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Discourses We Live By

Narratives of Educational and Social Endeavour

Edited by Hazel R. Wright
and Marianne Høyen

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8. Nurture Groups

Perspectives from Teaching Assistants Who Lead Them in Britain

Tristan Middleton

Tristan Middleton, a former teacher, seeks the views of two teaching assistants who run nurture groups, to find out about their work and its implications for policy and practice. He examines a series of cyclical sessions set up with the aim of supporting the teaching assistants to cope with challenging pupil behaviour, for which he was both supervisor and insider researcher.

This chapter explains the role of nurture groups in supporting children who display challenging behaviours within the British school system and describes a small-scale narrative-inquiry research project undertaken with practitioners to better understand the issues that are relevant to their daily work. The researcher has 'insider' status so is able to carry this out alongside sessions that provide the teaching assistants who run the nurture groups with a level of support. Benefitting from the collaborative empathy that this way of working creates, the study enables the staff voices to be clearly heard, making the experience a transformative one that also has potential to influence future policy decisions.

Context of the Research

The study discussed within this chapter was informed by earlier work reported by Bennathan and Boxall in 1996, who described a specific approach — the Nurture Group — to provide for the needs

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of those learners in a school setting who find it difficult to learn in a mainstream classroom. The concept is underpinned by attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991) and a psychosocial approach (Trenoweth & Moone, 2017) to understand the needs of children and young people who can often display challenging and violent behaviours towards both school staff and peers, and a range of negative attitudes to learning situations as a result of Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) challenges.

My research focused on one English primary school, with learners aged four to eleven, where there was a Nurture Group provision for approximately eight children, run by two teaching assistants (TAs).[1] The research used a narrative inquiry approach (Alleyne, 2015) to explore the impact of working with children with SEMH difficulties, who presented associated challenging behaviours, on both the personal and professional lives of the teaching assistants. The TAs constituted the research participants. The research also sought to identify supportive factors enabling Nurture-Group staff to navigate through these challenges.

A narrative inquiry approach was chosen as it is a methodology able to provide a space in which the research participants could examine and communicate their experiences and consider how they have impacted on their lives, a process with which they may not previously have consciously engaged.

Nurture Groups

Since their beginnings in the Inner London Education Authority in the 1970s, the prevalence, nature and location of Nurture Groups has gone through significant development. A Nurture Group, as initially defined by Bennathan and Boxall (1996), should be situated in a mainstream primary school, adhere to a clear structure of staffing and curriculum and run for a specified period of time. The current picture, following a decline towards the end of the twentieth century, is one of a growing number of school settings that have a Nurture-Group provision. The most recent census of 2015 identified 2,114 schools in the

1 TAs are variously termed learning support assistants, teaching aides, para-professional educators and education assistants in other contexts and places.

UK with Nurture Groups (NurtureUK, 2020) and examples of Nurture Groups are now found in Canada, Romania and New Zealand (Nurture Group Network, 2017). The structure and staffing guidelines, which were previously rather strict, are now more flexible, with guidance provided by the Nurture Group Network (Nurture Group Network, 2017) focusing on ethos and approach, rather than staffing and structures. In early iterations, Nurture Groups were led by a qualified teacher supported by a teaching assistant (Bishop, 2008). Later models have teaching assistants who run the Nurture Group without a teacher's direct, day-to-day involvement, possibly due to the funding challenges educational settings face. There are no comprehensive statistics to identify the prevalence of this way of staffing Nurture Groups.

The success of Nurture Groups in supporting the development of learners' social, emotional and mental health, as well as their academic learning, in a cost-effective way has been well documented by research literature (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007; Sloan et al., 2016) and also recognized by statutory school inspection bodies in England (Ofsted) and Wales (Estyn), as well as the Scottish Parliament (2017). There is a body of research which focuses on the interface between challenges, inclusion and resilience for teachers (Doney, 2013; Zee, de Jong & Koomen, 2016); however this is not the case for teaching assistants, who have been recognized as an under-researched group of educators (Sharples, Webster & Blatchford, 2015): likewise the Nurture-Group context is under-researched.

