

Investing in student success through nurturing in universities

Two case studies in North America.

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I draw from the practices of nurturing that developed in England in the 1970s as an intervention to support young children who were often experiencing socioeconomic and cultural disadvantages. Nurture groups provided opportunities for social, emotional, and cognitive development where shortcomings in family provision created deficits. The introduction of nurturing practices in universities could equally be considered a social reconstructionist measure of social justice. The application of nurturing principles, for students traditionally considered outsiders, and particularly those disadvantaged through racism and socio-economic circumstances has immense benefits for universities. By providing structures that nurture racialised and disadvantaged students, even at postgraduate level, universities provide real opportunities to belong and succeed in university. I take a critical position as I discuss social and cultural capital in universities and use two case studies to highlight the need to re-evaluate measures of ability and belonging. Overall, I advocate for nurturing practices in higher education as a measure of social justice ensuring equity, inclusivity, and diversity in universities.

INTRODUCTION

A recollection of the historical necessity of nurture groups as a means of providing children with essential opportunities for further development establishes the same logic for university students denied early nurturing for their academic success (Hughes and Schlosser, 2014). Nurture groups, established first in the late 1960s, were a response to the social and emotional behavioural difficulties often exacerbated by the stress of socioeconomic disadvantage faced by inner-city populations, in London, (Bennathan and Boxall, 2013). Boxall (2002) states that struggles with upheaval, unemployment and other challenges adversely affected children's normal development and schooling at the time. In response, nurture work sought to repair the disrupted and impaired experiences of early learning to the developing child (Doyle, 2003; Bishop and Swain, 2000). According to the Nurture Groups Network, nurturing is a concept that highlights the "...importance of social environments – who you're with, and not who you're born to – and its significant influence on behaviour and cognitive ability." Nurture group practitioners believe a good start in life brings a host of advantages including a tendency to do better at school, attend regularly, and enjoy activities with friends. The aim of nurture groups is to offer the fundamental experiences that build skills to do well at school, make friends, and deal more confidently and calmly with the trials and tribulations of life, for life (Nurture Groups Network). Since their inception in the late 1960s, nurture group models have progressed beyond early years provision to intervention in primary and secondary schools (Bishop and Swain 2000).

In nurture group models there are four basic assurances offered to students that would be beneficial to students in universities: comfort, welcome, containment, and protection (Boxall, 2002). These assurances are cultivated through the six principles identified by Lucas et al (2006):

- 1. Children's learning is understood developmentally**
- 2. The classroom offers a safe base**
- 3. The importance of nurture for the development of wellbeing**
- 4. Language is a vital means of communication**
- 5. All behaviour is communication**
- 6. The importance of transition in children's lives.**

We may think of university students as competent individuals but studies indicate a need for structures that support social, emotional, and mental development for academic success (Kiyama et al, 2014; Kiyama and Luca, 2013; Gerdes and Mallinckrodt, 1994). The university

students who would benefit most from nurture groups are from disadvantaged and marginalised communities; and homes where socioeconomic hardships stalled the acquiring of pertinent academic, social, and emotional skills. Nurture groups could therefore be a means of cultivating diversity, equity, and inclusivity in universities. In particular, racialised students (Solorzano et al, 2005; Harper et al, 2009) require measures that address historical factors that affect their sense of belonging and ability in academic settings. The needs of racialised students, distinguished through anti-oppressive and anti-racist pedagogy, require a change in culture and attitude that privileges all students through nurturing. In this context, racialised implies significant aspects of oppression and highlights the level of social discrimination that occurs on the basis of race in universities

In this article, I illustrate the transferability of nurture group principles into university settings. A critical analysis of the principles of nurturing highlights the importance and possibilities of

nurturing in universities as a means of developing student wellbeing. Similar to the difficulties and challenges faced by disadvantaged children entering the elementary school system, the conditions that a significant number of freshman university students face due to socioeconomic and cultural disadvantage disrupt their academic development. Even at postgraduate level, racialised and economically disadvantaged students face difficulties that threaten their success. Therefore, I argue for nurture-group practices to extend across formal education and learning, from early years to postgraduate level. I offer two case studies focusing on two intersectional factors contributing to student retention and success – socioeconomic and cultural – both of which might be due to selective structures of hegemonic belonging and ability.

