



# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NURTURE IN EDUCATION

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**Psychometric properties of the French version of the Boxall Profile**

# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NURTURE IN EDUCATION

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## Aims of the Journal

The International Journal of Nurture in Education aims to attract papers that explore themes related to the effectiveness of nurture groups, nurture in education, whole-school approaches to nurture and related subjects. The intention is to present the most up-to-date research of how nurture principles and practice improve the socio-emotional functioning and academic achievement of children and young people.

The journal aims to cater for a wide audience and the intended readership includes:

- Nurture practitioners, special needs practitioners and mainstream teachers;
- Academic researchers concerned with education, psychology and child development;
- Educational and clinical psychologists, counsellors and psychotherapists;
- School leaders, consultants, social workers and local authority officers working to support the social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people

## Review process

Articles submitted to *The International Journal of Nurture in Education* will first be seen by the editor who will decide whether the article will be considered for review or not. Articles then go through a rigorous double-blind review process where both the author and the reviewer remain anonymous throughout the evaluation.

More information on the review process can be found at: [www.nurtureuk.org/research-evidence/international-journal-nurture-education/reviewer-guidelines](http://www.nurtureuk.org/research-evidence/international-journal-nurture-education/reviewer-guidelines)

## Author guidelines

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Université de Sherbrooke

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**Sylvia Lucas** trained as a primary school teacher in the 1950s, opened the first non-pilot nurture group at Kingsmead Primary School in Hackney, later becoming headteacher there and in three other schools in East London before joining staff of Institute of Education, University of London. In retirement, she continues to be involved in nurture and related work with IOE and voluntary organisations in UK and overseas.

**Andrea Janet Middleton** previously worked in a large junior school setting where she piloted and led several nurture groups and led a team of professionals in creating a whole-school pastoral support offering. She completed her MA Education at Edge Hill University and currently works as an ELSA and SLCN Assistant in a primary school in Hampshire, where she is leading a Nurture-in-Nature group.

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# WELCOME

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## Dr Marianne Coleman, Editor of the International Journal of Nurture in Education and Trustee of nurtureuk

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Welcome to the sixth edition of the International Journal of Nurture in Education. It is a delight to introduce this edition of the Journal in the year when we are celebrating 50 years of nurture groups and the nurturing approach in education. The papers in this Issue indicate how nurture concepts and the Boxall Profile have developed from beginnings in Hackney 50 years ago, to influencing education policy within the UK, informing other educational initiatives and impacting internationally. The papers in this issue represent nurture at work in three of the countries of the UK: England; Scotland and Wales and also include a paper on the Boxall Profile in Quebec.

It is particularly appropriate that this Issue begins with reflections by Sylvia Lucas, one of the pioneers of nurture in British schools, on how much practitioners contributed to the origins of the Boxall Profile. Her account of the educational context from which nurture groups and the Boxall Profile emerged show just how revolutionary these concepts were at the time, and how far we have come in 50 years. It also celebrates the continuing role and importance of the nurture practitioner.

The second paper reports further on the development of nurture in Glasgow, (see also Issues 4 and 5 of IJNE) which is working toward being 'the nurturing city'. In the current issue, Maura Kearney and her colleagues report on the responses of a sample of parents/guardians and children drawn from a whole school nurturing environment. The views of children in nurture groups and those of their parents have been sought in the past, but the aim of this paper was to examine the impact of the whole school nurturing environment, asking questions in focus groups based on the six principles of nurture. Results were positive, indicating that both sets of stakeholders had a real sense of belonging to and engaging with the school.

Nurture principles can be applied in many contexts, and in the third paper Susan Davis and her colleagues report on a fascinating initiative in Wales where schools are working with the local police force on a mini-policing scheme, informed by nurture principles. The scheme proved to foster the resilience, aspirations and self-esteem of the young people who took part.

The fourth paper also takes a fresh look at the application of nurture in schools, in this case aligning nurture with nature, where Andrea Middleton reports on the application of the nurturing approach in a natural context, linking nurture practice with the appreciation of nature, both of which have a positive impact on mental and emotional health.

Finally, our nurture colleagues in Quebec, led in this case by Jean-Yves Bégin, have engaged with the tricky issue of ensuring that the French language version of the Boxall Profile is effective in properly identifying students facing difficulties. It is vital that, where the instrument is used in a different culture and language, that such validation takes place.

I am sad to say that this is the last issue of IJNE where I will be Editor as I have come to the end of my term of office as a Trustee. I have learnt much from the papers we published over the last six years and am proud to have had a small role in developing the body of knowledge related to nurture. I am delighted to hand the Journal over to the capable hands of my successor Dr Angeliki Kallitsoglou, Trustee of nurtureuk and co-editor of future issues of the International Journal of Nurture in education along with co-editor Tristan Middleton. I hope that they enjoy editing this Journal as much as I have.

# ON THE ORIGIN OF THE BOXALL PROFILE: HOW PRACTITIONERS CONTRIBUTED TO ITS DEVELOPMENT

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**Keywords:** Boxall Profile; intuition; observation; development; earliest learning

## ABSTRACT

This paper contributes to the history of nurture groups with a specific focus on the development of the Boxall Profile. It draws on the first-hand experience of the teachers involved in the Profile's origin with memories of the children who were responsible for the opening of the first non-pilot nurture group at Kingsmead Infant School, Hackney, during 1972-73. These memories are supported by the notes and the embryonic records from 1973-74 from which the Profile was derived, containing the nurture practitioners' intuitive responses, and how these were conceptualised, articulated and recorded.

This 50th Anniversary Year of Nurture sees the publication of a new edition of the Boxall Profile Handbook (Revised) (Bennathan and Boxall 2019). A paragraph in Chapter 1, The Origins of the Boxall Profile, gives a brief overview of the Profile's development from a historical perspective. Chapter 4, How the Profile evolved, is Boxall's account of the Profile's process from conception to formal acceptance by the ILEA of its precursor, the Diagnostic Developmental Profile. This paper tells the human story behind these more formal accounts, and the way in which practitioners' careers were nurtured in the process. The learning involved in compiling the Profile had a major impact on their personal and professional development at a time before organised professional development was usual.

## THE BOXALL PROFILE

The Boxall Profile is the instrument used in nurture groups, and increasingly in whole classes and across schools, to structure observation of children and to provide objective data to support the teacher's intuitive judgment that a child would be a good candidate for a nurture group or would benefit from other provision. The pattern of scores indicates the child's underlying need for attachment and early learning experiences to organise their experience and learning (Lucas 2010).

Versions of the Profile have been used by nurture practitioners for the past 50 years. In its present form, it is valued by teachers and is used to identify children with social, emotional and mental health needs in a range of educational settings. (Ruby 2019). Importantly, it is a unique tool, originating in teachers' observations of children rather than in psychological theory, and developed at a time when the educational climate was very different from today.

## UNDERSTANDING THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

To read the Profile in the light of current educational practice is to miss the radical nature of what was asked of all those involved in its origin. As teachers in 1969 and the early 1970s when the first nurture groups were opened, we relied on intuition and our own child studies, observations and life experience. We were informed by John Bowlby's work for the World Health Organisation on Maternal Care and Mental Health (Bowlby, 1951) which was published in summary as *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (Bowlby 1953). Bowlby's focus was on the effects of maternal deprivation among the many 'looked after' children in the post-war period, when the 'relative importance of nature and nurture remains still to be determined' (Bowlby 1953 p14), an ongoing debate in education, at the time. He identifies: 'lack of any opportunity for forming an attachment to a mother-figure during the first three years' (Bowlby 1953 p51) as one of three adverse experiences on a child's development, the others being deprivation and changes of mother-figure over a significant period.

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Further research led to the publication of *Attachment and Loss, Volume 1*, by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (Bowlby, 1969). Bowlby recounts the long research process in 'The Origins of Attachment Theory' in *A Secure Base* (Bowlby 1988) and his theory was taken up more explicitly in nurture groups as the nurture movement was formalised in the late 1990s (Bennathan and Boxall (1996). Meanwhile, as nurture practitioners, our primary task was to 'be and do' for the children as we would our own young children and our strategies, such as the use of 'transitional objects' (Winnicott 1971), were simple and spontaneous rather than considered psychology.

New 'informal' teaching methods were also coming into use, heavily endorsed by Plowden (1967) but there was very little consistency. This change of approach collided with the arrival on the Kingsmead Estate of many 'problem families' (Harrison 1983) mostly immigrants, as they were rehoused by the GLC (Greater London Council) from other parts of London. The proposed teaching methods, however desirable in theory, were less appropriate in this rapidly changing community.

Few children were referred to Child Guidance Clinics or for psychological assessment by schools and then only those seen to be unusually 'retarded', 'dull' or 'backward' (Hadow, 1956). More usually, those struggling to learn for whatever reason were referred to a school medical officer or nurse as 'backwardness' was often seen to be caused by poor attendance, health or home conditions such as poverty or ignorance. Education welfare officers with social work training were employed by the LEA, to make weekly checks on attendance with follow up home visits if required. The psychologist's role in relation to schools was to administer standardised tests of intelligence and verbal reasoning and any recommendations they might make would be to the headteacher and normally concern referral to a special school or management of a perceived disability, such as hearing or vision impairment.

Record keeping at most schools at the time was minimal. The records passed on to the next teacher would normally consist simply of a list of books read and a sample of the child's most recent work. Otherwise, teachers were advised to discuss the school history of 'retarded' children on transfer from infant to junior school and the: 'practice of passing on a brief report on each pupil is greatly to be recommended' (HMSO op cit).

The Kingsmead nurture group was set up within this educational and social context at a point when this small one-form entry infant school, along with several others in Hackney, was reaching breaking point, with many children at risk of exclusion and teachers under severe

stress (Lucas, 2019). I had unknowingly anticipated Marjorie Boxall's insights by adapting my teaching style to manage the most challenging children. As news of the pilot nurture groups in Hackney spread, the headteacher and I met with Marjorie Boxall to discuss how we might also start a group, to be made up almost entirely from children from my middle infant (Y1) class and with support from the then nursery assistant. With the youngest of my five small children in the nursery we understood each other well, how we might work together and the resources we needed.

As more nurture groups opened across Hackney, we began to meet regularly with other nurture practitioners at the Child Guidance Clinic for support and to share good practice. In the meantime, Marjorie Boxall continued to meet nurture teachers and helpers in their schools, frequently, with the discussions being recorded in fine detail, reflected on and often followed up later with a phone call for clarification. This set a pattern for detailed record keeping of every aspect of the nurture group day and particularly the individual child's daily progress and behaviour.

The detailed records kept in these early nurture groups were exceptional, and the Boxall Profile would not have come into existence without them. We recorded meticulously, for example, what provoked a fight or tantrum, the actual actions and language used, however lurid, the duration and frequency of incidents, together with our own responses, words and actions. Weekly record sheets were devised and reproduced without the aid of photocopiers and computers and these formed the basis for our regular discussions at the child guidance clinic.

Marjorie Boxall valued our direct and forthright comments. I recall vividly many of these distressed children and the hours of observation, recording and discussion to define their needs and how best to meet them. This distinctively developmental approach, for the adults as well as the children, underlined the basic premise of nurture groups: that they are about normal human growth and development, that is, learning, not pathology. As worried teachers, we were persuaded by Boxall that neither we nor the children were to blame; we were not failures and there was a way to understand and manage the behaviour confronting us daily, from parents on occasions, as well as the children. Threats, and on one occasion, actual physical violence, were not unusual.

The focus was always on the actual behaviour rather than our response to it. We gradually learnt Boxall's fundamental lesson and the conviction that underpins nurture work: that when we relate to children at the appropriate developmental level, learning takes place. Beyond this, what at times became deeply personal work although never straying into therapy,

we discovered the value of important professional practices such as detailed planning, record keeping and assessment, now accepted practice for all teachers. The line between therapy and education, albeit at an early level, was clearly drawn, a vital consideration now that nurture is used more widely to support children's mental health and wellbeing. The key to understanding this is the nurture curriculum based on Boxall's Earliest Learning: a summary chart. (Lucas 2010, pp7-11), mainly compiled from notes of my own baby's development, made during my maternity leave in 1978. This sets out the context for early nurture modelled on the learning of babies and young children at home that promotes healthy development. The content covers the two crucial phases of Early Learning: 1. attachment and proximity (birth to approximately 11 months, and 2. letting go and bringing back: developing autonomy (approximately 16 to 36 months).

### **Authentic nurture practice starts with the child**

Fifty years ago, during this period of far reaching social upheaval and change, many young children in Inner London schools who were at risk of exclusion, were reintegrated successfully into their ordinary classes with nurture group support. As far as it has been possible to ascertain, they continued their school careers without further incident.

Below, I have identified four of these children, children A-D, whose records clearly demonstrated a high level of what we recognise now as developmental needs and whose behavioural characteristics were eventually formulated into items on the Diagnostic Profile. These children predate the Profile as we know it. A fifth child, child E, identified by the Kingsmead nurture group, met the criteria for the first trial of Stage 1, as described in the Handbook Part 4 (Boxall op cit).

More items were contributed by teachers from other Hackney schools with each having its origin in the behaviour of an individual child. Without reference to the original records it is very easy to underestimate the slow and painstaking way in which this data was collected, item by item, over more than a year, each word being discussed at length then compiled in usable forms, all in addition to a full and demanding day's teaching.

Surviving copies of the earliest record keeping prior to the first draft Profile, are of a simple proforma, completed weekly by the nurture teacher, which recorded the child's response to the adults, level of play, conversation and behavioural features, together with a cognitive profile, their drawing of a man, a free drawing with a caption and with teachers' notes on the child's background. These items provided an overview of the child, an indication of their developmental and learning level and needs and a prompt for discussion

with the psychologist and class teacher. Crucially, for the development of the Boxall Profile, it is possible to recognise in the completion of these early record sheets, the observations which contributed to the earliest version of the Profile and would in time become the developmental strands and diagnostic profile.

While class teachers retained responsibility for the children's academic progress they were frequently frustrated by the disruption to the class as they attempted to follow the practices of the 'child centred education' recommended by Plowden. 'Nurture', that is providing and managing the children at the developmental level they presented at, appeared contrary to 'good practice'. Some experienced teachers felt seriously undermined and questioned the rewarding, as they understood it, of 'bad behaviour' and questioned reports of improvements in behaviour and learning in the nurture group setting. Many, already under pressure from the social and cultural changes on their personal lives, were unable to accept the notion of 'nurture' and withdrew, moving away from the stresses of the inner city to the suburbs or leaving the profession entirely.

Staff meetings as a forum for discussion were rare and INSET, as we now know it, was unknown. Where there was a willingness to learn, it was sometimes possible to have a professional dialogue about possible causes and strategies for survival, if nothing more. With sensitive management and understanding from both sides, there could be a sharing of good practice, leading eventually to the development of a nurturing school with nurture principles and practice at the heart (Lucas 1999).

### **Child A. Diagnostic Profile item 27: 'is into everything': shows fleeting interest but doesn't attend to anything for long**

Child A is the child referred to by Boxall in Part 4 of the Handbook as: 'is into everything'. These words used by the nurture assistant in the course of one of our meetings at the child guidance clinic clearly demonstrate the intuitive response to the actual developmental level ie that his behaviour was appropriate for a toddler of 1-2 years.

A had been described as very unco-operative throughout his Reception year.

As Boxall writes: *'He refused to co-operate or conform and would stubbornly refuse or throw a tantrum if his teacher insisted on such things as clearing up, going to the hall etc. He responded better to cajoling and would eventually do what was required. As he began to understand what was expected of him, he gradually improved, but he frequently took toys, sweets and money and his behaviour was generally very disturbed. The only quiet time was when he sat by his teacher's*

feet, playing with her laces.’ (Boxall. unpublished. See note on Nurture archive below).

His disruptive behaviour continued in his middle infant (Y1) class of 30. It was during his second year, 1972-73, that the school recognised the need for a nurture group with A being one of the children who demonstrated the necessity for it. As his class teacher at the time I often remarked that I could manage him if I related to him as a toddler; he needed a great deal of supervision in order not to disrupt and he became very dependent, often, I clearly recall, calling me “mum”. Intuitively, I managed his behaviour as if he were very much younger, for example, by restricting his access to materials and resources, by not expecting him to make a choice, giving him very simple and direct instructions rather than expecting him to understand general instructions to the class.

Boxall continues: *‘In the more secure environment of the group he was said to be a changed child. He seemed happy and biddable and could concentrate. All the features built into the nurture group’s day helped and reinforced the close relationship between himself and his teacher. The demands made on him were more relevant, the food and slower pace all helped, and he responded well. Out of the group however, he erupted.’* (Ibid).

In the ordinary classroom it was the disruptive behaviour that dominated, the grabbing of toys, material and even attention that led to arguments and fights, but within the nurture group environment it was possible to observe more closely and manage and relate to the individual child rather than the group or class.

This simple observation ‘is into everything’ and the discussion that flowed from it, led to a reappraisal of every aspect of our understanding of nurture. The insight gained from recognising the developmental need expressed in one aspect of child A’s behaviour was the key and we could now proceed, knowing now how to meet the child’s needs: the social and emotional behaviour of a toddler while encouraging the cognitive development of a 6+ child. We began to articulate the positive, very early developmental characteristics such as making eye contact, but at this time we were not aware that our observations were any more than an aid to understanding and helping the individual child, and possibly useful for a more constructive conversation with class teachers and parents.

In the short term this conversation allowed us to gain the trust of child A’s young West Indian single mother who had three other young children. It provided an opportunity to discuss cultural expectations and child rearing, especially of boys in the absence of a male role model. The conversation was less successful with the class teacher who was more concerned with the

child being up to standard for transfer to Junior School. The stability provided by the nurture group had helped A begin to make sense of his world, but circumstances meant that he was still in need of support when he had to leave for Junior school, pointing to the need for longer term provision than was possible at the time.

### **Child B and child C. Diagnostic Profile item 29: Clings tenaciously to inconsequential objects and resists having them taken away**

Child B was referred to the nurture group from the Reception class where she was at risk of being overlooked. A slightly-built, only child from one of the remaining and increasingly isolated, East End families on the Estate who did not mix or have a significant presence in the increasingly multi-cultural community, of mainly West Indian or African origin

She was a very quiet and solitary child who would initiate contact with another child or teacher several times a day, by offering a small item of something that she found, such as a small stone, feather or twig, and, having offered the item, asked for it to be returned, continuing to cling to it. What these items represented to the child we could only surmise. Perhaps they were some form of ‘transitional’ object and of value only to her. Words to describe this characteristic were discussed at length and eventually it was agreed that ‘inconsequential’ best expressed the rather bizarre nature of what appeared a simple action, but disconcerting and frustrating for a teacher in that there was no apparent meaning, that is, no curiosity about what it was, its qualities or features, and no possibility of developing the discussion any further. Eventually, the item was included in the Scale 11. Adult dependency (baby stage) section, implying, correctly we believed, that it was the action of a pre-toddler who, once gaining enough hand control, will pick up items at random, simply as a physical exploratory action. Although generally biddable, she was very reliant on the teacher and only minimally ‘socially aware’.

In all other respects, B tried to conform to the group requirements but appeared to have a limited vocabulary and struggled to communicate orally. I recall completing her cognitive profile and the length of time needed to wait for her brief, mainly single word responses with several whispered ‘don’t knows’. In the nurture group she engaged in solitary play alongside one of the other girls who was a little older than herself. Closer observation however revealed that she was a little more assertive than was apparent at first sight and she would silently resist taking on roles, for instance in house play, to please more assertive children and simply ignored them. Through B we were alerted to the need to observe the non-communicating children, particularly girls, who had developmental needs which, if unmet, would lead to difficulties later.

The family was eventually rehoused and B left the school towards the end of her second year. The experience though of articulating and including her 'inconsequential items' in the emerging draft Profile contributed importantly, to a diagnosis and support for child C.

C was the fourth of six children, a survivor of twins, from a French speaking Mauritian family. He was admitted to the nurture group in September 1974 at the request of the headteacher after a difficult encounter with his mother, although he was not considered at that time to be a typical nurture child. He was described as unforthcoming and immature and spent much of his time alone in repetitive, solitary play and drawing small unrelated items. He was seen for formal IQ testing by Marjorie Boxall as the school's educational psychologist and her report is available in the nurtureuk archives along with samples of his work and a letter from his mother. C became the subject of a film on nurture groups for the Open University Personality and Learning Course (OU, 1975) also available in the archives.