Whilst Scott Loinaz (2014) identifies some common behaviours exhibited by learners in Nurture Groups, there is little statistical or research evidence about the prevalence of emotionally distressing and physically violent behaviours carried out by learners and experienced by Nurture-Group practitioners. This area is rarely discussed either by practitioner groups or within forums, such as the charity NurtureUK. The reticence in discussing this significant area of practice (apart from private conversations between individuals) might be driven by a range of reasons, however, those that stand out to the author are: a sense of confidentiality combined with a desire to protect the individual children from criticism; a desire to protect the close relationship between the child / young person and the practitioner; but also a reluctance to revisit situations that the practitioner finds emotionally challenging. Whilst the

researcher's approach sought to fill this gap in knowledge through a focus on the impact rather than the actual behaviours, it is important for the reader to understand the context and acknowledge that behaviours displayed by learners in Nurture Groups can be extremely violent, both physically and emotionally.

Discussion of Violence

The research began from the position that it is not a violent act itself that has the significant impact, but the context, expectation and meaning-making of those involved. For example, when a rugby player pushes another player over, there is little emotional impact, but if a young person pushes their teacher to the ground, one might expect the teacher to experience significant emotional challenges. This interpretive viewpoint contributed to the choice of a narrative inquiry methodology, as this method enables the individual, contextual meaning-making that takes place during emotionally difficult situations to be explored openly, without the imposition of overt questions that may reflect the researcher's focus rather than that of the participants.

Layers of Discourse

Methodological choices acknowledged the contextual, or social and interactive importance of the learning situation (Dewey, 1958) within the human experience of an educational setting (Webster & Mertova, 2007). The methodology adopted places the participants' subjective experience and their perceptions of the meanings of phenomena at the centre of the research (Mertens, 2015) within 'an emotive or emotional and expressive register' (Alleyne, 2015, p. 40). Furthermore, the ontological framework of the narrative construction of reality (Bruner, 1991) and the epistemological underpinning of the approach of exploring personal narratives to interpret the impact of experienced events, link closely with a narrative inquiry approach. This approach values the openness of interpretation and the ability to organize data around a narrative plot (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 7), as attempted here when I present a collection of complex layers of

contextual meaning-making, based within the language defined by the particular values and beliefs of the individual.

The research cited here needs to be understood within the professional language of English primary-school practice, attachment-informed (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991) Nurture-Group theory, inclusive pedagogy (Nind, 2005) and relational ecologies (Warin & Hibbin, 2016). This context is further layered by the language of interpersonal professional relationships and both interpersonal and intrapersonal family relationships, which the research participants bring to the narrative. A further layer of context and language is introduced by the relationship enacted within the researcher/practitioner space (Clandinin, 2013) as the narrative is constructed. As the researcher interprets the data and communicates this in writing, a further layer of academic language is added. Finally, the reader will bring a personal contextual understanding and interpretation of the language, resulting in a potential discourse of meaning-making at this stage.

Researcher Intentions

As already indicated, within a narrative-inquiry approach, the context of the researcher — his/her identity, values and language — has a significant impact on the research relationship and the research data. Therefore, it is relevant to consider my own context as it is important to understand the researcher's value base in this interpretive relationship. I have a seven-year history of working as a teacher within a Nurture-Group setting, and also as a senior leader in a primary school. Furthermore, during my work as a Nurture-Group practitioner, I experienced significant professional and personal challenges related to my work including the physically and emotionally violent behaviours of children I worked with. Two important influences upon the research discourse can be seen to result from this. Firstly, as a researcher I was perceived by the participants to have a shared language, based upon common values and experiences. Secondly, my experiences enabled a shared understanding between researcher and participants (the two TAs).

These resulted in the creation of an honest and open narrative, where there were often shortcuts of understanding within shared frames of

reference. We perceived each other to hold similar values, supporting my desire to create rapport. I wanted to influence policymaking related to Nurture Groups, by providing a way for practitioner voices to communicate the real impact of Nurture-Group work and for these voices to be heard. My aim was to use their voices to introduce discussions about the need for recognition and emotional support for Nurture-Group practitioners, to influence national policy within the context of layers of influence (Barth, 1994); this would then be an example of a local struggle and social movement having strong influences on policy change (Apple, 2014). As such, I hope that the research outputs, in addition to enabling positive changes at a 'micro' (Barth, 1994) or local level, may also influence 'median' and 'macro' levels (Barth, 1994) at a national scale.

