I can only comment on this as someone who works in the sector and coaches nurture teachers regularly. The local authority training I discussed in the introductory chapter can often involve working with teachers to unpick these terms and understand what they mean for them on a pedagogical level. I recognise that further work to bring the terms together and support teachers in understanding the placement of TSPN alongside trauma-informed practice and adverse childhood experiences might be a valuable consideration for future research.

3.8 Conclusion

The research aims for the study were to explore teachers' perceptions of nurture practice, including their understanding of TSPN and the impact this might have on students' emotional wellbeing. Research questions for this case study were predicated on one main research question and three sub-questions. To conclude this chapter and remind the reader of the questions before moving to the first findings and discussion chapter, the main and sub-research questions are shown below.

- **Main Question: How do teachers perceive nurture and the use of nurturing principles in their daily processes and practices?**
- Sub-Research Question One: What are your views on nurturing principles, particularly in relation to the provision of an equitable education for children and young people?
- Sub- Research Question Two: What do nurturing principles mean to you in your daily processes and practices?
- Sub-Research Question Three: How effective/ ineffective are nurturing principles as a pedagogical approach in order to meet the needs of your pupils?

The chosen design of case study research with visually-mediated focus groups and interviews supported answers to the aforementioned research questions. Findings from the data are discussed in the following three chapters. To provide a map of the following three chapters, Figure 21 provides an overview of the overarching themes

and sub-themes, which will be detailed in Chapters 4 to 6. Research questions are shown to evidence the themes, which provided an answer for each question.

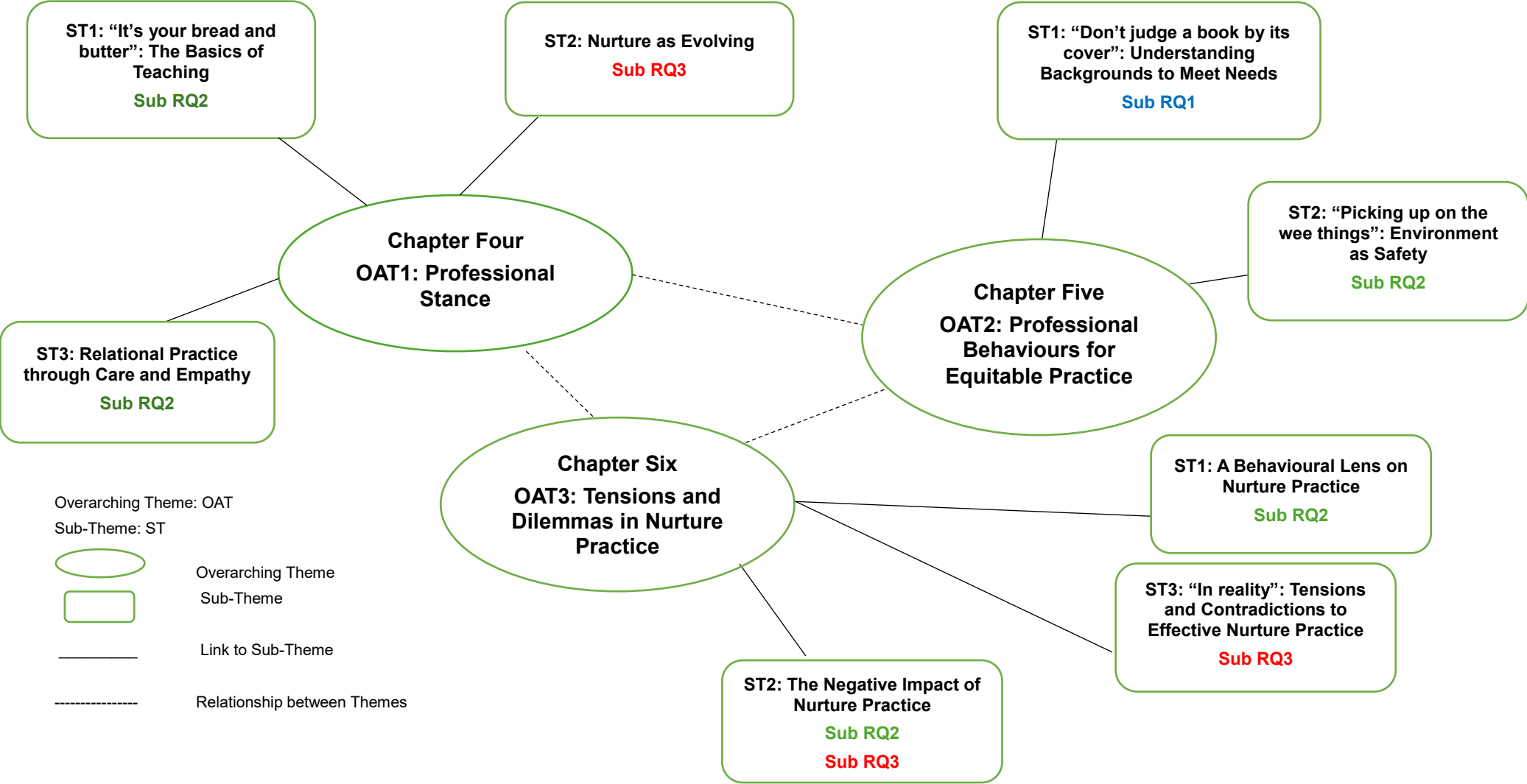


Figure 21: Full thematic map with overarching themes and sub-themes for the study

Chapter 4

Professional Stance

“Stance is where you stand as a teacher...it’s how you *are* in the classroom”

(Roberts, 2023, p. 17).

In this chapter, I discuss the first set of findings from the study through the development of themes that highlight the importance of nurture as a professional stance for teachers in the classroom. Three associated sub-themes are explored: “It’s your bread and butter”: the basics of teaching; nurture practice as evolving; and relational practice through care and empathy.

The findings in this chapter support an answer to the following research questions:

- Sub Question Two: What do nurturing principles mean to you in your daily processes and practices?
- Sub Questions Three: How effective/ ineffective are nurturing principles as a pedagogical approach in order to meet the needs of your pupils?

4.1 “It’s your bread and butter”: The basics of teaching

To begin the review of participant views on nurture in their day-to-day practice, Jane, a secondary school teacher, talked about the approach, and more specifically, *The Six Principles of Nurture* (TSPN), as if they were just an everyday part of being a teacher:

“I think for most classroom teachers it’s just the way that you do things. I hope it is for most classroom teachers... it’s just part and parcel of classroom teaching. I don’t think you could successfully teach a class unless you had those kind of principles embedded in you... of trying to make sure that the chances for each young person were the best they possibly could be.. [so]..I think they’re intrinsic to what you do and I think that if you don’t have that outlook you’re...I think you’d struggle in your career. I think you’d probably have quite a miserable time, as a teacher if you didn’t have that approach to working with young people. So, I would find it bizarre that people wouldn’t have that approach” (Jane, School One).

Jane’s language details how nurturing principles are fundamental to teachers’ actions and approaches in the classroom. This is made clear through terms such as ‘intrinsic,’ ‘just the way you do things,’ and ‘finding it bizarre’ to describe her view of why other teachers would not adopt this stance. This perspective of TSPN is detailed in the literature as an important aspect of classroom practice for teachers (Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Dove, 2021). The use of nurture practice to connect with children and young people positively impacts emotional wellbeing, particularly in relation to the role of the adult in a child’s life at school (Brawls & Ruby, 2023; Lucas, 2012; Marshall, 2014). Whereas it is recognised that there are many supports for whole school emotional wellbeing (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2020), it is important to acknowledge the strength of feeling Jane has around the teacher’s role in using

TSPN due to the clarity she seems to have in relation to their usefulness for teaching practice. Jane's views were echoed in focus group data in School Three:

"They [nurturing principles] are very important [and you] can't teach without them"
(Focus Group, School Three).

The use of nurture practice in whole class settings has previously been researched to establish the successes and challenges of using the approach in mainstream classrooms (Boorn *et al.*, 2010). Challenges include the values held by teachers on how best to support children with emotional wellbeing linked to social and behavioural needs. However, the detailed quote from Jane and the data from School Three suggest values that view the use of TSPN in the mainstream classroom as necessary. A stance that might suggest guidance in Scottish policy documentation on nurture practice could be taken a stage further than is currently expected for teachers (Education Scotland, 2018). Jane further suggested that, from her perspective, nurture is the absolute basics of teaching practice:

"It's your bread and butter as a teacher...to me it's a natural part of every classroom teacher's role" (Jane, School One).

This strength of feeling was echoed by Sally, who explained:

“It [a nurturing approach] is really what drives everything I do on a day-to-day basis. It’s the core for ensuring that children have the best start possible. I feel it’s the core to what you want your children to achieve. You want them to be the best that they can be and I think for a lot of the children that I personally work with, it’s ensuring that you get all this right for them” (Sally, School Two).

Sally’s view that nurturing approaches are ‘the core’ of teaching is interesting. Using an abductive reasoning strategy about the context in which she works, it could link to Sally’s experience as a principal teacher of an infant department in a primary school with responsibility for overseeing the nurture provision for early years and infant primary-aged children. Nurture principles and practice are a part of Sally’s day-to-day approach to working with children and young people. When asked about what this meant, Sally responded in relation to her experience and context:

“I think... because it is at the primary one and two stage it’s very easy to tap into those early developmental things that are missing... that maybe perhaps haven’t been addressed at the nursery stages...they [nurture principles] really are at this stage driving everything [including] everything that I’m doing within the infant nurture classes as well... it’s leading as well what’s going on in the upper nurture classes and groups in ensuring that these principles are highlighted... throughout everything that is done at the classroom level too, that these are not just important for... an identified group but they’re also important within what goes on, on a day to day basis in the classroom” (Sally, School Two).

Previous research on TSPN being at the core of teacher practice has been conducted with specialist nurture teachers in mind (Syrnyk, 2014). The findings from this study indicate that participants perceive nurture principles to be a significant

approach in whole class settings, which has implications for practice beyond a group intervention.

Data from this study suggests that participants from primary and secondary settings perceived TSPN as a fundamental part of what it means to practice as a teacher. Their views link to an intrinsic way of being, similar to the concept of “haltung” as described in Chapter 2 (Kaska, 2015, p.19). While it has been suggested that nurture practice should develop into a pedagogical approach in early years settings (Hayes, 2008), the findings from this thesis might extend the concept to primary and secondary settings based on the participants' perceptions in the study.

4.1.1 Nurture as personal stance

Anne, an art teacher with responsibility for learning support, explained that she felt TSPN were at the core of being a teacher and offered her views that were likely linked to her being a parent:

“They’re very effective because it’s almost part of most people’s psyche, just being nurturing. Perhaps there are people that need to develop it and think a little bit more about it... but I certainly think people who’ve had children, it’s very difficult not to have a nurturing feeling within you. Perhaps... before you have kids it’s just human nature to try and get on with people. I don’t think people should go into the teaching profession without a nurturing side to them” (Anne, School One).

The role of a teacher, as it is enhanced by being a parent, was also discussed by Emma:

“I think for me..., absolutely...I don’t know maybe being a mum or being a teacher I think it’s something that’s hugely important to my role, you know...it comes naturally, I think” (Emma, School Two).

Connecting the concept of nurture to parenting is understandable for practitioners, given that TSPN was developed further in educational practice based on attachment theory (Ainsworth *et al.*, 1979; Bowlby, 1969). As discussed in Chapter 2, nurture is often associated with good parenting (Eve *et al.*, 2014; Guttman *et al.*, 2009; Walsh, 2023; Zeedyk, 2020). Anne and Emma made the connection with parenthood, to build their understanding of what it means to be nurturing towards children and young people in their classrooms. This view sits comfortably alongside key literature on the necessity for nurturing approaches in schools (Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Marshall, 2014; Colley, 2017; NurtureUK, 2022) and links with the original conceptualisation of nurture practice as an emulation of children’s experiences with their primary caregiver (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000).

Reflecting on my professional experience, I would say that some of the most nurturing teachers I have worked with do not have children. Conversely, some of the least nurturing adults I have shared classrooms and staffrooms with are teachers who are parents. In my experience, they tended to avoid using TSPN in their classroom in favour of a behaviourist approach. At the end of Anne’s quote, she shared her view on whether or not people should contemplate a career in teaching without a ‘nurturing side to them’. This seemed to be based on her value system and

the preceding point about being a parent. It is possible to suggest that Anne is making meaning for her teaching role, linked to her values and experience (Mowat, 2007). There is a link to Anne's view of who she is as a teacher, and *how* she acts in the role (Goroshit & Hen, 2016) by considering a nurturing stance in her practice.

Whether or not all professionals in education should have the same skills, abilities, attributes, and values is worth considering. The concept of professional uniformity at a certain level could be deemed contentious (Christie & Menmuir, 2005). This is because a range of skills and approaches from adults are important to support wellbeing in school (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2020). Therefore, these findings indicate that teachers' understanding of TSPN may not be predicated on being a parent and could be based on their experience and values in educational practice.

4.1.2 Nurture as a desired professional stance

The extent to which nurture practice is successfully adopted within a school community is dependent on the foresight and support of the senior leadership team (Hickey, *et al.*, 2021; Reeves & Le Mare, 2018). This includes recruitment and retention of teachers able to demonstrate values which align with TSPN (Syrnyk, 2012). In the extract on the following page, Daisy, a deputy head teacher, explained her vision of the position nurture practice should hold when recruiting teachers:

“I think it’s [nurture practice] just the core of everything we do. I do believe absolutely and utterly if I was appointing teachers for next year I would be looking for people who have that [the principles]...and think in an interview you can feel that. It comes through in their answers and you ask then all the, the talk about can you tell me about BGE, can you tell me about raising attainment can you tell me about this but all their answers have got to have nurture in it. They’ve got to have the principles of nurture...and what to help young people do the best they can in an environment they feel safe in...at a pace that’s right for them...We have to make the right conditions for these young people and it comes from the teachers on a day-to-day basis” (Daisy, School One).

The notion that teachers must understand nurture practice *and* subject knowledge to be effective teachers is fascinating. It contrasts with previous research on teachers' views of nurture practice as an unfamiliar approach (Kearney & Nowak, 2019). Daisy stated that she would expect to have TSPN demonstrated in teacher interviews when recruiting to her school, a perspective evident in previous research indicating relational practice is a crucial aspect of teaching (Henderson & Smith, 2022; Gravett *et al.*, 2021).

Positioning nurture practice within frameworks for teacher recruitment is interesting because it adds to current literature that advocates relationship-based approaches in schools (Delaney, 2017; Geddes, 2006; Henderson & Smith, 2022; Whitaker, 2021). Positive student-teacher relationships and the capacity to build them are key aspects of full standards for registration as a teacher in Scotland, particularly regarding professional values of trust, integrity and respect (GTCS Scotland, 2022, p.4). However, I acknowledge that this perception was only shared by Daisy; therefore, it might be a black swan in the data gathered for the study (Silverman, 2010).

Teachers' perceptions of nurture practice as a desired professional stance were discussed in the following extract from Rose. She explained how teachers in her school are led by their value system, which includes how they view nurturing approaches:

“For some teachers, they do need to change or adapt their thoughts as to what nurture is and challenge their own personal values and that’s one of the things I think is probably hardest. You know, members of staff and their view of nurture is something more deep-rooted and is more values-related” (Rose, School Four).

Consideration of teacher values and attitudes around nurture practice is important as it helps develop an overall understanding of the culture of the school environment in which practitioners work (Coleman, 2020). This is valuable information for senior leadership team members when planning the move to whole school nurturing approaches. Deciding whether cultural and pedagogical shifts can successfully happen in a school based on the capacity of staff (Priestly *et al.*, 2017) to actively demonstrate specific values daily (Whitaker, 2021) is a key consideration for expected change in practice. Rose’s quote helps highlight the challenges teachers face when using nurture practice across a whole school environment, where adults may hold various perspectives on what TSPN mean in their classroom. The data extract from Rose links well with previous research on the problem of a potential “mismatch” of professional views on supporting children with emotional wellbeing needs across a school setting (Roffey, 2016, p.30).

Emma talked about the problem of a “mismatch” (*ibid*, 2016), as she reflected on the need for nurture practice as an expected aspect of teacher behaviour:

“I think it’s a necessity. An absolute necessity... and if I think if you think that nurturing principles or a nurturing personality are not needed for teaching then you shouldn’t be teaching...do you know, I think it's your bread and butter”
(Emma, School Two).

The term ‘nurturing personality’ used by Emma is interesting because research has found that assessing how nurturing teachers are is quite challenging (Carmel & Badash, 2019). The measurement and impact of “non-academic attributes” of practitioners is still being explored in initial teacher education programmes (Sheridan *et al.*, 2021, p.387). Asendorpf and Rauthmann (2020) argued that “states and situations” will influence how personality is measured at any given time (2020, p.56). This argument fits well with the influence of multiple views, values and experiences teachers bring to their role (van Manen, 2015). I agree with the notion that this measurement of values and attitudes is difficult because of the range of views I have encountered in my teaching career. Nevertheless, Emma’s perspective that nurture is a natural stance for teachers is clear from her quote. It is impactful because it suggests a link with pedagogical practice, which includes the concept of “haltung” or, way of being, in the classroom and centres children’s wellbeing through a caring, relational stance (Hatton, 2013, p.15)

School Three further discussed the importance of nurture practice as crucial for the role of a teacher. Aligned with Emma's view, focus group data showed that the approach was perceived to be lacking for some teachers:

“Not all teachers are nurturing...some are not nurturing, which causes issues within the class” (Focus Group, School Three).

I would abductively reason that participants' use of 'nurturing' in this extract aligns with the concepts of empathy and attunement discussed in Chapter 2. Where the respondents suggest that not connecting with children in this way 'causes issues,' It may be the case that they meant a rupture in relationships between the teacher and pupils (Geddes, 2006; Bombèr, 2007).

There is an interesting tension between the first data extract from School Three and this one. Within the same school, there were multiple mixed views regarding applying TSPN in practice. In the first extract used in this chapter, teachers in School Three explained that it was impossible to teach without nurture principles. However, in this quote, they stated that some people either got it or did not. However, an interesting word used by School Three is 'nurturing', which suggests an action by the teacher. As I argued in Chapter 2, nurture is an action word (Marshall, 2014). It is something adults do for a child, particularly regarding care to support learning and wellbeing (Eve *et al.*, 2015; Walsh, 2023, Zeedyk, 2024).

Although details of the ‘issues’ mentioned by focus group participants from School Three are not specific, from my professional viewpoint, I would abductively reason that there is a link to how teachers might cope with a child’s behavioural needs, especially if the choice made the teacher is to use an different approach to a nurturing, empathic stance. The perception of an individual teacher’s ability to use a nurturing approach and the extent to which they are or are not able to use TSPN was further discussed by Daisy in the following quote:

“Not every teacher in [School One] has a nurturing approach. They are in the very small minority and it reflects on uptake for their subject, it reflects on their exam results and it reflects on the behaviour of the kids in the class. And they don’t have it....Some people have got a mindset that ‘no, I’m the teacher in charge’. They haven’t got a nurturing bone in their body....[and] for some people it’s a huge mountain to climb. Eh, but I’d say ninety percent of the staff do it... just do it without even thinking. They don’t even know they’re doing it but they do it and you see it all the time in their classes. There’s some, you can see, in and out of it and there’s some...the shoes don’t fit and I don’t think they make good teachers”
(Daisy, School one).

The data from Daisy’s quote fits directly with current research, which critiques the behavioural actions of adults in response to challenging behaviour from children and the impact it can have on educational experiences for young people (Chatterley, 2020; Dix, 2017). Recent literature on adult responses to distressed behaviour and the effect on children in the classroom suggested that teacher reaction significantly affects pupils’ wellbeing (Chatterley, 2023). Adult responses and pedagogical approaches, which focus on a relational connection with students, have positively impacted children and young people at school (Dix, 2017; Hibbin, 2019). However, despite my firm belief that relational practice through TSPN is a significant approach for teachers, it should be noted that some writers view relational approaches as a

part of a teacher's role rather than a primary focus (Bennett, 2020; Rodgers, 2015). Daisy's view that teachers should have alternative approaches to their practice to meet the needs of pupils aligns with previous literature on the importance of varying pedagogical approaches to support students in the classroom (Flannery *et al.*, 2016; Saxena *et al.*, 2021).

4.2 Nurture practice as evolving

This second sub-theme details perceptions of the pre-existence and evolution of nurture practice. Findings in the data support an answer to research questions two and three regarding teachers' views on nurture practice in their day-to-day practice and their views on nurture as a practical pedagogical approach to meeting pupils' needs.

4.2.1 The existence of a nurturing pedagogy?

The main message in this sub-theme was that participants viewed nurture as always present in their practice. However, the terminology and focus around the approach had changed over time, as Rose explained in this first extract:

"I suppose I've mentioned a little bit about my career and we're now reaching about eighteen years and initially nurture wasn't something that was really spoken about at all... so it's been something that's come to the forefront in recent years but that's not to say it wasn't always there or...thought about but it's just, it's got a different sort of profile now or sort of level of awareness" (Rose, School Four).

Although clearly stating that nurture practice has always been part of how she works in schools, Rose pointed out that recent foregrounding could be due to the national focus on TSPN, nurture groups, and whole school approaches (Department of Education, 2020; Education Scotland, 2018; NurtureUK, 2020). It may also have been influenced by the drive to increase nurture groups and whole school approaches in the local authority where Rose and I work. Within the national Scottish context, whole school understanding of nurture practice became an important focus for the Scottish Government through evaluative guidance such as *How Nurturing is Our School* (Education Scotland, 2018) as they sought to emulate the success of Glasgow City Council's implementation of nurture across a range of Scottish primary and secondary schools from 2001 onwards (March & Kearney, 2017). Therefore, it should be recognised that the concept and language of nurture have been around for several years, particularly in existing work regarding the development of practice beyond the nurture room (Boorn *et al.*, 2010; Colwell & O'Connor, 2003; Doyle, 2004). This is a point that Rose highlighted in her response whilst discussing her experience throughout her career.

Daisy echoed Rose's views regarding the raised awareness of nurture practice in recent years:

"I think, as a teacher, I'd never heard the word nurture until maybe about four or five years ago. I think I probably always was [nurturing] and when I heard nurture I went, och, I've always done that, that's always been me and I think that's in my values... no matter what, everybody gets an equal opportunity and they [are] cared [for] very much" (Daisy, School One).

Nurture practice as a values-led approach has been linked with caring pedagogy in previous literature (Velasquez *et al.*, 2013; Brawls & Ruby, 2023). Professional values for teachers in Scotland include care as guidance in the standards for registration (GTCS, 2022). Moreover, Hayes (2008) linked concepts of professional care with nurturing pedagogy in the early years. Therefore, academic work has already established the link between care and nurture in education (Hayes, 2008; Noddings, 2012a). A pre-existing concept which Daisy highlighted in her quote. Jane shared this view, however, she extended her discussion to include the usefulness of professional learning opportunities:

“Possibly ten years ago it wasn’t called nurturing principles, it wasn’t a thing maybe the way that it is now. The brain development theory that we, that we’ve all had the training on, before that when we didn’t know, or somebody knew but they hadn’t told us about it, now it’s , you look at it and you think how on earth could you not do it...I think that focused the mind a wee bit. We thought we all knew it was a good thing to do but I don’t think any of use realised why it was a good thing to do. When you see the science behind it you think, ah, so we’re not just doing it to be nice, we’re doing it because actually there is a physical change in the brain if you do it...I think that’s when most of us thought that, while it may be natural...it’s good to know that you’re doing it for a proper reason” (Jane, School One).