Of significance for the purpose of this paper is the disclosure by his mother of his difficult behaviour at home and particularly of the collection of 'inconsequential items', dead flies and other insects, that he kept under his bed and which she was urged to allow and respect. A photograph of these in the course of the filming, immediately threw light on his preoccupation in school with his repetitive drawings of several small unrelated objects on a page and his inability to move on. He remained in the nurture group for the rest of the school year, gradually making friends and progressing with his learning. Slowly, as he gained in confidence, his drawings changed to become more recognisable as coherent 'pictures'.

With the increasingly positive relationship that developed with the family, C continued to make progress, transferring successfully to Junior school along with his peer group. On leaving the school, his mother commented that his admission to the nurture group had ended 'five awful years'.

**Child D. Diagnostic Profile item 3: Variable in mood; sometimes seeks and responds to affectionate contact with the adult, at other times rejects and avoids**

D was a member of the same middle infant class as A and similarly, identified as one of the children who demonstrated the need for a nurture group. He was a big, robust child of Nigerian origin who had been in foster care outside London, since babyhood. He was the oldest of three boys with his brother, a year younger in the Reception class and the youngest still with foster parents. His parents were university students who,

as we got to know them, explained that the fostering arrangement was a common practice in their culture. In his classroom he was described as restless, extremely moody and liable to get into fights. He was clearly intelligent, was beginning to read, write and do number work but would destroy his work if praised. He was liable to have a violent outburst, fighting any child in his way or demolishing a display, sweeping books and artefacts off shelves and tables. I quickly learnt that the best response was to reach out a hand silently and take him to a quiet space to recover.

Several items on the current diagnostic profile would be scored 2 or 3 for him but item 3, scored at 4, *like this to a marked extent*, is the item that most accurately describes him, although this barely describes the extent and volatility of his mood swings. The succinct wording of this item was arrived at after several attempts to describe his dependence on, yet ambivalence for, adult control and support. The surviving page in the archives of the draft profile relating especially to D and annotated in Boxall's handwriting, is a moving testament to her attention to detail and concern for individual children.

In the nurture group, D responded well to the routine and the limited choice of activities. As with A, a parent/child relationship began to develop intuitively in the classroom which continued into the nurture group. Here he was described and recorded as being dependent on the teacher for comfort and control. He engaged in very early level baby play, crawling on the floor and 'being' a baby to the extent of wanting to wear a nappy which he removed from the baby doll, over his trousers. At other times he chose to 'work' and made good progress with reading. Gradually, his preoccupation with baby play lessened and he began to show caring behaviour towards other children although visits to 'gran', his foster mother, or other family events such as his mother's admission to hospital after an assault, led to relapses into moodiness and sometimes fighting.

The family was rehoused outside Hackney at the end of the school year which coincided with D's transfer to Junior school. Informal enquiries were made about his subsequent progress and the response was positive with no report of behavioural difficulties.

**Child E and the first draft Boxall Profile: September 1973-4**

A diagnostic developmental profile from the ILEA Schools Psychological Service was introduced as a trial at the beginning of the school year 1973-4. It consisted of three levels: 1. Adult dependency; 2. Separation and developing autonomy; 3. Group-sufficient autonomy with categories of organised and disorganised behaviour which, when scored, gave a level on the disruptive index.

It was completed for a carefully selected child, E, who had been referred to the newly formed nurture group on transfer from reception class to middle infants/ Y1. There was debate as to whether placement in the nurture group was appropriate and whether his needs might be managed in his ordinary class with some modification. He was not seen as a typical nurture child, that is, his behaviour, although disruptive at times, was not typically that of a baby or toddler. At the time of referral, he was five years old and was making reasonable progress with his learning and beginning to read. Little was known about his family background other than he was of Ghanaian origin. His parents did not respond to invitations to come into school and were aggressive when visited by the education welfare officer to offer financial help as he was poorly dressed and often hungry. In the classroom, E was described as withdrawn and aggressive, kicking, fighting and stealing and he would frequently get into fights in the playground.

In his first weeks in the group E was very reserved. He would respond to a question but otherwise was unwilling to volunteer information. He was generally co-operative and would join in a group activity although his new class teacher reported that his difficult behaviour in the classroom continued. By the October half term, he had settled into the nurture group, begun to make friends and would play with another child from his class. He was making progress with reading and could remain with his ordinary class for occasional days without disruption. On returning from half term he chose to remain in his ordinary class spontaneously. By the end of the Autumn term his teacher described him as 'lively, full of fun, a really happy boy, rolls on the mat with laughter, making remarkable progress with reading'. The progress continued into the new year and he transferred permanently to his mainstream class.

The scores on the ILEA Profile supported the view that E was not a typical nurture child: he showed little adult dependency and had a reasonable level of autonomy, was usually biddable and could function in a group. After much thought it was considered that the ILEA Profile would not provide sufficient detail to diagnose and support a nurture child and the decision was made to retain elements of the format while constructing a profile based entirely on nurture practitioners' observations. The items to be included had been broadly agreed and were grouped into: Scale or Section 1. Biddable; Socially aware; Socially responsive; Socially adaptive and Scale or Section 11: Disengaged behaviour; Immobilised Behaviour; Adult dependency (Baby stage); Object investigation (Toddler stage); Lack of control; Ambivalence; Antisocial behaviour and Unventuring features. At this stage, scoring amounted to a simple tick if the item

applied. The items were listed in roughly developmental order within each category, 15 for Scale 1, 10 for Scale 2. For the children above, this gave a clear indication of their nurture needs, for example, A's reliance on the adult for support at the toddler stage of Object investigation and Lack of control if the support was not there. This version was valuable in clarifying what would later become developmental strands.

Meanwhile, we began to realise the need for a longer perspective. The first draft Diagnostic Developmental Profile-Behavioural Check List was compiled from the collected observations and grouped into 2 Scales: Scale 1 consisted of 60 items considered to be behaviour seen in normally developing pre-school children arranged in roughly developmental order and Scale 2, 80 items of behaviours that were considered 'deviant' with an additional 10 items of a child's competence in managing their personal needs. Scoring was now on a 6-point scale: 0 (doesn't apply) – 1 applies somewhat, 1\*, applies from time to time, 2 certainly applies, 2\* generally true, 3 very striking. This version was trialled in selected schools, including Kingsmead, towards the end of 1973-74 when after detailed feedback and further intensive discussion it was redesigned as described by Boxall in Part 4 of the Handbook.

In September 1974, we were ready to trial this first nurture Diagnostic Developmental Profile. The language needed to be clear, unambiguous and easily understood by inexperienced nurture and class teachers. For this, E's new class teacher, a newly qualified infant teacher and our newly appointed nurture teacher were invited to complete it as part of the ongoing monitoring of child E, and to comment.

Monitoring the progress and use of the Profile became the priority at all our meetings. As nurture groups continued to spread from Hackney into more schools across the ILEA, Boxall, in Chapter 4 of the Handbook, recalls the progress from being an in-school, hand produced document we shared informally among ourselves, to its eventual endorsement and publication by ILEA. Alongside this account, unpublished records from the Headteachers' Consultation group trace this and other nurture related issues that were taking place behind the scenes, especially the anxieties caused by the approaching demise of the ILEA through the late 1980s. As the ILEA was disbanded in 1989 and individual boroughs took on responsibility for education, the survival of the entire nurture project was at risk. One outer London borough, Enfield, included nurture groups in its special needs provision and the Nurture Group Consortium, a sub-committee of the Association of Workers with Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (AWCEBD), was formed in 1998 to take the work forward (Bennathan and Boxall

1996). The Consortium went on to become the Nurture Group Network and it was at a meeting in 1998 that the decision was made to rename the Profile.

In a handwritten letter dated 19.1.99 to nurture teachers, assistants and headteachers, Boxall recorded her embarrassment that the Diagnostic Developmental Profile was to be called the Boxall Profile. However, she was encouraged by its continued use and that publication would produce funds to support nurture into the future.

## CONCLUSION

The contribution of nurture practitioners to the development of the Boxall Profile has enabled many children at risk of exclusion over the past 50 years to continue their school careers successfully. Nurture groups have proved that early intervention, in its truest sense, works; no child or teacher need ever be left to fail before help is given.

In the pioneering days, Boxall emphasised the importance of teachers fully understanding the implications of using the Profile and taking ownership of its underlying concepts through reflective practice. When developmental needs are identified, appropriate strategies for managing these needs become clear and the personal and social gains for the child are apparent.

In today's world, recognising these gains as an achievement is vital for all concerned, teachers, school, parents and siblings, as well as the individual child. The cost to society of failure is huge if the young person is not able to support themselves and risks getting caught up in criminal activity or addiction. Teachers too, are vulnerable to adverse judgments and failure at a high personal cost as well as being an expensive loss to the education system. The Boxall Profile continues to be the most effective resource available to support those on the front line of the profession's responses to meeting these and future challenges.

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## NOTES

The 'nurture archive' referred to is the collection of children's records and notes from the Kingsmead nurture group together with Marjorie Boxall's notes, particularly those that contributed to the early drafts for the Diagnostic Developmental Profile, later to be known as the Boxall Profile.

Child C, real name Eric Clements, with his parents' permission, became a case study for an Open University film shown in 1976 on BBC3 for their course on Personality and Learning and which is available in nurtureuk archives.

# THE NURTURING ESTABLISHMENT: GATHERING CHILDREN AND PARENTAL/ CARER VIEWS OF THEIR EXPERIENCES OF A NURTURING ESTABLISHMENT

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## ABSTRACT

Glasgow City Council has stated its aspiration to move 'Towards the Nurturing City' where all establishments have implemented a whole school nurturing approach. This paper seeks to document the experiences of children and parents/carers, captured through semi-structured questionnaires in focus groups, in 'nurturing establishments'. Nineteen children and 21 parents/carers, randomly selected across two local authority primary schools and one local authority early years centre, took part in focus groups where they were asked about their daily experience of nurture in their schools and early years centre. The three establishments were selected by the Educational Psychological Service to exemplify good practice in embedding nurturing approaches with all staff. The 11 themes, derived from a thematic analysis, came from combining the responses of the parents/carers and children. All of the responses were positive in relation to the questions asked. In addition, the six nurture principles were felt by respondents to be applied in each of the three establishments, and the children and parent/carers gave lived examples of the principles.

## INTRODUCTION

Glasgow's nurture journey is well-documented (Kearney, 2005; Gerrard, 2006; March and Healy, 2007; Reynolds et al, 2009; MacKay et al, 2010; Glasgow City Council, 2014; Kearney et al, 2016; March and Kearney, 2017) and this evolution has resulted in a movement extending beyond targeted nurture groups to whole school nurturing approaches. As well as significant financial investment, Glasgow City Council has utilised the roles of the nurture development officer and the educational psychological service to ensure that all early years' establishments and schools have access to professional development that is focused on the whole establishment approach to nurture.

Nurture groups were fully conceptualised by Bennathan and Boxall (2013) emerging from Boxall's recognition that distressed young people need extensive support to regulate difficult emotions and behaviour. Distressed behaviour was seen as the product of childhood adversity, trauma, neglect and attachment issues, and often meant that children were not able to fully access the school experience. Utilising an emotionally available and attuned teacher in a smaller class setting allowed the child to build a trusting relationship and a secure base before

being reintegrated into their mainstream class. The evidence for the effectiveness of such an intervention has continued to build (Cooper and Lovey, 1999; Cooper et al, 2001; Binnie and Allen, 2008). Glasgow Education Services introduced nurture groups in 2001, since when the number of nurture groups across early years centres, primary schools and secondary schools has expanded, but the drive to develop a nurturing approach in establishments has also advanced and is a well-documented concept (O'Connor and Colwell, 2002; Doyle, 2003; Doyle, 2004; Kearney and Nowek, 2019). A nurturing approach is located within a whole establishment where all adults have an awareness and training in relation to the nurturing principles. These principles are evident in the promotion of wellbeing for all within the establishment. In addition, there is a focus on promoting healthy, positive and trusting relationships and self-evaluation of how the nurturing principles are embedded is undertaken.

Marjorie Boxall (2002) indicated the importance of parents and their interaction with the school, noting the significance of the ethos and atmosphere, as well as mentioning that the development of staff relationships with the parents is crucial, in particular, the need for staff to be emotionally supportive to parents. This

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relationship is coupled with the explicit understanding by staff as to how the nurture principles (Lucas et al, 2006) are embedded in the establishment and their: 'relevance to normal academic achievement' (Boxall, 2002; p17). Boxall highlighted that the principles help to promote engagement with the curriculum. Boxall (2002) gave concrete examples of the application of the principles, eg staff greeting the children in the morning in a welcoming manner and making staff available to speak to the parents so that both the children and their parents feel that the establishment is a safe place. Ensuring that wellbeing is a core focus for staff, helping to make children feel happy, relaxed and, in turn, more likely to be ready to learn. Lucas (1999) demonstrated the progress that learners can make when a nurturing environment, based on the nurture principles, is provided for them. She linked the delivery of the curriculum, set in the context of staff who have high expectations for the children they are teaching, with staff having an understanding of the emotional needs that learners have and how to build in strategies to support these needs.

The views of parent/carer and children on what makes a nurturing school are not well researched, but some findings include Cooper and Tiknaz (2007), that secondary school children were clearly able to identify what aspects of the nurture intervention supported their progress, discussing such topics as anger management and bullying. In addition Garner and Thomas (2011) captured the views of eight parents and six children in relation to secondary nurture groups with the children's views captured individually rather than collectively. Some of the themes present in this paper were seen in Garner and Thomas (2011) eg the importance of relationships with staff and the need to feel safe in their school environment. Communication was also a topic of discussion.

Glasgow research undertaken by Healy and March (2007) concerned the parental perceptions of the progress their child had made at the end of their time in a nurture group. In summary this work found that over 77% of parents solely had positive comments to make about their child's development post-intervention and only one per cent of parents had purely negative comments to make. The themes that came from the paper were largely related to the child's skills and abilities eg increase in confidence, academic performance and emotional progress. Parents also noted positively the attributes of the nurture teacher, but the overall support by the school and the wider staff group was not researched.

The national reach of the nurturing approach in Scotland is wide and spans at least 27 of the 32 local authorities (Kearney and Nowek, 2019). Kearney and Nowek indicated that there is a growing consensus

about what is meant by a nurturing approach in Scotland but concluded that there is a: 'need to consolidate the increased appetite in Scotland for nurturing approaches to ensure that it captures evidence of impact' (ibid; p19). Making certain that part of the impact of a nurturing approach is on the child's experience in school was a driver for the research that was undertaken and reported in this paper.

The aim of the research is to further unpack the nurturing approach. To find out if the child and parents' experience of a nurturing environment, and how that environment encapsulates the nurture principles, is a positive one. In addition, to identify what parents and children think are the elements of a nurturing environment.

Glasgow City Council has invested a great deal of time and resources in developing nurturing approaches throughout its educational establishments, but little research has been undertaken with the parents/carers and children who are key stakeholders in the whole establishment nurturing approach. This paper seeks to begin to address this.

## **METHODS**

Two Glasgow City Council primary schools and one early years centre were selected to take part. Their selection was based on their commitment to embed a whole establishment approach for nurture. A number of criteria were set to establish this commitment including:

- The establishment prioritising the development of nurture as part of their improvement planning.
- Requests to the Educational Psychological Service and Nurture Development Officer for input and training on varying aspects of nurturing approaches.
- The establishments were all using a nationally recognised self-evaluation framework (Education Scotland and Glasgow City Council (2017)).
- The school senior management teams were recognised by educational psychologists and education senior managers as having a longstanding commitment to nurture across their establishments.

The research team was made up of four educational psychologists. Two of the researchers undertook all of the focus groups with one researcher consistently asking the questions and the other researcher scribing. The use of the same person to undertake the tasks was to ensure that there was consistency in how questions were asked and answers recorded. A third researcher undertook the thematic analysis with the fourth researcher overseeing this process, consulting on what constitutes a theme.

Heads of establishment were asked to invite a random selection of children and parents/carers to take part and the primary head teachers were asked to cover all stages in their primary school. Some had experienced targeted nurture support but most had not.

Nineteen children aged from five years to 12 years took part; five children were of pre-school age and 14 were of school age; a mixture of boys and girls were in the focus groups. Twenty one parents/carers took part, all of whom were female. The selection of children and parents/carers was randomly made by the heads of establishment prior to the focus groups being held. The parents/carers and children were asked if they would be prepared to take part in a focus group looking at their experience of the nursery, and how nurturing it is. They were told that their participation in the group was voluntary. In total there were six focus groups. In each of the establishments a parent/carer focus group ran as well as a children's focus group. Explicit parental/carer permission was obtained for the children taking part and it was highlighted to them that the timeline of the focus group was one hour.

Parents/carers and children were asked questions relating to the nurture principles and where they saw them in practice (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2). The questions and prompts used were not standardised. Instead, the nurture principles (Lucas et al, 2006) were used as a basis around which to construct questions. Each of the questions was mapped directly on to a nurture principle.

A thematic analysis was used to group the themes that came from the six groups. The themes and their content were then matched with the nurture principle/principles that were best evidenced by that theme.

### **THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

'Thematic analysis is a poorly demarcated, rarely acknowledged, yet widely used qualitative analytic method within psychology' (Braun and Clarke, 2006; p77). Braun and Clarke note the issues relating to thematic analysis, but give a clear structure from which to maximise robust information. The six phases of scrutiny that they outline to do this, were employed as part of the research methodology. The steps of: familiarising yourself with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; producing the report were used by an educational psychologist (EP), who was not part of the focus groups, to organise the qualitative information gathered. Most importantly, the authors had the hope that: 'themes that emerge from the informants' stories are pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience' (Aronson, 1995). Aronson also goes on to say that those individuals who are using the raw information to develop the themes have to have a detailed understanding of

the literature that underpins the area of research. The EP who brought together the 11 themes had received training and had a well-developed understanding of the area of nurture and nurturing approaches.

Parental/carer feedback recorded at the focus group, was themed first as these responses were, in general, more detailed and expansive. The information that came from the children's groups was separately themed and then aligned with the parental/carer themes. It was felt by the researcher undertaking the analysis that both sets of themes were similar although the quality and clarity of the information differed. Since the themes that emerged from the parent/carer focus group and the children's focus group were broadly similar, to give a rounded view of how a nurturing establishment is experienced the information from both groups was combined.

The researcher who themed the information used the nurture principles to undertake the initial themes, for example, when parents/carers and children talked about a welcoming environment or how staff talked to them in a way that made them trust the staff, this was initially mapped on nurture principle two. However, the experience of the environment was extended beyond the classroom, thus the titles of themes were adapted to note the wider context. Some themes were more straightforward to develop, for example communication. This was related to the first general question of the focus group, and parents/carers generally responded to it by commenting on how the establishment communicated with them and providing examples of the types of communication. The children were not asked this question. Prior to the theme being agreed, the researcher pulled all the quotes and comments together, stated what they were suggesting as the theme and discussed this with a fourth researcher who had not been part of the focus groups or thematic analysis. Once the 11 themes were established, a consultation with the researchers who undertook the initial focus groups was held. This was to ensure that the quotes/comments were not taken out of context or misinterpreted.

Once the themes were established and the data that fell under each theme considered, the themes were aligned with the relevant nurture principles identified in the responses to the focus group questions.

### **RESULTS**

A series of prompt questions were used (see Appendices 1 and 2) designed to elicit information about how the nurturing principles were being used in practice. These prompts were also designed to explore the impact of this practice on the children and parent/carers who attend the establishment. There were 11 themes that came from the combined six focus groups and the six semi-structured questions.

Themes derived from thematic analysis included:

Formal transition; Conflict resolution; Communication; Building relationships; Attunement; Ethos; Learning/development; Environment/safe base; Parental/Carer engagement; Leadership and Impact on children and their families

The following is a report of the comments that were made by parents/carers and children about their experiences of what they feel makes a nurturing establishment.

### **Formal transition**

*'It's a process more than an event'* (parent/carer comment)

*'...every day, when I come in, they (the staff) say hello and smile at me'* (child's comment)

This theme related to how the parent/carer or child is helped to negotiate transitions. From everyday transitions, such as coming into the establishment, to more significant events eg moving from primary school to secondary school.

Across the three establishments, examples were given that children and parents/carers felt supported transition. Activities such as the Primary 7 outward bound trip, 'practising' accessing the playground area, supported visits to the dinner hall, welcome time where staff are at the front door or gate of the establishment and at the end of the day and pre-school visits.

There were several comments about the importance of the establishment being 'well prepared' in how they undertake transition, as well as the timing and pace of transition ie starting the planning and process early and then building up experiences over time.