Stages in the Research Process

My original intention was to carry out the actual research interviews with the two TAs (whose names are changed to ensure anonymity) as a series of 'research session cycles' (RSCs). However, a condition of researcher access was the introduction of 'supervision session cycles' (SSCs) to the process. The gatekeeper to the school setting insisted that I provide participants with a 'time and place to reflect on [their] work' (Bluckert, 2006, p. 109), a space to explore and express distress related to their work experiences (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006). Consequently, I scheduled a supervision session between each research session, taking care to separate the approach within the two. Possibly the research benefitted from this practice as the narrative space was less focused on the ideas that I as a researcher brought to the space; rather it was a place for the participants to explore their own issues and direct the foci of the sessions, resulting in a more iterative process to the emergence of the themes.

Findings of the Research

Difference

The overall experience of the participants' narrative was one of being separate from others who do not work within the context of nurture or support children with SEMH challenges. Their discourse described

their work as something distinct and different to that of the other staff in the school:

> [...] they [mainstream staff] don't know what we were dealing with on a day-to-day basis. (Kerry, SSC1)

and described colleagues' reactions to Nurture-Group work as being:

> [...] quite closed to the whole thing. (Kerry, SSC1)

The difference was often framed within the language of nurturing and emotionally supporting children.

> I go in and I sit with him and I reassure him and we talk but it's not the same as going in and knowing exactly where I'm... or what's expected of me or what's needed of me and what he needs from me. (Lilly, SSC1)

The difference was further exemplified in their descriptions of conversations about their work with people they meet in their personal life:

> I usually just say, 'I'm a TA.' I don't tend to say about nurture because maybe people don't really know... (Lilly, SSC1)

Likewise with family members:

> He just doesn't get it, no matter how many times I explain it... (Lilly, RSC2)

This difference, discussed in terms of distance from other staff in the school, reflected a discourse of separateness and of others making decisions that go against their own views:

> I almost feel like I'm always railroaded, I'm always round the outside of it. (Kerry, RSC2)

The outcome of the nature of the work, combined with their sense of isolation, their difference and distance from other staff, is expressed through a discourse of intellectual and emotional challenge and frustration:

> Oh, it just frustrates me, it really frustrates me. (Kerry, RSC2)

> I just felt so het up and so anxious all the time. (Lilly, RSC3)

> I am doing my best and trying to give him my all, I really am, but it's really difficult. (Kerry, RSC1)

Impact of Working Through Nurture Groups

The initial research aims focused on the impact of working with children within a Nurture-Group context. Three themes emerge from the data: the physiological impact of the work, impact on motivation and impact upon personal relationships.

Physiological Impact

The participants used a range of metaphors to describe the impact of their work with the children, some of which relate to physical impact:

> I'd had so many buttons pressed... (Lilly, RSC3)

> I was on my knees... (Lilly, SSC1)

The physical metaphor was also applied to exchanges with colleagues:

> [...] my face hit the floor and it was that thing of like, okay, take it on the chin. You've got to take that on the chin... (Kerry, SSC1)

In the description of the impact of the permanent exclusion of one child with whom they both worked closely the metaphors included:

> When he left it felt like losing an arm. (Kerry, SSC1)

> I started to feel alright about him not being here and now it feels like the band aid has just been ripped off and I've started hurting all over again. (Kerry, SSC1)

The participants also included, within their narratives, actual physiological impact that they experienced. In the preliminary, pre-research discussions, Lilly described a recent critical incident. At the end of term, Lilly had allowed a child to bring his skateboard to school and she took him into the playground to use it. The child encouraged Lilly to try his skateboard and as she was attempting this, she fell off the skateboard. In spite of being injured, she then walked the child back into the school, including walking down a flight of stairs. When they reached

another member of staff inside the building, Lilly sank to the floor. She was subsequently taken to hospital where she was diagnosed with a broken leg. In a more general sense, the physical impact of the work was clearly conveyed as part of the narrative:

> It's draining as well, it's tiring. It's tiring. (Lilly, RSC3)

> I was on my knees; I had nothing else to give at the end of the year and I was physically crying; it was my best year. (Lilly, SSC1)

Impact on Motivation

A very high level of commitment to, and emotional investment in, their nurture work in both a professional and personal sense was expressed in the narratives of both participants:

> I love my Nurture Group; I love my job. (Lilly, RSC3)

> That's what I love about the job, that is what gives me my drive, because I know by doing that sort of stuff, I'm hopefully supporting them and hopefully helping them to feel better about themselves, too, understanding themselves, too. (Kerry, RSC3)

In spite of this discourse of a deep commitment to a nurturing approach, a strong sense of their Nurture-Group work having a negative impact on their motivation was communicated:

> I think within nurture, things are disclosed that are quite… that can be quite tricky and obviously sometimes we are told things… that are quite hard to deal with… (Lilly, RSC3)

> […] a couple of hours just sat and thought about it…that was me trying to… gee myself up to get in, a come on, come on, we can do this… (Kerry, RSC1)

> I felt like I wasn't giving all the children 100% what they needed. […] So, I think because I felt so frustrated, I was almost at a point where I thought, actually, I'm not even going to do it anymore. (Lilly, RSC1)

The practitioners' perceived 'differentness' in relation to other staff was a further factor with a negative impact on their motivation:

> If you are butting heads with the teacher, it's really difficult to want to continue. (Lilly, RSC2)

> So just personally I was sort of saying I don't want to go to work. For the first time in my life, I do not want to go. (Lilly, RSC1)

This negative impact even went so far as to prompt the consideration of a change of job:

> I know both of us have been looking at other jobs too which is really bad. (Kerry, RSC1)

Impact on Personal Relationships

Within the contemporary professional context, where employers are visibly making more effort to address the wellbeing needs of their staff through a discourse of 'work-life balance', it may be expected that the practitioners compartmentalized their thoughts about work and did not allow thoughts about work into their 'non-work' time. However, the narrative pointed to thoughts about the nurture work dominating this personal time:

> I mean, I've even dreamt of it before ... I was worried about him the whole time thinking, oh my God, what's happening to him at home and what's he doing, is he okay ... and yes, even dreamt about being in this room. (Kerry, RSC1)

It also revealed how tiredness prevented the practitioners from using their personal time, other than to recover from the nurture work:

> [...] it does impact on your life because you're just going, 'Oh I'm so tired.' I said before, 'I've got nothing else to give.' I just want to sit here, drink tea and then just fall asleep on the sofa, which most of my Fridays are as exciting as that. (Lilly, RSC2)

The narrative also pointed to an impact on personal relationships, in relation to comments made by the participants' friends:

> [...] one of my friends said to me 'God, is that all you do?' I said, 'What do you mean?' She said, 'All you've done is talk about work.' 'What?' She said 'That's all you do, isn't it?' (Kerry, SSC2)

The participants' home lives were also significantly highlighted within the narrative as being impacted:

> I mean, I went home and I went, grrrrr, you know, screaming my head off. (Kerry, SSC1)

This was further described through the discourse around family members:

> […] it did feel like it became… he became almost an extension of my own children, he was then…. So, they're always there, always. (Kerry, RSC2)

> […] we take the dog for a walk every evening… most of that half an hour is me talking at my husband about the frustrations of my day to the point that eventually he says, 'Just stop. Just stop talking. You are doing it again'… there's so much going on in my own mind that I need to get out, that I can't focus on what he's saying to me. (Lilly, RSC2)

The TAs clearly recognize that nurture work impacts significantly on personal and family relationships. Lilly clearly described how her relationship with her son improved when a child with significant challenging behaviour left their setting:

> We sort of talk to each other in the mornings and we have a bit of a giggle on the way to school now rather than me shouting at him and bellowing and being stressed. (Lilly, RSC2)

Emergent Findings on Successful Nurture-Group Practice

Whilst I, as researcher, had questions in mind, these were used as a guide rather than a destination (Kim, 2016) enabling the research to be collaborative. Since they were co-constructed, the findings were sometimes not as I anticipated (May, 1997). The three key factors that emerged through the narrative were: shared belief, friendship and leadership.

Shared Belief

As identified earlier, the participants evidenced strong beliefs in a nurture approach. The narratives demonstrated that the sharing of these deep beliefs played a key role in supporting staff when navigating the challenges that the work presented:

> It's that connection, it's knowing somebody and obviously myself and Kerry have both had the same training and we've both been in nurture for quite a while now. (Lilly, RSC3)

The use of the personal pronoun 'we' in the following extract is further evidence of the importance of a shared belief:

> That opportunity and seeing their faces, it's like a toddler-like delight isn't it? We looked at each other and said yes, this is why we do nurture. (Lilly, SSC3)

Conversely, times when their work together was not positive also provided evidence of the significance of the shared beliefs:

> It feels like we are all disjointed. It doesn't feel like we are flowing. (Kerry, RSC3)

Friendship

The importance of friendship, a relationship extending beyond professional teamwork, was communicated as an important factor for the participants in promoting successful work:

> [...] we are really lucky and I think you've got to have that, you've got to have a good working relationship and a good friendship to obviously be able to co-lead a Nurture Group I think. (Lilly, RSC3)

Another important aspect of working together was physical proximity. The TAs went on walks together during which

> [they did] not even talk about nurture necessarily but just to sort of wander. (Lilly, RSC3)

Leadership

The impact of the school leadership was a significant presence in the narratives. Four key issues were communicated: being listened to; feeling recognized, included and supported; not letting problems escalate; and having a shared belief and involvement in leaders' decisions.