In this extract, Jane’s reference to ‘brain development theory’ could be linked to whole school training on attachment theory, which I also attended as her colleague. The training was aligned with the literature previously reviewed in Chapter 2, which discussed the impact of neuroscience knowledge on adults’ understanding of attachment (Desautels & McKnight, 2019; Kirshenbaum, 2023; Zeedyk, 2023). Jane’s view that neuroscience supported her understanding of nurture practice is positive and, because I worked closely with her I would argue that her intentions are clear as to how this knowledge could be used to help her teaching practice.

However, it should be cautiously received, as my experience with this detail has been mixed. Some teachers I have worked with have developed deterministic views of children and young people as a result of seeing brain scan images.

Professional development opportunities on attachment theory are a key aspect of teacher training, which allows practitioners to adapt their practice to support the emotional wellbeing needs of their pupils (Riley, 2011). This includes how attachment impacts behaviour and learning (Delaney, 2017). Supporting teachers to understand and make sense of the reasons for using TSPN in the classroom is important as it adds value to teacher understanding as to why this approach might be helpful for children and young people (Marshall, 2014; Little & Maunder, 2021). Therefore, Jane's views align with the literature, which advocated the usefulness of training in attachment theory to enhance understanding of the reasons for TSPN in the classroom (Boxall & Lucas, 2012). However, Harris (1998) argued that training based on psychological theory leads to assumptions about the impact of early life experiences and the role of the primary caregiver (Harris, 1998). Extending knowledge of attachment to move beyond the primary caregiver, which includes ecological and societal impacts such as peer groups, is important to support professional learning on using TSPN in school (Harris, 1998; Cameron, 2018). I agree that peer influence is a significant consideration for teachers. My experience in secondary schools opened my mind to this. I would argue that attachment is the starting position for nurture practice, but understanding infant, child, adolescent, and teenage development for children and young people would enhance a teacher's role, particularly in the secondary school setting.

Anne also discussed nurture practice as an evolving concept as she reflected on her learning experiences as a teacher. She explained that:

“I’m not sure how much in terms of pedagogy, or when I was doing teacher training it was. It wasn’t so highlighted that it had to be nurturing. It’s certainly developed an awful lot more” (Anne, School One).

In the first sentence, Anne talked specifically about pedagogical approaches, as her answer was in response to research question three regarding the effectiveness of nurturing pedagogy in meeting the needs of children. Anne pointed out that nurture practice was not viewed as a pedagogy when she trained as a teacher over seventeen years ago. This makes sense, as the theory was first written about in 2008. Anne went through her teacher training around the same time as me, and the theory of a nurturing pedagogy was not yet commonplace (Hayes, 2008). Therefore, it was unsurprising that she had not heard of nurture practice as a pedagogical approach, as I also discovered it as part of the literature review for this study, further to my professional interest in TSPN beyond the nurture group setting. Anne’s view that nurture practice was unknown as a pedagogical approach was reiterated by Sally, who explained that:

“I’m not sure that a lot of staff would be aware of it as that [a nurturing pedagogy]. I think unless you’re within that environment in teaching, you’re familiar with them [the nurturing principles] you may be ...not as familiar with it as a pedagogical approach. It wouldn’t be...maybe the first thing that a lot of members of staff might perhaps be... thinking of but...u-huh I think it is effective if you are familiar with it” (Sally, School Two).

In this quote, Sally used the phrase 'within that environment,' which could be associated with her role as a principal teacher. She was responsible for leading nurture group provision in School Two. Therefore, Sally may be referring to a nurture room. This is a significant contribution because it fits the existing literature on nurture practitioners as specialists (Syrnyk, 2012).

Sally's view that nurture practice is something teachers need to be 'familiar with' is interesting. It relates to previous studies arguing for whole school nurturing approaches as an essential element of wellbeing education teachers provide (Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Coleman, 2020). However, the concept of whole school approaches differs from the notion of TSPN as an existing pedagogical practice. Evidence from this quote and the previous data extract reinforces the suggestion that nurturing pedagogy was not known to participants in the study (Hayes, 2008).

4.2.2 From punitive measures to nurture practice

To further demonstrate findings of nurture practice as evolving, Daisy equated her views of nurturing approaches with her decision, early in her career, to not use the belt on children and young people. She explained:

"When I started teaching the belt was in and we had the belt for the first two years and I never ever used it. I never sent a kid to be belted. So, I probably have always had a nurturing approach" (Daisy, School One).

An abductive analysis of this part of Daisy’s interview could conclude that she is trying to clarify the dichotomy between extremely controlling strategies and caring, nurture practice. It is interesting because it gives insight into her understanding of nurture practice as the opposite of punitive or behaviourist methods. It also raises questions about potential misconceptions of the relationship between nurture practice and behaviourist approaches, which will be explored in more detail in Chapter 6.

The view that pedagogical approaches to support children’s learning and development in school had evolved from punitive strategies was also mentioned by Anne:

“when I was in primary and they still even had the belt...(Anne, School One)”

In both extracts, Anne and Daisy reflect on their personal experiences and values regarding punitive behavioural methods and the impact on their practice. This is important because teachers' life experiences are unique and shape the practitioners they are likely to become by developing specific values around education (Olsen, 2008). The impact of personal interpretations of pedagogy is an important consideration for teachers (Alexander, 2004). To take this point further, I would offer that previous experience and perceptions of pedagogy might significantly impact a teacher’s decision to adopt alternative pedagogies due to the vulnerability it can bring (Gravett, 2023).

Anne and Daisy express the move from punitive forms of behaviour support towards nurture as a positive step. This is clear from their reflections on what they perceive nurture practice to be and what they perceive it not to be. I cannot disagree with these views as a teacher who strongly advocates using TSPN with children and young people. However, the notion of nurture practice as the opposite of punitive, behavioural methods perhaps indicates confusion about the participant's understanding of nurture. The dichotomy in teachers' thinking is potentially an important finding in this study when considering the implications for practice. Anne expanded on why using TSPN, as opposed to punitive behavioural approaches, was important to her:

"I think that people are appreciating that you do have to show compassion and nurture people to actually help them develop. Even if it is just one person...it does help people children develop in education. It's very difficult to have an open brain to anything if you're closing it all off with sort of, upset. Yeah, so, it's very important because you could just end up with a completely closed off, shut down kid if they don't feel they're getting any response or any care from whoever's teaching them." (Anne, School One).

This quote highlights Anne's views of nurture practice and the link to care and kindness, not only as a perceived opposite to punitive behavioural methods but as an approach to supporting and teaching children and young people expressing a need. Anne's views on the 'open brain' are associated with her professional learning experience at her school, similar to Jane's, where both teachers participated in professional development on attachment theory and nurture practice in 2018. In the quote, Anne connected nurture, care, the importance of connections and compassion for brain development (Delafield-Butt & Adie, 2016; Desautels & McKnight, 2019; Zeedyk, 2020).

In the extracts from Daisy and Anne, there is a connection between their responses and the literature on concepts such as natural care in a professional setting (Noddings, 2012a). Anne explained her understanding of nurture practice as an aspect of care far removed from punitive approaches. As previously discussed, the actions and responses of adults are essential when considering support for children's emotional wellbeing (Dix, 2017). This includes an awareness of empathy and attuned responses to distressed behaviour (Amey, 2009; Bates, 2021; Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021; Delaney, 2017; Geddes, 2006). Punitive responses to young people needing a different pedagogical approach can cause additional stress for the child and the adult (Desautels & McKnight, 2019). Both participants' perspectives of punitive measures link with widely held views in current literature regarding the negative impact of punitive and behaviourist measures in schools (Bombèr, 2020; Chatterley, 2020; Chatterley, 2023).

4.3 Relational practice through care and empathy

To introduce this sub-theme, focus group participants from School Three shared their perceptions on the overall concept of relationships and their importance for teaching:

“Relationships are essential for all children and for others it is absolutely critical...they are the building foundations on which everything else depends. Secure, attached relationships allow children to explore the world confidently. This requires the whole school ethos to embrace these values...You need to have a relationship with the child” (Focus Group, School Three).

Focusing on “relational health” within the classroom has been argued to be a crucial aspect of the role of a teacher (Perry & Winfrey, 2021, p.250). Use of the term ‘secure, attached relationships’ by School Three participants assumed an understanding as to why TSPN should be used in school (Boxall, 2002; Boxall & Lucas, 2012) to support children’s social and emotional development (Bernier *et al.*, 2015). Perspectives that consider relationships as the foundation of teaching align with the literature regarding the impact of relational practice in the classroom (Geddes, 2006; Ugwuozor, 2020). Whilst discussing how teachers could positively impact their relationship with students, participants from another focus group in School Three also suggested that the key was:

“Trying to understand what is [the child’s] idea of a relationship [whilst] keeping these [nurture] principles in mind... [that] it won’t work with all children. [It is] dependant on your relationship” (Focus Group, School Three).

Viewing relationships through the eyes of the child in this way demonstrated an empathic approach to positive relationships (Phillips *et al.*, 2020). Teacher insight into the child’s view of relationships with adults in school and beyond is important because the information can support pedagogical decisions in the classroom (Riley, 2011). A relational pedagogy, which considers the ecological experiences of children, supports the development of trust, understanding and safety in the classroom (Bombèr, 2020; Brawls & Ruby, 2023; Whitaker, 2021). Therefore, the views of School Three align directly with the academic literature on relational approaches, which are recommended to support children to succeed in school.

An additional focus group from School Three shared their perspectives on relationships and the importance of knowing the children in their classrooms. They stated that:

“If you've not got a relationship with a child then you aren't going to get anywhere”
(Focus Group, School Three).

Whereas some writers suggest that student-teacher relationships are merely a part of the overall framework of teaching practice (Bennett, 2020; Lemov, 2021), the absolute nature of this statement fits more with academic literature that centres relationships as central to supporting wellbeing and learning in schools (Bombèr, 2020; Crouch *et al.*, 2014; Dix, 2017; Foulkes, 2024; Geddes, 2006; Riley, 2011). Positive connections in school directly impact other aspects of school life, such as attainment (Henderson & Smith, 2022). Therefore, I would abductively reason that respondents in School Three were suggesting the relational approach must come first in order to effect change for children’s learning across the curriculum. The findings in this data extract align with the concept of pedagogical relational depth between students, curriculum and teacher, shown in Figure 9, page 104. However, Grace made a point regarding the time it can take to establish relational connections with children in her class:

“It can take time to build up relationships with the children and to give them what they need. To explain things to them if they are upset or angry, to take that time to explain their feelings and talk with them... [and to]...let them know that it’s ok to be upset, it’s ok to be angry” (Grace, School Two).

The extent to which classroom teachers can fully impact the emotional state of each child in their care is certainly up for debate, given their range of responsibilities regarding children's learning (Bennett, 2020). However, this is a crucial role for classroom teachers because of the impact relationships have on social and emotional learning (Pendergast & Main, 2019). Grace's awareness that nurture practice includes supporting distressed behaviour through relationships and connectedness agrees with literature which advocates TSPN in the classroom (Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Brawls & Ruby, 2023).

In the same school, the concept of relationships was equally important to Emma as she explained her view on why nurture practice through positive relationships mattered in her setting for children and parents:

"I think if you don't have a nurturing approach, you can't build relationships and if you can't build a relationship with the children then...they can't learn. Do you know... it's the same with the families. The families need to trust you, they need to think that you've got the child's best interests at heart. Parents in our setting need to know that they can trust you. They need to know that they can come to you and speak to you and if the parents have that relationship with you then the children are going to have that relationship with you...[and] they need to know that there is a safe space and somewhere they can come and feel loved and cared for" (Emma, School Two).

Emma's view of relationships' role in gaining the trust of families to communicate and connect with school staff is interesting and was in response to research question two regarding nurture approaches in everyday practice. School connectedness, through the support and inclusion of parents and carers, is essential for children (Allen *et al.*, 2018; Dukynaite & Dudaitė, 2017). Solomon (2016) proposed that "nurturing the

parent connection” is an essential strategy for schools focusing on relationships (2016, p.51). Understanding and connecting with a child through an ecological and societal lens is helpful for teachers to establish what might be impacting their pupils’ wellbeing (Whitaker, 2021). A view that was shared by School Three:

“It’s about the relationships within the family, not just the school” (Focus Group, School Three).

Although this is a brief statement about relationships and nurture practice in their primary school, it should be acknowledged that respondents in School Three seemed to be looking beyond the classroom to consider why micro-level connections are crucial for student-teacher relationships across family, school, and community (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007).

4.3.1 Nurture practice as care and empathy

Nurture practice, as a relational approach with students and their families, was conceptualised as care and empathy by some respondents in the study. As Jane explained in the following quote:

“It’s about caring, I think... for the young people. Caring about their wellbeing but also caring about their learning,...caring about how they feel in your classroom, caring about what they care about and... just making sure that they feel in an environment that they’re in a safe place to learn and that they can be themselves within the room without fear of ridicule from me or from somebody else and that they can, they can succeed at some, at their level, within the classroom” (Jane, School One).

In this extract, Jane placed the role of carer firmly in the hands of the teacher. This quote is exciting because care has long been associated with nurture and relational educational approaches (Hayes, 2008; Noddings, 2012; Trout, 2018). Whether or not the responsibility for care lies solely with the teacher is open for debate, as a simplified concept of care exists within education due to the overuse of the term (Rabin & Smith, 2013). Professional values for teachers in Scotland include care as guidance in the standards for registration (GTCS, 2022). Therefore, it might be reasonable to offer that caring is a clear aspect of the professional stance of a teacher because the link between care and nurture in education has already been established in current academic work (Hayes, 2008; Noddings, 2012).

Jane's explanation of caring provides evidence of empathy for her students as she considers their feelings in her classroom. This is a fascinating contribution to this sub-theme and maps to previous research in the area (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2011). It is particularly relevant to how teachers might consider the impact of early experiences and the importance of an empathic approach to education (Little & Maunder, 2020). I would suggest that Jane's quote is evidence of a choice associated with cognitive empathy (Brown, 2018; Gilbert, 2009; Gordon, 2009; Perry & Winfrey, 2021). She is trying to view her classroom environment as an area of safety from the perspective of her pupils. However, she also demonstrates empathic concern when considering what she can do to help the young people in her classroom (Goleman, 1995; Szalavitz & Perry, 2010).

The emergence of care is an interesting finding in this sub-theme. Care is heavily weighted in the literature as an approach, and it offers guidance for education staff

around TSPN in the classroom (Brawls & Ruby, 2023). Empathy seems less prevalent, and the findings from this study add to the literature on TSPN to include further exploration of empathy as an area for teacher understanding and development.

In the following extract, Daisy detailed her perceptions of nurture as care through an example from her school experience. She reflected empathetically on her role as a depute head teacher, the students she cared for, and why she understood what it was like to be a teenager in need of a nurturing approach:

“I think it’s really important that you’re there for the kids and actually, you realise, ‘I remember being like you’. I remember being that awkward person, that hormonal female, that stropky girl... Then when you get to the fifth and sixth year then the insecurity about that next step. Where am I going? ... There was one teacher I had at school that I felt understood me and I think, I want to be that teacher now and I think she was nurturing. She cared about the people that played in the hockey team and I was a member of the hockey team and it didn’t matter whether you were doing five A Highers or not, she just cared... and I think that’s important” (Daisy, School One).

Evidence of personal accounts may be an expected outcome when asking participants to discuss their perceptions of a subject, encouraging respondents to connect to first-hand experience (Hamlyn, 2017). In this quote, Daisy’s response demonstrated her understanding of the challenges teenagers face in her school through an example of a teacher who ‘just cared’. Daisy empathised with the young people in her school by taking their perspective and considering the impact of a caring adult who can build positive relationships. Daisy seemed to be discussing Nodding’s concept of “natural care” (2012, p.54), detailed in a framework with

additional concepts such as empathy, listening and reciprocity. Daisy described how it felt to be in the same position as the senior students she teaches. This level of professional, empathic concern is an interesting link to the concept of nurture practice (Wilhelm & Bekkers, 2010). I would suggest that Daisy also demonstrated emotional empathy when discussing her school experience. The quote provides an important insight into Daisy's understanding of what it means to practice nurture through values of care and empathy. The extract adds to the findings in the sub-theme that empathy is an important concept when considering nurture practice. Both care and empathy, as linked to personal experience, were evident in Anne's next quote, where she explained why it was important to treat the pupils as she might want to be treated:

"You kinda see them as wee human beings that do need your help and even if they look a little bit older and a bit more sort of upset and maybe angry and behaving badly that is all based on sometimes... just even what's been going on around them. You can't think, just because it's in your classroom...you've got to understand that they have all different stresses and appreciate that they're similar to yourself and they're similar to your own family. It's almost trying to just see the children... and pupils, just similar to yourself and treat them the way that you'd expect to be treated and give them the respect and if they're struggling realise the struggle and try and adapt to try and help the work that they're doing be eased through nurturing and helping them with a different technique" (Anne, School One).

Anne made a strong link between caring and empathy, explaining her view of TSPN as a set of adult behaviours that resonate with responses she would expect from others towards herself or her family (Cherry, 2021). It could be reasoned that there is evidence of cognitive and emotional empathy through concern for her pupils on a

human level (Szalavitz & Perry, 2010). There is also the scope for aligning Anne's views as empathic concern for her students (Segal, 2018).

Anne's caring perspective is interesting as concepts of professional care which link with parental caring behaviours have been argued to benefit children in educational settings (Grimmer, 2021). However, the extent to which teachers demonstrate caring and nurturing behaviours, such as those of a parent, is often directly linked to their values and beliefs and may vary from person to person (Henderson & Smith, 2022). As previously discussed in this chapter, I have worked with a range of teachers who are able to provide or completely avoid nurture practice in their classrooms.

I would suggest that Anne could be describing "deep care" for her students during her response to research question two regarding nurture principles in everyday practice (Warin, 2017, p.196). Empathic concern is also evident from Anne's answer, given her discussion of compassion, kindness and consideration for the feelings and experiences of the children and young people in her classroom (Hogg & Vaughan, 2017; Huang *et al.*, 2020). The notion of care, as detailed in this sub-theme by Daisy, Anne, Emma and Jane, is closely linked to Noddings' concept of "receptive attention", which includes presence and empathic listening when working with others (2012, p.54). This is an area of practice I would closely align with attunement, as detailed in Chapter 2.

Being open to interactions with children by listening to show them empathy and care was identified as an important aspect of nurture practice by participants in School Three. Teachers in the focus group suggested that nurture principles in practice included:

“being available and approachable...[to] listen to [the students]...and show an interest in their lives outside of school...genuine interest” (Focus Group, School Three).

Making sure children are seen and heard is an important aspect of the role of a teacher (Loe, 2016; van Manen, 2015), particularly in the Scottish educational context, where the necessity of a child’s voice is explicit through UNCRC guidance (UNICEF, 2022) and GIRFEC (2008, 2022). The extract from School Three links well with the interview data on relationships, caring, and empathy because the skill of listening is an essential component of empathic behaviours in education (Wang *et al.*, 2022), as is adult presence and listening to understand the emotional state of children and young people (Dolan *et al.*, 2017). The idea of showing ‘genuine interest’ is fascinating as it makes me question whether there may be times when genuine interest is not possible. However, this is most likely due to time constraints on adults in schools rather than a lack of willingness to support a child’s emotional need to be heard (Clarke, 2022).

Findings that include listening as important for relational practice fit directly with previous research on models of attunement and nurture, where principles such as “being attentive, encouraging initiatives, receiving initiatives, developing attuned

interactions, guiding and deepening discussion” are highlighted as important approaches in whole class settings (Cubeddu & Mackay, 2017, p.261). Attunement awareness can support how teachers think about listening (Lipari, 2014). I would argue that the “serve and return” of attunement, as discussed in Chapter 2, is an important element in this sub-theme (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012, p.242) because of the association with participants’ suggestion of showing interest in a child. This is an important point to support teacher understanding of the concepts discovered in this study and their implications for developing TSPN across whole class settings.

These findings clearly link with the nurture principles; *language is understood as a vital means of communication* and *all behaviour is communication* (NurtureUK, 2020) due to the correlation with empathic behaviours, listening, and communicating to understand children and young people.

Empathic concern and care were evident in the next quote from focus group participants in School One as they reflected on their practice when working with children and young people deemed in need of nurturing approaches:

“[The] nurturing principles have hugely changed my practice. [The] nurture group and classroom are two different things...I understand more... [there is a] massive change in the relationships I've built with the young people. I think about it more...my communication with them...I'm more aware of it now...perhaps I wouldn't have been before... like how hard must it be to move from one nurturing environment to another...for the kids? They have a knot in their stomach moving from one class to another...where someone smiles at you and you can behave in a certain way but elsewhere you can't” (Focus Group, School One).

The level of reflexive detail in this extract may be due to three out of the six participants being part-time nurture practitioners and pastoral teachers. There is evidence in this quote that respondents have taken the young person's perspective and considered how they feel in their day-to-day interactions at school. This is important because it highlights cognitive and emotional empathy for the children in their care by considering how the young person feels (Wink *et al.*, 2021). This approach is an aspect of teaching practice that positively supports children and young people's emotional wellbeing (Odgers, 2014).

Understanding children by empathically considering their experiences was a point also raised by Rose as she discussed the effectiveness of nurture practice from her perspective:

“I do think it’s effective and it’s definitely the correct way to move forward and I think in order for the children to make progress and have the best experience we need to try and understand them, and try to understand as much as we can what their experiences are like in order to try and make things better for them. I’m thinking of children in a nurture group...for one child the behaviour is quite extreme...verbal, negative self-talk. For another child [they] want to talk all the time and seeking attention in a really nice way and then for another child [they] almost withdraw completely. For the children described there is the same need for nurture...but it presents differently...So, I think the approach is helpful for all children” (Rose, School Four).

Finally, Daisy explained her perception of nurture practice as it links to empathy, particularly regarding the impact of life outside of school for some of the children and young people with whom she worked:

“I’ll tell the kids...life is shit at times... life is and you’ve got a rotten deck of cards but school and all the people in here are going to get you to a place where *you* want to be, not where we want you to be. We don’t get paid bonuses... I’m always saying that to them. This is where you want to be... we can... help you because right now you’re having a real difficult time and we appreciate that. We’ll help you through it and get you back on the road” (Daisy, School One).

Daisy’s approach, with its very direct language, is further evidence of empathy as a way of “fostering interdependence” through the development of relationships with her pupils (Gordon, 2009, p.39).

4.4 Conclusion

The complexity of nurture practice from a values-based perspective, predicated on the professional stance of participants, was explored in this chapter. There were strong views regarding the necessity of nurturing practice within the class teacher’s role. This was an interesting finding due to the limited mention of nurture practice in the Standards for Registration in Scotland (GTCS, 2022). Although TSPN are signposted in guidance documents for teachers (Education Scotland, 2018), evidence from the data would suggest that respondents felt nurture principles had a more significant role to play in their professional practice. Therefore, I would argue that further work to support Scottish teachers to consider *how* they are in the classroom is important. This point was reinforced when nurture practice was presented as the absolute basics of the role of the teacher. Participants’ personal

experiences as parents, and professional perceptions of practice concluded the sub-theme.

Some participants revealed the evolving nature of nurture practice as they expressed a perceived shift in the use of language around the concept and TSPN. Several participants attributed their increased awareness of nurture practice to whole school professional learning opportunities on attachment and neuroscience. However, their views indicated that nurture had always been part of their practice, even if known by another name. There was a tension between perceptions of nurture as the opposite of punitive behavioural methods in reflections on personal and professional experiences of the evolution of nurture practice. I suggest this is an important finding as respondents viewed nurture practice as the opposite of behaviourist approaches.

This chapter addressed the question of nurture practice as a pedagogical approach, and there were mixed responses to research question three. Some participants indicated that it was helpful for TSPN to be considered this way. However, the findings across the data corpus suggested that there was limited knowledge of nurture practice as a pedagogy. This offers scope for further development of nurture as a pedagogical framework to add to the academic field and support teacher understanding of TSPN in their classroom.