It was felt that this theme clearly mapped on to nurture principle 6 (see Appendix 3 for principles).

### **Conflict resolution**

*'The school has lots of posters on their walls about friendship'* (parent/carer comment)

Children commented: '

*'It's easy to make friends after falling out' and 'Mistakes can happen but they get dealt with'.*

This theme focused on how the school responds to specific incidents where children have come into conflict with each other, as well as whole school approaches that are in place to support a relationship-based environment.

Parents/carers and children were able to name eight interventions that were used across the three establishments to support conflict resolution. Examples such as Bully busters, Friend fixers, Reflection time,

Restorative approaches, etc were used to ensure that children had access to an emotionally supportive environment or explicit time to consider and reflect on their experiences. Topics such as how they feel or how their actions may make other people feel are explored within this time.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principles 2, 3 and 5.

### **Communication**

*'The teachers are great at catching you at the end of the day to tell you what sort of day my kid has had'*.  
(parent/carer comment).

This theme brought together the different approaches the establishment took to make parents aware of what was happening in the establishment as well as individual information they wanted to share about a child.

The consistent message that came largely from parents/carers was that the communication between them and establishment was very good and took a variety of forms. Media such as newsletters, tweets, displaying the lunch for the day in a way that was easily visible for parents/carers, a communication book, general information-sharing boards that were accessible were used by the primary schools and early years centre.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principles 2 and 6.

### **Building relationships**

The theme related to how staff and parents/carers and the children establish relationships. In particular, what the staff did to engender trust in the parents/carers and children. It also included the quality of the relationships that exist between the children in the establishment.

This theme was further divided into the relationships between staff and parents/carers; staff and children and peer relationships.

### **Staff and parents/carers**

*'As a parent they have reassured me that it's going to be fine'* (parent/carer comment)

Parents/carers described the staff as warm and welcoming and people who helped engender trust in them. The parents/carers reflected that it was the flexibility and helpfulness demonstrated by staff that supported the building of the relationships between home and establishment. In particular parents/carers commented on the time that staff took to have informal discussions or handovers that was reassuring, thus helping them feel respected and reassured.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principles 2 and 4.

## **Staff and children**

*'...(we can)...trust teachers with our emotions'*  
(child's comment)

Replicated in the remarks made by the children, the issue of trust arose. The staff took the time to find out what the children liked and children felt their opinions were valued. They described staff members as: 'generous and kind' and demonstrated an openness about feelings. In addition, the staff helped them develop and scaffold peer relationships.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principles 1, 2, 3 and 5.

## **Peer relationships**

*'I've got loads of friends'* (child's comment)

Parents/carers and children noted several embedded approaches that the establishments used to support peer relationships; some structured such as buddy systems, others that were more general to the ethos. For example, being welcoming to all and including everyone in activities and taking on board the children's own ideas as to how they can develop friendships.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principles 1, 2, 3 and 6.

## **Attunement**

*'Children's individual personalities are nurtured'*  
(parent/carer comment)

*'When I feel sad my teacher can tell.'*  
(child's comment)

Attunement was not a word that was used in the focus groups or in the semi-structured questionnaires that were the focus of the groups. Rather, the researcher who themed the information selected it as a construct based on a knowledge of psychology.

Attunement describes the process of what happens when an adult gets 'in tune' or 'in synch' with a child, non-verbally or verbally. It is the experience of attunement that facilitates co-regulation (that is, being soothed and regulated by another), which then leads to the child learning how to self-regulate. Being understood in this way begins the process of self-awareness, and thus the capacity to empathise (Bomber, 2017, p69).

Parents/carers and children commented on what skills and abilities they saw staff demonstrating. They noted that the staff listened to the children, noticed when they were stressed, picked up on body language and facial expression. The staff gave both the parents/carers and children time for interaction and looked interested when engaging in dialogue.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principles 1 and 5.

## **Ethos**

*'Kids are at the heart of it'* (parent/carer comment)

*'There is always lots of nice things going on in my school'* (child's comment)

This theme was developed in relation to what the parents, carers and children experienced generally in relation to the establishment. That is, how they described the 'feel' of the school.

As well as discussing the inclusive nature of the ethos and how it permeated across the whole establishment. Other parents/carers, as well as children, went on to describe the establishments as family oriented, that it was a place where individual differences were understood, there was community involvement and that they felt a consistency in how they were spoken to, approached and dealt with.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principles 1, 2 and 4.

## **Learning/development**

*'Teachers make sure children are happy and emotionally ready'* (parent/carer comment)

*'Children can go to the playground to see their siblings [and this] decreases stress'* (parent/carer comment).

*'I love reading'* (child's comment)

This theme was constructed as parents/carers were asked directly about their child's learning. Although the children were not asked explicitly about learning, many of them were keen to discuss their classroom/playroom experience and what they enjoyed doing in that environment.

Again, the parent/carers itemised several approaches that were used to support learning and development. Some, related to the quotes above, were about altering the environment or using staff knowledge of child development, others were national or evidenced based methodologies eg Book BugPATHS and Seasons for Growth. Parental/carer discussion also took place in relation to ongoing encouragement when aspects of the curriculum are more challenging, ensuring that activities are engaging and creative and the use of play to develop children's learning.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principle 1.

## **Environment/Safe base**

*'The staff are good at picking up if my wee one isn't feeling great'* (parent/carer comment)

*'Nice staff help you learn'* (child's comment)

This theme emerged due to the direct question about what made the environment feel safe for the young people. Children said they feel happy and secure when staff are around. The children stated that they know that staff will respond to them if they are upset, distressed or stressed. Children also felt that in these situations staff responses were predictable and consistent.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principle 2.

### **Parental/carer engagement**

*'I really enjoyed helping out, and it was nice to get an inside view of what my child's day is like'* (parent/carer comment)

*'My mummy came to my class to read with us all'* (child's comment)

The parents and carers gave lots of examples about events they were invited to by the establishment, or when they were asked to contribute to the nursery or school day. This theme brings these examples together.

The establishments had engaged parents/carers to contribute to the school day in different ways. Some parent/carers had helped out with paired reading, others to speak about the jobs that they have. Opportunities such transition events, informal coffee mornings and play sessions were also available to parents/carers to attend.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principles 2 and 3.

### **Leadership**

*'The head teacher knows the name of every kid. My boy thinks that's amazing'* (parent/carer comment).

*'She (the head of establishment) always smiles at me'* (child's comment).

Parents/carers and children were keen to discuss the heads of establishment. This indicated the importance of the position of senior management in their collective eye.

Children across the establishments felt that the head of establishment knew their name and was familiar with everyone's 'story'. Parents/carers stated that the ethos of the school was set by the senior management team and there were several comments made about the tone of the environment: 'coming from the top'. Leadership was seen as important and positive in creating a nurturing environment.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principle 5.

### **Impact on children and their families**

*'My child is more confident, at first he wouldn't leave my side, and then after one week he came in fine. He is now a confident boy in school with no issues'* (parent/carer comment).

*'My dad tells me to listen to my teacher. He says she seems sensible'* (child's comment)

This theme emerged from comments that parents/carers and children made in relation what it felt like, as a family, to be part of the establishment. How their family were noticing the impact of the school or nursery in terms of changes to the parent/carer or child.

From the parental/carer perspective they identified that children appeared happy, seemed to be 'thriving' and they were more caring to others. The parents/carers further went on to say that they are very confident in the establishment. Children said they feel comfortable in their establishment, they feel safe and they feel that there is a whole team around to support them.

Evidence from this theme mapped on to nurture principles 1, 2 and 5

### **DISCUSSION**

While some researchers have commented on the importance of the individual classroom and the positive climate that the young person experiences within that classroom (Frederickson and Petrides, 2013) this research project sought to report on the wider school experience for children, parents and carers. Most of the themes that were elicited from the interviews describe the supportive ethos for children and their families, ie that there are feelings of trust towards the staff, being welcomed and encouraged (again, for both children and their families) and the happiness that the children exhibit. This helps to illustrate what the nurture principles look like for families and children in establishments that are recognised as being nurturing. These principles are likely to be experienced by a child and their family, in totality, as a sense of belonging to an early years centre or school. It may be reductionist to distil the principles down to a 'sense of belonging' however, the impact on children of this sense of belonging warrants further scrutiny. 'Research suggests that children's sense of belonging has significant implications for schools, as it is likely to be positively associated with important outcomes such as engagement with learning, mental health and happiness' (Prince and Hadwin, 2013; p242).

In addition, Moallem (2013) noted that the feeling of belonging is associated with increased student motivation and engagement as well as attendance, school completion and academic achievement. When there is a sense of belonging across the establishment, there are also lower levels of aggression and bullying

recorded (Bond et al, 2007; Duggins et al, 2016). Given this information, unsurprisingly, children and young people who have experienced a sense of belonging to their establishment, have stated that they are hopeful about the future; they experience positive mental health and a reduction in reporting of suicidal thoughts (Kidger et al, 2012; Marraccini and Brier, 2017, Van Ryzin et al, 2009). 'Of most significance in nurturing a sense of belonging was that of interpersonal relationships – including both those with peers and with staff' (Midgen et al, 2019, p12).

The themes identified in this study align with factors encapsulated in the wider concept of 'sense of belonging'. These include: the importance of communication, building relationships, managing transitions for children and staff attunement to the children. Our research also suggests that these elements are indicative of whether an establishment is experienced as nurturing.

Feedback from the respondents on the three establishments, stated the importance and quality of the staff as a recurrent theme, as well as the quality of relationships the family has with the staff. The impact of 'one good adult' is noted for supporting young people, particularly those who have experienced adversity in their life. Bellis et al (2017) found that having an adult a child can trust is vital to developing resilience in children who have had negative childhood events, and to mitigate against the mental and physical health issues that can come from these events. Our research detailed some of the implications of experiencing adversity in childhood ie poorer impulse control, a difficulty dealing with stress as well as trust issues and needing support to socialise.

Access to a trusted adult in childhood may dramatically reduce the impact of childhood adversity on mental wellbeing and the adoption of health harming behaviours...these relationships are apparent across all socio-economic strata' (Bellis et al, 2017). Melter et al (2018) further indicate the importance of trusted adults for those who are in young adulthood, thus the need for positive relationships can be seen to be crucial throughout the time (as well as before and after) that a child or young person is within their statutory education career.

Noting all of this research, it should be highlighted that the children and families who took part in the study consistently discussed the staff group rather than individuals (although the head of establishment was referred to individually). Staff acted as a consistent group who welcomed the children as they came into the school, used consistent language and approaches; were approachable and supportive, and respectful of parents and carers. The children and families

were indicating that they were enrolled in education establishments where there was a team of trusted adults to support them. This feedback chimes clearly with Dix's (2007) thoughts about ensuring: 'certainty' for children and their families all the way up the hierarchy of an establishment.

Despite the links between a sense of belonging and attainment outlined above, comments on attainment were not part of the responses of any of the children, parents or carers who took part. In relation to parents and carers, it was their child's wellbeing that seemed to be the central focus. The lack of reference to attainment may have been due to how the questions were constructed, that is, using the nurturing principles as a base. Possibly using other standardised measures (eg Resnick et al, 1997; Frederickson et al, 2007) alongside the semi-structured questionnaires would have generated information relating to attainment. It should be noted however, that the links between wellbeing and attainment are well documented (Durlak, 2016).

The limitations of the paper should be highlighted prior to the conclusion. As noted, the limited research base that the project was drawing from was apparent and also impacted on the materials that were used in the focus group. In addition, standardised materials would have given more weight to the findings and more structure to the thematic analysis. The establishments that were chosen to take part in the study were selected as examples of good practice. This means that there was less balance than there would have been for the average local authority establishment. So, for the average establishment the feedback is more likely to have a mixture of good practice as well as areas for development. The feedback from the focus groups was universally positive.

More detail as to who took part in the group would also have been helpful in relation to understanding the demographics of the focus group population. Also, grading the quality and quantity of the answers based on the child's age would have allowed more understanding of how children interpret their context based on their age and stage.

## **CONCLUSION**

There has been little research to date on parents/carers and young people's experiences of a whole school nurturing approach. However, this research demonstrates that there can be a shared experience by many of the parents/carers and children and young people of a nurturing approach that helps them to feel a sense of belonging to an establishment. The implications for this are significant in that a nurturing approach, across all establishments, could generate this engagement in education for many disenfranchised families.

The import the research team got from working with children and their families in establishments Glasgow would recognise as nurturing, was a strong sense of belonging to that establishment. A nurturing approach can help to support skilled and attuned staff who can encourage belonging via good communication bolstered by a leadership team who plan for and self-evaluate the nurturing approach in their environment. While this type of nurturing practice may not be consistent across every establishment, there is a clear aspiration that all Glasgow children will experience an establishment where nurture is embedded in all aspects of their day. The positive experiences of children and young people and parents/carers of a nurturing approach, in establishments where a clear nurturing approach is recognised, can be a useful springboard from which to help generate more consistency of practice. The leaders of establishments who supported this research already contribute heavily to the strategic nurture planning in Glasgow, and could further help support an understanding of how to implement a nurturing approach successfully, in the larger national context. There are clearly leadership skills that contribute to the implementation of such an approach and a further step might entail exploring what these are so this can be shared this more widely.

Unfortunately capturing what makes a nurturing leader is not something that can be done easily – although parents/carers and children recognised the importance of leadership in such an approach. Kearney and Nowek (2019) and Coleman (2019) suggest that leadership is key to embedding nurturing approaches as it ensures that the implementation and planning is done effectively. Glasgow is at the early stages of piloting an input that nurtures staff wellbeing, perhaps developing nurturing leadership is the next stage in moving towards the nurturing city. Capturing children's, young people's, parents' and carers' views is an important way to ensure that we are identifying key aspects of a nurturing approach and the impact it can have.

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# APPENDIX 1: Parents semi-structured questionnaire for focus groups

The researchers introduced themselves, the purpose of the focus group and welcomed the parents to the group. The researchers checked that everyone had consented to taking part in the group and then asked the following questions. The very first question was a general question to find out whether the establishment had spoken to parents about nurture and what it is.

Has the establishment talked to you or informed you about nurture?

**1. Children learn in lots of different ways.**

What have you noticed about how the establishment helps your child's learning?

*Nurture principle 1*

**2. Children need to feel safe to learn.**

How does the establishment help your child feel safe?

What do they say about adults in the establishment?

Do you feel welcome in the establishment – how?

*Nurture principle 2*

**3. What children learn is really important but their emotions, social development and feelings are important too.**

What does the establishment do to support wellbeing, eg friendships, wider achievements?

*Nurture principle 3*

**4. Using positive language is a really important part of nurture.**

How do adults talk to children in the establishment and give praise?

*Nurture principle 4*

**5. There is a principle all behaviour is communication, this is about adults understanding children's behaviour but also adults being aware of their own behaviour.**

Do establishment staff know your child well?

Do they know if any help is needed?

What do you notice about how staff interact with pupils?

How do you see children interacting with each other?

*Nurture principle 5*

**6. Transition is all about changes.**

How does the establishment prepare for changes eg changing class, going on a trip, changes in teacher or keyworker?

*Nurture principle 6*

Additional prompts – What do you see, hear, and feel?

How would you want this to happen in a school?

## APPENDIX 2: Children's focus groups

The children's focus groups were undertaken by using two activities. An icebreaker activity called the 'the emoji game' and a second activity called 'new to school'. The researchers led the activities.

### **Ice breaker activity – 'The Emoji game'**

This game was undertaken first. There were 20 cut outs of emojis laid out on the floor. The emojis represented different feelings and emotions. Children were invited to pick an emoji they like and say why they chose it. This activity acted as a warm up and allowed the children to say how they were feeling in relation to being part of the group. The researchers then led a discussion about why feeling anxious was a standard emotion to have when meeting new people. The children were encouraged to indicate verbally or via emoji if they felt uncomfortable in the group. They were also encouraged to ask any questions they may have.

This game was accessible to all of the young people who took part. Emojis, as well as verbal discussion, were used to identify the children's own feelings about taking part in the discussion and reassure them of what was expected of them. Additional reassurance was given in relation to how their information would be used and that they could opt out of the group at any point and that would be okay.

### **New to school activity**

The second part of the focus group involved a drawing activity and asking children what someone new to the establishment might experience. Prompt questions that were related to the Nurture Principles (appendix 3) were used to draw information from the children. The aim of the questions was for the children to identify what was nurturing in their environment and how a new person would experience that environment. Below each question is the Nurture Principle that is most relevant.

The questions were as follows:

1. What would happen if the new child needed to find a safe place in the school or nursery? What would they do? Where would it be?  
*Nurture principle 2*
2. What would happen in their school if that new child was worried about something?  
*Nurture principle 3*
3. Who would notice if they needed help and how would that person speak to them?  
*Nurture principles 4 and 5*
4. Who would they talk to if the work was too hard?  
*Nurture principle 1*
5. Who would they go to if they needed help making friends?  
*Nurture principles 3 and 6*

Responses to these prompts differed according to developmental stages with younger children able to give words that described feelings in different situations but less able to give examples of behaviours/practice.

# APPENDIX 3: The six principles of nurture



Lucas, Insley and Buckland (2006)

# BEYOND NURTURE GROUPS TO 'NURTURING APPROACHES': A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION OF THE HEDDLU BACH (MINI POLICE) SCHEME IN WELSH PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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## ABSTRACT

The concept of nurture establishes the importance of supporting children's social and emotional skills, wellbeing and behaviour. As such, a Welsh Police Force implemented the *Heddlu Bach* (Mini Police) scheme in three Welsh Primary schools in the 2017-18 academic year. Using an evaluation research design, three focus groups were undertaken in each of the three schools with pupils that were involved in the scheme. Supplementary methods included semi-structured interviews with other stakeholders (teachers, teaching assistants, police community support officers), as well as documentary evidence in the form of pupil/school biographical information. The results reveal that the scheme developed children's aspirations, resilience, and self-esteem/self-worth. The children were engaged and immersed in their mini police 'duties' and this resulted in a positive view of both their own abilities, the police and police work. This engagement was set against a backdrop of communities within areas of social and economic disadvantage, and where the police are often viewed adversely. By being part of the scheme, the children gained a range of transferable skills and attributes. Wider benefits were also evident with whole family/community/school engagement and curriculum aspects relating to personal and social development, nurture, citizenship and environmental issues.

## INTRODUCTION

Durham Constabulary was the first police force in the UK to establish a Mini Police scheme in 2011. Its remit was to establish a volunteering programme for 9-11 year olds with the aim of encouraging community engagement, while nurturing and developing the confidence of young people, initially within identified areas of social and economic deprivation. Although the scheme has never been independently evaluated, there appeared to be the following positive outcomes:

- A dramatic decrease in crime and antisocial behaviour.
- Greater engagement of young people with the police through the involvement of young people in civic, community and charity events and a growth in their self-confidence.

(Durham Constabulary, n.d.).

The use of interventions to support young people in challenging areas is not new, nor is the idea of

'nurturing approaches' within education (Kearney and Nowek, 2019). In parallel with the *Heddlu Bach* (Mini Police) scheme, seven other police forces in the UK have shown interest in implementing it. In Wales, there was a pilot of the *Heddlu Bach* scheme in three schools in South Wales in the 2017-2018 school year. The programme was rolled out to a larger number of schools across the local authority in 2018-19. The scheme is designed to facilitate factors such as community engagement, child-focused activities with a nurture dynamic, as well as educational aspects, such as supporting personal and social development and citizenship. This is usually achieved through either (school-led) community involvement or police-led participation in public events (Johnson, 2015).

The programme aligns with the current focus of Welsh Government, the police authorities, education and other public services in Wales in addressing the research knowledge promoted by Public Health Wales (2015) on the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on children's development. This

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concept was originally set out by Felitti et al (1998), who documented a number of adult behaviours that put children at risk. These include psychological, physical or sexual abuse. The research suggests that any adverse experiences encountered in childhood may contribute to antisocial behaviour in later years, including a propensity for aggressive and violent behaviour which may lead to them to becoming involved with the criminal justice system (Public Health Wales, 2015). Various studies have considered levels of crime in disadvantaged areas, and often conclude that low socio-economic status relates to greater involvement with the criminal justice system; higher rates of criminal offending and higher rates of victimisation (Newburn, 2016; Wilkstrom and Treiber, 2016). The Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) asserts that those living in areas of poverty suffer inequalities resulting from socio-economic disadvantage. Moreover, the Social Exclusion Unit in 1998 revealed that 40 per cent of recorded crime in the UK occurred in the most disadvantaged areas, with violent and drug-related offences being much more common in these areas (Power, 2009). These findings concur with a highly influential study that investigated why some societies are more equal than others and reported that if inequality reduces then levels of crime may also decline (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010).

