



The Nurture Story

Nurture is born

In 1969, Marjorie Boxall, an educational psychologist working in Hackney for the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), became concerned that so many young children – especially those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds – were entering primary schools with severe emotional, behavioural, and social difficulties.

At the time, these children were usually considered ‘maladapted’, but Marjorie recognised that their difficulties were often due to impoverished early nurturing. She therefore set up the first nurture groups, to provide these children with the “restorative experiences and development experiences” they were missing.

1970s – Nurture starts to impress

The success of Marjorie’s pilot project led to further nurture groups being set up across London – including at Kingsmead Infants School in Hackney, where the nurture group was led by future nurture pioneer Sylvia Lucas. At first, news of nurture groups’ effectiveness spread by word of mouth, but in 1978 they gained wider recognition through the influential [‘Warnock Report’](#):

“We have been impressed by the ‘nurture groups’ which have been started in a number of primary schools in London for children... who are socially and emotionally affected by severe deprivation in early childhood.”



1986 – Towards an inclusive education system

In the mid-80s, the ILEA spearheaded a national campaign to make education more inclusive. When a committee was set up to explore ways to achieve this, over 50 headteachers of schools with nurture groups made submissions arguing that nurture groups were integral to an inclusive approach. The committee's acclaimed report, [*Educational Opportunities For All?*](#), stated that:

“The concept of nurture work... is an important one. Much has been learned from this form of provision... As an approach with a clear rationale aimed at preventing many difficulties becoming special educational needs, it is to be endorsed.”

1989-90 – Nurture's annus horribilis

In 1989, Marjorie Boxall retired – a major setback for the nurture movement, since she had been central to training and supporting nurture group staff. A further blow came when the ILEA was disbanded, after the Greater London Council was abolished by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government.

Without the ILEA's support, nurture groups in inner London schools, which had been innovative incubators for nurturing practice, were scaled back or shut down. A handful of outer London boroughs, including Enfield, kept nurture alive, but its national stature was greatly reduced.

1990s – Nurture makes a comeback

In 1996, renewed interest in nurture was sparked by a book written by Marjorie Boxall and Marion Bennathan, [*Effective Intervention in Primary Schools: Nurture Groups*](#), which drew on the work of Eva Holmes, the principal educational psychologist in Enfield.

Using evidence from the book, about the impact of nurture groups in Enfield, The Association of Workers for Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (AWCEBD) successfully lobbied the Department for Education to support the expansion of nurture groups across the UK. To help train and organise these new groups, the AWCEBD founded the Nurture Group Consortium.

2000s – The Consortium becomes the Network

In 2001, the AWCEBD – recognising that nurture group training needed a more systematic, networked approach – replaced the Nurture Group Consortium with the Nurture Group Network, and appointed Marion Bennathan as its first Director.



Sadly, Marjorie Boxall passed away in 2004, a year before the Network became an independent charity. However, she left the organisation a financial legacy, which helped it to expand: it gained an office, took on more full-time staff, built a training network and founded a magazine. The charity also established an accreditation system for nurture groups, which it named – in tribute to Marjorie’s unique contribution to the nurture movement – the Marjorie Boxall Quality Mark Award.

2018 – The Network becomes nurtureuk

The Network continued to grow throughout the 2010s, and – among a range of innovations – took the Boxall Profile® online, to make it easier for teachers to identify their pupils’ social, emotional and mental health needs. To reflect the charity’s growth and ambitions, it was rebranded nurtureuk in 2018.

With more schools than ever applying for [Marjorie Boxall Quality Mark Awards](#) and taking part in the [National Nurturing Schools Programme](#), nurture returned to the educational agenda – with the [#AspireNotToExclude](#) campaign and [Now You See Us](#) report making national news.

2021 and beyond - nurtureuk today

The last few years have seen a range of exciting developments at nurtureuk. After celebrating the 50th anniversary of nurture in 2019, we welcomed a new CEO, Arti Sharma in 2020 – just as Covid-19 was hitting the United Kingdom. In response, we swiftly adapted our services to be delivered online – determined to keep supporting nurture during lockdown, when it was needed by pupils more than ever.

Today, nurtureuk continues to go from strength to strength. As well as expanding our teams, we’re stepping up our campaigning and policy work – building on our past achievements, to make nurture a cornerstone of education in the UK and beyond. Early in 2022 we will be sharing our future strategy to take us through to 2026.