The sub-theme, exploring relational practice through care and empathy, showed participants had clear and strong views regarding the teacher as responsible for relational practice and connections with pupils. This included the assertion that

relationships should be considered a foundational aspect of teaching practice and that, without the approach, teaching children and young people would be a challenge.

Participant's commitment to the notion of care was common across the data in the final sub-theme, not only due to the use of the term but the descriptions of practice provided by respondents, which aligned with previous and current conceptualisations of care (Henderson & Smith, 2022; Noddings, 2012; Taggart, 2016; Waring, 2017;). A surprise finding was the extent to which empathy appeared within this sub-theme. There was evidence of cognitive empathy, empathic concern and emotional empathy in some cases where participants reflected on their school experience. This is an exciting discovery, as empathy is a skill taught to children in school (Henshon, 2019). It is a concept which aligns with literature regarding alternative approaches to supporting distressed behaviour (Chatterley, 2023; Whitaker, 2021; Zeedyk, 2023). Empathy is heavily included in work exploring trauma-informed practice (de Thierry, 2021; Phillips *et al.*, 2020; Van Der Kolk, 2014) and is becoming increasingly evident as an approach for teachers to support children and young people who have experienced A.C.E.s (Breedlove *et al.*, 2021). Given that TSPN have recently been aligned with TIP and ACEs as existing within the same framework of supporting children's wellbeing (Education Scotland, 2018), it is reasonable to position empathy as an area of interest for teachers to further understand the use of nurture principles in their classroom.

Finally, as it aligns with nurture practice, the concept of professional stance was an important overarching theme across the chapter and offers further considerations for

the academic field and educational practice. This includes possibly detailing the teacher's professional stance within a pedagogical framework predicated on nurture practice.

Chapter 5

Professional Behaviours for Equitable Practice

This chapter will explore teachers' perceptions of *The Six Principles of Nurture* (TSPN) (NurtureUK, 2020) as they directly align with concepts of equitable practice. Data is analysed and discussed through the development of the overarching theme of Professional behaviours for equitable practice. There are two sub-themes: "Don't judge a book by its cover": Understanding backgrounds to meet needs and "Picking up on the wee things": Environment as safety, both of which support an answer to the following research questions:

- SQ.1 What are your views on nurturing principles, particularly in relation to the provision of an equitable education for children and young people?
- SQ.2 What do nurturing principles mean to you in your daily processes and practices?

5.1 “Don’t judge a book by its cover”: Understanding backgrounds to meet needs

To introduce this sub-theme, Anne discussed how nurture practice helped her consider a child’s home life:

“That’s my main thinking behind the principles of nurture...just listening and talking... and even, if they [the students] are behaving badly, it could be based on something which has happened previously or even happened in the house with them so you have to take that on board” (Anne, School One).

Anne’s views in this quote seem linked to empathy, discussed in the previous chapter. However, she associated listening and understanding with the importance of knowing what has happened in the child’s life before they get to school, an approach that is a key consideration in nurture practice (Boxall, 2002). An awareness of a child’s home life has long been an aspect of professional knowledge in teaching (Choudry, 2021). This is due to the impact family life can have on a child’s wellbeing and capacity to learn from both a positive and negative perspective (Willemse *et al.*, 2018). A point that Emma highlighted in her next quote as she explained the usefulness of knowing where her pupils are coming from in terms of their motivation and capacity to learn:

“I think having an understanding of the child’s background...we have to make sure that their needs are met before we can sit them down at a table and expect them to learn. Maslow’s theory of hierarchy of needs...if a child’s needs are not being met then they’re not prepared to learn, they’re not in a situation where they can reach their fullest potential” (Emma, School Two).

An awareness of early home experiences is considered an essential aspect of nurture practice (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000; Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Colley, 2007). Professional knowledge of what a child or young person has experienced at home is an important consideration for teachers and can inform pedagogical approaches in the classroom (Aubrey & Riley, 2019; Ogier, 2019). Emma's reference to the Hierarchy of Needs is important (Maslow, 1943). It indicates her view of the actions and choices of adults to meet children's needs. This perspective aligns with the current literature on supporting children at school through a professional awareness of basic needs (Baker & Simpson, 2020).

Children's experiences before school can substantially impact their learning capacity (Bombèr, 2020; Boxall & Lucas, 2012). Particularly if the experiences are negative and impacted by adults who find it challenging to respond to care needs at home (Greenwood, 2019). Emma's reflection on the importance of this is clear. I have worked with Emma for many years and would abductively reason that her intentions are well-meaning. However, I would also offer caution around this being a dominant view. The concept of deterministic views was discussed in Chapter 2, and I believe it is important to consider it again. In my experience of nurture practice, there is a focus on a child's background through consideration of attachment needs. This makes sense because of the link with parenting, the impact of unmet needs (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000; Geddes, 2006), and the potential outcomes for learning (Delaney, 2017; Colley, 2024). However, it is equally important to ensure that staff do not make assumptions about families or their capacity to support their children (Bailey, 2007).

Although it is imperative to ensure teachers have an awareness of the potential for deterministic views of children based on family experience (Burman, 2017; Peck *et al.*, 2015), professional recognition of the influence of early experiences in the family setting supports teachers understanding of the developmental and emotional stage children can express at school, despite their chronological age (Brooks, 2020; Brunzell *et al.*, 2019; de Thierry, 2021). This is an important reflection for teachers when considering pedagogical approaches which meet children's needs (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2021) and ties in directly with the theoretical framework of attachment and TSPN, which supports nurture practice in schools (Boxall, 2002).

Emma's view was shared by Rose, who explained that taking background information into account was important to understand how to support children's emotional wellbeing in her school:

"As a teacher I would say that it's about understanding the whole child and... not just thinking about their academic progress but thinking about their progress to do with health and wellbeing and their emotional development and also taking into account their background and what comes with them when they come to school and that wider understanding of their family and their experiences out with the school" (Rose, School Four).

In response to the question regarding nurture practice as equitable, Rose focused on an ecological view of the children in her school. When asked about nurture practice as an equitable approach in their setting, this was a common theme from respondents. Several participants reflected on their understanding of equity as an appreciation of the family background and the support at micro and meso-levels around the child (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). At times, this was referred to by

participants as understanding the whole child, as shown in the following quote from respondents in School Three. They stated that:

“It is important to treat the child as a whole, socially [and] emotionally...” (Focus Group, School Three).

This extract sits comfortably alongside previous research on the impact of children’s background information and its influence in the classroom for teachers to understand how they respond to children’s needs (Quigley, 2016). This has included adaptations of pedagogical approaches (Brawls & Ruby, 2023; Major & Bryant, 2023).

Understanding background information, as it links to family experiences and the impact on social and emotional development, was also evident from secondary school practitioners in School One. They stated that:

“What happens at home pre-school is vital...[as] developmental milestones may not be met...[and children] may already have less of a baseline” (Focus Group, School One).

The quotes from School Three and School One are interesting because they connect secondary and primary school teachers with similar views on the importance of background data as a support to developing teachers' understanding of the need for nurturing approaches in the classroom. The extracts demonstrate that questions on nurture practice as equitable education can lead teachers to discussions on the background experiences of children in their classrooms. This is understandable

as information gathering beyond academic results is now a standard part of equitable practice in schools (Choudry, 2021) and often takes the form of specific data regarding home circumstances, family details and previous academic outcomes (McClure & Reed, 2022).

5.1.1 Using school data to support nurture practice

Understanding background data is an important aspect of teacher education as it supports quality teaching and learning experiences across the curriculum (Boudett *et al.*, 2020). This view fits with the findings of the study. There was additional evidence from School One:

“[The] whole school are better at nurturing information E.g. more background factors and data sharing” (Focus Group, School One).

Due to my experience working in School One, I would abductively reason that the data referred to as ‘nurturing information’ is directly linked to social and familial information. However, this is also often associated with assessments, standardised tests, and attainment data collated in the same spreadsheet, so it was unclear what respondents meant by this term.

Standardised data from assessments is an important part of school information gathering in the UK, and understanding the attainment gap through baseline data is a regular occurrence in early years, primary and secondary establishments (Gross, 2022; Choudry, 2021). In Scotland, government guidance on baseline and standardised assessments highlights the use of data to develop an understanding of

where children are in their learning at key points in their school career using the *National Improvement Framework* (Scottish Government, 2023). Tracking pupil performance through standardised assessment data is fundamental to ensuring children are given an equitable start in Scotland through initiatives such as the *Scottish Attainment Challenge* (Scottish Government, 2015). This would suggest that it is important to ensure schools have a complete picture of children as they progress in their learning. However, Jane had a different perspective on the weight given to assessment data, as she explained in this next quote:

“The background information is...to me personally, it’s worth way more than a standardised test score because [the assessment] is a snapshot of the day that they were in P7 and they did their Maths or their English test... but the background information, knowing the wee story about who the big brother is or what the family background might be... particularly in a subject like social subjects, where we might touch on things that might be a wee bit raw to some young people... it would very much steer the way we taught something. If there was something in the background that we knew might cause some trauma to somebody if we started talking about it... For example, talking about refugees...[and] things like... poverty” (Jane, School One).

Jane’s perspective on using background data links with previous research on the important position and associated pressure that academic performance holds in education (Ball, 2016). It aligns with academic work that described the challenge of competing demands of “performativity” (Mowat, 2019, p.54). Jane’s views are similar to the scepticism of “test-based accountability” regarding the importance associated with standardised assessments and attainment (Camphuijsen *et al.*, 2021, p.624). Her perception seems to favour an ecological lens to build a picture of children’s needs and strengths in her classroom.

Jane was clear that, in her opinion, understanding where a child has come from, in some cases quite literally, has a direct impact on how she teaches specific subjects in her classroom and across her department. It could be argued that Jane is “humanizing the data” to use it to improve student experiences (McClure & Reed, 2022, p.57). Her explanation of her teaching methods to make students comfortable seems to sit well within some of the pedagogical approaches detailed in Chapter 2, such as social pedagogy (Cameron, 2018). For example, by considering the background and home experiences of the children in her classroom as more important than attainment data, Jane described an aspect of social pedagogy, whereby she demonstrated her “haltung” or stance regarding the care and consideration she shows for her student’s wellbeing and learning (Kaska, 2016, p.19).

Proponents of a social pedagogy approach argue that there is a strong connection between socially-led care and education when considering the benefits for pupils in school (Black *et al.*, 2017). There is a positive impact on equitable education for children (Cameron & Moss, 2011). A link that could be argued as present in Jane’s quote. This fits well with expectations of equitable practice in Scottish education, as detailed in the *Standards for Full Registration* (GTCS, 2022). Therefore, based on the findings from this sub-theme and previous literature, it could be reasoned that understanding pupils’ backgrounds is an important aspect of teaching practice, to provide an equitable learning experience in the classroom and inform pedagogical choice. A point that Jane made regarding the impact of background knowledge on options for teacher pedagogy:

“So, within the last two years we’ve taken the decision to include all of the young people’s ... background information on our spreadsheets so that when we are target setting, having learning conversations or just getting to know a class at the start of a year we know what the standardised test scores are; we know what the primary levels are for English and Maths; we know their economic background; we know about any welfare needs we’ve been given [and] we know information we’ve been given from the support team. We actually know them quite well before we even see them which allows us to plan. It allows us to plan what we want to do with the class as a whole; it allows us to plan the resources we might need; it allows teachers to use the support assistants to the best opportunity that we can but I think we’re so data rich we are much more able to ensure that the teaching is equitable in the classroom by providing the steps up where they’re needed... Knowing that information before, that’s what builds your classroom environment. That’s what makes it a learning environment for all young people” (Jane, School One).

Jane’s statement that ‘we actually know them quite well before we even see them, which allows us to plan’ is interesting as it suggests that Jane perceives the details in the spreadsheets she mentioned as useful when thinking about the whole child. Her description of the strategic deployment of PSAs demonstrates that it is a carefully considered decision that employs details from background data to establish which pupils might need adult support and why. It could be argued that this is a pragmatic reflection to enhance children’s learning (Aubrey & Riley, 2019) because Jane is making the best decisions to improve her practice at that moment in time.

Using data to customise curricular approaches, resources, and pedagogical decisions demonstrates a sense of professional “intentionality” around Jane and her staff’s actions to provide an equitable education for children in their classrooms (Priestly *et al.*, 2017, p.23). Interestingly, teachers achieve this when they are fully aware of how their views are shaped as professionals, and they can practice with an open mind, regardless of societal expectations around children from economically

disadvantaged or advantaged areas (Ready & Wright, 2011). Personal experiences of school, length of teaching service, cultural context and location of the school in which teachers work can have an impact on their views and confidence to adapt flexible pedagogical approaches which meet the needs of students (Flores & Day, 2006; Safrankova & Hrbackova, 2016). These assertions make sense within the context of Jane's quotes as she was a principal teacher with 23 years of experience at the point of the interview. From my professional point of view, Jane stands out as one of the most respected school community members and staff listen to what she has to say. Therefore, her understanding of the school community, length of service, and position may make a difference in how she approaches her practice.

Although respondents found the use of background data important when asked about equity in their classroom, it is important to highlight these findings from a children's rights perspective. Children have a right to be heard and express their opinions on matters relating to them (UNCRC, 1989). Care should be exercised when using their data, as there is a view that children are "datafied" in an unreasonable way in today's society (Lupton & Williamson, 2017, p.780). It is necessary to ensure that a child has a say in information shared about them. Therefore, it is with caution that I agree that a wide range of background data is helpful to support teachers adjust their practice in school. However, I would suggest that there must be a balance in its use. Awareness of pupil voice through national guidance such as GIRFEC (Scottish Government, 2008. 2022) and international guidance from the UNCRC (1989) is crucial for professionals who plan learning experiences based on knowledge of a child's early experiences and home life.

Children's rights should be positioned alongside well-intentioned school practice (Jerome & Starkey, 2021).

5.1.2 Challenging assumptions

Grace continued the theme of understanding background by discussing the need to maintain an open mind when working with children in her setting. She was clear that nurturing approaches included:

"Making sure [the children] have got the appropriate equipment for gym [and] just having an understanding [of] the family background and stuff, you need to have that. You know you can't... assume that these children have everything that they need" (Grace, School Two).

Grace's perception of nurture practice, as a professional awareness of a child's home experiences, is in keeping with the overall findings of this sub-theme; however, an additional component includes the link with economic barriers. A point also discussed by Emma concerning the provision of food:

"We're supporting children in all areas, children who might come in in the morning if they've not had breakfast before they walk through the door, so you're giving them breakfast before they go into class" (Emma, School Two).

This quote is noteworthy because it provides insight into Emma's perception of TSPN and how she links it to supporting children with basic needs, such as eating. An awareness of children's physiological needs and the importance of meeting them prior to learning is a standard approach in nurture group settings (Boxall &

Lucas, 2012; Colley, 2017). However, this may raise questions about how it can be emulated across a class setting. Grace and Emma discussed it as part of their daily practice, but this approach may prove challenging for other practitioners unless there is support and guidance to develop teacher skills in this aspect of practice.

Taking time to ensure that children are in the right place, emotionally and physiologically, to concentrate at school by emulating a home environment, which includes food, is an important aspect of nurture practice (Solomon, 2016). There is evidence of professional care in these quotes from Grace and Emma, who described the importance of keeping an open mind about what children might need from adults to cope with the school day. Emma and Grace highlighted an awareness of systemic poverty and its impact on children in their classrooms (McClure & Reed, 2022). Their sensitivity to the likelihood of financial barriers children might face is an interesting link with nurture practice, particularly regarding their view that it is important to do things differently to support children's wellbeing and learning when faced with economic disadvantage (Child Poverty Action Group, 2023).

Daisy's perceptions on the importance of keeping an open mind and being flexible with your thinking about children's background were similar to Grace and Emma's. However, in this case, she explained the necessity of ensuring you are aware that all children, regardless of economic background, may require a nurturing approach:

“So I always remember that you don’t judge a book by its cover... don’t look at the stats and assume just because of SIMD.... I worry about the SIMD. You know kind of ringfencing kids because there’s kids... I have... taught in XX Academy where... the children that need the most nurture were the wealthiest...the parents, the professionals that were never around for their kids! So you can’t just assume because they’re SIMD ten that those kids don’t need to be nurtured and yet again, don’t assume that kids from SIMD one..., in deprivation, aren’t loved or nurtured” (Daisy, School One).

In this quote, Daisy referred to SIMD, which stands for Social Index of Multiple Deprivation (Scottish Government, 2020), a relative measurement used in Scotland to establish the level of economic disadvantage and deprivation in communities across the country on a scale of one to ten, with one being measured as most deprived and ten being most affluent. Daisy explicitly detailed the importance of understanding the child’s background story rather than making assumptions about their emotional wellbeing needs or their development and early experiences based on the area in which they live. This demonstrates that for Daisy, the term nurture is not automatically linked with economic deprivation, despite the approach being directly linked to initiatives such as the *Pupil Equity Fund* (PEF) in Scotland (Thornton, 2020). I would also suggest that it highlights Daisy’s awareness of the potential for professional bias and deterministic views when working with pupils from different demographic areas (Major & Bryant, 2023). The concept of nurture groups and the theoretical framework behind the initial approach focused on deprived areas in London (Boxall & Lucas, 2012). However, Daisy’s quote stands out because it shows that nurture practice should be universally offered based on children’s needs instead of assumptions about home life and SIMD scores.

TSPN are often discussed in terms of supporting children who are from low SIMD areas and are linked with a practice that supports distorted or missing early childhood experiences from an early age (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000). However, Daisy's perspective potentially raises awareness of the need for nurture principles for children from various economic backgrounds by discussing her previous experience as a teacher in an affluent area in Scotland. This view is important because it raises questions about deficit-based beliefs, which can be linked to complex barriers such as poverty (Brunzell & Norrish, 2021) and may lead to stigmatisation (Mowat, 2019). Daisy's views agree with literature that advocates open-mindedness on children's needs and abilities, regardless of family background (Ready & Wright, 2011) and opt for a strengths-based lens for children who may, or may not, need support at school due to the areas in which they live (McClure & Reed, 2022; Major & Bryant, 2023). Respondents highlighted equity as an important aspect of professional practice in 2019. However, it could be argued that it is especially important today due to the impact of a global pandemic (Breslin, 2021) and the current cost-of-living crisis (Hill & Webber, 2022).

Daisy's perception was reiterated by focus group participants in School One, who suggested that:

"Stereotypes could lead to criteria not appearing met. People in affluent areas may not be able to get support [that is] needed" (Focus Group, School One).

This extract is powerful because it highlights the participants' perceptions of nurture practice as it links to views regarding economic background and need. The use of

the term 'stereotypes' is important because of the connotation with economic advantage as a reason to misjudge children's capacity and need in school (Durante & Fiske, 2017).

Finally for this sub-theme, Jane explained why she felt it was important to set aside professional assumptions regarding background needs and family circumstances:

"It's very important to know the background of the young people so that we don't, we hope that we'd never patronise... you just want that awareness to make sure that we know the background of them socially but also knowing how they learn...knowing the best ways to teach them. The wee sentence that says a wee bit of praise for this young person goes a long, long way. That's the kind of thing that changes the environment of your classroom and if you know that before they come into your classroom...[then] that wee bit of praise...giving out the pencils...just these wee nuggets of information, to me are worth their weight in gold" (Jane, School One).

Jane's reflection in this extract supports literature which advocates for "enacted professionalism" through the use of flexible, responsive pedagogical approaches to support the needs of children as a result of varied early experiences (Waring & Evans, 2014, p.3). Jane's focus on specific roles for pupils indicates evidence of meeting the child where they feel most comfortable and could be abductively reasoned as an example of her awareness of equitable approaches as explained through a nurture practice (Boxall & Lucas, 2012). It could also be suggested that this is evidence of Jane's understanding of the nurture principle, *children are understood developmentally* (NurtureUK, 2020). The presence of professional reflexivity (Braun & Clarke, 2021) in Jane's quote is an important and welcome addition to the sub-theme. This is because it questions the assumptions connected

to ecological factors as central to children's experiences at school (Shelton, 2019) and highlights the importance of teacher awareness of pedagogical approaches which develop equity and wellbeing in the classroom (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2021).

5.2 “Picking up on the wee things”: Environment as safety

This sub-theme explores teachers' views on the importance of physical and emotional safety for children and young people through their environment, including adults' consistent and adaptive approaches in school. The concept of environment will be discussed at classroom and whole school level.

5.2.1 The classroom (and school) offers a safe base

Lily shared her perception of nurture as associated with one of TSPN: *the classroom offers a safe base* (NurtureUK, 2020):

“For me, really, nurture is setting a safe and secure environment for the kids..., in reality it's being that kind of safe base in a sense for the kids” (Lily, School Two).

This is an understandable link because at the point of the interview, Lily provided additional literacy support for children who attend nurture groups and was likely to be very familiar with the language of nurture principles. In Lily's quote, it could be reasoned that she is referring to both physical and emotional security for her pupils, and her perspective directly agrees with key literature surrounding the meaning of safety as it pertains to nurture principles (Brawls & Ruby, 2023).

Lily's view was shared by Sally, who explained that her perception of nurture practice and safety was about:

"Looking at ensuring that firstly children feel safe within the environment you're working... that they are secure; that they are aware of their own environment and their surroundings and what you can do to help best support them as well" (Sally, School Two).

Sally's perception of children's feelings of safety, through familiarity with their environment, was a logical stance regarding nurture practice, given her knowledge of TSPN. At the time of data collection, Sally led a primary school department in nurture practice; therefore, she was immersed in the language and approaches of nurture principles. Her view was shared with other respondents in the study, as Anne explained in the following quote:

"Certainly I think...people just flourish if they're given a good, quality environment and they might have a tricky situation going on or something difficult to deal with or something in the house or in home but I do think if the school nurtures them and helps develop a safe environment for them then they will flourish and they'll do well. I think... the school can make a big difference in providing a positive environment for people. Children understand better if they are looked after and helped and nurtured and if the environment is safe and they're not embarrassed to speak about things. Not even just their learning, maybe if there's something that's going on or somebody's being horrible to them within the classroom. They feel that they have a voice and they can tell you and they're understood and they're not struggling on their own" (Anne, School One).

The importance of emotional safety for children at school cannot be underestimated, particularly if it is understood that they require an approach that considers emotional wellbeing needs linked to adverse experiences beyond the school environment

(Golding *et al.*, 2020). Nurture practice was developed to help children who required group interventions linked to missed experiences which impacted their social and emotional development (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000; Boxall & Lucas, 2012).

However, Anne's reference to emotionally safe classrooms seems to go beyond the realisation of group practice due to a universal approach she advocates for all pupils who could benefit from someone understanding and hearing their voice on aspects of emotional wellbeing in a positive environment. This is an interesting finding, as previous research on pupil voice and nurture practice in mainstream classrooms reports a variation in approaches from teacher to teacher (O'Farrell *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, there is scope for further development of practice and guidance regarding the adult's role in creating emotionally safe classrooms.

In addition to the voice of the pupils, the role of the adult, as explicitly involved in the provision of safety, is evident in both Sally and Anne's responses and sits comfortably within the literature on nurture practice in group settings (Colley, 2017) and the intended outcomes of the practice across whole school settings (Coleman, 2020).

Anne's perspective that a safe, nurturing environment should be universal within the classroom and the school setting was reiterated by Rose, who described her wish to develop nurture beyond the group setting in her school:

“In terms of the Depute role, for me, one of the things I’ve been keen to do...is raise the profile of nurture...but think of nurture as something that happens in all classes. Sort of a whole school approach...We do have nurture groups but I’ve been quite keen that teachers don’t think that nurture is something that happens in a nurture group and, on the whole, I would say, amongst the staff everyone does recognise that ..but that’s not to say that more work can’t be done to talk about what that looks like within classes” (Rose, School Four).