It is not surprising therefore, that police forces across the UK have become increasingly involved with schools in undertaking crime awareness and prevention activities with young people. The *Heddlu Bach* scheme currently sits alongside this provision in Wales. After reviewing the literature and presenting the methodology, this paper will present findings from the evaluation of the pilot phase of the *Heddlu Bach* scheme. Conclusions and recommendations will then complete the paper.

### **The Heddlu Bach scheme**

The *Heddlu Bach* project was designed to enhance existing links between a South Wales police force and schools within the area. Many links had already been well established through school engagement with the All Wales School Liaison Core Programme (AWCLCP), which has been traditionally delivered by School Community Police Offices (SCPOs) over a number of years. A variety of themes were adopted for the 2017-18 academic year and included a range of topics such as: internet safety, bullying, personal safety and safe places to play. The SCPO delivered the core aspect in assemblies or in lessons over a half-term and the Mini Police involvement/follow up was related to these themes. The children would assist with the delivery of a particular topic, and involvement would be, for example, contributing to school assemblies or supporting peers on the playground/in the classroom in relation to developing friendships or befriending children who

were on their own. Establishing community links was additionally a key factor in the scheme, so activities often had an outward-facing focus.

Three schools in an urban conurbation in South Wales were chosen to adopt the Mini Police scheme. A total of 58 children were 'sworn in' as mini officers after a 'mock' recruitment process that asked pupils to fill in an application form with their parents. A sense of identity was seen as being integral to the scheme both by school staff and children, with children having their own *Heddlu Bach* uniform. Children nominated themselves for positions and in some cases, an interview process was implemented. Training in a range of police-related tasks was facilitated by a School Police Liaison Officer (SPLO). The children were then involved with community tasks such as litter picks and looking at issues raised by the community. Specific interventions then took place, such as working to educate their peers on issues such as antisocial behaviour around Hallowe'en and Bonfire Night, as well as assisting the police on issues such as speed awareness. Generally, a weekly session of varying duration was delivered by each of the schools, and pupils were then selected by the school (in collaboration with the attached Police Community Liaison Officer) and attended an awards ceremony at the UK Houses of Parliament.

### **Children's attitudes, values, character and behaviours**

It is apparent that the education system seems to be increasingly responsible for promoting moral and civic values in young people (Oladipo, 2009). The 'social action' measure of the *Heddlu Bach* programme may be categorised according to Lickona (1991) as 'character education', and the debate here is whether schools should in effect, be moral guardians as well as educational ones. The role of the school in relation to pupils' social and emotional development is on many political agendas (Welsh Government, 2018; Gov.UK, 2018). There is no doubt that social structures are rapidly altering and families, family life and the fabric of communities are constantly changing. Current events in the UK (such as Brexit) are blurring these boundaries as further divisions are becoming apparent, such as the worrying rise of extremism and a sense of alienation felt by some in disadvantaged communities. These developments have been exacerbated by public funding cuts to local services and many police forces. The *Heddlu Bach* scheme is not a panacea for these issues, but by engaging in short-term nurture-based programmes, children in areas of disadvantage may have an opportunity to improve their long-term life outcomes through the development of factors such as improved self-esteem, resilience and better school engagement, which could result in raised aspirations and attainment. It is pertinent to point out here that studies such as Baumeister et al (2003) allege that

positive self-esteem alone has little effect on academic performance. Nevertheless, Marsh and O'Mara (2008) remark that positive academic self-concept does influence school performance. Therefore, engaging children in tasks and education-related skills may prove a contributing factor to greater school success for children following the scheme.

Weare's (2006) work on the emotionally literate school stressed the importance of building and maintaining positive connections between the school and community, even while operating within challenging circumstances (Cushman, 2008; Dean and Galloway, 2008). Understanding the long-term impact of any intervention programme on children under the umbrella of a wellbeing dynamic is a challenge. This is because children are reliant on nurture and care in their early development and education, (Dowling, 2014, Garvey, 2017). Also, it is becoming more apparent that how an individual perceives themselves has an impact on their actions, and thus any intervention that supports children in relation to their self-perception will have an overlap or contribution to a family/community dynamic (Dornyei and Ushioda, 2009).

Intervention programmes that work with children and families such as Head Start (2015) document positive outcomes, not just during the programme, but also after they have left it (Deming, 2009). Most research on young children focuses on measurable impacts on child development or school readiness, without follow up over time to understand and document children's longer-term wellbeing. Few studies identify short-term positive changes that create a gateway towards later benefits for the child and family and herein lies the problem. Often these programmes are directed at early pre-school intervention, and Yen et al (2019) suggest there is evidence that pre-school programmes for children from low-income households have the most effect (Campbell et al, 2012; Elango et al, 2016).

### **The use of targeted social and emotional development intervention programmes for school-aged children**

Research on targeted intervention programmes for school-aged children is well documented within a nurture dynamic (Bennathan and Boxall 1996; Boxall, 2002; Lucas, 2010). However, these are equally as pertinent as early intervention programmes, especially for children in areas of socio-economic disadvantage who may be subjected to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) such as abuse, neglect and poverty (Public Health Wales, 2015). Green et al. (2018) found that this will enable clarification as to which child and family level factors are most important to ensuring children's resilience to adversity. Indeed, Maslow (1970, 1998) indicated that 'self-actualisation', or the ability to find self-fulfilment and

to realise one's own potential, could not occur until various other physiological and psychological needs were met. Positive self-esteem has been viewed as a desirable attribute for pupils, and therefore studies investigating self-esteem measures often note the important influence of the school climate (Scott, 1999). Another factor that could contribute to any success of a targeted scheme is the ethos and guidance of head teachers and their subsequent nurturing of pupils and studies investigating self-esteem measures often note the important influence of teacher dispositions and school climate (Helm, 2007; Scott, 1999). The National College for School Leadership (NCSL, 2010) also identified the importance of 'resilience and emotional maturity' as essential competencies for effective school leaders. This is a dynamic that needs further research in relation to the development of a nurture-based whole school environment.

It may be pertinent to compare the implementation of the *Heddlu Bach* scheme to a 'growth mindset' approach. This method of thinking refers to a belief around the malleability of personal attributes (Dweck, 1999), and thus, children who engaged with the scheme had mind-sets which were open to meaning making processes, goals and behaviours (Dweck et al, 1995). Having a growth mindset can allow a child to respond to challenges and disappointments from a standpoint of resilience as opposed to feeling disengaged and helpless, and Dweck and Leggett (1988) and Yeager et al (2014) attest that children with a growth mindset are more able to adjust to academic transitions than those with a fixed mindset. Dweck and Leggett imply that having a growth mindset can modify the link between challenge and subsequent performance. Indeed, growth mindsets may be associated with higher self-esteem and improved performance (Brock and Hundley, 2016) and because links between results and engagement are established, this can then lead to higher willingness and capacity to learn, especially from new information or difficult situations, which are abilities likely to be vital for succeeding in adult careers now and in the future (Bakhshi et al, 2017). Although there is evidence that growth mindset interventions can result in positive change directly afterwards, there is no robust evidence for sustained change. To this end, the lack of long-term sustained evaluation within the literature is still apparent (Blackwell et al, 2007), which rationalises the need for longitudinal tracking of initiatives (such as *Heddlu Bach*) in relation to intended outcomes.

### **METHODOLOGY**

As a result of the preceding literature review, the following research questions were explored:

- How did engagement with the *Heddlu Bach* scheme

support and nurture children with developing their aspirations and resilience, and what impact did it have on aspects such as self-esteem/self-worth?

■ What was the impact on children's educational development and wellbeing?

■ How did the scheme affect child/police relationships?

An evaluation research design was adopted for the present study. As the approach implies, evaluation research generally manifests itself in the social sciences and is normally used to investigate social or organisational programmes or interventions (Bryman, 2012). While scholars such as Pawson and Tilley (1997) advocate the inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative research methods, there has been a recent shift in evaluation research that solely focuses on qualitative approaches (Bryman, 2012).

In embracing this shift, the ontological assumptions in this research aligned with critical realism. At a rudimentary level, this approach is outcome focused, and is concerned with how the generative mechanisms and contexts have contributed to that outcome. Critical realism is a specific form of realism that recognises the natural order (including events, discourses and structures) of the social world. Without this knowledge, social researchers are unable to understand, and so change the social world where interventions take place (Bhaskar, 1989).

### **The research settings**

The *Heddlu Bach* scheme was piloted in three primary schools in South East Wales. All three schools are situated in urban areas of considerable socio-economic disadvantage. The schools also have an established commitment to nurturing approaches and finding community asset-based solutions to overcome the impact that poverty has on their pupils. Therefore, this is just one example of the considerable work that is undertaken to try to raise aspiration and achievement regardless of background.

#### **Orange school**

Orange school is a large inner-city school. The school prides itself on its multi-faith demographic, with 28 different languages being spoken. There are over 600 pupils on roll, around a quarter of whom are new to English. The number of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (eFSM) sits well above the national average. Over a third of pupils have additional learning needs.

#### **Red school**

Red school is situated in a large social housing estate. There are around 250 pupils on roll and a part-time nursery class. The majority of pupils live in the housing estate close to the school and most children are of white British ethnicity. Approximately one third of pupils

are eFSM, which is well above the national average. The school identifies around one third of pupils as having additional learning needs, which is above the national average of 25%.

#### **Yellow School**

Yellow School sits in a working-class suburb in the eastern side of an urban conurbation and the school has provision for pupils between the ages of three and 11. There are just under 250 pupils on roll, of which nearly half are eFSM. Around a third of pupils have additional learning needs, which again is above the national average. The school population is largely homogenous, with pupils mainly coming from homes where English is the first language.

### **METHOD**

After gaining ethical clearance and conforming to BERA's (2018) ethical guidelines, the main mode of data collection was focus groups at the three school sites. Each researcher had responsibility for one school site and ran a series of focus groups with a representative sample of pupils with a stratifying criterion of being in Year 5. Each focus group lasted approximately 30 minutes in a largely unstructured format and was overseen by a permanent member of staff at each school. Focus groups, especially when working with young people, are likely to yield more candid responses, whereas one-to-one interviews may not be as effective due to the lack of rapport between researcher and participant (Krueger, 1994). Moreover, the utility of focus groups in evaluation research is especially beneficial, given the fact that through facilitated discussion, participants can build on each other's ideas and experiences through 'piggybacking' (Krueger, 1994).

Two further sources of data supplemented the focus groups. Interviews as conversations occurred with key stakeholders involved in the planning and delivery of the project, and who were especially knowledgeable of the *Heddlu Bach* scheme. In this instance, these included teachers, support staff, and police officers. These were largely unstructured and took place both inside and outside of school sites using purposive sampling (Gibbs, 2004). Documentary evidence also proved useful both in terms of providing a biography of each of the school sites, as well as demographic information and Key Performance Indicators. This includes information on pupil attainment, eFSM, English as an Additional Language, More Able and Talented and Additional Learning Needs.

#### **Data analysis**

Each researcher had responsibility for transcription of their own phase of data collection after initially (re) reading the data. The next phase involved searching for initial codes, which, in simple terms means that

interesting ideas were initially grouped together in a meaningful way. Next, after a long list of codes were generated, the research team met and generated a mind-map which highlighted how the initial codes could potentially align with each other to form actual themes. This was especially important for this research project whereby different researchers may generate very different codes, although Braun and Clarke (2006) advocate that it is more than permissible to generate a list of miscellaneous codes at this stage. The research team then discussed the relevance of the identified themes and considered how the identified themes fitted together to form a coherent narrative of the data. The final stage of analysis (prior to the production of the written document) involved what Braun and Clarke (2006, p92) term as 'define and refine' whereby the essence of each theme was confirmed by the research team in relation to what they are and what they are not.

### Representing the data

Debates around the reliability and validity of representing qualitative data is a well-trodden path. For Delamont (2002) however, the way to overcome potential questions is for researchers to be constantly reflexive throughout the research process. Indeed, in a commitment to this claim, the research team adopted Lincoln and Guba's (1985) alternative framework for judging qualitative research. For example, the first criterion is labelled internal or 'face' validity, and this was accomplished when adult participants member-checked the interview transcripts for verbatim interpretations and representations of what was discussed. The focus-group data were checked by the supporting member of staff present during data collection. The next criterion is transferability, or external validity, and is about how the findings transfer into other settings and this was done by providing thick contextual descriptions of the three schools under investigation. The third criterion is dependability, and which would occur where a researcher(s) would obtain the same results if the study were to be conducted again. This is certainly an almost impossible ideal, and LeCompte and Goetz (1982) have identified this, especially when several researchers are working across different settings. Nevertheless, the research team compensated for this difficulty by conducting frequent inquiry audits of the data as part of the data analysis phase (Cresswell, 1998). The final criterion confirmability, was shaped by the corroboration of others, which in this case were the direct stakeholders involved in the project (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

## RESULTS

### Development of children's aspirations; resilience; self-esteem and self-worth

The data suggested that both teachers and pupils were extremely positive about participation in the scheme. The children especially enjoyed the role-play activities,

teamwork and becoming role models to their peers and younger year groups within the school, as well as wider social circles. The children believed that their behaviour had improved and used words and phrases such as 'more responsible'; 'confident'; 'proud'; 'brave'; 'resilient'; and 'powerful' when describing their experiences. As the assistant headteacher in Red School commented:

*'We're starting to see what were the quiet children really start to flourish after being involved with Heddlu Bach. The external activities have instilled a newfound confidence that they are now bringing into school with them and transferring to their schoolwork. They don't seem as afraid to make mistakes when contributing in class either.'*

The scheme was clearly giving pupils a platform to create a positive image/self-esteem in which the teachers confirmed that the pupils had taken part in several community outreach projects and events, which the children might not have had contact with before. Such activities included: visiting a home for the elderly; acting as a guard of honour at the Holocaust Memorial Service; visiting the House of Lords; and participating in Remembrance Day at the City's cathedral. The School Community Police Officers (SCPO) also offered perspective that the scheme was positively fostering cultural integration, aligning with other interventionist approaches for children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Public Health Wales, 2015). As one PCSO noted:

*'As you probably know, this is a really diverse area with lots of different nationalities. Relationships have been very tense at certain stages in the past, and what we are now seeing as part of the scheme are the historic barriers starting to be broken down and parents from different backgrounds seeing their children mix together. This means that they start to feel valued as part of the school and wider community.'*

The children in the *Heddlu Bach* scheme often vocalised their sense of pride and self-worth as a direct result of being part of the scheme. This was apparent in speaking with the children following the implementation of their *Heddlu Bach* 'duties' where a sense of pride in helping their peers and community was evident:

*'I liked going to Mini Police meetings and getting certificates (certificates) it made me feel proud.'*  
(Year 5 male pupil).

*'The Mini Police is an amazing thing to be in because it helps me feel more confident. I enjoy helping others and wearing my uniform.'*  
(Year 5 female pupil)

'Mini Police has helped me to work with others.'  
(Year 5 female pupil)

*'I feel proud to be in the Mini Police. I would like to be a police officer when I am older.'*  
(Year 5 male pupil)

School staff also reported positive gains associated with the children's involvement:

*'As a school we work hard to build community relationships. We are so pleased at the positive way our children are working with the community, through their Mini Police duties. We are so proud of them and we can see their confidence and aspirations growing through their engagement with the scheme. This is particularly pertinent for our children, giving them the tools to imagine themselves in possible future careers.'*  
(deputy headteacher)

*'The children's confidence has grown so much through their engagement with the Mini Police programme. They engage with it 100% and I can see such positive gains to their social and emotional development from being part of it.'*  
(support teacher)

### **Educational development and wellbeing**

Educational aspects evident within the *Heddlu Bach* scheme align with the proposed new Welsh government primary humanities curriculum, which has within its vision and philosophy, elements relating to the role of learners as active citizens, improving their own lives and of people in their local community. Curriculum documentation also sets out the idea of children engaging critically with local, national and global issues. (Welsh Government, 2018). It became apparent that the *Heddlu Bach* scheme was leading to some positive unintended outcomes. The teachers interviewed explained that as a result of the scheme, it was abundantly clear that pupil aspirations have been significantly raised in terms of seeing potential routes into future employment. For example, to be considered for a place on the scheme in the initial phase, the pupils had to work through three simple questions at home with their parent/guardian, before submitting an 'official' application form to the respective school, which raised awareness of what it might be like when the time comes to seek employment post-education, therefore demonstrating the value-added of the academic self-concept (Marsh and O'Mara, 2008).

The children gave considered and varied responses to their chosen career aspirations and started to piece together what they needed to obtain in efforts to try and get there. As these children highlighted:

*'I want to own my own bakery. I enjoy working with*

*my hands and want to be my own boss!'*  
(Year 5 male pupil)

*'I definitely want to be a policeman now after having a go with the speed gun.'* (Year 5 male pupil)  
*'I'd love to be a doctor as I really enjoy helping other people. I know I have to work hard in school though.'* (Year 5 female pupil)

### **Improving police relations**

The proactive intervention taken by the police force in commencing the scheme was clearly promoting positive relations that have traditionally been fractious. The police input to the scheme was mainly facilitated through the SCPOs and aligned with the ongoing work of the All Wales School Liaison Core Programme (AWSLCP). To this end, the children participated in a wide range of activities including health and safety information linked to Halloween and Bonfire night; anti-bullying; internet safety; drug and substance misuse, grass fires; and personal safety. Interview data reported that the police officers involved believed that the scheme had led to positive interactions with the children which had the subsidiary effect of building trust and rapport, which was being taken back to their households. As one SCPO commented:

*'What we are seeing is that not only are the children starting to take responsibility for their behaviour, they are seeing how other people's negative behaviour could affect them in a variety of ways. It is also promoting a positive dialogue with parents so that they can also see the value of police work which has traditionally been viewed negatively.'*

This sentiment was echoed across all school sites, although one deputy head teacher remarked on its pertinence:

*'We have definitely seen a reduction of negative parental involvement with the police. I'm not the expert so I can't say for sure that it's down to the scheme at this stage, although there is definitely something going on that needs longer-term monitoring.'*

This is crucial considering evidence that has demonstrated strong links between disadvantage and crime rates. Accordingly, Newburn (2016) concluded that low socio-economic status is associated with greater involvement with the criminal justice system, higher rates of criminal offending, and higher rates of the various derivatives of victimization.

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

It is clear from the pilot phase of the *Heddlu Bach* scheme that the presiding police force are happy with the outcomes, and that pupils looked very positively on being asked to participate in police activities (such

as holding a speed gun outside of the school gate). This example heightened their awareness of the proactive work that the police undertake, and while the pupils made the connection that police work could be a possible attainable future career for them, they principally noted the importance that the proactive work that the police do actually improves the pupils' (and wider community's) personal safety. Clearly then, and even in the face of adversity, the children were developing a more focused and positive outlook to both their personal and academic development (Yates et al, 2015). The scheme was clearly promoting a 'growth mindset', therefore developing meaningful processes, goals and behaviours needed to succeed in educational environments (Dweck et al, 1995). Life satisfaction, a component of subjective or psychological well-being, refers to the way in which people assess or evaluate their lives (Diener et al, 2017). Agarwal and Dixit (2017, p61) assert that life satisfaction is: 'the ultimate goal' that people try to achieve throughout their lives. This phenomenon has been studied across cultures and populations, and Brown and Mueller (2014) found it to be significantly related to positive psychological attributes such as hope and self-efficacy, which were observed in abundance throughout the *Heddlu Bach* data.

Altruistic behaviour can have a community or civic dimension, as is apparent in relation to the *Heddlu Bach* scheme. For members of a society, living well or 'flourishing' often, involves engaging in civic activities, many of which are the result of nurture or 'nurturing approaches' (Baehr, 2017). In a school and community context, the virtues of tolerance, respect, and being community focused help (Shields 2011). The original report on the implementation of the mini police scheme discussed the aspect of character – thus, the principles of 'character education' (Peterson and Seligman, 2004; Tough, 2012; Porter, 2016) have parallels with the civic, community minded and altruistic traits evident in the children taking part in the *Heddlu Bach* scheme.

It is understandable why, given the focus on early intervention coupled with resource limitations, *Heddlu Bach* has been confined to the primary phase thus far, but given what we know about ACEs and the impact of adolescence on young people, it seems prudent to consider if the approach might be continued into the low years of secondary education, again alongside the AWSCLP. As the *Heddlu Bach* initiative is still embryonic, and because this evaluation only covers the pilot phase of the project, future research studies could be longitudinal in nature, therefore evaluating the longer-term effects of the programme on pupils in relation to the objectives. A further potential limitation is the fact that there was no parental involvement in the data collection process.