Being Listened To

Occurrences during which the participants perceived that members of the school leadership team had not listened to them were related within the discourse of significant negative impact:

> […] that thing where you just know she's not really listening... it was almost like we weren't being listened to in a way... that really just makes you feel undervalued. (Lilly, RSC3)

> I've tried to discuss about the whole situation and how it was dealt with and how I felt about it, but I was shut down. (Kerry, RSC2)

Feeling Recognized, Included and Supported

Beyond being listened to, the participants identified the importance of their leaders acknowledging their work and the challenges they encountered:

> So, for me, it's the relief of being recognized. (Lilly, RSC3)

Where leaders' support is not clearly communicated or not perceived, this has a negative impact on the practitioners:

> […] they don't trust me as much or they've lost confidence in me. (Kerry, RSC2)

> I'm doing the right thing by following procedures, policies, etc., but I'm not being backed up with it. (Kerry, RSC2)

In contrast, positive recognition is identified as having a positive impact:

> I think the realization that actually I must be doing something right is a good feeling. (Lilly, RSC2)

Not Letting Problems Escalate

Further developing the theme of being listened to, recognized and supported, the need for this to happen in a timely way, as perceived by the practitioners, was highlighted:

> [...] that thing of I feel like I'm doing everything I can but then not being able to talk to the correct person at that time. (Kerry, RSC2)

> [...] it only seems to get to a proper meeting point when you go, 'Do you know what, I've had enough of this.' And I find that really strange... (Kerry, RSC2)

These comments point to the perception that unless practitioners have the opportunity to talk about challenges with their leaders, at the time that they are having an impact on them, the difficulties increase.

Shared Beliefs and Being Involved in Decision-Making

Within the narratives, a perceived gap between the participants and their managers when it came to beliefs and to involvement in the decision-making was identified as a key barrier to successful Nurture-Group practice:

> I feel that actually there's so much more we could do and then if you want to do those things and then you're almost being cut off then you think eventually it will just be, 'well, you know what, you do it your way.' (Kerry, RSC2)

> [...] how can we possibly make it a success if we're not all singing from the same hymn sheet? (Lilly, SSC2)

Summary of Findings

In summary, the research narratives highlighted the sense of difference the practitioners experienced between their role and practice and that of others in their professional and personal communities. The research identified that critical incidents related to the challenging behaviours of children impacted on the practitioners' physiological state, their motivation towards their Nurture-Group work and their personal relationships. The practitioners' ability to navigate these challenges varied according to their professional and personal relationships and was mediated by their beliefs and values. Their need to be listened to in a timely way by their leaders and to have a shared discourse with peers was an important theme.

Reflections upon the Discourse

Shared belief and friendship were present throughout the discourse and can be viewed as protective factors in supporting the practitioners' management of the challenges of their work. These themes may also be understood within the context of 'communitas' (Turner, 1997), that is, a form of comradeship that is based not only the homogeneity of setting and experience but also on shared beliefs. The creation of the liminal space of shared dialogue, between the researcher and the practitioners, highlighted this comradeship to the practitioners. Through having a sympathetic listener and a space in which to explore their own narratives, the practitioners' reflections led to them becoming more aware of these factors. The focus of the discourse on the impact of the senior leaders in the school was something that I had neither expected nor specifically sought, however the co-construction of the research dialogue allowed this unexpected finding to emerge. The factors identified by the practitioners as critical to the leadership they experienced could be viewed as ones which, if present, would lead to the development of a professional community in the setting based upon a more democratic and participatory model of shared values. This could be conceived as a desire on the part of the practitioners to develop a broader 'communitas' within their setting, and this has implications for both school leaders and Nurture-Group practitioners.