That nurture practice should move beyond the nurture group environment to classrooms and whole school settings was a common position in this sub-theme, and it is a perspective which was shared by School One:

“Nurture needs to go beyond the group. Staff need to take it into the classroom”
(Focus Group, School One).

Additionally, moving from the group to the whole class and school approaches for nurture was discussed by Sally, who expanded on this idea by considering the role of transitions in the lives of children who require support:

“It’s not only about what we do within the individual groups and different supports that are put in place, it’s about looking at nurture as a whole within the classroom with the transitions that they [the children] make and ensuring that transitions are... tight for children that do require a nurture input. ..It’s looking at ensuring that that movement back from, whether they’re in a group and back to class that’s , that’s very tight for them, [that] they understand that and they’re prepared for it as well. So it’s not only what’s going on within the group but also within the classroom as well, ensuring that the nurture principles take place within the classroom environment as well” (Sally, School Two).

Sally's perception of nurture and environment includes transitions for children and references the nurture principle *transitions are significant in children's lives* (NurtureUK, 2020). Sally's conceptualisation of nurture practice beyond the group setting is interesting because she advocates a whole class and school approach to the practice, particularly concerning movement and change across the child's learning environment. This view agrees with key proponents of nurture practice and the positive impact of whole school approaches (Boxall & Lucas, 2012) to support transitions across various experiences for children at school (Moore, 2022; Rae, 2014).

There is evidence that whole school nurture practice can effectively support wellbeing to provide safe, consistent environments for children and young people (Kearney & Nowak, 2019). However, the extent to which schools adopt TSPN as universal practice varies across educational settings (Nolan *et al.*, 2021). Within the Scottish context, Education Scotland has provided self-evaluation documents for establishments to explore their readiness for nurturing approaches and the adoption of the principles across whole school environments (2018). This is as far as any consistency goes regarding TSPN in educational settings and raises questions about the knowledge and skills necessary for teachers to provide nurturing experiences for children moving through nurture groups, classrooms and whole school interactions. A depth of understanding of the environment as safety might be a plausible offer from this study. This is because school readiness for nurture practice should include all school staff (Coleman, 2020). Daisy's next quote highlights the importance of the school community in creating a safe, nurturing environment. She described the

impact of a range of adults in her school who were able to understand children using nurture practice. People who were:

“picking up on the wee things...as a Depute, I often hear staff say there’s something just not right, there’s something wrong here...and it can be PSAs it can be librarians, it can be the dinner ladies saying [the child] has not bought lunch for a while...is everything ok? We are very, very good at nurturing... and picking up there’s just something not right and hopefully someone picks up on it in time to make sure that that kid feels ok [for me]...I always make sure the quiet ones are watched because they can be the ones that can slip under the radar and nobody notices...” (Daisy, School One).

The possible misconception that nurture practice is primarily for children who externalise their needs through vocal or physical displays of distressed behaviour is an important finding in the study. There is a sensitivity to Daisy’s view on ‘the quiet ones’, and she seems to demonstrate professional awareness and care regarding the students she teaches (Noddings, 2012a; Shah, 2021). Paying attention to children who are “quiet, shy or...anxious” at school by using nurture practice is a view which aligns with recent research on the use of nurture-based group interventions in primary schools to support children’s wellbeing and confidence (Davis & Cooper, 2021, p.27).

In this extract, I would abductively reason that Daisy was showing her insight into the possibility of an alternative pedagogical approach to suit the needs of her school’s children and young people (Ansar *et al.*, 2021). This is an approach that Daisy believed was used by a range of colleagues in School One. Actively paying attention to children who have potentially frozen or are disassociated from their environment due to trauma linked to early experiences and home life (de Thierry, 2021) is a

common approach suggested in a range of whole school (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021; Golding *et al.*, 2020) and classroom literature (Brooks, 2020). Adult awareness is fundamental when providing a safe space (Gross, 2022).

Another fascinating aspect of Daisy's quote is the assumption that nurturing approaches are for children for whom something is 'just...not right'. This may be because nurture practice is mainly linked to group interventions within School One where Daisy and I worked. The group interventions targeted children and young people who required support due to an emotional wellbeing need. It is reasonable to associate nurture practice with the developmental, economic and emotional needs of children and young people due to the well-documented reasons for the inception of nurture practice (Colley, 2017; Colley, 2024; Lucas, 1999; Middleton, 2022).

However, as has been previously discussed by Daisy and focus group participants in School One, assumptions about the needs of pupils should be challenged to avoid stereotypes and deficit-based thinking.

I would posit that, in this extract, Daisy described "natural care" in her conceptualisation of nurture practice through the professional flexibility, attention and teamwork of adults across the school community (Noddings, 2012a, p.54). In her quote, Daisy highlighted that the tacit, consistent actions of adults can impact the needs of children. As Daisy understood it, the idea of 'picking up on the wee things' indicates that adults in the school consistently go above and beyond to meet children and young people's needs. This approach positively and negatively impacts adults working with children and young people due to the emotional investment needed from teachers (Somech & Bolger, 2019).

5.2.2 A confusing combination? Consistency *and* flexibility

Predictable teacher behaviours are considered to be essential for children (Delaney, 2017). Consistency from adults is one of the most significant elements of support for children and young people with emotional wellbeing needs associated with attachment and early adverse experiences (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000; Delaney, 2017; Geddes, 2006). Children's need for safe spaces, built on predictable routines from adults, are an important aspect of consistency in the classroom (Brawls & Ruby, 2023). Consistency is an important aspect of any classroom environment to support the wellbeing and learning needs of all children and young people (Cowley, 2014; Kyriacou, 2018; Rodgers, 2000).

Lack of consistency leads to “uncertainty in the classroom”, which is challenging for children who require predictability (Beghetto, 2017, p.1). In this next quote, Lily explained why she perceived consistency from the adults as an element of safety when considering nurture practice in her classroom environment:

“I think...that they [the children] know you're the one constant and no matter, right or wrong what they've done, they know that they're going to get quite a consistent response from you and yes, we all make mistakes but you learn from it, it's not the end of the world and I think being quite firm but fair at the same extent gives them...safe boundaries within the environment” (Lily, School Two).

Lily's quote is thought-provoking because she associated the idea of consistency in nurture practice with supporting children in a 'firm but fair' way to explore and learn from mistakes. Safety as a space to make mistakes and be guided by a trusted adult

is important when considering nurture principles in practice as it is a significant approach used in nurture rooms (Cloran *et al.*, 2022). Connecting the ideas of safety and consistency to TSPN helps teachers understand their role in providing secure learning environments (Greenwood, 2019).

Lily's perspective is interesting due to her discussion of adults being 'firm but fair' within 'safe boundaries' because the terms have connotations with behaviour management approaches in the classroom (Bates, 2021; Bennett, 2020; Cowley, 2014; Dove, 2021; Rodgers, 2015). Associating the language of behaviour with TSPN is an interesting point made by Lily due to her recognition that consistency of adult behaviours supports and nurtures a child (Solomon, 2016). As discussed in Chapter 2, previous research has associated the concept of nurture in a classroom setting with the role of warm demander from adults, where there is a balance between assertiveness and care (Zachos & Akouarone, 2020). Lily's quote agrees with this view. However, I would urge caution around the importance of a balance between 'firm but fair' as my professional experience has taught me that it can quickly tip into firm, especially if this is the teacher's default pedagogical position.

The concept of consistency appeared regularly in School Three data when focus groups were asked about nurture principles in practice, as the following extract demonstrates:

"Adults need to be consistent... be predictable, consistent and fair... [because] consistent approaches are very important"(Focus Group, School Three).

The extract agrees with the literature on consistency and its importance in providing a secure class base for children who require support with their wellbeing needs (Brawls & Ruby, 2023; Nash, 2017). This includes the reliability of consistent adult actions and reactions (Brooks, 2020). Adult consistency for all pupils is crucial to support the development of trust and mitigate perceived risk to the emotional wellbeing of students at school (Brunzell & Norrish, 2021; Dix, 2017). As Daisy explained in her next quote:

“My favourite thing is, I always say to kids, I’ll give you a fresh start every day and I think that is part of nurture... realising that young people go through quite difficult times and they show their emotions all over the place and we are the adults and they’re the young people and it’s our job to give them a fresh start and for them to know that we’ll give them a fresh start and we’ll not ignore them or huff and puff and give up on them” (Daisy, School One).

Daisy’s quote demonstrates consistent awareness of children’s needs over and above the potentially emotional reactions of adults. It is an aspect of nurture practice that I completely agree with because of the many conversations I have had with adults throughout my career. Daisy’s description of consistency through her term ‘a fresh start every day’ provides safety for children and young people who expect adults to let them down. It is a definite choice for teachers and, in my professional experience, makes a significant difference when building relationships with children and young people. Daisy showed the link between her empathy for the children in her school and her knowledge of the power of consistent fresh starts, especially for children who perhaps do not expect it due to their previous experience of mistrust with adults (Bombèr, 2020; Riley, 2011).

The behaviours of reliable adults, who start each day afresh, are crucial in developing trust with children and young people who find it challenging to trust adults or build positive relationships (Perry, 2014). The power of consistent adult reactions to children in need of support cannot be underestimated (Golding *et al.*, 2020). I would argue that this includes a professional choice to demonstrate empathy, openness (Whitaker, 2023), and engage in attunement behaviours to strengthen relational connections with children. “Rebuilding safety” through consistency in a school environment is a significant aspect of relational practice, such as nurture (Chatterley, 2020, p.46). It is important to support adult understanding when responding to children’s wellbeing needs (Rae *et al.*, 2017).

The practice of consistently responding to the needs of children to ensure they felt secure in their environment was, interestingly, discussed as professional flexibility in the classroom by focus group respondents in School Three:

“Being flexible with each child... adjusting [the] classroom environment [by remembering] not one rule fits all...to meet needs and support the child... [like] changes to support needs [or] visual timetables for transitions [by] constantly changing...being responsive and adapting” (Focus Group, School Three).

Teachers should be able to adapt their practice to suit the needs of the children and young people, which is a standard expectation of the role in Scotland (GTCS, 2022). It is an important point from focus group participants in School Three as they responded to research question one regarding equitable practice by linking nurture practice to adaptation and flexibility. Professional adaptation in teaching is an issue

detailed as “structured flexibility” in the classroom to maintain a balance for children who require both predictability and flexibility (Phillips *et al.*, 2020, p.95). A point which Lily made regarding the adaptability of the teacher and the classroom environment:

“I think within the school in general...it’s everybody being aware that ...there’s not exactly one size fits all so we have to adapt our environment or ourselves to meet [children’s] needs and manage it as best you can day to day” (Lily, School Two).

Both consistency and flexibility were also discussed in the following extract from Daisy as she explained how she supported young people in her school who require a calm, coherent message about their perceived safe base, especially when faced with change or transitions in their lives:

“When kids are acting up I think, what’s wrong, there’s a reason for this and I always know there’s a reason. You might not find out but you know...that is their way of saying I’m not in a good place and a number of them weren’t in a good place over this week because they’re not comfortable with six weeks of the Summer holidays and you can see them playing up a wee bit and being a wee bit loud, a wee bit... all they want is for folk to say ‘it’s ok’. We’ll be here. We’ll be here in August, the Summer holidays will be ok and I think that’s really important, that you don’t know what’s going on at home so what you have to do is make sure in here is ok for them. That they’ve got a safe place and whether that’s the classroom, whether it’s the interview room, whether it’s just in the corridors... they know that there are people here that they can go to and they’ll not turn around if they’re really, really busy... there’s always someone else and I would say ‘I can’t see you right now but here’s Miss XX’ or ‘I’ll see you in five minutes’ and you will be back in five minutes...I’ll put you in a quiet place but I’ll be back in five minutes. Right now I need to do this but I will come back” (Daisy, School One).

Daisy’s explanation of nurture practice demonstrated the concept of a secure, safe base throughout the school environment. The message regarding consistent

approaches and reassurance for the pupils is interesting, as there is an inference that the school building is a secure base for some students. Having worked alongside Daisy in her school, I completely agree with this view. Some of the young people I worked with would spend more time in the school than I expected at the end of a day, week or term. A significant part of my role, alongside Daisy, was to reassure the pupils that we would be exactly where they left us. The comfort provided through their connection to the school environment was very important.

A key aspect of Daisy's explanation of consistency as a response to questions about nurture practice included the comment 'when kids are acting up'. This might suggest that she described the need for a reliable, calm approach to distressed behaviour. Consideration of distressed behaviour as an outward display of a child's need for safety is a key message from nurture practice (Boxall, 2002; Boxall & Lucas, 2012). Proponents of the view that distressed behaviour is associated with an underlying need advocate that teachers should start with an assumption that children are communicating something that is not right for them (Chatterley, 2020; Desautels, 2020). Daisy's quote supports previous literature on the importance of adults who provide consistent, calm environments for children and young people with emotional wellbeing needs.

5.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, nurture practice was discussed as an equitable approach through participants' understanding of the importance of home life and its potential impact on

children's experiences at school. These views were supported by existing literature. Respondents considered awareness of school data used to make equitable decisions an important professional responsibility. However, it was noted that it is essential to ensure children's voices and rights are a focus when teachers consider using children's personal information to make decisions in school.

The findings from this chapter showed that social, emotional, and familial information was deemed more useful than attainment, baseline, or standardised test data. This raised questions about the position of these data sets as a priority for schools, given that attainment and achievement are still key measurements for schools, particularly in the secondary sector. It also offered scope for repositioning background information as a key source to support teachers in developing a nurturing approach, as long as children and young people were given a say in school staff using their information.

Assumptions on needs linked to home circumstances highlighted the necessity to be cautious around deficit thinking about children from socio-economically disadvantaged areas who may be deemed to need nurturing approaches because of where they live. Conversely, it was found that children and young people from economically advantaged areas should not be overlooked as in need of nurturing approaches at school because they come from affluent areas. This point is a valuable reminder for teachers due to the impact of recent world events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis.

The importance of the physical and emotional learning environment was highlighted as a key consideration for teachers who described TSPN in their day-to-day practice. This may have been due to their awareness of the nurture principle, *the classroom offers a safe base* (NurtureUK, 2020). However, the concept of safe spaces and whole school environments which cared for children's wellbeing was evident through general discussion from responses to the research questions rather than a sole focus on one of the nurture principles. The fact that participants felt their role was important in providing a secure environment for children and young people was interesting due to the responsibility that comes with this view.

The professional behaviours of adults featured as an element of safety and included the notion that adults could 'pick up on the wee things'. These behaviours align with the literature on trauma-informed practice, where teachers are encouraged to keep children in mind as they go through the school day (Golding *et al.*, 2020). A strategy which is argued to build relationships, improve behaviour and create a sense of belonging for children (Phillips *et al.*, 2020).

Consistency and flexibility from adults were established as crucial approaches to practice for supporting children and young people who required help with their emotional wellbeing. However, by definition alone, they initially appear to be at odds with each other. This tension raised questions over how nurture practice was being viewed in classrooms. Are teachers to be consistent, flexible or both? Some current literature has offered advice on how this might happen and what it could look like in the classroom (Brawls & Ruby, 2023). However, this study's findings offer scope for

more detailed support in this area of practice so that teachers are clear and confident when applying TSPN in their classrooms.

Chapter 6

Tensions and Dilemmas in Nurture Practice

The final findings and discussion chapter will focus on the tensions and dilemmas inherent in participants' perceptions of *The Six Principles of Nurture* (TSPN) (NurtureUK, 2020). The findings in the chapter support an answer to the following research questions:

- SQ.2 What do nurturing principles mean to you in your daily processes and practices?
- SQ.3 How effective/ ineffective are nurturing principles as a pedagogical approach in order to meet the needs of your pupils?

6.1 A behavioural lens on nurture practice

The nurture principle that came to the forefront of the focus group discussions and interviews, time and time again, was directly linked to *all behaviour is communication* (NurtureUK, 2020). This is a significant finding for the study because it showed how participants associated a question about nurture practice, with an answer regarding behaviour. It supports the findings from the review of existing literature that

behaviour management strategies are long-established as an approach (Wielkiewicz, 1986), which are still prevalent in schools today (Bennett, 2020; Saari, 2019).

In this first extract, focus group participants in School Three reflected on behaviour through a discussion of the aforementioned nurture principle:

“The nurture principles are informative...they help you understand behaviour and that all behaviour is communication... Children might not know why they are reacting how they are...both children and adults need to make allowances...[because] the way you respond to children gives consideration to the behaviour and what is causing it...” (Focus Group, School Three).

The perception that behaviour is something to be explored or understood was viewed as important by focus group participants. Adult curiosity about children's behaviour is crucial for supporting emotional wellbeing needs in school (Maynard & Weinstein, 2019). In addition to an awareness of children's behaviour, adult responses were acknowledged as something teachers should be mindful of in their practice. The quote from School Three aligns with literature on the impact of positive adult behaviours when faced with children who require support for their behavioural needs (Chatterley, 2020; Dix, 2017; Golding *et al.*, 2020). The data extract agrees with current writing on supporting distressed behaviour through a “reframing” of language to include an expression of need rather than a problem to be corrected (Bombèr, 2020, p.35). In some literature, adult approaches to children's distressed behaviour are explained as a proactive strategy for teachers to strengthen classroom relationships and build empathy (Bowerman, 2024; Chatterley, 2020). I would argue

that focus group participants from School Three demonstrated a professional, empathic choice to understand children's distressed behaviour.

The positive impact of TSPN for supporting behaviour and relationships in the classroom was a point that was raised by focus group respondents in School One:

"Nurture improves behaviour and builds relationships...Nurture helps improve understanding of behaviour in classrooms" (Focus Group, School One).

This quote speaks to assertions in existing research about the relational impact of nurture practice in schools to positively influence behaviour and understand what a child communicates when in distress (Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Bombèr, 2020; Colley, 2017). Both School Three and School One extracts clarify that some participants in this study viewed children's behaviour as something to be understood and explored by adults (Bates, 2021; Chatterley, 2020; Foster, 2023). Respondents in both focus groups demonstrated curiosity about a child's needs, where they are trying to understand rather than react to distressed behaviour (Zeedyk, 2020). However, participants' perceptions of TSPN as directly linked to their existing views of the concept of behaviour in this way is a dilemma because they can include terms which are more closely associated with deficit phrases to describe children's needs (Desautels, 2020; Kohn, 2018), a point raised in discourse which critiques the language of behaviour and the associated impact it has on the actions of teachers (Cushing, 2021). This is an important finding because behaviour management terms are viewed as deficit-based language when considering the needs of children (Dix, 2017) and are at odds with relational approaches such as nurture practice

(Chatterley, 2023; Foster, 2023; Maynard & Weinstein, 2019). From the findings in this study, I would argue that the nurture principle of *all behaviour is communication* (NurtureUK, 2020), through the use of the term behaviour, contributes to a perceived association with the language of behaviour management, rather than the intended care and understanding of seeking what is behind children's behavioural presentations.

The teachers in this study often linked the language of nurture practice to behaviour management strategies and approaches. This finding demonstrates the potential for ongoing development and support for school staff on how TSPN should be used and understood in a classroom setting (Brawls & Ruby, 2023; Whitaker, 2021). To illustrate this finding further, in the following quote from Anne, there appears to be a disconnect between the values she described, her views of nurture practice, and the language she used:

"I certainly, I just think you do have to appreciate everybody even if they kind of get your back up at times with, you know, with being cheeky, it's just them trying to get a response and sometimes a negative response, for some people, is positive, you know...and if you just realise it and always give them something good back and be kind back to them, I think it might get them out of that negative mind set. It's the best way to learn" (Anne, School One).

Anne's quote is important for the discussion on nurture practice viewed as behaviour management because her use of terms such as 'being cheeky' and 'get your back up at times' reveals how problematic behaviour could be at the forefront of her thinking when discussing TSPN. Moreover, these phrases could be reasoned as deficit

language around emotional wellbeing needs (McClure & Reed, 2022), which sits uncomfortably alongside Anne's views of nurturing young people.

The terms used may be specific to Anne, and how she labels particular behaviours, she experiences in her classroom. In her quote, Anne tried to balance her views of distressed behaviour by aligning her practice to TSPN through statements such as 'giving something back' and acknowledging the importance of positive student-teacher interactions to support an expressed need in her classroom (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021). Paying attention to teachers' styles and choice of language to describe behaviour is an important consideration in research studies when exploring teachers' attitudes and readiness to consider pedagogical change (Sokolová, 2018), particularly as it can lead to stigmatisation of children and young people with wellbeing needs (Mowat & Beck, 2023).

Deficit, behaviourist terms were a common aspect of the responses in this section, even if it was clear participants were trying to positively explore their understanding of nurture practice and values around distressed behaviour, as the following quote from focus group participants in School Three demonstrated:

"Outbursts are a form of communication...[and staff should]...separate the negative behaviour from the child...[by] trying to analyse the behaviour [and] treat the child like a puzzle" (Focus Group, School Three).

Using the word 'outbursts' seems to be at odds with the perceived collective, and more positive, understanding of the practitioners in the group as they suggested

‘separating the behaviour from the child’ as a helpful strategy. Analysing this data extract abductively, I would argue that this seems to be well-meaning for the respondents. Well-meaning behaviours align directly with the expected actions of teachers for general registration to the profession (GTCS, 2022) and, as previously discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the findings from recent reports, such as the ASL Review, regarding the ways distressed behaviour is viewed in Scottish schools (Scottish Government, 2020).

Behaviourist language such as ‘outbursts’ and ‘negative behaviour’ are associated with terms from previous literature on managing and supporting challenging behaviour (McNamara & Moreton, 2012; Bennett, 2020; Lemov, 2015), despite the recognition that nurture practice involves an approach which separates the child from the behaviour to understand their emotional need (Brunzell & Norrish, 2021). This is important for the study as TSPN have been used in schools across the UK and beyond for several years (Boxall & Lucas, 2012). Therefore, the link to behavioural language is an area that could be developed to support teachers in reframing their understanding of nurture principles to include further curiosity, empathy, and care.

The term ‘treat the child like a puzzle’ seemed important for this sub-theme. The quote from School Three explained that the focus group participants proposed a problem-solving approach to supporting distressed behaviour (Chatterley, 2020). This is a positive finding; however, it re-emphasises the mismatch between the language used, professional approaches, and teacher intentions around nurture practice, where deficit language co-exists alongside well-intentioned practice.

These findings link with previous research on adult curiosity when faced with distressed behaviour in the classroom (Chatterley, 2023; Delahooke, 2020; Dix, 2017; Naish *et al.*, 2023; Zeedyk, 2020). Developing an interest in the reasons for specific behaviours can build teachers' skills in supporting the wellbeing of their pupils (Bates, 2021; Colley, 2024; Desautels, 2020). However, the extent to which teachers should spend time being detectives to investigate needs-driven behaviour is unclear, especially when classroom teachers are managing groups of up to thirty children. Bennett (2020) argued that a sole focus on needs-based analysis is a simplistic view due to the range of reasons that could cause "non-conformity" at school for students deemed to display challenging behaviour (2020, p.112). Reasons that may or may not include early experiences, insecure attachments, and emotional wellbeing needs (Bombèr, 2016; Chatterley, 2020; Cooper & Colley, 2017). In some cases, a balance should be struck between managing behaviour and building relationships to support children with a range of needs at school (Rodgers, 2015). Whereas I understand the critique of problem solving a child's behaviour at school, my practical experience has taught me that curiosity and understanding a child's behavioural presentation is worthwhile for teachers. I am not suggesting that every interaction be thoroughly analysed and scrutinised, as I know this is impossible. However, some curiosity around the *why* of a behavioural presentation for a child is, in my professional opinion, a valuable strategy for school staff.