In concluding, this paper has provided evidence from the pilot phase of the *Heddlu Bach* scheme. It became apparent that the scheme also contributes to a nurture agenda, as evidenced in our findings, which demonstrate that the children involved in the *Heddlu Bach* scheme across all three schools gained educational benefits, skills and attributes such as self-esteem and confidence, thus aligning with the principles of a nurture approach, and this was also corroborated by school staff. There were also wider community benefits relating to a family/community dynamic, with children becoming more involved in their local community and engaging in a range of activities. While the *Heddlu Bach* scheme has produced overwhelmingly positive results from all stakeholders to date, this pilot project has produced several areas for consideration while the project continues to grow and be considered for use in other schools in the area. Therefore, it is vital that it is not viewed as 'standalone' or even 'tokenistic', and it is important that in the interlinked environments of schools, community organisations and public services, the scheme is located within a wider body of community asset-building. The evidence is stark that if schools are given sole responsibility of participation, the scheme is likely to wane, will not sustain and will be replaced by the next scheme being lined up. It is axiomatic, of course, that the scheme should remain aligned to the ACE programme being developed in Wales.

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# THE CLASSROOM OFFERS A SAFE BASE: EXPANDING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF A KEY PRINCIPLE OF NURTURE GROUPS FROM ATTACHMENT THEORY TO PLACE-BASED PEDAGOGY, TOWARDS DEVELOPING A CONTEMPORARY MODEL OF NURTURE-IN-NATURE PRACTICE IN SCHOOLS

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## ABSTRACT

From its origins within the deprived schools of inner London in the late 1960s, nurture group practice has evolved organically. Based on instinctive, clinically observed and evidence-based principles, nurture groups continue to offer a viable educational response in providing for the fundamental attachment needs of vulnerable children in schools. The theoretical, philosophical and pedagogical concepts that have shaped nurture practice since its establishment are discussed - particularly the theory of the safe base introduced by child psychologists, Bowlby and Ainsworth. This paper asserts that through the expansion and exploration of our understanding of one of the key principles of nurture practice, and by embracing elements of a place-based pedagogy approach, nurture practice can evolve further to meet the needs of vulnerable pupils today and in the future. Furthermore, this paper suggests that nurture groups are well placed to offer the opportunities of reconnection to, and the wider exploration of, the child's natural setting, thereby increasing attachment to place, connectedness to nature and the promotion of pro-environmental behaviour. Insights into a current nurture-in-nature model of evolved practice are presented for the purpose of initiating discussion and further research into this subject.

*'All of us, from the cradle to the grave, are happiest when life is organised as a series of excursions, long or short, from the secure base provided by our attachment figures.'* (Bowlby, 1988)

## INTRODUCTION

Half a century ago schools in London were experiencing many of the challenges still being faced in education today – severe behavioural issues among pupils leading to high rates of exclusions and referrals to specialist services; and high levels of stress among teachers leading to staff attrition, absenteeism and burn-out (Bennathan, 2011; Education Support Partnership, 2018). Marjorie Boxall, an educational psychologist working with the socially and economically deprived children of the city during the late 1960s, responded to the challenge of supporting these pupils in school. By

drawing on her clinical experience of the early nurturing experiences of young children, Boxall devised and developed an inclusive and responsive educational approach that sought to address the root causes of the issues among these vulnerable children. The first nurture group, established in 1969, was Boxall's instinctive response to remedy the consequences of the '[in]adequate and [in]attentive early nurturing care' (Bennathan and Boxall, 2000 cited in Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, p12) she observed, by affording children the opportunity to re-establish these lost experiences within the classroom.

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In observing the milestone of 50 years of nurture groups, we have the opportunity for professional and personal reflection on the evolution of nurture practice. With the benefit of hindsight, together with the advantages offered through the growth and development of research, technology and our increased understanding of brain development and psychology, we are perhaps better able to evaluate the past successes and future challenges of nurture practice than ever before. This paper is the result of my own reflection on the theoretical, philosophical and pedagogical concepts that have shaped nurture practice since its establishment. Furthermore, it seeks to answer the question of whether we, as contemporary nurture practitioners can – by reaffirming our theoretical foundations and by embracing more recent concepts – respond with the same curiosity, imagination and innovation as our pioneers once did, in evolving our practice to meet the particular challenges faced by vulnerable children in education, today and in the future.

Although many of the perennial social, emotional and behavioural challenges described by educational professionals in the 1960s are still prevalent today, children and young people are additionally facing urgent and unique challenges in a time of unprecedented ecological crises. Pollution, global warming, overpopulation and natural resource depletion are evident and seem symptomatic of the wider disconnection between people and planet. Indeed, the term ‘nature-deficit disorder’ (Louv, 2010) – a metaphor describing the human costs of alienation from nature and the environment – is one that is now familiar with educators and the public alike. Within this reality, one of the most significant challenges for contemporary nurture practitioners appears to be not only to offer the opportunity for the remedy and repair of the underdeveloped connections between child and attachment figure, but also that of the fractured connection of child to their natural environment, community and wider world. This paper asserts that through the expansion and exploration of our understanding of one of the key principles of nurture – that the classroom offers a safe base – and by embracing elements of a place-based pedagogical approach, we may further evolve nurture practice to meet these challenges. Furthermore, this paper suggests that nurture groups are well placed to offer the opportunities of reconnection to, and the wider exploration of, the child’s natural setting, thereby increasing attachment to place, connectedness to nature and the promotion of pro-environmental behaviour. This paper also offers an evolved model of nurture practice – a nurture-in-nature approach – that was adopted in a primary school setting in Hampshire more than two years ago, as a possible model for future practice. Forest Circle is a nurture group,

grounded securely on the six principles of nurture, that also embraces the concepts of nature connectedness and place-based education in providing opportunities for wider reconnection to self, people and place, for vulnerable pupils. An illustration of how this evolved model of nurture practice is translated into practical activity is included by affording the reader a glimpse into a typical session of the Forest Circle.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF NURTURE PRACTICE**

The theoretical and pedagogical framework underpinning nurture practice from its first intuitive beginnings has evolved over the past 50 years, alongside our developing understanding of child development, psychology and neuroscience. The first nurture groups were informed by the theories of child development, including those of Piaget (1896-1980), Vygotsky (1896-1934) and Erikson (1902-1947), current at the time (Lucas, 2010). The preceding two decades after the second world war had seen the emergence of a new theory of child development pioneered by John Bowlby (1907-1990), a British psychoanalyst and child psychiatrist, that asserted early childhood attachments played a critical role in the cognitive functioning and later development of young children. Attachment is defined as: “a deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another across time and space” (Bowlby, 1969). Bowlby drew on a variety of disciplines, including cognitive science, developmental psychology, evolutionary biology, zoology and ethology in the formulation of his ‘attachment theory’ (Van Dijken, 1998). At the time the first nurture group pilot scheme was established in 1969, Bowlby was collaborating with another pioneering psychologist, Mary Ainsworth, in the collection of empirical evidence for the emergence of attachment theory. Ainsworth’s insights to Bowlby’s theory contributed significantly to the expansion of attachment theory and its influence in the spheres of developmental and social psychology (Bretherton, 2006). One of Ainsworth’s major contributions to attachment theory is the concept of the attachment figure as a secure base from which an infant can explore the world.

The first generation of nurture practitioners were familiar with these theoretical, philosophical and psychological concepts that formed the foundations for the pedagogical framework of nurture groups (Lucas, 2010; Lucas, 2019). Within this framework, with attachment theory as its cornerstone, nurture groups were, and continue to be, conceptualised as: “a school-based learning environment specifically designed for pupils whose difficulties in accessing school learning are underpinned by an apparent need for social and individual experiences that can be construed in terms of unmet early learning needs” (Bennathan and Boxall,

2000; Boxall, 2002 cited in Cooper and Whitebread, 2007, p.173). Nurtureuk (formerly The Nurture Group Network), the leading charity dedicated to the support and development of nurture groups, has identified six key principles of nurture group theory and practice that underpin the context, organisation and curriculum within all nurture groups (Lucas, Insley and Buckland, 2010), namely: Children's learning is understood developmentally; the classroom offers a safe base; the importance of nurture for the development of self-esteem; language is a vital means of communication; all behaviour is communication; and the importance of transitions in children's lives.

### **THE SAFE BASE**

Since the establishment of the first nurture group, several variants of the 'classic' nurture group structure were introduced by practitioners who applied the underlying principles of nurture, but adapted the original model in response to the needs of their pupils, and taking into account the particular conditions, resources and situation of their schools or settings. These variants are described in the literature in terms of their differing structures (eg full-time, part-time, groups for older children in Key Stages 2 and 3, etc) but are all defined by the theoretical underpinnings of the nurture group approach and by their adherence to the underlying principles of nurture (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007; and Lucas, 2010). One of the principles common to each variant of the classic nurture group structure is the concept of the classroom offering a safe base (Lucas, 2010). The phenomenon of the secure base was first described in the literature by Ainsworth, who observed this 'behaviour pattern' in her developmental studies of infant-mother attachment (Bretherton, 2006). Rather than being a physical place, the secure base, in Ainsworth's view, is provided through a close relationship with one or more sensitive and responsive attachment figures who meet the child's needs and to whom the child can turn as a safe haven when upset or anxious. Ainsworth asserted that when children develop trust in the availability and reliability of this relationship, their anxiety is reduced and they can therefore explore and enjoy their world independently, safe in the knowledge that they can return to their secure base for help if required (Ainsworth and Wittig, 1969). In other words, the emotional connection (attachment) created between the adult and the child is the secure base, and through this connection, the child develops the deeper connection with their physical environment. The concept of a secure base is significant, not only because it provides the basis of a secure attachment, but because it also links attachment with exploration; a securely attached child does not only seek comfort from an attachment figure, but through feeling safe to explore their wider environment, develops confidence, competence and resilience (University of East Anglia, 2019).

### **THE SAFE BASE**

Place attachment refers to the positive emotional-cognitive connections or bonds forged between a person and the significant places where they live and spend their time (Schultz, 2001; Scannell and Gifford, 2017). Schools are places that are imbued with both personal and shared meaning and therefore the space they occupy can act as conduits of ideas and practices: "within which cultural knowledge, norms, values, attitudes and skills can be passed from one generation to the next" (Hutchison, 2004, p.9). The study of child developmental psychology describes how children gradually come to know the world as they mature and how children's perceptions of their immediate and distant places change over time. This understanding has been developed into a variety of theoretical models to explain this concept of place attachment; however, few educators have used this knowledge in developing a learning curriculum responsive to children's developmental experience (Hutchison, 2004). Although there is little published research available regarding place attachment and the classroom environment, a recent study investigating the ways in which person-place connections contribute to an individual's psychological wellbeing revealed several cognitive-emotional benefits, including comfort/security, belonging, relaxation and positive emotions (Scannell and Gifford, 2017). There is little doubt that such evidence was not available 50 years ago when nurture practice first emerged, yet the instinctive response of Boxall and the other early practitioners bears out what contemporary research confirms – namely that attachment to homes (one's current home, childhood home, or the house of someone else) emerge as the most common type of place attachment and that when the socio-physical features of the place match the individual's needs and goals, place attachment is more likely, thereby increasing feelings of wellbeing (ibid).

The nurture group classroom was, and is, consciously planned and arranged: "to create an educational experience that is rooted in feelings of emotional security" (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, p27). With the acknowledgement that the physical environment associated with feelings of secure attachment has a significant role to play (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007), practitioners give much thought to how the classroom itself will feel homely, comfortable and safe, and how the physical environment will encourage secure attachment and embody and promote the principles of nurture (Lucas, 2010). The findings of a recent study appear to confirm this idea when it found that individuals seem to benefit psychologically and experience intrinsic fulfilment from places of attachment that provide them with aesthetic pleasure (Scannell and Gifford, 2017). The physical environment of the nurture group classroom also provides the backdrop to the:

'ritualised routine' (Lucas, 2010, p38), characteristic of all nurture group classrooms – providing familiarity, recognition, reassurance and a sense of calm – all of which reduces anxiety, builds connection and relationships and optimises the opportunity for learning. Nurture group practice acknowledges the significance of both the 'emotional space' and the physical environment and the positive effects of both on building attachment. Thus, for children attending nurture groups, the development of place attachment facilitates the development of attachment between child and main attachment figures in the form of the nurture group practitioners.

Place attachment is also associated with connections to natural environments, with emerging research demonstrating that secure place attachment is linked to the presence of nature, social bonding and the development of emotional and cognitive processes such as resilience (Chawla, 2015; Little and Derr, 2018). Despite the potential importance of this concept, it remains relatively undertheorized, particularly in relation to children's relationships to the natural world (Little and Derr, 2018).

### **NATURE CONNECTEDNESS**

Human connectedness with the rest of nature – the extent to which individuals include nature as part of their identity – is a topic of increasing research interest. A growing body of evidence suggests that emotional association with one's natural environment, also known as nature connectedness (Schultz, 2001), has benefits to psychological and physical health and the ability to learn (Louv, 2010); and can also assist in developing pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours (Richardson et al, 2019; Gosling and Williams, 2010). A recent report conducted by the Institute of Education at University College of London was commissioned by The Wildlife Trust with the aim of evaluating the impact that nature-based activities have on children's wellbeing and views about nature. The researchers found that regular contact with nature allows children to experience profound and diverse benefits, including improved wellbeing, health, motivation, confidence and better relationships with teachers and peers (Sheldrake et al 2019). Despite the proliferation of this evidence, research also demonstrates that children are spending significantly less time in nature than ever before (Beer et al 2018). Several reasons for this have been cited in the literature, including: the rapid embrace of digital technology as recreation by young people; poor play opportunities; increasing urbanisation of the population; and increased risk aversion and safety fears among parents (ibid). In his seminal work, *Last Child in the Woods*, (Louv, 2010) the author asserts that this disconnection from nature is related to lower school achievement, lack of self-confidence and many other social, emotional and physical problems.

Human beings are currently living in way that is completely unsustainable with the world we live in. There is a wide range of views about the nature and severity of the current environmental crisis and although some of the issues are highly controversial, the majority of current scientists agree that massive resource depletion, widespread poverty, pollution and climate change are unfolding more rapidly than normal because of human activity (World Future Fund, 2019). The 2018 Living Planet report from the World Wildlife Foundation has found that an astonishing 60 per cent of the earth's mammals, birds, fish and reptiles have been eliminated by human activity in just over 40 years (WWF, 2018). The report offers a sobering picture of the impact of human activity on the world's wildlife, forests, oceans, rivers and climate. As we proceed rapidly towards a future of increasing ecological uncertainty, the need to involve our next generation in appreciating and respecting the natural world is of pressing significance (Beer et al, 2018). A growing body of research suggests that motivating people to care sustainably for the environment means promoting compassionate concern for our natural world, which originates from early contact with nature, empathy for our fellow creatures, and a sense of wonder and fascination (Frantz and Mayer, 2014; Geng et al, 2015; Schultz, 2001). These studies confirm that while environmental education imparts knowledge and creates experience to change beliefs, attitudes and behaviours (Frantz and Mayer, 2014), it is only when children are given an opportunity to develop a sense of wonder – particularly if nurtured by an attentive adult who facilitates and listens to the child's inner life and own world – that rapid advances can be made in developing ecological understanding (Lloyd and Gray, 2014).

### **PLACE-BASED PEDAGOGY**

Place-based education is a pedagogical model based on a philosophical orientation to teaching and learning that emphasizes the pupil's immediate local environment and community as the primary resource for learning through hands-on, real-world learning experiences (Sobel, 2013). From a phenomenological perspective, place-based education acknowledges the deeply personal experience of place that is rooted in feelings of attachment and belonging to particular environments; these natural and cultural spheres from which people derive meaning and purpose are viewed as the starting point from which curriculum learning emerges. In this way the importance of the conscious planning of learning environments, including classrooms, is reinforced (Hutchison, 2004). Place-based education can be characterised as a pedagogy of community – the reintegration of the individual into their homeground and the restoration of the essential links between a person and their significant place (Sobel, 2013). Although place-based education only

originated as an educational concept within the past 20 years, its origins can be argued to be far more ancient. The study of significant spaces can trace its conceptual roots to the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC) and his theory of place, or *Topos*, which refers to the feelings of belonging evoked by the orientation and dimension of a person's relationship to the space they inhabit (Hutchison, 2004). Later, Comenius, the 17th century education philosopher, articulated one of the core precepts of place-based education by stating: "Knowledge of the nearest things should be acquired first, then that of those farther and farther off." (Woodhouse, 2001 cited in Sobel, 2013, p7).

In the UK the natural environment of the school outside the classroom is seen as integral to the implementation of government initiatives that focus on improving curriculum learning, children's wellbeing, sustainable development and pro-environmental behaviours (Lloyd and Gray, 2014). The Education Outside the Classroom Manifesto (Department for Education and Skills, 2006) makes the case for learning outside the classroom to promote widespread understanding and acceptance of the: "unique contribution these experiences make to the lives of young people" (p10). The Manifesto asserts that the learning experiences outside the classroom are often the most memorable, as they help children to make sense of the world around them by forging links between emotional and cognitive learning. In their meta-analysis of the qualities required by educational settings to provide significant experiences of nature activity, Giusti et al (2018), found initiatives that were: child-driven, challenging, entertaining and restorative; focused on free play as well as learning; allowed engagement with plants and animals; provided environmental epiphanies; and allowed opportunities for cultural and artistic activities were the most effective in shaping connection to nature among children, their families and their community. Incorporating the key concepts of place-based education within the nurture group setting requires practitioners to consider not only the characteristics of the classroom in facilitating secure attachments, but also the existing opportunities for deeper connection with the natural spaces within the school environment; and examining the possibilities of how these spaces could embody and promote deeper connection and wider learning. One of the posited models of place-based pedagogy – the developmental congruency model – suggests an approach where educators heed the developmental experience of the individual pupil by imagining a developmentally congruent learning curriculum derived from each pupil's developing sense of place (Hutchison, 2004).

The Forest School movement is one example of a place-based learning pedagogy evident within the UK school

system that emphasises experiential learning, self-directed play and exploration in a safe and supportive natural environment (Lloyd and Gray, 2014). Through repeated opportunities of being and learning in nature, Forest School allows pupils to build a deep, instinctive connection to their natural space; reconnects them to their ancient heritage; and allows them to consider their roles and responsibilities towards the wider natural world (Forest School Association, 2019).

Emerging research suggests that children benefit from engagement with Forest School in a number of ways, including showing increased motivation, concentration, confidence, knowledge of the natural environment, and increased awareness of others (Ridgers, et al., 2012). The Forest School philosophy offers many similarities to the ethos of learning within nurture groups in that the learning is focused on 'processes rather than products' (Norfolk County Council, 2009, p3) and allows pupils the time and space required to develop at their own developmental pace. Inclusive, child-led learning through play; the development of personal, social and emotional skills; and the opportunity for pupils to be themselves, find peace and communicate with others in a safe and caring environment, are features common to both the Forest School and nurture group approaches.

#### **FOREST CIRCLE: A NURTURE-IN-NATURE MODEL**

The theoretical concepts contained in nurture group practice, attachment theory, place attachment and place-based pedagogy discussed above, have been incorporated into a practice-led project in a primary school based in North-East Hampshire over the past two years. The Forest Circle nurture group project engages up to 12 pupils from both Key stage 1 and Key Stage 2, and comprises two part-time nurture groups – Seedlings and Saplings – with each group attending sessions for an afternoon once a week, facilitated by a nurture group practitioner and a Learning Support Assistant (LSA). The pupils attending Forest Circle are identified by their class teachers as experiencing a range of emotional, behavioural and social difficulties that impact their ability to access aspects of their learning in their mainstream classes. Teachers' observations are recorded in the form of the Emotional Literacy Questionnaire (ELQ) (Southampton Psychology Service, 2003), a standardised assessment tool that measures the status of pupils' emotional literacy within five key areas, addressed in the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) curriculum, including: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. The measures on the ELQ are used to help identify areas of focus for the intervention and to inform lesson planning. Boxall profiles are also completed for each pupil attending Forest Circle within the first half-term of admission (baseline), and at the end of each term, to provide

more detailed developmental and diagnostic data with the view to create a targeted prepared environment and to track pupils' progress.