In order to support Nurture-Group practitioners to manage the challenges to their professional and personal lives that the nurture work presents, perhaps stakeholders should consider the potential value of developing shared value-systems and a shared paradigm of leadership, such as the approach of Distributed Leadership (Leemans, 2017) or 'soulful organisations' (Laloux, 2015).

Another enabling factor that practitioners identified as supportive was part of the research itself: the 'supervision' sessions. These were seen to be an important element of the discourse (Chappell, 1999), validating and supporting the practitioners (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006).

The practitioners' responses when asked to provide feedback on the research process included:

> I have become a more confident and effective practitioner, developed personally and become more self-aware. The process has made me

> continuously self-evaluate. I have a deeper understanding of my beliefs and boundaries. So much so, I felt encouraged to continue my exploration of self-awareness and personal development. (Kerry, feedback)

> The supervision has been vital this year as we have had our ups and downs. I feel it has given me the reflection time I needed to make valuable decisions and to recognize when it is okay to say no. (Lilly, feedback)

These reflections highlight the way in which the discourse of the research facilitated practitioners to think reflectively. Furthermore, the importance of the research dialogue taking place in the limbic space of shared values and thinking was identified by the practitioners' reflections:

> I found talking to another professional [the researcher] who had been a nurture practitioner themselves, easier to discuss situations that had happened with children within the Nurture Group and staff. It put me at ease, and I felt able to give my opinions, thoughts and feelings without being judged. (Kerry, feedback)

> It also gave me time to just talk to somebody who wasn't connected to school but understands the importance of nurture coupled with the importance of taking care of yourself to be the best person to do the job I love (whilst maintaining my sanity). (Lilly, feedback)

The impact of this safe research space and the discourse that took place within it could be considered as a transformative process for both the participants and the researcher. The research space can be compared with the safe human learning spaces described by Winnicott (1965).

> I have been able to answer many questions in just one session as when I am talking aloud or he [the researcher] is giving me feedback, I am able to piece things together. Over time I have come to realize that my voice is important and for the sake of the children in nurture and its success I have to be prepared to challenge things that a year ago I would of [sic] just nodded and smiled at. (Lilly, feedback)

This feedback emphasizes the empowering nature of the discourses, which became apparent during the research. It could be considered that the research process led to a change of habitus (Bourdieu, P., 1984). Before the research process, the practitioners had a well-established view of themselves and their capabilities. These were heavily influenced by the contextual policy-led professional attitudes towards TAs and their own

views of their qualifications and roles within their own setting. Through being deeply heard (Rogers, 1967) in the context of the collaborative, transformative narrative inquiry (Webster & Mertova, 2007), the participants have experienced a level of 'biographical reconnaissance' through being awarded the time and space to walk towards themselves (West & Formenti, 2017).

> I think everybody is feeling more positive around me because I'm feeling more positive in myself. (Lilly, RSC2)

> And when you finally get that recognition that actually what you are saying is right... it is a relief. It's a relief everywhere. It's a relief at work, it's a relief at home. (Lilly, RSC3)

The recognition and validation identified by the participants provided a significant contrast to the disjoint of values and communication communicated in the data. It may be considered that the research process was part of the 'struggle, to reveal and undermine what is most invisible and insidious in prevailing practices' (Ball, 1995, p. 267) and that the discourse experienced within the research could contribute to developing the sense of agency and social power within the 'battle for truth' (Foucault, 1983).

In conclusion, the strength of the data which points towards the value of the layers of research discourse as a transformative and empowering experience could inform a way of conceiving the implementation of support for Nurture group practitioners. It suggests that we should consider an approach to leadership and management with a foundation of 'discourse as practice' (Foucault, 1972, p. 46). An approach which aims to develop a safe space for a discourse aiming to match shared values and to share experiences, within the context of being heard and validated, thereby supporting reflective practice.

The researcher acknowledges that the basis of this chapter is only one small-scale 'piece of research' situated within the 'complicated reality of academics and school people trying to work together' (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007, p. 374), and as such there will be many limitations. Furthermore, the research did not address a range of other possible discourses, for example, the narrative of gender (Morissey et al., 2017), given the fact that the researcher identified as male and the two participants as female, or, within the context of the school setting,

the narrative of the organization (Czarniawska, 2007). These, and other contexts can serve as ways to take the themes and findings of this research forward to further explore the truth and meanings of the subjectivities (West, 1996) explored here, through the creation of new authentically engaged research relationships (West, 1996), but for the present the story stops here.

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