The quote from School Three above agrees with literature that suggested taking the time to seek "what lies beneath" a child or young person's distress can support the development of positive outcomes in the classroom (Phillips *et al.*, 2020, p.268). Considering what is behind a display of distressed behaviour is important for adults

working with children (Chatterley, 2023; Delahooke, 2020). It acknowledges that adult capacity to problem-solve children's behaviour is highly complex.

6.1.1 Further misconceptions of nurture practice

In addition to mixed perceptions around language discussed in the previous data extracts, further tensions between nurture practice and behaviour management approaches became clearer in this section. In the following quote, participants in School Three suggested nurture practice allowed for a:

“Lack of accountability for extreme behaviour...[which meant that] for those children we are not preparing them for life outside school” (Focus Group, School Three).

This response further proves the uneasy link between participants' perceptions of behaviour management and nurture practice. The extract strengthens assertions from recent research, suggesting nurturing approaches are perceived as a soft option to support distressed behaviour (Whitaker, 2021). However, the quote directly disagrees with existing literature on relational practice, which argued that relational approaches help children gain life skills that are helpful beyond school (Reeves & Le Mare, 2018). Relational approaches, such as nurture practice, have been significantly aligned with routine, predictability and responsibility (Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Brawls & Ruby, 2023), key skills that are very important for life outside school (Reeves & LeMare, 2018). Therefore, this extract could be presented as an example of teachers requiring additional support and information to understand TSPN in their

setting due to the perceived mismatch between nurturing approaches and ineffective support for life skills beyond school.

The previous data extract raises the question of the extent to which mainstream teachers fully understand nurture principles. From a professional perspective, I believe this quote is quite a stark one and stands out due to the suggestion that adopting a nurturing approach does not prepare children for life. I argue, perhaps unsurprisingly given my career to date, that adopting practices where consistency, structure, safety, and relationships are key considerations in the classroom are important aspects of pedagogy that successfully support children to develop and grow for life beyond school.

Misconceptions of nurture practice were directly addressed in the next quote from focus group participants in School One. As teachers discussed nurturing approaches, there was a demonstration of professional reflection:

“There is a misunderstanding of what nurture is. Some schools use it as a way not to enforce boundaries...[but staff] challenging behaviour is still needed...some staff don't get this... [as the] perceptions of staff is that it is an excuse for difficult behaviour...[however] it is a situation where behaviour should be challenged...”
(Focus Group, School One).

This extract supports the overall meaning of this section regarding misconceptions of nurture practice. Participants from School One were aware of the need for nurture to support distressed behaviour rather than excuse it. This finding is directly linked to the tensions around TSPN, as seen through a behaviourist lens, where challenging

behaviour is interpreted in ways that pit adult positions of power against children's expressed needs (Kohn, 2018). It is a well-documented dichotomy as counterproductive when supporting children in emotional distress (Bates, 2021; Chatterley, 2023; Desautels, 2020; Desautels & McKnight, 2019).

The tensions in participants' perspectives of nurture practice, as an excuse to allow challenging behaviour in schools, was reiterated by Lily:

"I think also... firm and consistent boundaries. I think a lot of people sometimes see that with nurture you don't necessarily address behaviour and it's well, for me that's part of nurturing any child. There's got to be firm and consistent boundaries and I don't think that's always necessarily understood on all levels" (Lily, School Two).

This quote is interesting because it sits alongside the views of focus group participants in School One and supports an answer to research question two about teacher perceptions of what TSPN mean for daily practice. There is also a link to consistency, as detailed in Chapter 5. Lily felt that nurture practice should include behaviour support for children and young people in her setting who display distressed behaviour, mainly through consistency and boundaries. Lily offered a view that aligns with the literature on school culture, where children's needs are nurtured to help them understand how to behave (Borerro, 2018; Shcherbakova, 2016).

Lily's description of consistency agrees with existing literature on the importance of boundaries and routines for children who require support with their emotional

wellbeing through nurture practice (Greenwood, 2019; Jones & Harding, 2023). Research has shown that clear expectations linked to a nurturing and respectful approach considering a child's emotional state are important for successful classroom behaviour and interactions between teachers and students (Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Bates, 2021; Brookes, 2020).

Approaches in the classroom, which include something as specific as TSPN, require the teacher to lead in demonstrating behaviours that support everyone in the room (Brawls & Ruby, 2023; Dix, 2017; Maynard & Weinstein, 2019). Adult modelling is crucial to nurture practice (Boxall & Lucas, 2012). Lily's perspective that addressing behaviour is 'part of nurturing any child' shows that nurture and behaviour are not an either/or position for her, but rather an approach which allows choice and flexibility for teachers.

6.2 The negative impact of nurture practice

The data indicated that some teachers perceived nurture practice as negatively impacting adults and children. Displays of distressed behaviour and the effect on staff and pupils' wellbeing were common findings in the data, which supports an answer to part of research question three regarding the ineffectiveness of nurture practice for meeting children's needs.

6.2.1 The negative impact of nurture practice on the adult

Rose discussed the perceived impact of nurture practice for members of staff and children:

“The interactions..the way [the children] communicate... sometimes it’s perceived as quite negative behaviour but it’s a way of communicating and for me that probably does present challenges and I know that [it] presents challenges for members of staff when children in the class who have quite significant needs are... perceived as misbehaving. The behaviour can be quite disruptive not only for themselves but for other children in the class” (Rose, School Four).

Rose's views are supported by existing literature regarding the emotional impact on adults who work with children and young people in nurture group settings (Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Colley, 2017; Coleman, 2020). However, a new finding in this study is mainstream classroom teachers' views about how challenging they find nurture practice.

In the following quote, focus group participants from School Three explained their understanding of the emotional impact of TSPN when adults are trying to adopt the practice:

“In the moment it’s difficult...I adhere to ‘all behaviour is communication’ because I know it is right but it is hard... [you need]..thick skin...[to] not take things to heart or hold it against [the children]...[and] rise above it...It can be exhausting embracing these values” (Focus Group, School Three).

The emotional impact on adults who work with children and young people with social, emotional, learning and wellbeing needs is important in this research and has been acknowledged by key proponents of nurture practice (Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Roberts, 2017). However, this study's findings highlight the strength of feeling around the use of TSPN day after day. Views such as 'I know it's right but it is hard...[and] it can be exhausting to embrace these values' (Focus Group, School Three) are impactful and support an understanding of where participants are emotionally in their capacity to put nurture principles into practice in their classrooms.

As I previously discussed in this chapter, this view could be directly associated with the tensions around the nurture principle that *all behaviour is communication* (NurtureUK, 2020) due to the association with views on distressed behaviour. Given the response from School Three, it might be suggested that expectations on teachers to work with this principle can cause an "erosion of empathy" given the daily emotional impact on adults (Jessen, 2017, p.4). As someone who worked in nurture groups and used TSPN in my classroom, I cannot disagree with the participants' views in this study. Nurture practice is hard work and requires an awareness of the impact it can have on adults.

By describing teachers as exhausted, participants in School Three described feelings indicative of "personal distress" for practitioners supporting children with challenging behaviours due to their professional commitment to supporting the children in their care (Segal, 2018, p.24). Therefore, findings detailing teacher views on the challenges presented by nurture practice are important and support an understanding of teachers' capacity to use TSPN daily. The findings in this section

sit uncomfortably alongside the expectations on teachers in Scottish Government guidance on nurture practice, ACEs and TIP (Education Scotland, 2018). In my professional opinion, the suggested guidance around relational practice, such as trauma-informed practice (TIP), adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and nurture practice in government documents, can be confusing. The data from this study highlights that nurture practice is challenging, even for experienced staff members with a depth of knowledge and understanding of TSPN. It raises questions for mainstream classroom teachers who have not had the level of professional learning of some of the participants in this study. How do they adopt nurture principles and embed them in their daily practice? How can the principles be developed and explained so teachers can embed them in their classrooms?

In the following extract, School Three participants further explored the emotional impact of nurture practice by linking it to the concept of trauma:

“It really takes its toll on you as a classroom teacher...if you’re doing it right. It doesn’t just bounce off you. It’s like secondary trauma dealing with a traumatised child. You need to take time to process before going back to have the discussion with the child” (Focus Group, School Three).

The emotional impact on mainstream teachers who work with children and young people with behavioural needs is well-recognised (Chatterley, 2023; Foster, 2023; Lucas, 1999). In more recent years, the effects have been associated with the impact of TIP through the consideration of issues such as secondary trauma (Brooks, 2020; Bates, 2021). An awareness of secondary or vicarious trauma for

staff working with children in nurture rooms and across mainstream classes is a relatively current theme in educational research due to the language of TIP becoming popular in educational settings when discussing the emotional wellbeing needs of children (Brooks, 2020; de Thierry, 2021; Roberts, 2017). Understanding the existence of secondary trauma, including the language used in this quote, is important because it is now a regularly used phrase when considering the emotional impact on staff who teach and support children with social, emotional, and behavioural needs (Golding *et al.*, 2020). Indeed, Scottish Government guidance on nurture practice, TIP and ACEs has been developed into a document for practitioners due to the perceived interchangeability of the terms and their use to impact pedagogical change and support wellbeing (Education Scotland, 2018). However, as discussed in Chapter 2, teachers' capacity for different pedagogical approaches in the classroom can be underpinned by their professional values, training and personal experiences (Flores & Day, 2006; Olsen, 2008; Safrankova & Hrbackova, 2016; van Manen, 2015). A "values clash" can impact the effectiveness of nurture practice in the mainstream classroom (Warin & Hibbin, 2016, p.34). In my professional experience, it is an issue that can cause tension if a teacher's pedagogical stance is predicated on approaches that sit uncomfortably alongside relational pedagogy (Dix, 2017).

When considering perceptions of nurture practice as contributing to secondary trauma in the classroom, it is also important to be mindful of the teacher's life experiences (Brooks, 2020), the student-teacher relationship style (Riley, 2011), the impact of adult experiences on pedagogical approaches and responses to children who require nurture due to emotional wellbeing needs (Simon *et al.*, 2022), and the

impact of the senior leadership team's response to listen to staff when the role is challenging (Bowerman, 2024). The data from this section is interesting because research exploring the emotional impact of nurture practice on teachers is often described from the perspective of the nurture group practitioner (Coleman & Cooper, 2017; Middleton, 2019). Studies are less likely to be detailed from the mainstream practitioner's viewpoint. Therefore, findings that support an awareness of the emotional impact of nurture practice for mainstream classroom teachers are an important contribution from this study.

6.2.2 The negative impact of nurture practice on children

Participants held views on the impact of nurture practice on children in their classrooms. Emma, who works in School Two, explained her perception of nurture practice, not only as a response to distressed behaviour but also as having an impact on all children in her care:

"In my setting...if there is a child who's having a meltdown, it can take two members of staff...and then the other children are kind of left to their own devices, to be fair it's more dependent on the children" (Emma, School Two).

Viewing this extract abductively, it could be reasoned that Emma has strong opinions on how dysregulated children can affect children in her classroom, including the perceived time adults might spend supporting those children at the cost of all pupils' needs. The term 'other' is interesting. It seems to support a discourse of difference concerning pupils who might need nurturing approaches (Watson, 2022).

Similarly, Emma's use of the term 'meltdown' is surprising but understandable as she works in a communication centre for autistic children and young people. The term often describes distressed behaviour in specialist settings (Phung *et al.*, 2021). However, it has been criticised as an unhelpful word with negative connotations linked to behavioural concerns rather than neurodiversity (Beardon, 2022). As previously mentioned, deficit-based language is shown to be associated with behavioural terms in the data extracts. However, strengths-based values are peppered throughout the quotes, which is encouraging due to their importance for teaching (Galloway *et al.*, 2020).

Emma's views from the previous quote aligned with Grace's regarding the impact of supporting children with behavioural needs in a busy classroom, as Grace explained:

"It can have a knock on effect on other children as well...If a child's up or behaving in a particular way, it might set off other children" (Grace, School Two).

What is particularly interesting about these views is that both Grace and Emma have linked distressed behaviour, nurturing approaches, and the ineffectiveness of the practice for all children in the room when specific pupils are distressed. I find these extracts fascinating due to their insight on the expected capacity of teachers to use TSPN to support larger groups of children in mainstream classrooms. This consideration is important as it is an uneasy finding in the study because it does not agree with literature that promotes whole class nurturing approaches as a positive experience for relational practice and belonging (Coleman, 2020; Kearney & Nowak, 2019; Phillips *et al.*, 2020).

The perceived negative impact of nurture practice on children in mainstream classrooms was further highlighted by focus group data from School Three, which stated that children in the class were:

“Seeing behaviours [which] can be very challenging in the moment [and nurture practice] has its challenges for other children [when] you need to take the moment right there and then. It needs too much input from adults...other children suffer” (Focus Group, School Three).

The view that nurture ‘needs too much input from adults’ is interesting and links with the interview data from Emma and Grace. It highlights that nurture practice could be deemed a challenging pedagogical approach in a mainstream setting when solely aligned with TSPN. There is also a message in the response from respondents in School Three about the time it takes to use nurture principles in the classroom. An obvious question from the nurture practitioner in me would be, as opposed to what? The view that supporting distressed behaviour is time-consuming may be due to participants’ perspectives that nurture practice is not as immediate as a behaviour management approach. Behaviourist approaches have been heralded (Cushing, 2021) and criticised (Kohn, 2018) for being quick and associated with rewards and sanctions, which adults use to control classroom behaviour around adult-led expectations. The “manage and discipline” model, as linked to behaviour management strategies, is deemed a faster way for teachers to maintain control of their classrooms, despite being criticised as an outdated concept when considering the needs of children in schools (Armstrong, 2018, p.1000). Therefore, the view that nurture practice takes too much time would support a picture that highlights some

participants' confusion and concern over the use of TSPN, as was mentioned in the following quote:

"If you are trying to nurture a child it is a challenge as other children will see negative behaviour being ignored [so] we explain to other children what we are doing and why [and] help children understand why nurturing principles are important" (Focus Group, School Three).

Once again, the data highlights a direct link between perceptions of 'negative behaviour' and nurture practice. These are interesting views from mainstream primary teachers because the quotes show that an aspect of practice deemed to support emotional wellbeing is perceived to cause difficult experiences or confusion for some children at school. This is in direct contrast to literature that advocates for nurture practice in the classroom to support the wellbeing of all children (Colley, 2017; Kearney & Nowak, 2019).

Displays of distressed behaviour can be disruptive for adults and children in the classroom (Bates, 2021; Bennett, 2020; Rodgers, 2015). However, the views expressed by participants that adopting a nurturing approach to support distressed behaviour will have a negative effect on children and take up too much of the adult's time are worthy of attention. This is because research evidence suggests children can understand and guide each other in classroom learning through peer support and raised awareness of inclusive approaches (Alderson, 1999). A distillation of teacher control can be a helpful approach when considering alternative learning strategies in the classroom (Florian & Beaton, 2018). Whereas the role of the adults in nurture practice is important, a sole focus on adults to model and demonstrate

specific behaviours is a top-down approach, which may not always be necessary because peer support is an important method in guiding children to understand varying needs within their classrooms, as well as develop an ethos of empathy (Segal, 2018) and supportive understanding of others (Cowie, 2020). Academics have argued that “expert-led processes and perspectives” may favour power dynamics for adults who do not consider children’s abilities (Davis *et al.*, 2014, p.38). However, nurture practice is based on adult role modelling, particularly learning that supports children's wellbeing (Boxall & Lucas, 2012). Therefore, it is understandable that participants believed that adult time was precious.

6.2.3 Safety and inclusion

This section will continue to examine participants’ views on the negative impact of nurture practice through the concepts of safety and inclusion, which are elements of every child’s school life and are deemed rights in international policy guidance (UNICEF, 2022). The view that children and young people could be impacted by a nurturing approach in a negative way, which included safety, was shared by secondary practitioners from the focus group in School One, as detailed in the next extract when they suggested that there is:

“Disparity between principles and practice with relationship to theory...[such as] putting other young people at risk” (Focus Group, School One).

Consideration of pupils 'at risk' is quite significant in this data extract as it takes the challenges of distressed behaviour to an issue of safety for children and young people. Despite the findings of the previous chapter, where the notion of a safe environment was important to participants, there is an obvious tension in this response. Indeed, when considering research question three about the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of nurture principles in practice, the participants in School One also asked the question:

“Can a safe base be for everyone?” (Focus Group, School One).

The question is directly linked to the nurture principle; *the classroom offers a safe base* (NurtureUK, 2020). It could be reasoned that the respondents' focus on safety was due to their experiences with pupils who require a lot of support for their behaviour and emotional regulation in the secondary school setting. The concept of safety as a concern for teachers in the study was also raised by teachers in School Three who stated that:

“All children should feel safe, no matter where they are”
(Focus Group, School Three).

The classroom as an area of physical and emotional safety is a well-known aspect of nurture practice (Bombèr, 2007; Brawls & Ruby, 2023; Boxall & Lucas, 2012). However, using the term to discuss the ineffectiveness of nurturing approaches is an uneasy contribution to this sub-theme because it is associated with pupil behaviours,

which are considered a cause for concern regarding the classroom as a safe space. More importantly, it is an interesting view, given the findings detailed in section 5.2.1, page 220, where participants discussed the crucial nature of their role in providing a safe base for children and young people in their classrooms and schools.

Interestingly, participants in this sub-theme highlighted the behaviours of children and young people. However, the responses and actions of adults were not discussed. It is a notable omission. Adult actions are a significant focus in recent literature because their response to children in distress is of paramount importance when considering the safety of everyone in a classroom (Chatterley, 2020; Delaney, 2017; Dix, 2017). This includes consideration of teacher “behaviour [and] attitude” towards student behaviours in the classroom (Beadle & Murphy, 2013, p.18). Therefore, supporting adults in reflecting on their practice to provide a safe space for children and young people might develop professional learning on TSPN because ensuring children feel safe in school is an essential requirement of the role of a teacher in Scotland (GTCS, 2022). However, the extent to which teachers can achieve this has been criticised due to their professional understanding of issues such as inclusion and exclusion (Norwich, 2013; Slee, 2018; Tomlinson, 2012). Teachers’ professional perspectives can impact their decision-making processes around inclusion (Byrne *et al.*, 2018). Interpretations of inclusion in schools have been challenged due to the myriad of ways internal exclusions can masquerade as children continuing to be part of their school environment whilst being taught elsewhere in the building (Slee, 2018). Interventions such as nurture groups are often argued as an example of this practice (Power & Taylor, 2018; Middleton, 2022), where labelling children through planned interventions and support can lead to

confusion over the expected professional actions of teachers in school, alongside deficit-based thinking regarding inclusive approaches (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014). Concerns have also been raised over children's rights and the need to educate them in their mainstream classroom (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian, 2017; Hodkinson & Vickerman, 2009; Parsons, 2005; Slee, 2018). Whereas I acknowledge these concerns, I agree with Norwich (2013) and his summary of a continuum for inclusive education, which advocates flexibility to meet needs in the way that best suits the child. I understand the tension between rights-based and needs-based perspectives (Ravet, 2011). However, from my experience, I believe that balance, to support the child, is essential when considering nurture practice in a group or whole class setting.

The complication of inclusion, as perceived by respondents, was raised by School Three, who felt that:

“The impact of inclusion is unsustainable...have we got time to deal with everything?” (Focus Group, School Three).

This data extract potentially provides a partial answer to research question two regarding nurture principles in practice. It is possible to reason that nurture practice in this response is viewed as an aspect of inclusion that covers 'everything'. That participants viewed inclusion in this way is very important. It aligns with previous literature that argued there is confusion, on the part of teachers, over the meaning of inclusive education and what it means to have children and young people fully

included in their classrooms (Buli-Holmberg *et al.*, 2022; Nilhom & Göransson, 2017).

The perspectives detailed in the previous four data extracts imply that some children who are not displaying distressed behaviour are, in some way, excluded from learning if the teacher's attention and time are directed elsewhere in the classroom.

Rose held a similar view regarding the teacher's capacity to demonstrate inclusive practice. However, as no doubt with the teachers in School Three, her views seemed out of concern for colleagues in her school:

“We maybe can't do it all in schools but it's an important part of our jobs now... that we try and provide the best we can” (Rose, School Four).

Data extracts focusing on concerns around inclusion are an important contribution because research into the effectiveness of TSPN in mainstream settings has been carried out over several years (Doyle, 2004). Whole school approaches to nurture practice are now viewed as a natural progression for most schools, although this is not unchallenged or unproblematic (Rennie & Smart, 2023). The expectation of whole class nurture practice raises questions about teachers' understanding of inclusive education and the link to TSPN as used in a group setting. Where nurture groups are thriving and there is a positive, nurturing culture in the school, nurture practice is a helpful addition to whole school approaches (Coleman, 2020). However, as detailed by teachers in this study, the challenges raise questions of teacher capacity and interpretations of inclusive practice, where nurturing approaches are potentially seen as an additional element to their role rather than a key component.

Whereas it is not within the scope of this study to debate the pros and cons of inclusive education, it is important to recognise the scale and weight of the first part of the quote from School Three regarding views on nurture as potentially non-inclusive practice. This may be due to participants' understanding of inclusive education and the myriad of interpretations on the concept (Florian, 2014). How respondents frame their thinking around inclusive practice (Razer *et al.*, 2012), their concerns over the time it takes (Mintz & Norwich, 2023), and their professional development needs on inclusion (Beaton *et al.*, 2022) could contribute to these views. The findings in this study demonstrate that mainstream teachers may require support to understand where inclusive practices can complement each other as part of a continuum of support (Norwich, 2013; Norwich & Kousouris, 2017) for children and young people and that teacher "craft knowledge" (Florian & Beaton, 2018, p.873) can be enhanced to build practitioner confidence when considering the use of TSPN in the mainstream classroom. It is important to give thought to the potential incongruence between participants' perspectives of nurture as a barrier to inclusive practice in the classroom and the expectations of professional regulatory bodies (GTCS, 2022) and government policies (Scottish Government, 2020) that require the teaching profession to demonstrate specific skills and values around inclusive practice in Scottish schools. As Lily discussed in the final quote for this sub-theme:

"Given the inclusive nature of education now, you're having to cater for a range of needs...learning, socially and developmentally and I think if you're offering an equal opportunity for everybody you have to look at those nurturing principles because it means everything is accessible to everyone, no matter what your background [or] academic abilities...those principles fit (Lily, School Two).

6.3 “In reality”: Tensions and contradictions in effective nurture practice

The final sub-theme for this chapter explores the tensions inherent in participants’ views on the practical implications of TSPN in their classrooms and schools. It addresses research questions two and three regarding nurture principles in practice and their perceived effectiveness and ineffectiveness as influenced by resources, leadership, and professional learning.

6.3.1 Resources

Emma discussed her view of the practical challenges of implementing nurture practice as it related to staff numbers:

“I think your biggest challenge would be the numbers. When you’ve got a class with the size of numbers that you’ve got, how can you give a child that amount of time that’s needed to foster that relationship? I’m probably lucky in the sense that I have four boys just now and I can take the time to sit with them every morning to make sure that they know that they’re cared for, to make sure that they know that they’re loved but you don’t have that luxury. Staffing as well, staffing’s getting cut all the time” (Emma, School Two).

This is an interesting perspective on nurture practice. From Emma’s point of view, it is only possible with a small number of children or if more adults are available to support the practice. This would certainly fit with the nurture group model, which advocates for between ten and twelve children in a group led by two adults at any time (Boxall & Lucas, 2012). However, perspectives that align with nurture practice as a group model could be problematic due to the expectations of a whole school approach (Education Scotland, 2017). The view that the staff-to-pupil ratio is

important for effective nurture practice potentially adds a layer of complication to the practicality of the approach in mainstream classrooms, particularly as the drive to use TSPN in whole class settings has been a focus for some years (Coleman, 2020; Kearney & Nowak, 2019).