The setting for the groups comprises the nurture classroom and the local ecology of the school, which includes the schoolyard garden, school grounds and adjoining fallow farmland, rented by the school and incorporated as a functioning school field. The nurture room is located in a quiet area of the school with direct access to the full extent of the school grounds described earlier. The nurture room is designed to be cosy, comfortable, uncluttered and contained to induce a sense of calm and peace. Wherever possible, natural materials (wooden furniture, living plants, natural textiles, etc) and natural elements (eg the nature table displaying seasonal objects) have been incorporated into the décor. Two key 'home areas' (Lucas, 2010, p39) have been established – the fire circle indoors, and the totem circle outdoors – as the secure places described in the literature (Lucas, 2010 and Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007). These areas provide pupils with a physical and emotional base from which to: orientate themselves; begin their learning journey; and return to in order to reconnect with the practitioner and the rest of the group at the start and throughout the session.

The classroom set up is prepared by the practitioner before the children arrive so that the space is always presented in a similar way. Pupils have a designated place assigned to them within the fire circle. Their space is designated by the placement of a cushion and name card, depicting an image of a species of an indigenous animal, bird, insect or plant. For example, at the time of taking the photograph in Figures 1 and 2 (below), each pupil's card depicted a different species of owl occurring in Britain. Each seating place

also contains a (battery operated) candle contained within a clay bowl, made by the pupils in a previous session. The centre of the circle is delineated by a green felt mat with a wooden perpetual calendar at the midpoint - a repeated symbol within the classroom - of the continuity of the seasons and the rhythm of life. Resting on the perpetual calendar will be either of two objects – the 'Idea Seed' box or the 'Lost Word' tin. The idea seed is a concept used in Forest School sessions where the practitioner prepares a stimulus for the outdoor activities and learning that will take place later in the session; the 'seed' is selected based on observations from previous sessions and can take the form of an item related to a story, song, game, activity, natural occurrence, etc (Norfolk County Council, 2009). The lost word tin is an activity inspired by the award-winning book, *The Lost Words* (Macfarlane and Morris, 2017), written in response to common nature and landscape words, eg 'acorn', 'bluebell', 'kingfisher' and 'wren', being found to have fallen from the consciousness and common usage in children (ibid. 2019). In the Forest Circle classroom, a tin containing sensory natural materials such as leaves, twigs, acorns, etc is prepared by the practitioner who places magnetic letters inside depicting the lost word for the session. A magnetic whiteboard is stored nearby to facilitate the task of forming the word during the session.

The Totem circle is situated in the schoolyard garden on a relatively flat and grassy site where three wooden sculptures, depicting the lifecycles of various animals had been installed some years before. Movable wooden stumps sourced from a local tree surgeon have been placed in a wide circle, with a large stump at the centre.



**Figure 1:** *The Forest Circle nurture classroom*



**Figure 2:** *The Fire Circle safe place*

A large display board covers each of two classroom walls – one is referred to constantly throughout the sessions and contains session information in visual form (see Figure 3), eg Forest Circle Customs (visual timetable), calendar, weather, pupils’ birthdays etc; and the other is used to display evidence of previous sessions in the form of the pupils’ artwork, journal excerpts and photographs. The predictability of routines in the group and the visual cue of the picture timetable offers a sense of security and helps the children to manage the stress associated with change and transition (Lucas, 2010). There are no distinctive rules within the nurture group that are set apart from the pupils’ year groups and wider school, instead a simple maxim – ‘always kind, always fair’ – depicted at the top of the main display board, underpins all interactions and sets the aspirational code of conduct within the group. In the place of individual rewards, when the nurture group practitioner notices the children displaying behaviours that support the group’s maxim, the practitioner mentions the child and the incident and places an acorn in a glass jar. When the jar becomes full of acorns, the children receive a group reward in the form of an item that benefits everyone within in the group, eg a handcrafted item, seeds or piece of gardening equipment.



**Figure 3:** *Main display board featuring session information*

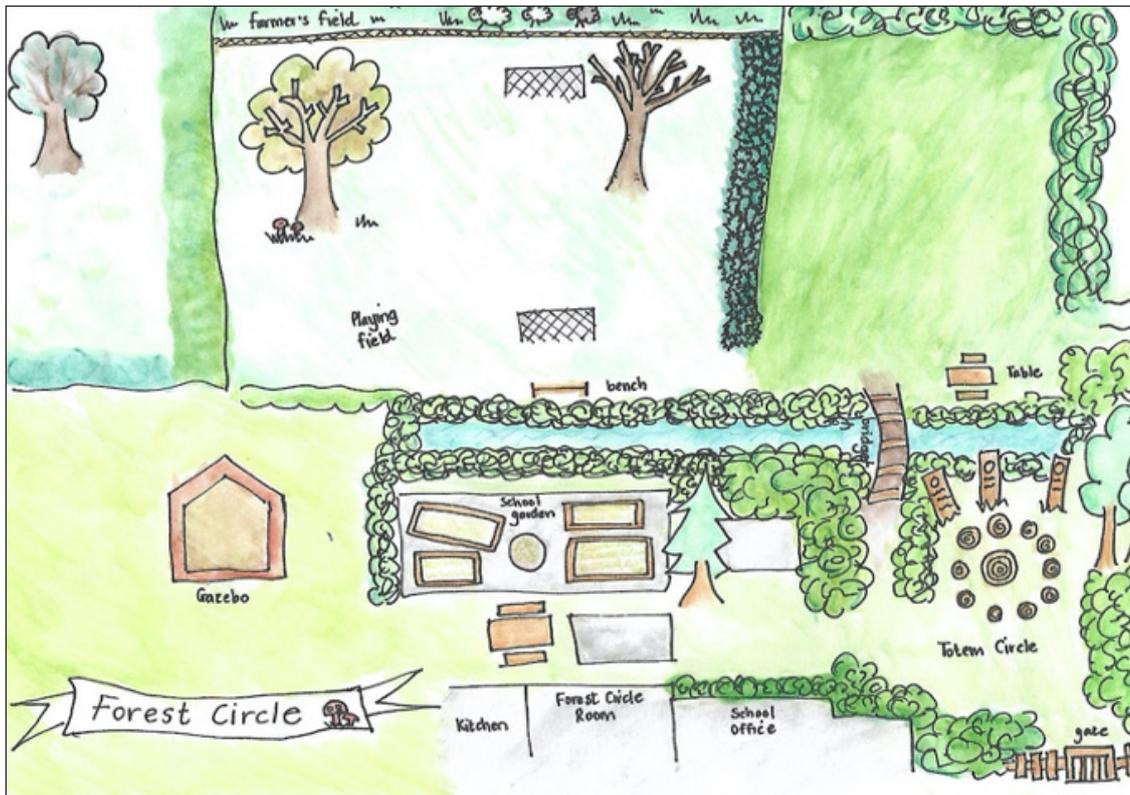


Figure 4: Map of the Forest Circle environment created by a Year 6 pupil

The schoolyard garden is accessed through double doors opening directly from the nurture classroom into the outdoor space. A large wooden picnic table and benches are located a few steps into the fenced garden, which serves as a surface on which to work and create, but also as a dining table where a snack is shared towards the end of the session. The totem circle is set a short distance away from the classroom and sits in a secluded spot, bordered by a fenced-off pond and a small bamboo plantation and fruit trees, which provides a shady area, excellent for den building. A small bridge spans a dry stream ditch and leads to the school field, bordered by wild hedgerows and diverse species of mature trees. Figure 4 depicts the area as seen through the eyes of a Forest Circle pupil.

### A typical afternoon in Forest Circle

When they enter the nurture classroom each pupil takes their seat in their place (identified by their name card, candle and clay bowl), and lights their candle. These items are specifically provided to offer each pupil an objective representation that is both tangible and symbolic of their identity and their value to the group (Lucas, 2019). Once all the pupils are seated in a circle and each candle has been lit, the group recites a short verse, signalling the beginning of the session. Repetitive rituals or customs allow for the establishment of fellowship and create a sense of belonging within the group (Norfolk County Council, 2009). At each session, an 'Okethiwe' (chosen person) is selected sequentially according to the calendar of pupils' birthdays depicted

on the display board. This leadership role facilitates the development of the pupil's thinking and social communication skills, and the development of self-esteem and confidence (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007). A visual timetable is permanently presented as a familiar, reassuring ritualised routine of the afternoon's itinerary that helps pupils to develop feelings of safety and security (ibid.). The Okethiwe chooses a card from a pack that displays a greeting spoken in another country around the world and with the help of the practitioner, finds the country using a world globe, then models how to pronounce the greeting so that all the pupils may greet each other in a foreign tongue. This activity creates an awareness in the pupils of the wider world, and its possibilities of diverse cultures and languages and geographical locations. The Okethiwe is also responsible for changing the calendar settings to show the season and date, thereby orienting the pupils to the cyclical passage of time in the natural world. With the consensus of the group, weather cards are chosen and displayed to create an awareness of the outdoor conditions in preparation for the transition to the natural environment.

### The Idea Seed and Lost Word

Once the routine of the session has been established by working through the customs mentioned above, the practitioner will call the pupil's attention to the centre of the circle by asking them to focus on their candle for a moment and by engaging in a few rounds of nose breathing. Nose breathing has been found to promote

activity of the parasympathetic nervous system, which calms and relaxes the body and increases cognitive functioning of the brain (Ruth, 2016). In the silence of the moment, the practitioner will ask the Okethiwe to open the idea seed box or the lost word tin, depending on which has been prepared and placed at the heart of the circle. The idea seed box will contain a sensory stimulus that can be passed around the circle to every pupil, thereby promoting a conscious link to the outdoors, as well as the philosophical enquiry and discussion promoted in the Philosophy for Children (P4C) curriculum (SAPERRE, 2018). The lost word tin is passed around the circle and when a pupil receives it, they will close their eyes and try to find one of the magnetic letters inside the box, without looking. This sensory activity isolates the sense of touch as the pupil must discriminate the shape of a letter from the other forms inside the tin. Touch is essential for building and maintaining attachment and trust (Gerhardt, 2004). The activity also promotes patience and turn-taking among the other pupils in the circle. Once a letter is found, it is placed on the magnetic board until the whole word is discovered, whereupon a discussion about the word will elicit the discussion of experiences of the children or facts they already know that link to the lost word. These simple, yet profound, techniques associated with these two activities allow the pupils to reconnect with nature and with their own 'inborn sense of wonder' (Carson and Pratt, 1965 cited in Beer et al, 2018).

### The Totem Circle

The practitioner draws the children's attention back to the board, where the activities for the day are displayed, and explains the outdoor task for the session. The outdoor portion of the session follows the basic outline and contains a number of characteristics of a typical Forest School routine (Norfolk County Council, 2009). The pupils now prepare to head outdoors and after dressing themselves in the appropriate clothing (jumpers, coats, etc) according to the weather cards,

they follow the practitioner outside to reconvene in the outdoor safe space, the totem circle. This space represents the reference point for the pupils in the outdoor environment; a place where personal contact with the practitioner has been established so that the pupils can return to it as a safe base for the duration of the session (Lucas, 2010). Once the pupils are seated in places of their own choosing, the practitioner shares any specific hazards from a daily risk assessment with the group. Pupils are encouraged to think ahead and determine any risks they may encounter and discuss these thoughts with the other pupils. Certain procedures may need to be practised through games or role play, particularly in the case of activities or tasks that may be unfamiliar or new to the group. In this way pupils are supported in taking appropriate risks which develops trust in themselves and the other members of the group (Norfolk County Council, 2009).

Another characteristic of Forest School adopted in the nurture-in-nature approach is the element of free will. Each pupil has the choice to work alone, work in a pair or work in a whole group – leading to increased participation, motivation and enjoyment (ibid). The practitioner will ask the Okethiwe first, and then the other pupils in turn, how they would prefer to work in the session; if they indicate they would like to work in pairs or in a group, the pupil will invite the other pupil(s) to do so. The practitioner will model the use of language in how to invite a member of the group to work and how to politely accept or decline an invitation. Modelling the use of language while creating awareness of what a pupil might be feeling, allows the person choosing to feel empathy for and identify with, the other pupils in the group. As the pupils are provided with support, they become more aware of themselves as individual people who 'make choices, have legitimate wants and are able to control them' (Lucas, p125), which contributes to the development of self-awareness, self-esteem and empathy.



**Figure 5:** *The Totem Circle photographed through the seasons*

## Outdoor learning

The outdoor learning experience mirrors the Forest School ethos in that the learning is focused on the process and the journey, rather than on outcomes. Pupils are given the time and space to learn and develop at their own rate, while building a deep instinctive connection to the natural space of their school environment (Norfolk County Council, 2009). During the first session of a new cohort, the outdoor activity will include a guided walk through each area of the outdoor nurturing space, where pupils are encouraged to note features of the landscape significant to them, followed by a mapmaking exercise. Mapmaking, from a developmentally congruent point of view, can be viewed as a developmental expression of the pupil's innermost need to organise, make sense of and connect with their surroundings (Hutchison, 2004). This further affords the practitioner the ability to observe the pupil's 'unique perceptual, spatial, and emotionally resonant ways of perceiving the world around them' (ibid).



**Figure 6:** A map produced by a Year 2 pupil depicting the outdoor nurture space

Some of the planned outdoor learning experiences within the nature-in-nurture model are practitioner-led, although the focus remains a pupil-led approach that will include opportunities for the pupils to observe the ever-changing natural environment and to form questions about the unfolding process independently. The Woodland Trust (2019), the UK's largest woodland conservation trust, has developed an initiative – Nature Detectives – which provides a large bank of cross-curricular ideas, activities and free online resources designed to encourage pupils to embrace the natural world around them. Many of the activities and ideas for the Forest Circle are drawn from this resource and also that of Trailblazer – an outdoor learning initiative devised by Hampshire County Council (2019), dedicated to supporting outdoor learning in Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and West Berkshire by providing practitioners with training, ideas and experience-sharing opportunities. Some of the structured outdoor activities offered during Forest Circle sessions include (but are not restricted to): seasonal activities (scavenger hunts, material gathering, etc); arts and crafts using natural materials (sketching, watercolour painting, sewing, clay sculpting, etc); nature observation and study (bird watching, tree and leaf identification, identifying animal tracks, bird egg identification, etc); habitat building (animal shelters, nest making, den building, etc); cooking (pumpkin soup, pesto pasta, apple tasting, etc); plant/garden cultivation (planting a herb garden; creating a wildlife meadow, etc); and wildlife conservation (creating a hedgehog habitat and feeding station, etc).

Structured activities in the outdoor environment are important and allow for the development of the pupils' knowledge and skills, however, just as children require positive adult contact and a sense of connection to the wider human community, they also need the positive playful contact with nature and moments of solitude that being in nature offers (Louv, 2010). Play is generally understood as the 'various activities and behaviours that children engage in' (Ridgers et al, 2012, p3) and while it is difficult to define due to the complexity of the behaviour, there is general acceptance that play is enjoyable, fun, intrinsically motivated and self-directed (ibid). Unstructured play, whether a solitary or a shared activity, is an important element in nurture practice as it is recognised as a conduit for the exploration and engagement of a pupil's cognitive, social and emotional resources (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007). Play also facilitates the development of pupils' problem-solving, cognitive and social communication skills and has the potential to help pupils 'to connect the school experience with their inner world' (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007, p. 29). Including the time and space for pupils to engage in unmediated play within the routine of the session, is therefore imperative.



pupil and gives details of the occurrence and then places an acorn in the group jar. This exercise helps to create a sense of positive achievement that highlights not only individual achievement, but allows the other pupils to celebrate in the collective success of each pupil's positive achievement (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007). The practitioner encourages the continuation of the sense of calm and peace of the outdoor experience by reading a story to the pupils, with the chosen book usually relating to a tale of the natural world or linked to the structured activity offered earlier in the session. Research has found that the exploration of a book by young children alongside an attachment figure is a fundamentally social process, 'embedded in the affective interpersonal context of the attachment relationship' (Mackay et al, 2010, p101). Reading in this way provides an opportunity for a pleasurable, calming experience that creates a deeper connection between pupil and practitioner; and additionally, has positive implications for social, emotional and cognitive learning, particularly in the learning process involved in the development of literacy skills (ibid).

At the close of the session, the group gathers in a circle once again. The pupils hold hands and recite a blessing on each other until they meet again for the next session.

The practitioner will call each pupil in turn to gather any items of clothing, etc and invite them to meet at the door, where they shake hands and thank each other for the experience of being together for the afternoon. This is a gesture of mutual respect and affection that strengthens the emotional connection and attachment between practitioner and pupil, and that allows the pupil to transition back to their mainstream class with assured confidence.

## **CONCLUSION**

The aim of this paper was to endeavor to offer a comprehensive narrative of the fundamental theoretical, philosophical and pedagogical underpinnings of nurture group practice that has evolved from its beginnings 50 years ago, to the present day. What emerges from this retrospective reflection is an impression that although nurture practice has certainly evolved and grown over the half-century of its existence, its fundamental purpose has remained unchanged – to provide opportunities within the school setting for the establishment of warm, reciprocal, responsive attachments that will empower the pupil to be confident enough to explore their world, embrace opportunities and fulfill their innate potential.

Schools have a long history of concern about pupils with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties who underachieve at school (Geddes, 2012). Bowlby's attachment theory offers a unique insight into the roots of these difficulties as it recognises that the

communication implicit in behaviour is based on unmet needs. Nurture practice begins at this very point by 'hearing' the inner voice of the pupil and responding to the cries through the creation of connection, safety and trust. From the position of a secure relationship, the pupil learns to function within the school environment in way that is more synchronised to his true nature. In the words of one of our pioneers: 'Nurture is about relationship; nurturing is something that we do' (Lucas, 2019). The theoretical framework of nurture practice has grown from the core of this instinctive response to the obstacles faced by pupils in schools 50 years ago; and just as the pupil matures and grows, so too must our response as practitioners evolve to meet the new challenges and embrace the singular experiences of the present day.

The global landscape of the 21st century presents significant challenges for the children of today, and the pervasive risks and uncertainties are impacting on children's precious childhood experiences (Malone, 2004). The fact that the natural world is essential to the emotional health of children has been articulated in the body of research referred to in this paper. This paper offers the findings of previous research that affirms the following position: concern for the environment is based on an individual's connection to nature that develops with the opportunity for regular, autonomous and unmediated contact with natural spaces that hold meaning for the individual.

Additionally, it is asserted that through the evolution of our own model of practice, and by embracing elements of contemporary practice, such as place-based pedagogy, nurture groups are well placed to offer pupils the type of opportunities for contact with the natural world described above; having the awareness of the benefits that such contact would provide to the pupils themselves, their schools, communities and the wider world. I concur with Krautwurst (2004, p. 1) when he asserts: "Our challenge isn't so much to teach children about the natural world, but to find ways to nurture and sustain the instinctive connections they already have."

This paper does not outline a formal research investigation, but rather offers an anecdotal example of a model of contemporary nurture-in-nature practice for the purpose of initiating interest and discussion. In this respect, further research that focuses on the formal evaluation of a similar model of practice would be welcome, and more specifically, studies that relate to the impact of the engagement with nature as a key element of nurture practice. The evaluation of such case studies could combine data gathered from observational assessment tools commonly used by nurture groups, for example, The Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 2010) and the ELQ (Southampton Psychology Service, 2003)

with adapted, evidence-based, self-report response questionnaires used in previous studies to measure place attachment (Katsamagka, 2013; Williams and Roggenbuck, 1989), nature connectedness (Cheng and Monroe, 2012) and pro-environmental behaviour (Sheldrake et al, 2019) in young children within outdoor educational settings.

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# PSYCHOMETRIC PROPERTIES OF THE FRENCH VERSION OF THE BOXALL PROFILE

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**Keywords:** Boxall Profile, French version, psychometric properties, validity, ROC curves.

## ABSTRACT

The Boxall Profile provides a framework for the structured observation of children in nurture groups. It is a detailed and rigorously trialled normative diagnostic instrument developed for teachers and teaching assistants to measure children's levels of emotional and behavioural functioning. Moreover, it highlights specific targets for intervention within a child's individual functioning. As of yet, the psychometric properties of the French version of Boxall Profile have not been extensively studied. In total 169 boys and 23 girls ( $N = 192$ ) ranging from 6 to 13 years old ( $M = 9.24$  years old,  $SD = 1.83$ ) were assessed by their teacher using the French version of the Boxall Profile, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, and the Teacher Report Form. Internal consistency analysis (Cronbach's Alpha), correlation analysis, exploratory factor analysis, and area under the receiver operating characteristic curve (AUC) were performed. The results demonstrate good reliability of scales and sub-scales, the fit of the first level of factorial structure, and good concurrent validity. These results suggest the effectiveness of the French version of the Boxall Profile in properly identifying students facing difficulties. Possible solutions are discussed to improve the construct validity of the second and third tiers of the instrument.