In School Three, focus group data showed that participants agreed with the concern around staffing:

“Nurturing principles are important but you’ve got to have people...you need resources...strategies from [nurture principles] can be useful but can be unrealistic if adults are not there to back you up. In reality it can be forgotten. There are pressures of workload, timing, staffing [and] stress...It can [also] be a lot of time and planning...is it sustainable? Do I have the resources [like] PSAs/ Support Teachers” (Focus Group, School Three).

Seminal literature advocating for classic models of nurture practice within group settings advises that two adults are present to model behaviours and approaches associated with TSPN (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000). Previous research has suggested that this supports children’s social and emotional learning in the group and is deemed theoretically and practically effective by those who initially conceptualised the practice (Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Warin & Hibbin, 2016). The view from mainstream teachers in this study that a small team of adults is required to provide nurture could be considered reasonable, given their professional learning on the approach. However, there is a tension in the findings from this study over staff resources to support children with emotional wellbeing needs. It is a common theme in education, particularly regarding the national drive to provide equitable solutions for children and young people (Choudry, 2021). The term ‘in reality’ is interesting as it

suggests a disconnect between nurture theory and practice, which is an important reflection from respondents. The use of the phrase 'in reality', which was used in several data extracts and is a key focus for the title of this sub-theme, demonstrates that perceptions of nurture practice seem to be at odds with expectations from policy documents around the implementation of whole school nurturing approaches (Education Scotland, 2017).

The previous quote from School Three suggests a perspective of nurture practice that creates negative connotations for staff and directly links with the extracts from sub-theme two in this chapter on the impact of nurture practice on adults. Phrases such as 'pressures of workload, timing, staffing [and] stress' strengthen the findings in this chapter regarding the emotional impact on teachers and demonstrate a tension around participants' views of the likelihood of effective nurture practice beyond a small group setting.

6.3.2 Senior leadership support

Several comments focused on the support respondents believed they needed to make nurture practice successful in their setting, which included guidance from the school leadership team. As Lily explained in the following quote:

"I think in reality... it only works if everybody buys into it. In reality, a top down approach that from a management perspective they support it, they put in place the supports, the financing and bodies...to meet those needs. I think, across the school community... you've got to have buy-in at all levels from the Head Teacher to your PSAs that there's an understanding of the need and why some children might have a... slightly different tact with other children from the main body of the class in a sense" (Lily, School Two).

Lily's conviction in this extract links well with School One and School Three's view that there is a disparity between theory and practice regarding nurture practice. The quote highlights the need for a whole school approach led by senior leaders. This is in line with literature on the topic of whole school implementation of nurture practice and the crucial role of leadership from the top (Binnie & Allen, 2008; Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Colley, 2017; McNicol & Riley, 2018; Nolan *et al.*, 2021).

Support from senior leadership teams in schools has been identified as significant for successful whole school approaches to embedding nurture practice (Lucas, 1999; Binnie & Allen, 2008; Coleman, 2020). Current guidance for developing a whole school nurturing approach in Scottish schools, such as Lily's, sets out clear roles and responsibilities for school leaders (Education Scotland, 2017). However, the extent to which they will fully endorse and embed nurture practice varies (Coleman, 2020; Warin & Hibbin, 2016). Whole school approaches to emotional wellbeing interventions in schools must have the full commitment of the leadership team for wellbeing initiatives, such as nurture, to be impactful for children and young people (González *et al.*, 2018). This includes school-wide policies and approaches around relational practice (Hickey *et al.*, 2021; Smith *et al.*, 2014).

Lily's perception of nurture practice fits with existing research on whole school approaches and the essential role of the senior leadership team (Reeves & Le Mare, 2018). However, the findings from this study clarify and deepen the understanding of teacher capacity to navigate the practical challenges of nurture practice in whole class settings in a way that links with their current pedagogical practice.

Interestingly, Lily's views were shared by Rose, a member of her school's senior leadership team. However, in Rose's case, she explained the practical issue of developing her knowledge to support teaching staff with nurturing approaches in their classroom:

"I think that's something myself, whilst I'm going to be leading this, you know, sort of approach to whole school nurture across the school, if I'm honest that's something I probably need to do. I will be learning with the staff in terms of thinking about the nurturing principles. I think certainly, my values of believing in nurture are all there but in terms of promoting the different principles around it, that's something that I'll be learning along with the teachers in the school. That's not something that you can just present at an in-service day and people will automatically take on. I think it's something that is a process and will happen over time through, you know, raising the profile at staff meetings but also through things like talking about restorative approaches and, sort of, modelling interactions with children, as well as the daily conversations with members of staff"

" (Rose, School Four).

Rose highlighted teacher knowledge and skills regarding nurture practice in this extract. She included possible professional development needs for members of senior leadership teams. This is impactful because, from my experience, I have observed that school leaders can be expected to have all the answers and are often quickly viewed as experts in nurture practice. It is an assumption that tends to be solely based on their position in the school rather than practical experience using TSPN in group settings and beyond.

6.3.3 Professional learning for staff

The extent to which nurture teachers are viewed as experts varies despite research which has highlighted the depth of knowledge and practice required to successfully work in a nurture room (Middleton, 2019). If it is the case that nurture practice involves an element of expertise outside of mainstream teacher professional learning programmes then I would suggest that teachers' concerns over their capacity to use nurturing approaches in their day-to-day practice are worthy of consideration. It raises questions about mainstream teachers' skills and knowledge to effectively implement nurture principles in their classrooms. Focus group participants from School One considered the tensions around what teachers currently understand and where they might need further support:

“[The] confidence of staff...how do we know it's right? What does a nurturing class look like? [We] need more information on physical and emotional milestones [because] teachers may not fully understand what 'developmentally' means and there is a tension between knowing, embedding and accepting...there are tensions between age and stage of development amongst some staff” (Focus Group, School One).

This is an interesting quote because it demonstrates secondary teachers' perceptions of their experience, training, and expectations around nurture practice. It aligns with research which has highlighted the importance of staff confidence to use different approaches in the classroom (Cate *et al.*, 2018). The suggestion that more information is needed on children's developmental stage is important as it reveals that secondary practitioners require more support to understand why nurture practice may be helpful in their setting. This perspective fits with recent research, which argued that the success of nurture practice in secondary schools is partly dependent

upon professional learning and development to enhance staff skills in TSPN and the theory underpinning the practice (O'Farrell *et al.*, 2022). The view from School One was shared by participants in School Three, who expressed their views that:

“Thinking of Initial Teacher Education...[we] need more details on child development...strategies are needed to be shared across staff [and] build in more time to discuss children's behaviour [because] it takes experience to manage behaviours” (Focus Group, School Three).

I would suggest that the focus on supporting behaviours, as detailed by focus group participants in School Three, is somewhat unsurprising given the ongoing spotlight on distressed behaviour during conversations about nurture practice throughout this chapter. However, it may be reasonable to consider that the request for ‘more details’ on child development is a surprising finding from primary school practitioners due to expectations around the content of primary Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses on child development theory. Primary school practitioners are more likely to be trained in various educational theories (Conkbayir & Pascal, 2023) regarding children's development (Pollard & Wyse, 2023). In some cases, educational, developmental and pedagogical theories will overlap (Aubrey & Riley, 2019). However, the findings from this sub-theme suggest that teachers might require further support through ITE programmes to balance the theory and practice of nurture with other pedagogical theories and priorities which are dominant in their school.

Reflecting on my ITE experience in 2004, only two developmental theorists were explored over as many lectures. Piaget (1951, 1954) and Vygotsky (1978), whilst

very important, were the sole focus of my course. I learned everything I know about attachment theory and TSPN whilst practising as a support for learning teacher across various sectors. This is an important point for the future of nurture practice in schools because the findings from my study show that teachers could benefit from additional learning and development on how TSPN are supported and used in the mainstream classroom. In particular, from a pedagogical standpoint, due to the familiarity of the term for teachers.

Making sense of pedagogical theory and practice has been highlighted as an area of ongoing professional development for teachers (Flores, 2018). Reflecting on approaches to teaching which support children's learning is deemed a positive "attitude of professionalism" (Stronge, 2018, p.226). The findings in this section of sub-theme three demonstrate that it would be helpful to include nurture practice in future ITE courses due to the focus on relational approaches in current educational policy guidance such as the *National Improvement Framework* (Scottish Government, 2023), *Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education* (Scottish Government, 2016) and the *Additional Support for Learning Review* (Scottish Government, 2020). This would allow teachers to reflect professionally on key policies impacting their day-to-day pedagogical practice (Bolton & Delderfield, 2018).

The perceived disassociation between theory and practice was considered further by School One participants who suggested that:

“[There are also] tensions between nurture principles in theory and practice, [especially around] understanding what is needed in relation to learning and behaviour...“Nurture is seen to end at the end of S2...all the pupils hear is SQA/Highers/Nationals...[and] pupils may feel undervalued from S3...we stop valuing young people for who they are... given the pressure on us...results matter... Nurture doesn't become as important when pupils move from S3 for national qualifications...exam results are important, they are the pupil's future...”
(Focus Group, School One).

The language in this quote about ‘learning and behaviour’ is important because it highlights another area for skill and knowledge development, which the teachers have identified as a tension. The data extract aligns with the findings which permeate this chapter regarding behaviour as a significant topic for participants. Understanding nurture as a pedagogical practice which supports a child’s emotional regulation, wellbeing, and readiness to learn is a significant detail for teachers if they are to realise the theoretical background to nurture practice (Boorn *et al.*, 2010; Kourmoulaki, 2013; Boxall & Lucas, 2012). The quote from School One also offers a clear message from participants regarding a potential imbalance between the competing priorities of nurture practice and attainment. This finding agrees with literature that has detailed the pressures on teachers to support wellbeing whilst meeting attainment outcomes (Powell & Graham, 2017). It is a tension described as untenable (Clarke, 2022; Schweisfurth, 2015) as it would appear to contrast with national policy guidance around equitable solutions and interventions in Scottish education, which associate TSPN with wellbeing support and educational expectations for vulnerable learners through some recently mentioned initiatives.

School One participants' perspectives on the disconnect between nurture practice and attainment may be due to their understanding of nurture practice models used in their secondary school, which included three terms across a young person's first and second year at school. According to traditional nurture group models, three terms are deemed sufficient time for the intervention in secondary schools to maintain the fidelity of the approach and impact young people's emotional wellbeing (Grantham & Primrose, 2017). Despite the traditional model used in School One in 2019, secondary practitioners made clear that attainment was at the heart of what was expected of them, and this raised questions about the importance of nurture practice and how it was viewed across the school community. Interestingly, this view was not specific to the secondary school sector and a focus on attainment, as it was deemed to impede nurture practice, was also mentioned by a participant from the primary school sector, as the following quote from Sally demonstrates:

"[It is] crucial rather than, perhaps rather than a focus on the attainment, all the time... [It's] just as important [that] these principles as well will have to be put in place... to ensure that they reach...attainment level as well. To ensure that [the children] reach that" (Sally, School Two).

The term 'crucial' indicates Sally's strong view on the need for nurture practice to be embedded alongside attainment rather than an either/ or position. Her questioning stance regarding attainment is interesting as it aligns with previous literature that suggested critical pedagogical perspectives are crucial for developing changing practice in the classroom (Green & Macrine, 2020; Macrine, 2020).

In this next quote, Daisy also questioned the priorities of attainment with the need to embed nurturing practice in her school:

“We help them and support them to be independent learners and to be strong mentally and I think the world they’re about to go into with all social media and stuff they need to be able to take the knocks, they need to be able to be resilient and I think nurturing isn’t smothering... I think people might sometimes confuse nurturing with mothering and smothering, it’s not. It’s about giving them the resilience and the confidence and the mental wellbeing to stand on their own two feet and to me, actually if they didn’t leave with five A Highers it wouldn’t bother me but if they had those traits they’ll do brilliantly in the world” (Daisy, School One).

This extract is important because it further demonstrates that primary and secondary practitioners hold similar views regarding nurturing practice as part of a teacher's skill set to support emotional wellbeing. It could be argued that the participants in the focus group for School One expressed concern about the significance of attainment rather than wellbeing due to their comments on the position of national qualifications in pupils' lives at their secondary school. Daisy’s comment regarding ‘five A Highers’ stands out in this quote as it is not what might be expected from a secondary school depute head teacher responsible for qualifications and attainment. The evidence from the data extracts in this section demonstrates why nurture practice is deemed important and complex for teachers in the current educational climate of performance and improvement (Clarke, 2022). These findings shed light on the necessity of exploring and expanding teacher skills to include a pedagogical lens on nurture to formalise the approach for whole class settings. In the final data extract, Lily explained the competing priorities and roles teachers must consider in classrooms that might challenge effective nurturing approaches, despite her stance that nurturing practice is a form of pedagogy. She expressed that:

“I think...in the circumstances we are now in, it has to be a relevant pedagogical... approach because in order to meet the needs that you are now faced with within a classroom you have to have the knowledge of how to do a wee bit of everything from the developmental understanding..., the academic understanding, the social side because the job is no longer just teaching in itself, eh, the academic side there’s so much more to it and I think it has to be, well for teaching staff coming out, they have to have that breadth of understanding...of all different areas to be able to sort of do the best you can with what you’ve got because once you come through the doors you’ve not got the same level of support you would have say,... as a student or whatever so you need to have a broad understanding of all those principles to be able to manage things as best you can for not only yourself but for the kids” (Lily, School Two).

Teachers are expected to balance and meet a range of emotional, social and learning needs within their classroom (Cloran *et al.*, 2022). Lily’s perception of what teachers need to achieve to enhance learning experiences for children and young people is important for the findings in this theme as she directly links nurture practice to a list of skills she deemed necessary for new and experienced staff. Lily’s suggestion that being aware of concepts such as nurture to prepare teachers to cope with classroom challenges is an important point regarding its usefulness for both pupil and teacher wellbeing. Moreover, it is a uniquely strengths-based lens around the potential impact of TSPN on teachers and children in the classroom (Brunzell & Norrish, 2021; McClure & Reed, 2022).

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter explored tensions and dilemmas of nurture practice, with interesting and challenging findings for the field. The confusion over nurturing approaches as a

form of behaviour management was evident. The nurture principle, *all behaviour is communication* (NurtureUK, 2020), seemed to be associated with responses that focused on challenging behaviour and loss of adult control in the classroom.

The language of behaviour management approaches was prevalent, as were deficit terms around children and young people's needs when distressed. Participants seemed concerned about using nurture practice as an excuse for allowing children to get away with challenging behaviour. This raised questions for the broader field of nurture practice and how TSPN are used to help mainstream teachers understand the concept. Considering all behaviour as a form of communication is undoubtedly a starting point. However, the data from this study details that teachers predominantly linked the phrase to the language of behaviour management and associated strategies.

At times, nurture practice was viewed as oppositional to behaviour management techniques rather than an additional element to teaching practice, where relational and restorative approaches could be useful (Bates, 2021). An explanation for this disconnect might be how nurture practice, which was originally developed for small-scale group intervention, has been packaged and offered as a whole school approach (Education Scotland, 2017). A sole focus on nurture principles is insufficient to support teachers' understanding of the practice in whole class settings. The findings in this study detail the confusion and tension around the terms used and the way in which they are dovetailed with behavioural support strategies.

Understanding the impact of the phrase, *all behaviour is communication* (NurtureUK, 2020), which specifically mentions behaviour, is important because behaviour management strategies are still prevalent in schools today despite the ongoing critique of their use (Conkbayir, 2023; Kohn, 2018). Systems of rewards and sanctions, predicated on adult expectations, are often used routinely (Bennett, 2020; Cowley, 2014). This raises questions about how teachers can be supported to understand nurture practice as a whole class approach that moves beyond behaviour management. Understanding how teachers perceive nurture practice through behaviourist approaches in schools is important due to the misconceptions around relational practice and nurture, which have been highlighted as a result of this study. Therefore, reconsidering the use of the word *behaviour* might be a starting point for further development of the empathic, attuned approach, which seemed to sit almost invisibly behind the language of the nurture principle in data extracts from respondents.

The responses in the data collected for sub-theme two were both challenging and exciting due to perceptions of the negative emotional impact of nurture practice on teacher wellbeing and the effect on children's learning. Significantly important concepts, such as safety and inclusion, were featured. Concerns about the emotional and physical safety of children and adults are an important contribution to the academic field of nurture practice for a few reasons. To date, studies have focused on the emotional impact of nurture practice on nurture group practitioners (Cefai & Pizutto, 2017; Grantham & Primrose, 2017; Kearney & Nowak, 2019). This means there is a potential gap in the literature that allows for the inclusion of teachers' perceptions and the use of nurture practice in mainstream classrooms.

In academic literature, nurture practice is held as a positive, relational approach to supporting children's well-being at school (Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Brawls & Ruby, 2023). Policy initiatives for whole school implementation (Scottish Government, 2017) and the drive to embed the practice in whole class settings are ongoing. The implications of the findings in this chapter could enhance practitioner knowledge and allow for professional reflection on terms associated with behaviour and nurture.

Findings from the final sub-theme were peppered with concern over resources, professional learning and support from school senior leadership teams. The implications of the findings are important for the future of nurture practice in schools because participants seemed to view additional staff as an answer to their worries over their capacity to use TSPN in their classrooms. Staff numbers have always been an important issue regarding equitable approaches such as nurture (Choudry, 2021). However, the current economic climate in education would suggest that infinite numbers of staff will not be possible (Webster, 2022). Therefore, additional ways in which to support teachers use nurture practice in the classroom should be sought.

Finally, concerns around the reality of nurture practice in the classroom included the disconnect between nurture and attainment. This is an important finding because it strengthens the current body of literature regarding school leaders' challenges around academic performance versus wellbeing education (Clarke, 2022). Hearing teacher voices from both the primary and secondary sectors, which detailed the imbalance between wellbeing and attainment, is pertinent in the current education context in Scotland. Understanding teachers' views on the challenge of meeting

attainment targets whilst supporting children and young people in having positive wellbeing at school is helpful to move the dilemma forward. In the case of classroom teachers, this could be a framework that supports their pedagogical practice in the whole class setting.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

7.1 Purpose and findings of the study

This research aimed to explore mainstream teachers' perceptions of *The Six Principles of Nurture* (TSPN) (NurtureUK, 2020) and their relevance for daily practice in the classroom. The study included the extent to which participants were familiar with the term *nurturing pedagogy* (Hayes, 2008). Nurture practice, positioned within the framework of wellbeing education and underpinned by TSPN, was a key element in creating the research aims and questions. Figure 22 provides a reminder of both.

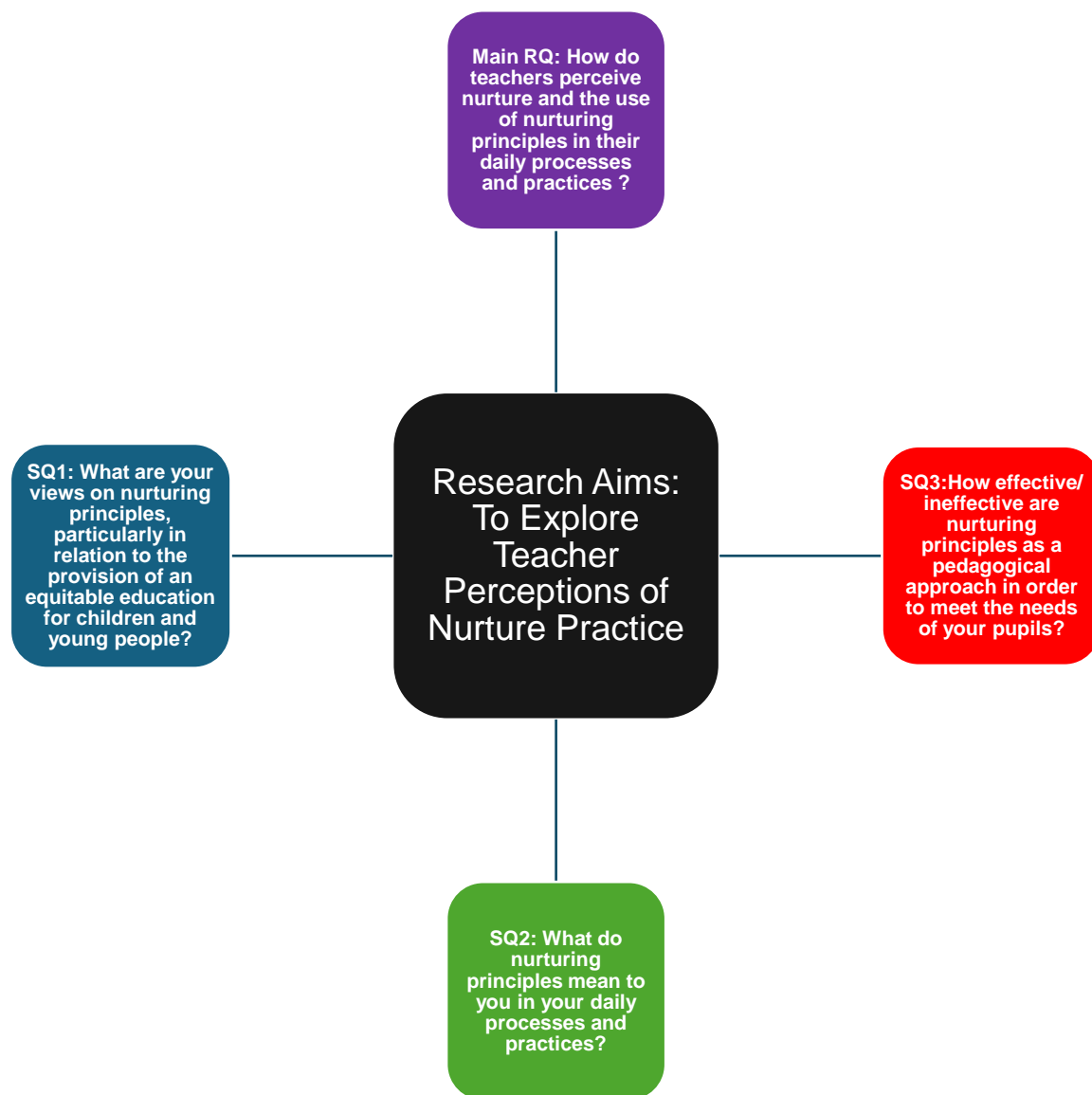


Figure 22: Review of research aims and research questions for the study

This research found that nurture practice was viewed by participant teachers as a fundamental part of the basics of teaching, which included concepts of relational care and empathy. The case study established that being ‘nurturing’ was considered a desired professional stance for teachers across both primary and secondary sectors. Whether nurture practice can be perceived as a pedagogical approach is yet to be fully established, as findings from this research suggest that it was not a well-

known concept. However, the study offers a starting point for further exploration and allows association between TSPN, as originally conceptualised by Holmes & Boyd (1999), and a supportive framework that enhances teacher knowledge of nurture practice in their classroom.

Understanding of nurture principles in practice as an equitable approach to education was heavily influenced by participants' awareness of a child's home context and familial circumstances. The emphasis on using school data to help participants understand an ecological view of the child was important. However, as I discussed in Chapter 2, raising teacher awareness of potentially deterministic views around a child's home life and experiences is significant. Encouraging teachers to question deterministic thinking should be standard practice amongst the teaching profession. Additionally, there needs to be clear consideration of the child's voice when schools are looking to use data relating to family circumstances. Teachers' professional behaviours and ability to respond to children's needs through consistency, flexibility, and awareness of pupils' wide-ranging behavioural presentations were also important findings.

Certain tensions were prevalent throughout the thesis. This study showed teachers' focus on children and young people's behaviour, including the associated language and strategies of behaviour management approaches. The nurture principle, *all behaviour is communication*, was often viewed from a behaviourist perspective (NurtureUK, 2020). Findings in Chapter 6 demonstrated confusion over nurture practice as an answer to supporting distressed behaviour and as an excuse for allowing challenging behaviours, which highlighted the perceived dichotomy that was

prevalent throughout the study between nurture practice and behaviour management approaches. There was some awareness of nurture practice and behaviour management as part of a continuum to support children's wellbeing, rather than hinder it.

Key findings came from discussions on the impact of nurture practice on staff and children's wellbeing. Perspectives on the necessity of resources, staff training, and the critical nature of leadership support to embed TSPN across a school community were important. At times, findings from Chapters 4 to 6 seemed contradictory, given the way participants advocated for TSPN and voiced concern over practical hurdles and emotional impact. These tensions highlight the complexity of nurture practice for teachers considering using TSPN in their classrooms.

7.2 Contribution to the academic field

My research adds to the academic field on nurture by developing a Framework for Nurturing Pedagogy, intended to support teachers' understanding of TSPN and how they are expanded and understood in the whole class setting. This is significant because TSPN were created for small group interventions (Boxall, 2002). An important focus of the study was how participants interpreted the nurture principles being operationalised in a whole class setting. Key concepts such as relationships, care, empathy, consistency, flexibility, equity, and understanding behaviour through nurture were findings that will augment teachers' knowledge of TSPN in their classroom setting. As shown in Figure 23, the Framework for Nurturing Pedagogy

supports a new development in whole class approaches to nurture practice by moving beyond TSPN as the primary guidance for classroom teachers.

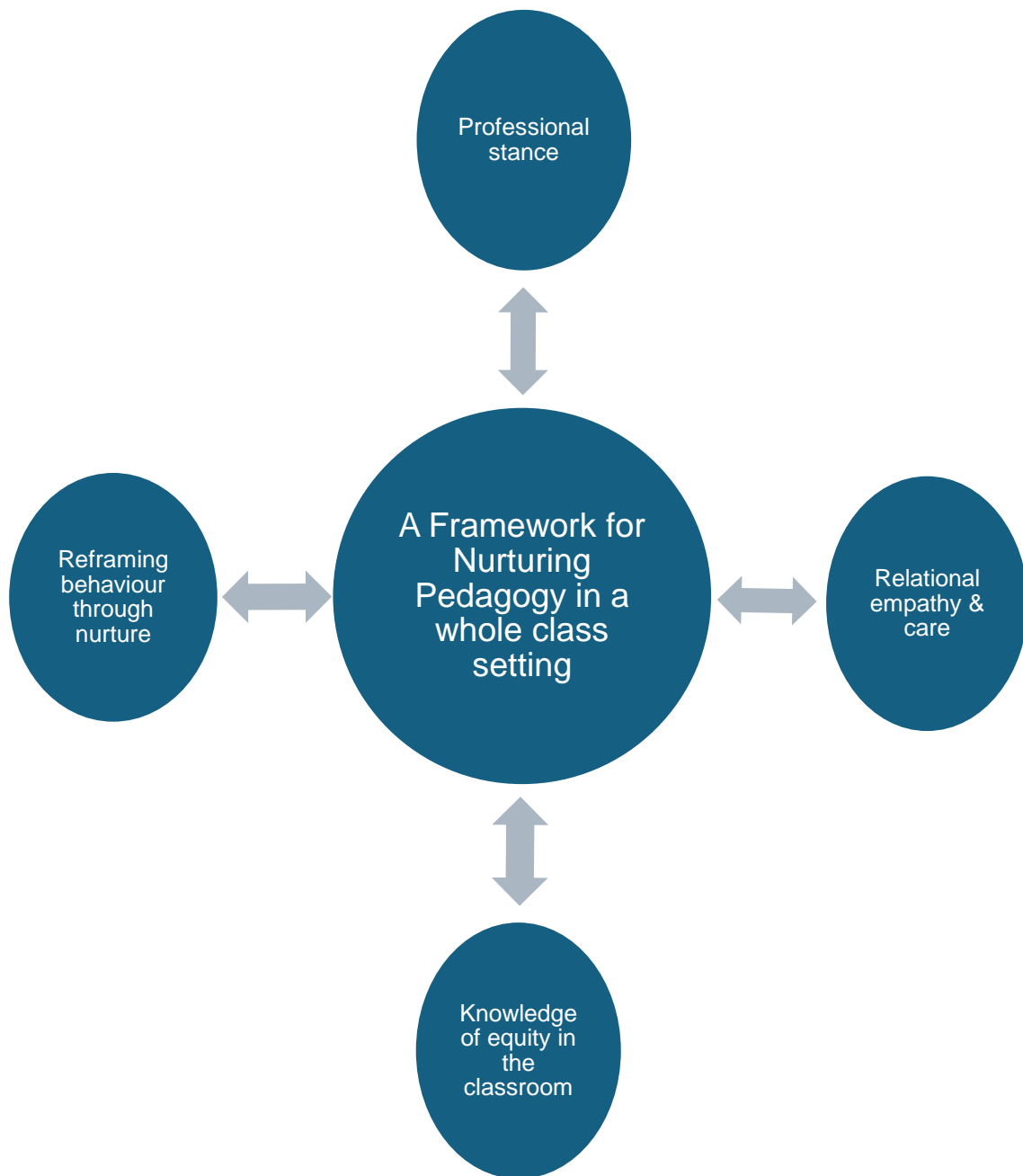


Figure 23: A Framework for Nurturing Pedagogy in the whole class setting

It should be reiterated that an impetus for the study was the work of Hayes (2008), who conceptualised the term *nurturing pedagogy* in the context of early years education in Ireland. My work extends this application to include primary and secondary school contexts in Scotland. The Framework for Nurturing Pedagogy is intended to link with language and concepts that teachers already understand to support the development of how teachers “are” in the classroom (Roberts, 2023, p.17) and how they can build upon their existing pedagogical practices (Pollard & Wyse, 2023) in a way that allows for a choice of approach (Gilbert, 2009) and strengthens existing craft knowledge (Florian & Beaton, 2018). In addition to enhancing pedagogical knowledge for teachers, I anticipate that my framework will add to the current literature on relational practice and the importance of nurture practice to support children and young people’s wellbeing at school. It will contribute to currently understood research on whole class nurture practice, which links directly and solely to TSPN without further exploration of what it means for teaching approaches in the whole class setting.

7.2.1 Further exploration of the Framework for Nurturing Pedagogy in the whole class setting

Empathy and care, as they relate to the teacher skillset, were key findings when participants were asked about their perceptions of nurture principles in practice. Care in education is not a new concept (Noddings, 2012; Velasquez *et al.*, 2013), particularly regarding discussions on school nurture practice (Brawls & Ruby, 2023). However, as shown in this study, empathy was perceived as an important aspect of nurture practice, used to connect with children who require support for their emotional wellbeing needs.

Given the findings in this study, which identified empathy as important for nurture practice, I suggest that a deeper focus on empathy would benefit children and adults in schools. As shown in Chapter 2 (Figure 2, page 41), empathy consists of three components: cognitive empathy, emotional empathy and empathic concern. Each part is associated with a recognition and response for teachers. However, I argue that emotional empathy is a required response from parents but is not a necessary condition for teachers. The model I propose in Chapter 2 is important because it is helpful to start professional dialogue on empathy in the classroom. Now that the research is complete, I am more convinced of the requirement for teachers to understand the concept as it relates to TSPN. Reflecting on my teaching career, I believe that a deeper understanding of the link between the principle that *all behaviour is communication* and empathy is needed (NurtureUK, 2020). When learning about nurture practice, as an alternative to my approach in the classroom, I would have benefited greatly from more detail on why empathy was important to support children in my classroom. Empathy's significant place in my study's findings is a positive outcome. Therefore, the Framework for Nurturing Pedagogy highlights the placement of empathy as a key component of nurture practice.

Professional stance refers to how a teacher is in the classroom. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, influences on this can include a range of factors such as personal experiences at school (Olsen, 2008; van Manen, 2015), preferred pedagogical approach (Flannery *et al.*, 2016) and teachers' choices regarding how their lessons should be taught (Kareepadath, 2018). Additional findings in my thesis demonstrate that a teacher's professional stance should encompass nurture practice as the basics, or 'bread and butter' of teaching. Therefore, my proposed framework

includes a professional invitation for teachers to reflect on their current pedagogical stance and consider the reasons behind their choices. This includes their readiness to embrace the discomfort and vulnerability a relational pedagogy might bring (Gravett, 2023). The Framework for Nurturing Pedagogy is a way of supporting teachers' reflections on their pedagogy.

As a component of my pedagogical framework, the development of knowledge for equity in the classroom was supported by findings linked to participants' understanding of pupils' backgrounds, safe and secure environments and the importance of "flexible consistency" as a standard approach to meeting children's needs (Whitaker, 2021, p.55). Consistency is emphasised in behaviour management literature (Bennett, 2020; Cowley, 2014). It is also acknowledged by researchers who argue for relational approaches in the classroom (Bombèr, 2020; Chatterley, 2020; Dix, 2017). However, proponents of relational approaches point out that being flexible to meet the needs of children is helpful for pupils in class through "consistency compromises" (Dix, 2017, p.56). The findings of this study add to the current literature on the value of balancing adult consistency and flexible teaching practice.

The importance of teachers' understanding of children's backgrounds is already evident in the literature on nurture practice (Brawls & Ruby, 2023; Chatterley, 2023). Placing this focus in a pedagogical model to support classroom teachers is a new development and adds to the academic field. The inclusion of this section in the Framework for Nurturing Pedagogy is important because it is associated with existing models for understanding children's needs, as previously discussed in this

thesis. In Chapter 2, I suggested that I tentatively accept Brofenbrenner and Morris's (2007) Ecological Systems Model as a helpful way to understand children and young people's wellbeing. Now that the study is complete and I have found that the broader information on children is important for teachers, I am now prepared to accept the model's usefulness as a tool for teachers.

The final part of my framework encourages a reframing of behavioural pedagogical approaches through nurture practice. When discussing children and young people, it is important to challenge behavioural and deficit language around distressed behaviour and move towards a different approach in the classroom (McClure & Reed, 2022). Experts who argue for relational, restorative approaches to support children (Chatterley, 2023; Dix, 2017; Bombèr, 2020; Zeedyk, 2020) could welcome academic research that heralds a change in direction. Throughout this study, the principle *all behaviour is communication* (NurtureUK, 2020) came to the fore, time and time again. It is a guidance statement underpinning nurture practice in schools and is widely used in and across literature (Boxall & Lucas, 2012; Chatterley, 2020; Cooper & Colley, 2017; Foster, 2023; Whitaker, 2021). I argue that further explanation of the phrase is required when considering children's behavioural presentation and emotional wellbeing needs in a whole class setting. This is because the association with behaviour management terms was evident in responses from teachers in this study. Some participants raised questions of school discipline and teacher capacity to adopt nurture practice as it was perceived as a soft option (Whitaker, 2021). Therefore, there seemed to be a dichotomy of nurture practice as both important and problematic at various points in the study. My professional reflection on this point has helped me realise that the either/or position is very

prevalent in teaching. I have mentioned it many times throughout the thesis. I am unclear whether this can be completely changed, given how embedded the language of behaviour management is in education. However, the findings from this research are a good starting point for discussion amongst teachers to support a change in direction.

Some writers have suggested that adults should consider children's behaviour as communicating a specific need, rather than generalising that behaviour is communication (Chatterley, 2023; Desautels, 2020). This is a step in the right direction. I suggest that the problem is with the term behaviour, which is still directly associated with behaviour management approaches. An adaptation of TSPN could support teachers' understanding of the term differently. I believe that changing the terminology in the principle *all behaviour is communication* (NurtureUK, 2020) would be welcome to distance it from behaviourist language and approaches still used in schools today (Armstrong, 2018; Bennett, 2020). For example, modifying TSPN to align with the language of empathy might support teachers' understanding of their actions and choices to provide a nurturing experience for pupils. This change could support a move from the perceived dichotomy between nurture practice and behaviour management approaches in schools. I acknowledge that further research would be necessary to establish if this is likely to resonate with teachers, given how embedded the language of TSPN is in schools nationally (Ruby, 2018) and internationally (Coleman & Cooper, 2017).

7.3 Implications for educational practice

This study discovered key concepts that are important for teaching and the future of nurture practice in the whole class setting. My newly proposed framework adds value to the current use of TSPN in the classroom. Therefore, it is important to link the Framework for Nurturing Pedagogy to the nurture principles as they are currently understood. Mapping TSPN onto the framework is helpful to show the clear association for teachers. An example of this is shown in Figure 24. I propose that my framework be used as a structure for nurture practice in the classroom setting to provide relational pedagogical depth. In Chapter 2, Figure 8, page 104, I discussed my reconceptualisation of the pedagogical triangle to include relational pedagogy as depth. Now that the research is complete, I argue that this is a very important consideration. Relational pedagogical depth, as shown in Figure 9, helps explain the role of the Framework for Nurturing Pedagogy in supporting classroom teachers' understanding of nurture practice. My new framework offers a concrete example of relational, nurturing pedagogy for classroom teachers, which could support student, teacher and curriculum transactions.

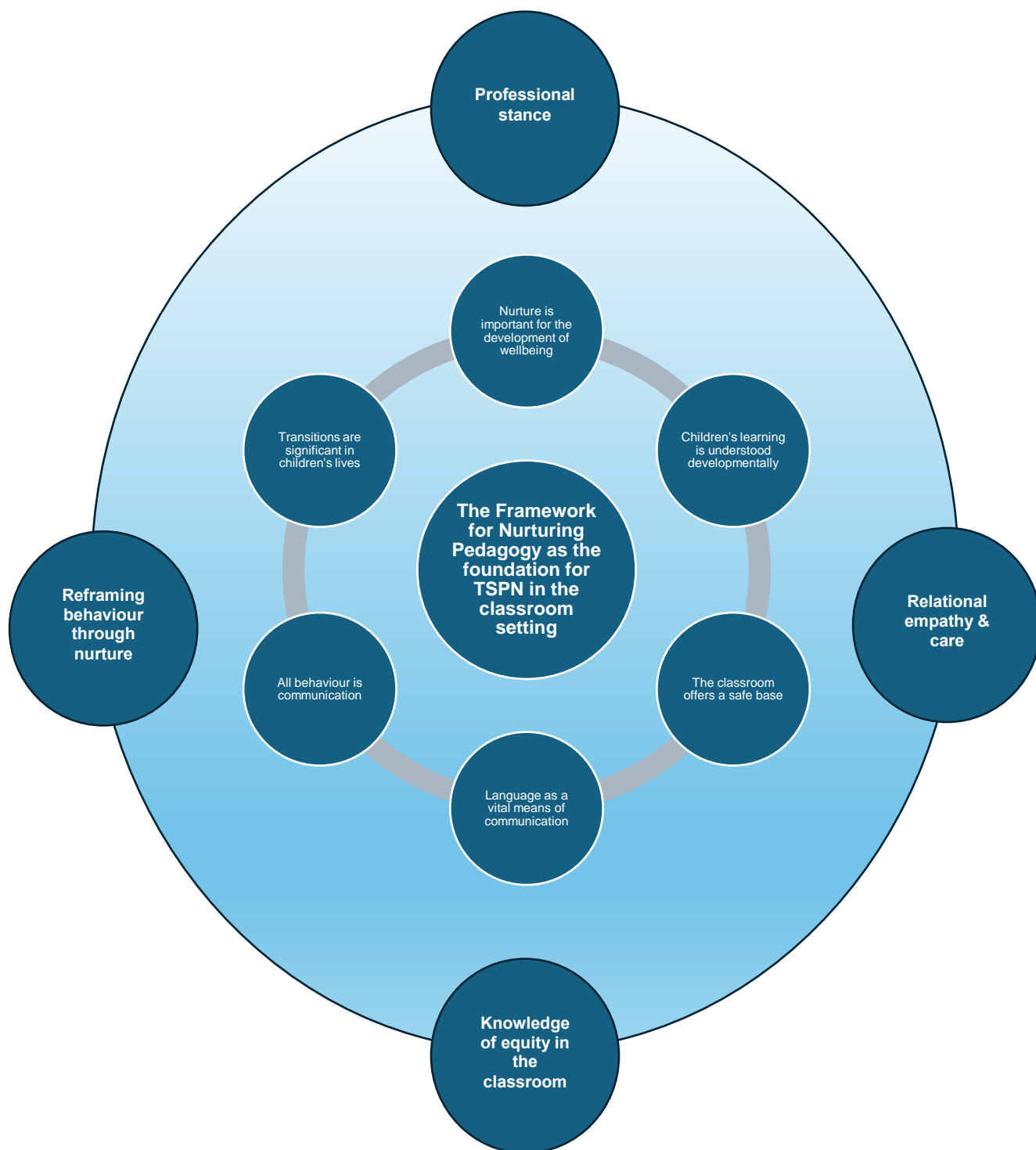


Figure 24: The Framework for Nurturing Pedagogy as it supports The Six Principles of Nurture

My research offers an additional contribution to pedagogical practice by supporting teachers to understand concepts such as professional stance, relational empathy and care, knowledge of equity and reframing views of behaviour through nurture. I suggest this would most likely be through ITE or local authority professional learning opportunities. I argue that the study findings will augment the expected knowledge of professional responsibilities for full registration in teaching in Scotland. Currently, GTCS registration documents for NQTs indicate that teachers are responsible for ensuring “trust and respect” through relationships and care (GTCS, 2023, p.4). However, empathy does not yet feature. Given that empathy was a surprising but important finding in the study, it is relevant to consider the placement of this concept in future GTCS documentation to support new teachers in developing their practice and “professional actions” to meet children’s needs (GTCS, 2022, p.10).

The findings of nurture practice as equitable, through the development of safe learning environments, which take account of a child’s previous experiences and background, are helpful starting points to connect TSPN to a whole class setting and the everyday pedagogical approaches teachers use. This includes the discovery that participants linked nurture practice with the sharing of children’s personal information relating to inform pedagogical approaches in the classroom. Whereas I believe that understanding a child’s experiences on an ecological level is important, I suggest proceeding cautiously to ensure children’s rights are adhered to when sharing their data.

The idea that consistency *and* flexibility are important aspects of nurture practice seems to be lesser known and may require further exploration for teachers to

understand how both concepts can co-exist comfortably in the classroom. Reflecting on my career, I would argue that this is a standard practice for most nurture teachers, mainly if it includes consideration of children's distressed behaviour. I agree with Desautels (2020) that using both approaches maintains emotional and psychological safety. Whereas nurture practice in a small group environment will allow for this. A class of up to thirty students presents an additional layer of complexity, as discovered in Chapter 6.

Despite the difficulties surrounding these concepts, I suggest that they are very important in a classroom setting. For example, being consistently predictable supports children's wellbeing (Brawls & Ruby, 2023), as does the professional ability of teachers to respond to the needs of the children if something does not go according to plan (Desautels, 2020). Both approaches are important aspects of teaching (Cowley, 2014) and are likely to be familiar to practitioners (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017). I propose that further professional learning about how consistency and flexibility can comfortably co-exist will help teachers consider nurture practice in their classrooms.

The final consideration for practice is the perceived dichotomy between nurture practice and behavioural approaches in the classroom. This is one of the most important findings in this study. Despite the ongoing and multiple use of the nurture principle, *all behaviour is communication* (NurtureUK, 2020) and what seemed to be the strengths-based intention behind participants' use of the phrase, there was clear evidence of an either/or position. The use of behaviour management terms when discussing TSPN was evident across the findings. I conclude that linking nurture

practice to behaviour through this principle is likely to cause teachers confusion, leaving teachers to infer a meaning that might lead to default towards behaviour management terms and deficit language, especially since the approach has been dominant in their professional and personal school experiences. Refocusing and considering alternative pedagogical options is important. The offer of alternative teaching strategies, which support the development of pedagogical practice (Grimmer, 2021) across a range of contexts (Saxena *et al.*, 2021) and at different points in their career (Murphy, 2009), would better support teachers.

I am not suggesting that behaviourist pedagogy does not have a place in supporting children and young people. Existing literature advocates for both, and to some extent, I understand the reasons why (Cowley, 2014; Rodgers, 2015). However, in my professional experience, a behaviourist approach is often short-lived and somewhat problematic for children and young people who require additional support based on a relational connection. Supporting teachers to be curious about behaviour and consider alternative approaches in the classroom is not new for those who have realised behaviour management strategies must be called into question (Chatterley, 2020; Dix, 2017; Foster, 2023). Therefore, I suggest that actively encouraging teachers to reframe children's distressed behaviour and reconsider the language and values of behaviourist pedagogy through the Framework for Nurturing Pedagogy will support teachers in understanding how they can adapt and change their practice to meet their pupils' needs.

7.4 Implications for educational policy

On an international scale, educational policy has children's wellbeing at its core (UNICEF, 2020). The UNCRC leads countries worldwide to develop policy initiatives predicated on children's rights (UNICEF, 2022). This includes children and young people who are marginalised at school due to family circumstances and require more equitable approaches in the classroom (Choudry, 2021). The findings from this study indicate that teacher knowledge of children's backgrounds and experiences is an important aspect of nurture practice to support wellbeing (NurtureUK, 2023), as long as children and young people have a say on how their data is used. Therefore, ensuring teachers understand the importance of their role in developing knowledge of children's backgrounds to promote equity in the classroom should be built into educational policy developments "within schools, between schools and beyond schools" on an international level (Ainscow, 2020, p.15).

It is clear that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has yet to be fully realised for children and young people's wellbeing (Breslin, 2021). Research is still emerging on the importance of nurture practice during the pandemic, with recommendations to include nurturing pedagogies and care for children in early years settings (Gleasure *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, ensuring the existence of nurturing, relational practice as a foundation for school wellbeing policies is an important recommendation from this thesis, which offers the Framework for Nurturing Pedagogy as an approach for primary and secondary schools.

A brief review of educational policy across the UK suggests that government organisations are at odds with relational approaches. In parts of the UK, there is a tendency towards behaviour management approaches in schools, which is evident from the rise of initiatives such as off-site behaviour hubs in recent years by the English and Welsh education departments (BehaviourHub, 2024). The focus of the behaviour hub is often on addressing challenging rather than distressed behaviour (*ibid*, 2024). The increase in these provisions would suggest a dilemma for teachers to interpret relational and behaviour management approaches to support children with distressed behaviour. Moreover, it is an issue that is becoming more widespread in Scottish education. For example, the current national discussion on extreme behaviour in Scottish schools led to the development of a summit, chaired by the Education Secretary, to “establish a robust evidence base, informed by practitioners, on [the] issue of relationships and behaviour policy in schools” (Scottish Government, 2023, p.1). The summit aims to address ongoing concerns over student behaviour and its impact on staff wellbeing that, in my professional opinion, creates a tension between national guidance that advocates for nurturing approaches but uses behaviourist language. Whilst this consultation takes place, the Scottish government recommends that those interested in the subject familiarise themselves with key policy documents such as *Included, Engaged and Involved, Part Two* (Scottish Government, 2019) and *Better Relationships, Better Learning, Better Behaviour* (Scottish Government, 2017). These are documents which, interestingly, despite the title, advocate for strong relational approaches to understanding pupils’ needs.

Although the data for this study was collected almost five years ago, some key findings from this study support policy development changes during this current consultation phase and change for the Scottish Government. Most significantly, the move to view behaviour through nurture practice that includes empathy and attunement behaviours from adults. If there is a professional expectation to use a nurturing, relational approach in Scottish schools, especially for those children most impacted by their emotional wellbeing, then a move away from a behaviour management stance might be a helpful first step.