## INTRODUCTION

During an extensive longitudinal study (across 12 years 1998-2010) on child development ( $N = 2,120$ ) in Quebec (Canada), it was found that almost half of the participating children had a high incidence of social emotional behaviour disorders symptoms (SEBD) during at least two of the eight data collection time intervals (from the 17th month through to the 10-year point). More specifically, around 25% exhibited a high level of internalising behaviours, 37% exhibited a high level of externalising behaviours, and 7% exhibited a high level of interpersonal difficulties (Riberdy et al, 2013). For children aged between 5 and 10 years, close to 19% of study participants received at least one formal neurodevelopmental disorder diagnosis during the study with the most prevalent being learning disorders (10%) and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (12%). All reported that social, emotional, behavioural, and learning difficulties were more prevalent in children from families with a history of sustained low socio-economic status (Riberdy et al, 2013).

Throughout Quebec primary schools, various special

education programmes have been established to prevent SEBDs from worsening and to foster improvements. Inspired by Marjorie Boxall's UK-based nurture groups (NG), 'Kangaroo Class' (KC) is one such programme that has been operating in a considerable number of Quebec primary schools for over 10 years now. KC programmes cater to children who in their early years at school have not acquired the necessary social and/or behavioural maturity levels to attend mainstream classrooms and offer them an alternative setting which has been adapted to fit their developmental needs. Research has shown that NGs have a positive effect on the development of children in many areas and consistently shows that children who attend NGs make significant social and emotional gains after attending the groups (Sanders, 2007; Seth-Smith et al, 2010; Shaver & Mcclatchey, 2013). Furthermore, findings from a study conducted by Cooper and Whitebread (2007) similarly indicate significant improvements for nurture group students in terms of social, emotional and behavioural development and noted that in schools providing NG programmes, students with SEBD who attend mainstream classrooms throughout the year

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had also significantly improved in terms of behaviour – more so than students both with and without SEBD attending schools that did not operate nurture group programmes. Quebec studies that sought to appraise the implementation and success of KC programmes reported similar findings. Research on the impact of KC programmes indicates that both KC teachers and the parents of KC students expressed high rates of satisfaction and had very positive perceptions of the level of SEBD gains, with over 80% reporting positive or very positive effects on the following criteria: students' behaviour in school, self-esteem, and general attitudes towards school and adults (Couture, 2009; Couture & Bégin 2010). Quantitatively, the same research data shows more noteworthy behavioural improvements in KC students on some particular criteria than for students attending other programme types (Couture & Bégin 2010; Couture & Lapalme 2007).

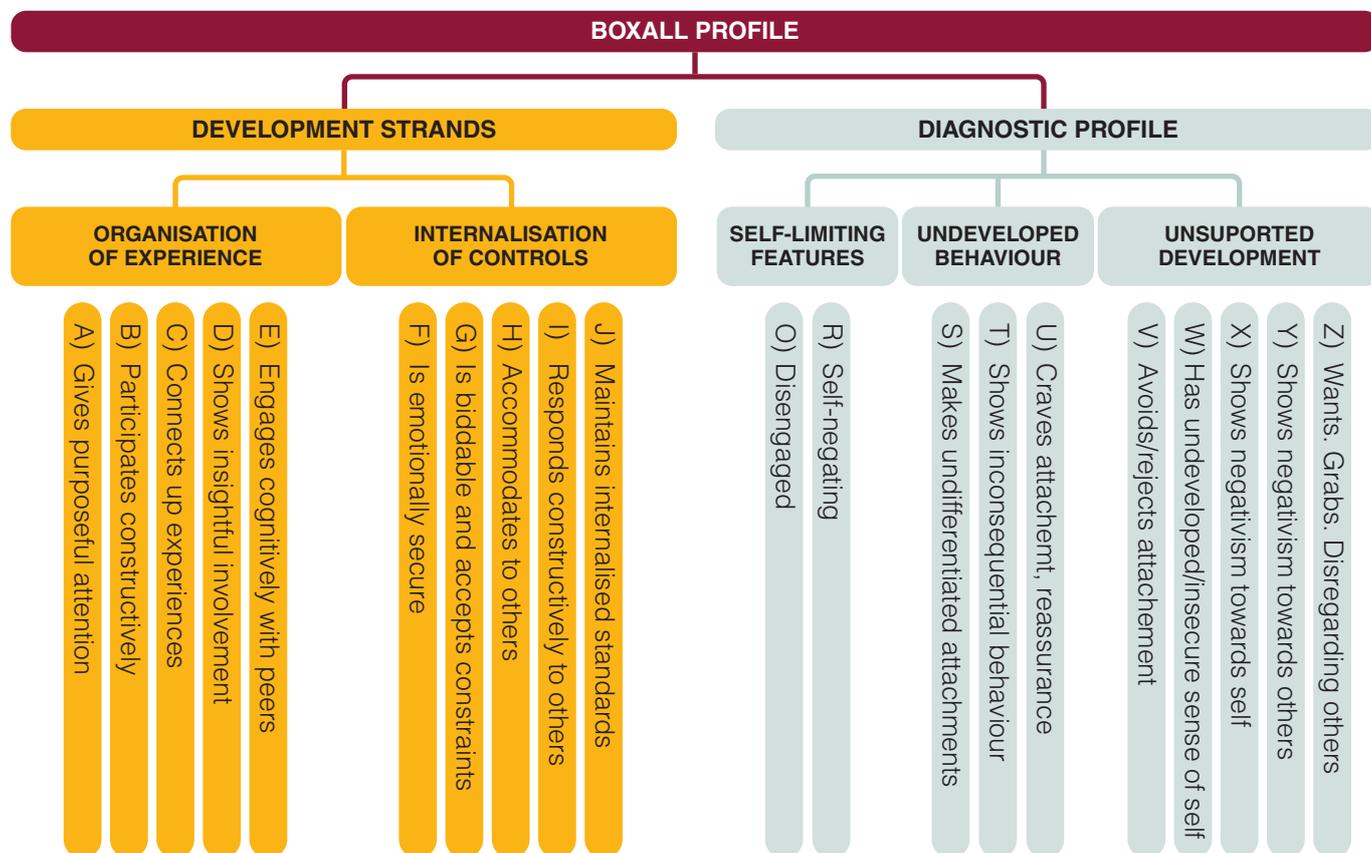
The original NG model advocates the use of an instrument named the Boxall Profile (BP; Bennathan & Boxall, 1998), a French version of which has since been translated for use within Quebec's KC programmes. This questionnaire was designed for teachers and teaching assistants to thoroughly assess a student's strengths and difficulties with an aim to design effective intervention plans for their specific and unique needs. The systematic use of the BP is

scheduled across time intervals for each student to properly track student evolution and progress in order to make further adjustments to individual intervention plans as needed (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007).

Given the current lack of scientific validation for the translated French version of the BP, this study aimed to identify its psychometric qualities and limitations by applying a range of statistical analysis methods.

### Boxall Profile

The BP comes in questionnaire form and is filled out by a school teacher or staff member who knows the student. Its creators support its use with children from ages 3 to 12, although it is only normalised for ages 3 to 8. Figure 1 shows how the BP is structurally broken down. Divided into two core sections, the first section is called Developmental Strands and deals with developmental factors underpinning the individual's ability to engage effectively in the learning process. This section is then divided into two parent scales: Organisation of Experience and Internalisation of Controls. Each of these scales comprises five subscales that reflect the child's level of engagement with the world as well as his or her level of personal development, and his or her awareness of others. Each subscale contains between two and five items each for a total of 34 items across the whole section.



**Figure 1:** Layout of the Boxall Profile structure. The first tier is comprised of two core sections. The second tier is broken down into five scales. The third tier involves 20 subscales that then break down to a total of 68 final items.

The second section is called Diagnostic Profile and deals with any behavioural characteristics that may inhibit or interfere with the child's social and academic performance. This section is divided into three parent scales: Self-Limiting Features (with two subscales); Undeveloped Behaviour (three subscales); and Unsupported Development (five subscales). These subscales respectively reflect a) a lack of a normal thrust for growth, b) a lack of inner resources to relate to others and engage at an age-appropriate level, and c) a lack of early nurturing care. As with the first section, the second one comprises 34 items, albeit split up across 10 subscales. This study used the standardised version of the norms calculated in 1984 that evaluated 880 students in the United Kingdom.

### **Psychometric properties of the Boxall Profile**

Bennathan and Boxall (1998) presented findings from a validation study conducted on the original instrument. Content validity was established by pooling the observations made by experts working with children in the context of NGs and mainstream classroom settings, as well as by one psychotherapist. The BP's items were defined as to represent children with developmental delays whose dysfunctional living context may contribute to emotional immaturity. Both the theoretical foundation of the BP and the NG intervention philosophy are rooted in attachment theory (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000). Construct validity was assessed using a sample of 880 children aged from 3 years 4 months through to 8 years of age. Specifically, 442 were in primary school NGs: 307 in mainstream primary classes, and 131 in mainstream nursery classes. The BP's sections, scales and subscales were initially created by grouping items using factor analysis. For both of the main sections, the subscales' clinical thresholds were derived from the scores of children whose average age was five, and who the teachers deemed to be developing typically and functioning well.

A study led by Couture, Cooper, and Royer (2011) assessed the concurrent validity of the BP using data previously collected by Cooper and Whitebread (2007). The sample consisted of 202 children and adolescents (70.3% boys, 29.7% girls) attending NGs at 25 schools spread across eight Local Education Authorities throughout the United Kingdom. Children were aged from 3 years 11 months to 14 years 3 months ( $M = 6.61$ ,  $SD = 1.90$ ), with 87.6% of the sample falling between 3 to 8 years of age, the range for which the BP has been normalised. The internal consistency of the five BP subscales was demonstrated using Cronbach's alpha, which varied between .24 and .87. To establish the BP's ability to differentiate children with difficulties from those without, the researchers split children into two comparison groups – normal range ( $N = 14$ ) and abnormal range ( $N = 170$ ) – based on their

scores on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997). Independent t-test results revealed that, using the SDQ as a baseline, four out of the five BP scales showed appropriate and significant differentiation of children in the normal and abnormal ranges. Only the Undeveloped Behaviour scale did not differentiate sufficiently both groups. To ascertain the level of construct convergence and divergence, Pearson's correlations were conducted between the six SDQ scales and the five BP scales. The results showed that all of the BP scales significantly correlate with at least three of the SDQ scales ( $r = -.45$  to  $.58$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and all BP scales were significantly correlated with the SDQ total difficulties score ( $r = -.43$  to  $.36$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In sum, findings indicated that both instruments measure reasonably comparable constructs in children with behavioural difficulties, even though each instrument has a different scoring approach.

All in all, the information reported by Bennathan and Boxall (1998) allows for the assessment of the BP's initial design process and content validity. On the other hand, the psychometric properties, along with the detail on the statistical analyses conducted, the results, and the conditions of data collection were either presented cursorily or altogether absent. Similarly, the process of validation and normalisation of clinical thresholds was only briefly presented, and the sample's characteristics, such as children's ages, were not representative of Quebec's primary school setting. Couture et al (2011) study addressed these limitations in part, but it also contained gaps, such as solely conducting a partial evaluation of the BP's psychometric properties and using unequal child comparison group sizes.

### **OBJECTIVES**

The pertinence of this study rests primarily on the fact that there had not yet been any validation work done on the French version of the BP. Given that KCs have garnered significant interest in Quebec (Canada) and require the systematic use of the BP, this research aims to: (a) study the questionnaire's reliability and analyze the internal consistency of the scales and subscales; (b) study the construct convergence and divergence; (c) study the questionnaire structure using factor analysis, and; (d) study the concurrent validity as well as evaluate its diagnostic performance.

### **METHOD**

#### **Participants**

Table 1 shows the demographic breakdown of the study's sample group which consisted of 169 boys and 23 girls ( $N = 192$ ) between 6 and 13 years of age ( $M = 9.24$  years of age,  $SD = 1.83$ ). Participants were drawn from mainstream classrooms ( $N = 44$ ), KC programmes ( $N = 94$ ), and special-education type classes catering to children with behavioural disorders ( $N = 54$ ).

**Table 1:** Sample Group Demographic Breakdown ( $n = 192$ ).

	Mainstream classroom ( $N=44$ )	Kangaroo class ( $N=94$ )	Special education type class ( $N=54$ )
<b>Boys</b>	39	79	51
<b>Girls</b>	5	15	3
<b>M age (SD)</b>	8.13 (1.33)	9.35 (1.82)	9.85 (1.83)

## Participants

Both the KC-programme children and the special-education-class children included in the sample were drawn from a three-year-long research project (2005 to 2008) financed by Quebec's *Ministère de l'Éducation du Loisir et du Sport du Québec* (MELS). The MELS-financed study sought to devise an adapted version of NG programmes to be more viable within the Quebec school setting, while concurrently assessing the effectiveness of KC programmes already underway in Quebec (Couture & Bégin, 2010; Couture & Lapalme, 2007). The procedure was approved by the education and social sciences ethics committee at the Université de Sherbrooke. The research was conducted in six schools spanning five Quebec school districts. To accurately represent the population attending these specialised programmes, no specific inclusion or exclusion criteria were set. KC programme and special-education teachers were recruited on a voluntary basis and gave their free and prior informed consent to partake in the study. Each child's parent also formally consented. According to the MELS (2008), the average socioeconomic disadvantage index for the participating schools was situated in the 8th decile which positions the schools well below average disadvantage levels for Quebec. The average student body size per school was 383.3 ( $SD = 152.95$ ,  $MN = 146$ ,  $max = 612$ ).

Children from mainstream classrooms were selected from a single Quebec school district out of three schools whose student body size and socioeconomic disadvantage index were somewhat consistent with the six schools participating in the MELS study. In all, nine teachers were chosen across the three schools and spanning a range of class levels (Grades 1-6). Each of the nine teachers then randomly selected five students from their class list to undergo a series of assessments, after first having eliminated any students they had known for less than two months or who may have shown signs of developmental delay, intellectual disability, other cognitive impairments or SEBD.

## Measurement

Teachers administered three questionnaires per participant, those being the French version of the BP (Bennathan & Boxall, 1998), the French version of the *Teacher Report Form* (TRF; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001) and the French version of the *Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire* (SDQ; Goodman, 1997).

The TRF and SDQ were completed by teachers as a point of comparison to establish a gold standard to assess the concurrent validity of the BP. These two questionnaires (TRF and SDQ) were chosen for their proven psychometric properties.

## The French version of the Boxall Profile

The initial French version of the BP came into circulation in 2004 via a two-step translation process. The BP and accompanying teacher handbook were first translated (Bennathan & Boxall, 1998) by a bilingual Master's level (MSc) psychoeducator with several years work experience in the education field. The first translation was then submitted for review by a bilingual Master's level (MSc) psychologist and a bilingual doctoral-level (PhD) psychoeducator.

**Teacher Report Form.** Comprising 113 items, the TRF assesses behavioural difficulties via a range of specific subscales (Anxious/depressed, Withdrawn/depressed, Somatic complaints, Social problems, Thought problems, Attention problems, Rule breaking behavior, Aggressive behavior) as well as more general scales (internalizing/externalizing behavioural issues) culminating in a Total Score that reveals the overall severity of the behavioural difficulties experienced. Translated into multiple languages and used by over 80 different societies and cultural groups, this questionnaire has been scientifically considered psychometrically sound. Among others, the study carried out by Ivanova et al (2007) examined the use of the TRF in 20 societies, using confirmatory factor analysis to find that the items and constructs within the questionnaire had high cross-cultural likeness. As for reliability, Rescorla et al's (2007) study on the TRF's internal consistency when used across 21 countries reports Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .64 to .96 ( $M = .82$ ) across all scales. Average alpha coefficients for the three general scales (Total problems, Internalising problems and Externalising problems) sit respectively at .96, .82 and .92 (Rescorla et al, 2007).

## Teacher Version of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

This questionnaire involves the assessment of 25 items across five scales: 1) Emotional symptoms, 2) Conduct problems, 3) Hyperactivity/inattention, 4) Peer relationship problems, and 5) Prosocial behaviour. The sum of all four *difficulties* scales (aforementioned scales 1 to 4 only) generates a Total Difficulties Score. The SDQ has been translated into over 60 languages. Moreover, it has been both extensively validated worldwide and put to extensive use in international epidemiological studies to assess childhood mental health. Shojaei et al (2008) stated that its psychometric properties have been evaluated in over 20 distinct studies. Furthermore, Capron et al (2007) reported

that the French version of the SDQ's scales (teacher version) showed good internal consistency. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .64 to .87 for the scales overall. With respect to temporal stability, over a six-week interval the correlation coefficient for the total of the *difficulties* scales sat at .88 whereas correlations varied between .63 and .89 on its other scales (Capron et al, 2007).

**Table 2: Reliability of the Boxall Profile Scales and Subscales (N = 192).**

SCALES AND SUB-SCALES	CRONBACH'S ALPHAS
<b>DEVELOPMENT STRANDS</b>	
<b>Organisation of experience</b>	<b>.91</b>
a) Gives purposeful attention	.81
b) Participates constructively	.68
c) Connects up experiences	.76
d) Shows insightful involvement	.70
e) Engages cognitively with peers	.77
<b>Internalisation of controls</b>	<b>.89</b>
f) Is emotionally secure	.69
g) Is biddable and accepts constraints	.75
h) Accommodates others	.85
i) Responds constructively to others	.76
j) Maintains internalised standards	.62
<b>DIAGNOSTIC PROFILE</b>	
<b>Self-limiting features</b>	<b>.65</b>
q) Disengaged	.66
r) Self-negating	.75
<b>Undeveloped behaviour</b>	<b>.80</b>
s) Makes undifferentiated attachments	.62
t) Shows inconsequential behaviour	.82
u) Craves attachment, reassurance	.77
<b>Unsupported development</b>	<b>.90</b>
v) Avoids/rejects attachment	.71
w) Has undeveloped/insecure sense of self	.77
x) Shows negativism towards self	.73
y) Shows negativism towards others	.87
z) Wants, grabs, disregarding others	.78

### Internal validity

Internal construct validity was assessed using cross-correlation matrices, first comparing the BP scales among each other and then subsequently comparing the scales to the subscales. Table 3 presents the BP interscale correlation results, showing the degree of convergence and divergence among the scale's constructs.

The two positive scales within the Developmental Strands – those being Organisation of Experience and Internalisation of Controls – showed a positive correlation with a coefficient of  $r = .83$  ( $p < .001$ ). Similarly, the Diagnostic Profile's negative scales – those being Self-Limiting Features, Undeveloped Behaviour and Unsupported Development – also indicated there was a positive correlation between the three of them. These correlation coefficients ranged from  $r = .75$  to  $r = .84$  ( $p < .001$ ) suggesting that these scales measure essentially comparable constructs. In contrast, constructs assessed on the Diagnostic Profile scale indicated there was a negative correlation with those assessed on the Developmental Strands scale. These correlation coefficients ranged from  $r = -.43$  to  $r = -.69$  ( $p < .001$ ) suggesting that the constructs differ.

To study relationships between the various scales and subscales across the two sections of the questionnaire, a second correlation matrix was conducted. All of the Developmental Strands subscales indicated that there was a positive correlation with this section's two scales, ranging from  $r = .59$  to  $r = .94$  ( $M = .80$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Correlation coefficients were higher between subscales when within their parent scale. In point of fact, coefficients between subscales 'a' and 'e' (see Table 2 for the complete titles of all subscales) and the Organisation of Experience scale ranged from  $r = .84$

**Table 3: Interscale Correlation for the Boxall Profile (N = 192).**

BOXALL PROFILE SCALES	BOXALL PROFILE SCALES				
	Organisation of experience	Internalisation of controls	Self-limiting features	Undeveloped behaviour	Unsupported development
Organisation of experience	–	.83**	-.58**	-.50**	-.43**
Internalisation of controls		–	-.64**	-.68**	-.69**
Self-limiting features			–	.75**	.77**
Undeveloped behaviour				–	.84**
Unsupported development					–

Note. \*\* $p < .01$

to  $r = .92$  ( $M = .88, p < .001$ ) while coefficients between subscales 'f' and 'j' and the Internalisation of Controls scale ranged from  $r = .80$  to  $r = .94$  ( $M = .88, p < .001$ ). As expected, all Developmental Strands subscales indicated there was a negative correlation with the Diagnostic Profile scales, with correlation coefficients ranging from  $r = -.20$  to  $r = -.72$  ( $M = -.51, p < .001$ ). All Diagnostic Profile subscales indicated there was a negative correlation to the Developmental Strands scales, with those correlations ranging from  $r = -.31$  to  $r = -.71$  ( $M = .50, p < .001$ ). All Diagnostic Profile subscales indicated there was a positive correlation with the section's three scales, ranging from  $r = .47$  to  $r = .93$  ( $M = .74, p < .001$ ). As noted previously for the Developmental Strands, correlation coefficients that linked the Diagnostic Profile subscales and their respective parent scales were also somewhat higher than out-of-scale. Indeed, the relationship between subscales "q" and "r" and the Self-Limiting Features parent scale were  $r = .83$  and  $r = .89$  ( $p < .001$ ) respectively. Coefficients that linked subscales 's' through 'u' and their Undeveloped Behaviour parent scale ranged from  $r = .80$  to  $r = .93$  ( $M = .86, p < .001$ ). Lastly, subscales 'v' through 'z' had relationships to their Unsupported Development parent scale showing correlation coefficients ranging from  $r = .76$  to  $r = .92$  ( $M = .85, p < .001$ ).