In my professional experience, national and local professional learning programmes consistently remind teachers about the importance of being cognisant of nurture practice, trauma-informed practice (TIP) and understanding ACEs (Education Scotland, 2018). These terms do not sit comfortably with the rhetoric of “tackling [and] dealing with the problem” of challenging behaviour in our schools, as recorded from the behaviour summit (Scottish Government, 2023, p.1) and the data from the recent *Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research Report* (Scottish Government, 2023) which indicated that teachers perceive challenging behaviour to be on the increase. Therefore, findings from this research, which highlight the potential to think of children’s needs in a different, more empathic way along a continuum of relational and behavioural practice, may add depth to what currently appears to be a linear view of distressed behaviour.

In addition to the government consultation, the ASL Review emphasised the importance of relational practice in supporting distressed behaviour across whole class and school settings (Scottish Government, 2020). This included the

significance of the language of nurture practice, TIP, and ACEs. Therefore, there seems to be an aspiration in Scotland to include relational practice as a starting point for adults and children in school, despite behaviour summits and the view of national governments to address challenges in a behaviourist way (UK Government, 2024). This study supports the need for nurture practice within the classroom using the Framework for Nurturing Pedagogy, which encourages nurture practice as a way of being for teachers rather than an additional component of their role.

I am mindful of what I am proposing in these conclusions. The findings from the study suggest that teachers found the implementation of nurture practice in the whole class setting challenging at times. In the context of this thesis, space, time, resources, senior leadership support and professional learning for nurture practice were questioned in 2019. Since then, the Covid-19 pandemic has meant more children with distressed behaviour in schools (Schwartz *et al.*, 2021) and national policies to solve it with a continued focus on raising attainment (Weidmann *et al.*, 2022). All of these issues have occurred alongside budget cuts (Webster, 2022) that have reduced staffing from Covid-19 “catch-up strategies” (Breslin, 2021, p.98) and impacted professional learning opportunities (Efthymiou, 2022) despite evidence that school funding is important for positive outcomes for children and young people (Jackson, 2020). These concerns lead to a perfect storm, making this thesis more relevant but the Framework for Nurturing Pedagogy even more challenging to implement.

Moving towards a new or less familiar way of working in the classroom for some teachers who are, from my practical experience, already exhausted and working in

challenging circumstances will be hard to implement. Especially as these circumstances could mean further scaling up an approach previously deemed only relevant to group interventions. This is precisely why the contribution from my study is important, as I argue that developing teacher professional learning to support nurture practice in the classroom is key to offering an alternative pedagogical approach and supporting the wellbeing of children and young people on a universal level (Weare, 2016). My work is also increasingly relevant, as interventions, such as nurture groups, tend to be the first aspects of practice to change when school leadership teams are forced to make decisions around budgets and resources (MacKay, 2015).

It would be remiss of me not to mention staff wellbeing in this concluding chapter. This is due to the findings on vicarious trauma and perceptions of the negative impact of nurture practice on adults. Staff wellbeing is a key consideration for teachers working with children and young people who require a nurturing approach through TSPN (Bates, 2021; Brooks, 2020; Lucas, 2012a), and supporting staff wellbeing in education has become even more significant since the Covid-19 pandemic (Breslin, 2021; Dabrowski, 2021). Recent reports, such as *The Teacher Wellbeing Index*, suggested that teacher emotional wellbeing has decreased and stress levels have increased due to concerns such as “post-pandemic scarring [and] challenging pupil behaviour” (Education Support, 2023, p.56).

In Scotland, staff wellbeing in schools has gained increased prominence for the reasons already mentioned. It has taken a central position in recent policy documents such as *The Cycle of Wellbeing* (Education Scotland, 2023). Given that

the data for this study was gathered in 2019 and participants held strong views then, I argue that focusing on adult wellbeing needs is as important, if not more so, when schools consider a whole school policy change towards nurture practice. Over the past couple of years, I have been involved in a project to introduce peer supervision for teaching staff. The role is a direct result of my thesis and my work alongside a charity organisation, *Scottish Attachment in Action* (2023). Early evaluations of the project indicate that teachers and PSAs are motivated to engage in a process which allows them to reflect on their practice. Empathy, relationships and belonging permeate the sessions, and staff are keen to explore the wellbeing impact of supporting distressed children. On a national level, a few third-sector organisations in Scotland are now considering the issue of supervision for teaching staff (Barnardo's, 2020; Place2Be, 2023). This is a welcome step because my professional supervision experience strengthens my belief that it is required to support staff wellbeing. The data from this thesis indicates that supporting staff to reflectively and reflexively review their practice would be a positive development for the profession.

7.5 Personal reflections on the research experience

It may seem obvious, but the EdD journey was one of my most challenging undertakings. As a novice researcher, I found the academic process confusing, challenging, exhilarating, and frustrating. I now understand this is nothing new to anyone who has been through it. My main concern was my lack of research experience, but I appreciate that everyone must start somewhere. The weight of

doing this with an EdD was significant for me, as was the realisation that this had to be a unique contribution to knowledge.

The research process built my resilience and supported my development and patience, especially around my entirely unrealistic, self-imposed timeline for the study. I have learned a lot from this. However, it is always important to focus on the positives and review my research skills in interview questions, focus group facilitation, data analysis, and academic writing. I can conclude that they are much stronger than at the start of the process, which initially felt quite daunting.

My confidence as a researcher has grown. As mentioned in the limitations section in Chapter 3, I noted that further interviews, focus groups and participants might have strengthened the study. I accept that this is only possible if teachers wish to join in. However, I am more aware of my skillset and capacity to discuss these options with participants. Despite the "certain uncertainty" of participant recruitment, I would be more inclined to go with the process rather than panic (Bolton & Delderfield, 2018, p.29). As a novice researcher, I avoided those conversations or interactions. My primary aim was to get in, gather the data, and get out. Now, I would have more to offer and more to say.

While reflecting, it may be useful to mention that this work almost never happened. In December 2019, I devised long-term plans that I hoped would lead to a career change. I was unhappy with my job at the time. Looking back, it was more about the team I was working with than the role. I eventually realised that teaching was still a

passion, especially anything that involved understanding and supporting children and young people. As a result, I continued in my research journey.

At the same time as this personal and professional unrest, I felt that I was fumbling through the writing of the first few chapters of my thesis. There had been significant disruption to my supervision, and I felt like I was wading through treacle, trying to make sense of my data. Therefore, I decided to stop, unsure that I would try again. Further to consultation with Kate, I chose to take voluntary suspension to have time away from the EdD. I can still remember thinking that I would never return.

Shortly after the voluntary suspension began, I decided to embark on a qualification that I was sure would support my move to become an Educational Psychologist. Looking back, I think my passion for all things nurture was driving this change. The MSc in Psychology took two years, and I enjoyed it immensely, especially the thesis, which was a qualitative study on Educational Psychologists' perspectives of Emotional School-Based Absence. The skills I learned were very valuable, to the extent that I wished I had had the experience before starting the EdD.

The approach and expectations of an MSc degree from a Psychology department and another university certainly felt different. The most striking aspect was my discussion with my supervisor about epistemology. Essentially, I had the choice of Critical Realism or Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. My supervisor for the MSc explained to me that those were my options because I was researching various perspectives and views on one phenomenon. After carefully considering both, I

decided that Critical Realism was worth exploring. Thinking about the MSc qualification is important as I reflect on my EdD thesis because I realise this research could have been a Critical Realist study on teacher perceptions of nurture practice. When I returned to my EdD work in January 2022, I started to question the ontological and epistemological choices I had made for the EdD. These thoughts confused me over many, many months. However, the confusion meant that I spent a ridiculous amount of time researching why constructionism and pragmatism were more relevant to this study. I will not repeat my reasoning and justification as detailed in Chapter 3. However, the experience of potentially stepping away from my original ontological and epistemological choices brought me back to them. Exploring other options in much more detail helped me understand why, in particular, pragmatism was a natural choice for this study. Whereas being forced to choose two theoretical frameworks for the MSc had quite the opposite impact.

It is impossible to omit the Covid-19 pandemic as I look back on the last few years. My first reflection would be that I was lucky to gain access to teaching staff the way I did the year before the pandemic hit. Classrooms full of staff working in focus groups over one mind map or list to create visual data would never have happened. Nor would I have been able to sit in rooms with my colleagues and hear what they had to say about their experiences and views of nurture practice. Therefore, despite my worries about the length of interviews, space and the number of focus group participants sharing one classroom, I am grateful I could complete the data gathering process in person with my fellow teachers.

On a more personal level, at the time of the Covid-19 outbreak, I was on a break from the EdD due to my self-imposed falling out with the qualification and potential career change. I might have had to do that anyway as, along with so many others, Covid had a devastating impact on my family. However, this brings me to the reason I finished the thesis. I started it for my grandparents. They helped me fund a large part of the qualification because they valued education above all other things. So, I returned to the study for them.

Reflexivity has been a key term throughout this process; therefore, reflecting on the possible improvements and impact of my practice as a teacher and researcher is important. As it turned out, my job changed, and I stayed in teaching after all, but with a lot of additional knowledge of psychology. As a practitioner, I believe I am stronger in my conviction when working with colleagues who require support with nurture practice and, more often than not, as it turns out, advice on the association with behaviourist approaches. My job includes peer supervision for school staff and local authority professional development sessions on a range of learning around nurture practice, from groups to whole school approaches. Improvement and change in educational practice are at the heart of my professional and epistemological approach. I relish working with others to support their professional learning and development.

7.6 Next steps for research

The next step for this work might include an investigation of teacher views on behaviourist approaches in their pedagogy, and whether a change of language around nurture principles, such as *all behaviour is communication* (NurtureUK, 2020), would be helpful to make the link to empathy and care. As discussed in section 7.4, this is even more important given the current national focus on children's distressed behaviour in schools and tensions around the perceived dichotomy between the language and practice of nurture versus behaviour management.

Qualitative and mixed methods studies on teacher experiences of changing practice from behaviourist pedagogical approaches to nurturing pedagogy would enhance the conclusions from this study regarding the usefulness and effectiveness of my Framework for Nurturing Pedagogy. Digging deeper into the concepts shown in Figure 20 and their practical associations with TSPN would strengthen the use of the framework for teachers in whole class settings.

An additional consideration for the next steps in future research should include the investigation of language, which centres on TIP in the classroom (Brooks, 2020; Naish *et al.*, 2023). There is evidence from this study that the terminology of TIP, ACEs, and nurture practice is fast moving, particularly over the last few years as the world faced a collective trauma (Breslin, 2021). Albeit there was a clear overlap in the language of nurture practice, ACEs and TIP from this research, there is scope to define the parameters further and explore expected practice around these concepts to support teacher understanding of their relevance in the classroom.

7.7 Conclusion

This thesis explored teachers' perceptions of nurture practice in the mainstream classroom in one Scottish local authority. The research developed a Framework for Nurturing Pedagogy, a new pedagogical framework significant for the academic field of nurture practice. It builds upon the language and concepts from existing studies (Hayes, 2008) and extends the practical application of TSPN in whole class settings.

The findings from this study offer an exciting opportunity for further exploration of current trends in relational practice that support children and young people's wellbeing. This includes how teachers are in the classroom through their pedagogical practice. Although my role has changed over the years of the study, I now find myself in a job I enjoy due to the opportunities it brings to develop nurture practice across the local authority where the study occurred. Due to my research experience, I look forward to continually supporting teachers in enhancing their understanding of nurture practice in the whole class setting. My work offers exciting possibilities for further research and new directions for nurture practice in schools.

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Appendix A: Example of participant information sheet



Participant Information Sheet for Quality Improvement Officers

Name of department: School of Education

Title of the study: How do teachers perceive nurturing principles?

Introduction

In addition to my role as a Support for Learning Principal Teacher at XX High School, I am also a postgraduate doctoral student within the School of Education at the University of Strathclyde. Under the supervision of Professor John Davis and Professor Kate Wall, I will be researching the above question and would welcome your consent to assist me with my research.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of the research is to establish how teachers perceive nurturing principles and to what extent teachers believe that it is an effective pedagogical approach. The aim of study is to explore teachers' views of nurture and to establish how they perceive the concept. I also hope to find out what it means for teachers in their daily practice and to explore teacher views on the challenges and benefits to providing a nurturing experience for pupils. I am interested in teacher voice as it pertains to nurture.

Do you have to take part?

Participation of local authority schools within your remit and your staff is entirely voluntary and you are free to decline. Should you decide to participate and change your mind later then you are able to opt out up to the date of writing up which is expected to be December 2019.

What will you do in the project?

During the research teachers from schools in the XX cluster will be asked to participate in a focus group with at least five other teachers from their school. The session will cover four questions relating to teacher views on nurture and what it means for them in their classroom. It is hoped that the session will last no more than one hour. Whereas you will have no direct involvement in the research it is important that your permission is gained to approach the Head Teachers in each school prior to speaking to their staff.

In addition to the focus groups research I would like to conduct follow up interviews with individuals and the interview location can be decided by the participants. The interview should last no longer than 45 minutes. All aspects of the research, in relation to gathering teacher views, will be conducted at the school where the teachers work, unless teachers would rather have the opportunity to meet elsewhere for individual interviews.

Why have you been invited to take part?

As Quality Improvement Officer for the local authority with an overview of research, I am looking to gain your permission to approach your staff in order understand teacher views of nurturing principles. Therefore you have been asked to give permission specifically due to your professional role in relation to research and the link with the XX cluster.

What information is being collected in the project, who will have access to it and how will it be stored?

During the project I will be gathering information from focus groups, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis. Focus group data will be anonymised with pseudonyms used for schools, focus group participants and documentary data anonymised.

No personal data will be used and all participant identity will remain anonymous. Quotes from focus group sessions or individual interviews may be used when the research is written up in my thesis however they will be completely anonymised in relation to the local authority, school, groups of teachers and individual teachers.

The information gathered from participants will be used to contribute to a thesis I am due to complete in 2021. I will have access to the information collected during the research project, as will my supervisors. All information will be securely stored for the duration of the project and then securely destroyed when my research is complete.

The University of Strathclyde is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office who implements the Data Protection Act 1998. All personal data on participants will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

What happens next?

If you are willing to allow me to contact schools in your cluster in order to establish if they wish to participate in the research project I would ask that you complete the attached consent form and return it to myself at the earliest convenience.

If you do not wish to be involved in the project, no further action is required and I thank you for taking the time to read this information. Upon completion of the project you are welcome to request a copy of my thesis and the sections within.

Contact:

Should you require any further information about my research please feel free to contact me directly at XX High School on 0141 000 0000. In addition to being able to speak to me, please do not hesitate to contact Professor John Davis or Professor Kate Wall at the University of Strathclyde, Lord Hope Building (Level 5), 0141 444 8100.

Chief Investigator details:

As principal supervisor for this research, Professor John Davis can be directly contacted at:

john.davis@strath.ac.uk

0141 444 8054

This research was granted ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee.

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the research, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Dr Eugenie Samier
Chair of the School of Education Ethics Committee
University of Strathclyde
Lord Hope Building
141 St James Road
Glasgow
G4 0LT

Telephone: 0141 444 8091

Email: eugenie.samier@strath.ac.uk



Consent Form for Head Teachers

Name of department: School of Education

Title of the study: How do teachers perceive nurturing principles?

- I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- I confirm that I have read and understood the Privacy Notice for Participants in Research Projects and understand how my personal information will be used and what will happen to it (i.e. how it will be stored and for how long).
- I understand that the participation of my school is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, up to the date of writing up which is expected to be December 2019, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.
- I understand that I can request the withdrawal from the study of some personal information and that whenever possible researchers will comply with my request. This includes the following personal data:
 - audio recordings of interviews that identify my staff
 - personal information, from my teachers, from focus groups and interview transcripts
- I understand that anonymised data (i.e. data that do not identify my school or staff) cannot be withdrawn once they have been included in the study.
- I understand that any information recorded in the research will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available.
- I consent to members of my staff being participants in the project.
- I consent to my school participating in the project.

Do you agree with the above statements?

YES / NO (Please circle)

Head Teacher's name (please print):

Signature of Head Teacher:

Date:



Participant Information Sheet for teaching staff

Name of department: School of Education

Title of the study: How do teachers perceive nurturing principles?

Introduction

In addition to my role as a Support for Learning Principal Teacher at XX High School, I am also a postgraduate doctoral student within the School of Education at the University of Strathclyde. Under the supervision of Professor John Davis and Professor Kate Wall, I will be researching the above question and would welcome your consent to assist me with my research.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of the research is to establish how teachers perceive nurturing principles and to what extent teachers believe that it is an effective pedagogical approach in order to meet the learning and emotional needs of their pupils. The aim of study is to explore mainstream teachers' views of nurture and to establish how they perceive the concept. I also hope to find out what it means for teachers in their daily practice and to explore teacher views on the challenges and benefits to providing a nurturing experience for pupils. I am interested in teacher's voice as it pertains to nurture.

Do you have to take part?

Participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to decline. Should you decide to participate and change your mind later then you are able to opt out up to the date of writing up which is expected to be December 2019.

What will you do in the project?

During the research you will be asked to participate in a focus group with at least five other teachers from your school. The session will cover four questions relating to teacher views on nurture and what it means for you in your classroom. It is hoped that the session will last no more than an hour.

In addition to the focus groups research I would like to conduct follow up interviews with individuals and the interview location can be decided by you. The interview should last no longer than 45 minutes.

All aspects of the research, in relation to gathering your views, will be conducted at your school, unless you would rather have the opportunity to meet elsewhere for individual interviews.

Why have you been invited to take part?

I am keen to understand the views of teachers therefore you have been asked to participate specifically due to your professional role in your school as a teacher. If you are involved in providing a nurture room experience for pupils then you are also welcome to take part in the study as long as your main role is within a classroom environment and not a full-time nurture group teacher. This is part of the inclusion criteria for research due to the nature of the research questions.

What information is being collected in the project, who will have access to it and how will it be stored?

During the project I will be gathering information from focus groups, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis. Focus group data will be anonymised with pseudonyms used for schools, focus group participants and documentary data will also be fully anonymised.

No personal data will be used and all participant identity will remain anonymous. Quotes from focus group sessions or individual interviews may be used when the research is written up in my thesis however they will be completely anonymised in relation to the local authority, school, groups of teachers and individual teachers.

The information gathered from participants will be used to contribute to a thesis I am due to complete in 2021. I will have access to the information for the duration of the research project, as will my supervisors. All information will be securely stored for the duration of the project and then securely destroyed when my research is complete.

The University of Strathclyde is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office who implements the Data Protection Act 1998. All personal data on participants will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

What happens next?

If you are willing to participate in the research project I would ask that you complete the attached consent form and return it to myself at the earliest convenience. If you do not wish to be involved in the project, no further action is required and I thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Upon completion of the project you are welcome to request a copy of my thesis and the sections within.

Contact:

Should you require any further information about my research please feel free to contact me directly at XX High School on 0141 000 0000. In addition to being able to speak to me, please do not hesitate to contact Professor John Davis or Professor Kate Wall at the University of Strathclyde, Lord Hope Building (Level 5), 0141 444 8100.

Chief Investigator details:

As principal supervisor for this research, Professor John Davis can be directly contacted at:

john.davis@strath.ac.uk

0141 444 8054


This research was granted ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee.

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the research, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Dr Eugenie Samier
Chair of the School of Education Ethics Committee
University of Strathclyde
Lord Hope Building
141 St James Road
Glasgow
G4 0LT


Telephone: 0141 444 8091

Email: eugenie.samier@strath.ac.uk



Teacher perceptions of nurture in School Three

Tuesday 7th May 2019



A brief summary...

- GIRFEC Group Cluster Review 2018 – 2019 Improvement Priority
- Questionnaires adapted from Education Scotland How Nurturing is Our School Self-Evaluation documents for staff, parents and pupils
- School development and training

Nurturing Principles

- Children's learning is understood developmentally
- The classroom offers a safe base
- Nurture is important for the development of wellbeing
- Language is understood as a vital means of communication
- All behaviour is communication
- Transitions are significant in the lives of children

The process

- My role
- Consent forms
- Method of data gathering – visual methods (with facilitator observations)
- Questions and corresponding colours E.g. Q.1 = blue, Q.2 = green etc.
- Please add your views and voice to the process
- ***Please add your details to the back of the A1 paper – Initials, your role in the school and how long you have been teaching***
- Evaluation of the experience

Ethical Considerations



- Your data (personal information, school name and comments) will be fully anonymised
- Information regarding individual pupils should be very sensitively considered
- Professional conduct is of paramount importance
- You have the option to withdraw your consent for participation at any time up to the point of write up



- Q.1 What are your views on nurturing principles, particularly in relation to the provision of an equitable education for children and young people?
- Q.2 What do nurturing principles mean to you in your daily processes and practices?
- Q.3 How effective/ ineffective are nurturing principles as a pedagogical approach in order to meet the needs of your pupils?

- Q.1 What are your views on nurturing principles, particularly in relation to the provision of an equitable education for children and young people?
 - Q.2 What do nurturing principles mean to you in your daily processes and practices? Challenges and benefits?
 - Q.3 How effective/ ineffective are nurturing principles as a pedagogical approach in order to meet the needs of your pupils?
-
- Nurture Principles
 - Children's learning is understood developmentally
 - The classroom offers a safe base
 - Nurture is important for the development of wellbeing
 - Language is understood as a vital means of communication
 - All behaviour is communication
 - Transitions are significant in the lives of children



Introduction/Settling in questions

- How long have you been a teacher?
- How long have you worked at School X
- What is your role in the school? Have you held any other roles or responsibilities?
- What is your understanding of nurture, within the context of your role as a teacher?

RQ1

- What is your perception (understanding) of Nurturing Principles in relation to providing an equitable education for children and young people in your classroom?

RQ2

- What do Nurturing Principles mean to you in your daily processes and practices as a teacher?

RQ3

- In your view, how effective/ineffective are Nurturing Principles as a pedagogical approach in order to meet the needs of children and young people in your classroom?

Appendix F: Example of spreadsheet used for data comparability across visually-mediated focus groups and semi-structured interviews

Relational Practice through Care and Empathy			
A	B	C	D
Relational Practice through Care and Empathy	IP1	EMPATHY? RESPECT??It's almost trying to just see the children as, and pupils, just similar to yourself and treat them the way that you'd expect to be treated and give them the respect and if they're struggling realise the struggle and try and adapt to try and help the work that they're doing be eased through nurturing and helping them with different technique	Secondary Practitioner
Relational Practice through Care and Empathy	FG: School 3	Prepare for change and be ready to listen	Primary Practitioners
Relational Practice through Care and Empathy	FG: School 3	Children might not know why they are reacting how they are	Primary Practitioners
Relational Practice through Care and Empathy	FG :School 3	Need to have the relationship with the child	Primary Practitioners
Relational Practice through Care and Empathy	FG: School 3	Relationships ...know what the child likes...listen to them. Be available and approachable...	Primary Practitioners
Relational Practice through Care and Empathy	IP3	Parents in our setting need to know that they can trust you. They need to know that they can come to you and speak to you and if the parents have that relationship with you then the children are going to have that relationship with you. And you might be the only friendly face that those children might see, or those children might see. You know, they need to know that there is a safe space and somewhere they can come and feel loved and cared for.	Primary Practitioner
Relational Practice through Care and Empathy	IP4	It can take time to build up relationships with the children and to give them what they need. To explain things to them if they are upset or angry, to take that time to explain their feelings and talk with them. Emm, let them know that it's ok to be upset, it's ok to be angry and to help them to...	Primary Practitioner