### External validity

Table 4 presents the correlation matrix comparing BP scales to SDQ scales. This helps us to consider the level of convergence or divergence among constructs measured by the BP in light of similar or opposing constructs measured by other proven, psychometrically

validated instruments. Results showed a negative correlation between the two positive BP scales in the Developmental Strands section (Organisation of experience and Internalisation of controls) – which both measure child competency – and the negative SDQ scales which measure constructs related to behavioural problems. The coefficients ranged from  $r = -.31$  to  $r = -.70$  ( $X = -.52, p < .001$ ). The negative relationship proved even stronger with the SDQ total difficulties score showing respectively  $r = -.70$  ( $p < .001$ ) and  $r = -.77$  ( $p < .001$ ). Beyond this, there was a positive correlation between the Developmental Strands' two positive scales and the SDQ's positive scale (both measuring social skills). Correlations with the SDQ's Prosocial Behaviour scale were  $r = .63$  ( $p < .001$ ) for the Organisation of Experience scale and  $r = .71$  ( $p < .001$ ) for the Internalisation of Controls scale. The inverse was true for the Diagnostic Profile's negative scales (Self-limiting features, Undeveloped behaviour and Unsupported development). In addition, the latter all showed negative correlations with the SDQ's Prosocial Behaviour scale.

In addition, there was a positive correlational relationship between the Diagnostic Profile's negative scales and the SDQ's negative scales which all measure behavioural challenges. These correlation coefficients ranged from  $r = .46$  to  $r = .70$  ( $X = .56, p < .001$ ). As per the Developmental Strands scales, correlation coefficients between the Diagnostic Profile's negative scales and the SDQ's Total Difficulties Score were substantially higher. The positive correlations underscore the similarity of constructs and ranged from  $r = .74$  to  $r = .80$  ( $X = .77, p < .001$ ).

**Table 4:** Correlational relationships between the Boxall Profile scales and the Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire scales (N = 190)

BOXALL PROFILE SCALES	STRENGTHS AND DIFFICULTIES QUESTIONNAIRE SCALES					
	Emotional symptoms	Conduct problems	Hyperactivity inattention	Peer problems	Prosocial behaviour	Total difficulties score
Organisation of experience	-.35**	-.48**	-.55**	-.56**	.63**	<b>-.70**</b>
Internalisation of controls	-.31**	-.70**	-.67**	-.57**	-.71**	<b>-.77**</b>
Self-limiting features	.60**	.50**	.54**	.49**	-.38**	<b>.74**</b>
Undeveloped behaviour	.48**	.70**	.68**	.53**	-.41**	<b>.80**</b>
Unsupported development	.46**	.70**	.53**	.49**	-.20**	<b>.76**</b>

Note. \*\* $p < .01$

## Factor analysis

Subsequently, we conducted exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to explore relationships between the various constructs being measured by the BP, in light of the questionnaire's existing structural breakdown. EFA also helped in establishing whether it was possible to group certain constructs differently, potentially with constructs currently undeveloped. Principal component analysis was used as the factor extraction method. Axes were repositioned with the direct oblimin rotation technique and with an understanding that the extracted factors might be cross-correlated (Hair et al, 2010). The choice to rotate the axes is supported by the interscale correlations presented in the internal validity section of this study. To further explore the existing questionnaire's breakdown we extracted factors from the BP's 20 sub-scales. This was done to achieve stable estimates and correlations with a ratio of 10 participants per studied variable (Hair et al, 2010). The BP's EFA (KMO = .938; Bartlett's test of sphericity  $\chi^2 [190] = 3553.2, p < 0,001$ ) pointed to the presence of two main factors; the first of which accounts for 57.8% (eigenvalue = 11.4) of the variance and the second of which accounts for 14.6% (eigenvalue = 2.8). Those two factors were negatively correlated (-.508). A second EFA conducted on the Developmental Strands' ten respective sub-scales (KMO = .930; Bartlett's test of sphericity  $\chi^2 [45] = 1826.9, p < 0,001$ ) established the presence of a sole factor accounting for 71.3% (eigenvalue = 7.2) of the variance. Similarly, EFA conducted on the Diagnostic Profile (KMO = .916; Bartlett's test of sphericity  $\chi^2 [45] = 1440.2, p < 0,001$ ) demonstrated the presence of a sole factor accounting for 65.5% (eigenvalue = 6.6) of the variance.

## Concurrent validity and diagnostic performance

An area under a (AUC) Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) analysis (Hanley & McNeil, 1982) was performed for each of the BP's scales to study the instrument's concurrent validity. The ROC curve provided us with a graphic representation of the current relationship between the sensitivity and the specificity of the instrument to determine its diagnostic performance and predictive validity. Thus, the ROC curve analysis conducted on each of the BP scales was used to determine whether the questionnaire is in fact able to accurately identify children who present significant behavioural difficulties as well as those who do not. For comparison purposes, the predictive capabilities of each of the BP scales was measured against those of the SDQ using the method proposed by DeLong et al (1988).

Gold standard criteria were set in order to guide these analyses and to form two comparison groups using children's TRF Total Difficulties scale results. Children who scored above the 90th percentile on this scale received a positive diagnosis, accounting for age and sex. In the context of this study, the TRF's Total Difficulties scale had an internal consistency of alpha .87. In total, 99 children received a positive diagnosis for SEBD and 86 received a negative one. TRF data was incomplete for seven of the total sample of 192 children. The AUC for the various BP scales and SDQ scales are presented in Table 5.

The AUC estimates predictive ability, wherein an AUC of .50 represents an instrument's arbitrary predictive capability in accordance with the laws of probability (50% chance of a correct diagnosis). Therefore, as a scale approaches 1, its predictive validity is

**Table 5:** Area under the Receiver Operating Characteristic Curves for the Boxall Profile and the Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire scales

STRENGTHS AND DIFFICULTIES QUESTIONNAIRE		BOXALL PROFILE	
Scales	Area	Scales	Area
Emotional symptoms	.75*	Organisation of experience	.82*
Conduct problems	.87*	Internalisation of controls	.89*
Hyperactivity/inattention	.85*	Self-limiting features	.90*
Peer relationship problems	.83*	Undeveloped behaviour	.96*
Prosocial behaviour	.76*	Unsupported development	.94*
<b>Total difficulties score</b>	<b>.94*</b>		

Note.  $N = 185$ . Positive diagnosis:  $n = 99$ ; Negative diagnosis:  $n = 86$ . \* $p < .001$

deemed better. For reference purposes, tests were distinguished as follows: zero contribution (AUC = .50); slightly informative (.50 < AUC < .70); moderately informative (.70 < AUC < .90), very informative (.90 < AUC < 1), and perfect (AUC = 1) (Delacour et al, 2005). For example, a test with an AUC of .80 means that subjects with pathology would be 80% more likely to receive positive test results as compared to their counterparts without pathology. The AUC for the SDQ scales ranged from .75 to .87 ( $X = .81, p < .001$ ) while the area for the Total Difficulties scale alone was .94 ( $p < .001$ ). The AUC for the Organisation of Experience scale was .82 ( $p < .001$ ) while for the Internalisation of Controls scale it was .89 ( $p < .001$ ). Lastly, the area for the various Diagnostic Profile scales ranged from .90 to .96 ( $X = .93, p < .001$ ).

Comparative findings for the AUC of the two questionnaires' various scales are presented in Table 6. Scales that measured relatively similar constructs were compared. In comparing the AUC for the BP's two positive behavioural scales with the SDQ's positive Prosocial Behaviour scale, no significant difference was found between the latter and the BP's Organisation of Experience scale. Conversely, the BP's Internalisation of Controls scale predicted behavioural difficulties in children significantly better than the SDQ's Prosocial Behaviour scale  $X^2(1, N = 185) = 22.02, p < .001$ .

By comparing the AUC of each questionnaire's negative scales, referring to behavioural difficulties, the BP's Diagnostic Profile scales were shown to have overall better predictive performance than the SDQ scales. At the same time, no significant difference was found between the BP's Diagnostic Profile scales and the SDQ's Total Difficulties score. The same phenomenon was observed between the BP's Self-Limiting Features

scale (AUC = .90)  $X^2(1, N = 185) = 4.68, p < .05$ , its Undeveloped Behaviour scale (AUC = .96)  $X^2(1, N = 185) = 15.35, p < .001$ , and its Unsupported Development scale (AUC = .94)  $X^2(1, N = 185) = 10.90, p < .001$ , which had a significantly better predictive validity than the SDQ's Peer Relationship Problems scale (AUC = .83). Additionally, the BP's Undeveloped Behaviour scale (AUC = .90)  $X^2(1, N = 185) = 13.30, p < .001$  and Unsupported Development scale also had a significantly better predictive performance than the SDQ's Conduct Problems scale (AUC = .87).

## DISCUSSION

According to the results of all dataset analyses, the scales' and sub-scales' internal consistency shows as acceptably homogenous. Following De Vellis's (2017) proposed typology, the minimum acceptable homogeneity for Cronbach's alphas would fall between .65 and .70. Considering the entirety of the BP parent scales, solely the Self-Limiting Features scale, with a .65 Cronbach's alpha, might benefit from some rectifications. This finding is comparable to findings reported in Couture et al (2011) study wherein the Cronbach's alpha for this scale proved insufficient (.24). It is worth highlighting that this parent scale contains only two sub-scales, which might lead to a considerably lower Cronbach's alpha. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that these same two sub-scales might not entirely align with the construct that the parent scale purports to measure (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). All BP sub-scales met requirements, with the exception of two (Maintains internalised standards and Makes undifferentiated attachments) whose Cronbach's alpha sat just below the minimum threshold at .62 – and while this is low homogeneity it is not entirely insufficient (< .60; De Vellis, 2017).

**Table 6:** Comparison of the area under the Receiver Operating Characteristic Curves for the Boxall Profile and Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire scales

SDQ SCALES	BOXALL PROFILE SCALES				
	Organisation of experience	Internalisation of controls	Self-limiting features	Undeveloped behaviour	Unsupported development
Conduct problems	–	–	.73 (1)	13.30*** (1)	7.52** (1)
Peer relationship problems	–	–	4.68* (1)	15.35*** (1)	10.90*** (1)
Prosocial behaviour	3.24 (1)	22.02*** (1)	–	–	–
Total difficulties score	–	–	3.07 (1)	.85 (1)	.07 (1)

Note 1. These values represent the results of a chi-square  $X^2$  test with degrees of freedom indicated in parentheses. Chi-square test allows the analysis of the distribution of positive and negative diagnoses (gold standard) according to the scales compared between BP and SDQ. The comparison was carried out using the methods proposed by DeLong et al (1998).

Note 2. Positive diagnosis:  $n = 99$ , negative diagnosis:  $n = 86$ .

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

As per the Self-limiting features scale, these two sub-scales have a low item count at two and three items respectively. Incidentally, De Vellis's (2017) proposed cut-off threshold is less stringent than the norms that other psychometric experts recommend. Point in fact, according to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), an acceptable threshold for Cronbach's alpha varies depending on how the test is being used. In their expert opinion, when an instrument is used in research endeavours its Cronbach's alpha should range from .70 to .90. In the context of this particular study, the Cronbach's alpha for an instrument used in clinical interventions should sit above .90 and ideally above .95 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). These norms are nonetheless contested by Streiner (2003) who suggests rather that Cronbach's alpha should not exceed .90 for instruments used in clinical contexts, to avoid any unnecessary item redundancy or across-item construct duplication. Among the BP scales, only two (Organisation of experience and Unsupported development) meet Nunnally and Bernstein's (1994) requirements. However, in consideration of Streiner (2003), with the exception of the Self-limiting features scale, all BP scales have sufficient homogeneity for clinical-use purposes.

That the BP scales' internal consistency is found on the whole to be acceptable is no surprise, remembering that Cronbach's alphas are estimates based on item-to-item correlational averages within a given scale (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). In this respect, for the BP structure's first tier, EFA showed the presence of two distinct factors with a negative correlation. In the structure's second tier (parent scales), analyses emphasised a sole factor per section. In short, the two diametrically opposed factors identified using EFA in the first tier of the questionnaire structure are corroborated by the single factors noted in each of the two second-tier sections accounting respectively for 71.3% and 65.5% of the variance.

The divergence of the two above-mentioned factors can also be observed in the correlation matrices used to study the BP's internal and external construct validity. Correlation matrices indicate that the Developmental Strands scales correlate negatively with the Diagnostic Profile scales, confirming a sound level of construct divergence. Contrastingly, interscale correlations for each section show strong association and point to a good level of construct convergence. Furthermore, each of the BP sub-scales shows a strong correlation to its parent scale, further indicating a substantial level of convergence. Construct divergence on the BP sub-scales has been demonstrated by way of a negative correlation between its own opposing constructs, as well as when cross-correlated with the SDQ. This is evidenced by the fact that the Diagnostic Profile scales (measuring constructs associated with

behavioural difficulties) show a negative correlation with SDQ Prosocial Behaviour scale (constructs measuring desirable skills). Similarly, comparable constructs measured by both questionnaires converge with positive correlations when comparing the Diagnostic Profile with the entirety of the SDQ's behavioural difficulties items, and when comparing the BP's Developmental Strands with the SDQ's Prosocial Behaviour items. All these results support Couture et al's (2011) study findings. Indeed, the two scales under the Developmental Strands section show a negative correlation with the three scales under the Diagnostic Profile and vice versa. Furthermore, the aforementioned correlations move in the same direction, while BP and SDQ cross-correlations were also the same. Contrary to Couture et al (2011) the correlational relationships in this present study, however, were overall found to be higher and more significant statistically.

The above evidence supports the presence of two distinct constructs that are diametrically opposed. We can therefore attest to the validity of the BP's structure insofar as the first tier is concerned (the two core sections of the questionnaire). The existence of this factor in the structure's first tier accounts for 57.8% of the variance and can likely be linked to its matching construct in behavioural difficulties. In considering the sample group closely, with 70% of the children in the study sample attending specialised classrooms (either KC or special-education type classes), this could very well explain the sound psychometric qualities associated with the Diagnostic Profile given that its creators had intended it specifically to assess behavioural challenges in children. This sample-group characteristic could certainly lead to biased results on the Diagnostic Profile analyses, particularly in light of a sole predominant factor being observed on the first tier of the BP structure in EFA. The aim being to assess students experiencing behavioural challenges, this likely led to a lower focus on concepts linked to the desirable competencies covered under the Developmental Strands. Notwithstanding this, findings demonstrate on the whole that the Diagnostic Profile contains better psychometric properties than the Developmental Strands, as much from a reliability standpoint as from a concurrent validity standpoint. The AUC for the Diagnostic Profile's three scales is greater than the Developmental Strands scales, and all comparative findings lead to the conclusion that these differences are statistically significant. We can conclude that the Diagnostic Profile's scales have a greater capacity to correctly discern which children are actually challenged in accordance with the gold standard (based on the TRF's clinical cut-off point). In addition, in comparing the BP's AUC with the SDQ's, the statistically insignificant differences suggest that the two questionnaires boast equivalent predictive validity insofar as their ability to distinguish between

children with behavioural challenges. That said, comparative analyses also show several BP scales (among the Diagnostic Profile's scales) as having better diagnostic performance than some of the SDQ scales. Nonetheless, both questionnaires may be used for different clinical and research purposes. Considering that the SDQ has the advantage of brevity (completion time) with a count of only 25 items (McCrorry & Layte, 2012), it may be used as a routine outcome evaluation, in the context of systematic screening for mental health issues or in epidemiological research (Goodman, 1997; Johnston & Gowers, 2005; Sosu and Schmidt, 2017). On the other hand the BP, which takes longer to complete, is mainly used for clinical contexts or for the purpose of designing individual educational plans in school (Bennathan & Boxall, 1998). We must underscore that any statements regarding the BP's predictive capabilities were somewhat skewed by our methodology in this study. First, the sample contained a low number of children falling in the normal range ( $n = 44$ ). Second, the TRF's combined Total Difficulties scale which was adopted as our gold standard is conceptually in much closer alignment with the Diagnostic Profile than with the Developmental Strands section, potentially leading to a bias in consideration of the Diagnostic Profile's predictive capabilities.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To summarise, the French BP has good predictive validity. In effect, the results herein confirm the BP's effectiveness in screening students with behavioural difficulties, which is consistent with those of Couture et al's (2011) study. There is undoubtedly some appeal to further exploring results that demonstrate the questionnaire's strong performance as a diagnostic tool. However, one must not lose sight of the instrument's primary function as a tool intended to aid teachers in a workplace setting. The BP was originally developed to provide a common language between teachers to discuss SEBD students, and with the ultimate goal of ensuring consistency in their interventions. These interventions were geared more toward item analysis and a deeper clinical interpretation of the BP's subscales, which does not entirely align with the type of statistical methods used in this study. That said, future endeavours to further investigate the validity of the French BP should lean more toward defining and conceptualising the sub-scale constructs to assess its usefulness as a clinical rather than diagnostic tool.

The BP's structural weaknesses that we observed via the factor analysis findings, could in part be explained by certain sample-group characteristics. However, other hypotheses could also account for this flaw. In essence, the translation and cultural adaptation of any questionnaire comes with limitations, especially if not done with proper attention and scientific rigour. While the BP French translation was done by bilingual

professionals, many key transcultural adaptation steps were overlooked (Vallerand, 1989). It is important to recognise that the BP was originally developed in a particular cultural and linguistic context with its own specificities. That is to say, mental constructs might differ beyond a simple question of word-based semantics and terminology. In turn, a given user's interpretation and application of results could naturally be biased if the translated terms differ in meaning in another setting. Nevertheless, even with a rigorous translation process, there is still some risk of artificial correlation between word meanings from one language to another. Naturally, in consideration of the language barriers in play, any other-language versions produced cannot be considered better than the original (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, National Council on Measurement in Education, & Joint Committee on Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, 2014; Sarrazin, 2003). All things considered, to effectively mitigate any negative influence on the French BP's validity that might stem from any aforementioned socio-linguistic challenges, it would be advisable for the current French version of the questionnaire to be back-translated by a professional practitioner (Massourbe, 2002) and then subjected to a new round of factor analyses.

## LIMITATIONS

This study comprises some non-negligible limitations. Indeed, the sample collected from 2005 to 2008 includes fewer girls than boys (29.7% girls). Furthermore, due to logistical or geographical constraints, with some teachers being made responsible for the selection process in the absence of researchers and despite the fact that teachers were instructed to recruit randomly, selection bias cannot be ruled out. Additionally, the BP norms were recently revised in 2017. Unfortunately, this study used the pre-2017 norms which is a considerable limitation as average scores used in this study might not reflect the typical range of skills currently expected of primary school students (Nurture Group Network Limited, 2017). Finally, the gold standard we relied on could prove questionable as it is based on the TRF rather than a clinical and a normative sample.

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## ABOUT NURTUREUK

Nurtureuk is a registered charity working tirelessly to promote access to education for all. With rising levels of mental health problems and increasing numbers of children and young people affected by social, emotional and behavioural difficulties that inhibit their progress and limit their life chances, nurtureuk is at the forefront of combatting barriers to learning and development.

Our charity has developed a range of evidence-based interventions and support, delivered in schools and other educational settings, that give disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people the opportunity to be the best they can be.

Whether it is delivering certified training for professionals, supporting whole-school nurturing approaches, providing accurate assessments of need, or promoting rigorous research-based evidence, nurtureuk is providing the quality support and resources that make impactful, nurturing, education provisions a reality for children and young people throughout the UK and beyond.

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