METHOD

Although not associated specifically with the Nurture Groups Network's model of nurturing the featured case studies adhere to the six identified principles of nurturing; and offer the assurances that the nurturing principles provide. For both case studies, interviews were conducted via email with practitioners and participants of nurturing student support programmes in two universities. This method has been discussed by Meho (2006) as "semistructured in nature and involves multiple email exchanges between the interviewer and interviewee over an extended period of time" (pp. 1284). I contacted the interviewees via email and through a confidential and ethically (Parker 2008) sound correspondence gathered the information I needed. There are several advantages to this method of data collections as Meho states, including the elimination of geographical and economic factors in collecting data.

The challenges of university achievement: social and cultural capital

An emerging concern in higher education is the rate of dropouts at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Enrolment into a university can be a challenge (Stephan 2013) but once on campus the challenges do not go away. In 2014, the *New York Times Magazine* published an article that highlighted these phenomena.

The article: Am I supposed to be here? Am I good enough? (Tough, 2014) elucidates on the difficulties of staying in university for many students and refers to a "winnowing process that takes place in higher education". He advocates for a change in measures of student success catalysed by a change in the attitudes of the educators who should view 'ability' as a matter of socioeconomics rather than academic propensity. While 'winnowing' is perceived to weed out weak students, in fact it weeds out students without the social and cultural means to support academic success. The language used in Tough's article highlights the criteria used to measure a student's capacity to succeed in university; and implies a clumsiness and ineptitude rising out of the students' personal attributes rather than barriers in the selective university environment. Words such as

'derailed' and 'tripped up', which result in the student being 'overwhelmed' and 'freaking out' in response to the closed environment point to aspects of social competence, rather than academic aptitude.

Proactive universities recognise that beyond socio-economics, the needs of marginalised students are complex and multidimensional, presenting long before they begin university (Stephan 2013; Hughes and Schlosser, 2014). Particularly, as Smith et al (2011) state, in historically white spaces people of colour are still treated as outsiders, meaning racialised students in universities must often justify their presence in white spaces and defend against oppression, which occurs even in the most subtle ways (Smith et al 2007a; 2007b; 2011). The psychic trauma and ramifications of defending against racism and its vicissitudes within 'racial badlands' according to Smith et al (2011), results in 'emotional, psychological, and physiological distress'. Universities as badlands are hostile, unaccommodating, and even ignorant of race as a subjective position, which leads to feelings of not belonging and inability. From a critical perspective 'ability' becomes questionable when based on traditional racial, social, and cultural means rather than academic aptitude.

Belonging, in this context, refers to how one fits in with the academic culture, and whether one is perceived to be good enough for the academy by self, peer or faculty (Litalien and Guay, 2015). For some students belonging depends significantly on their peer- and faculty-perceived identity, often judged in terms of race, and social and cultural capital. For many disadvantaged and marginalised students, university is supposed to be an equalising opportunity.

However to succeed, these students need to show that they indeed belong, know how to belong, and are able to maintain the requisites for belonging (Gronborg, 2015). Yoon (2012) argues success in an academic setting is a complicated process that requires the students' agency, identity awareness, negotiation, and external confirmation of their unique abilities from teachers and peers. For racialised students, identity is something often handed down through history, legislation, policies, and practices, limiting their power and cultural capital as foreign and other (Yoon 2012). Yoon's statements are true at any level of education that is why nurturing is a means of empowering marginalised and disadvantaged students. Nurturing creates the assurance of a welcoming campus and comfort within the larger community. Disadvantage is contained and students are protected from the historical and socio-political racialisation that would disadvantage them.

Traditional standards of belonging and ability do not accommodate or make room for diversity. For example, Contreras and Contreras (2015) consider this problem in a California university by examining the success rates of Hispanic students. They recommend a redefining of what is relevant in predicting students' success. Nurturing practices in universities offer a means to re-evaluate the measures of ability by considering the subjectivity of students. Coming from a different racial or cultural background

means the cultural capital of university is something disadvantaged students need to acquire along with the necessary grades to succeed. Ability is measured first through racial and social identity, and cultural capital, then academic achievement, meaning actual academic ability counts less than socioeconomic and cultural advantage. A nurturing culture can challenge exclusive measures based on race and socioeconomic privilege, in favour of practical student-focused measures towards success. Through nurturing principles accommodations, concessions, and adjustments take the form of resource re-allocation rather than simple remedial academic supplementation. Nurturing infrastructure changes the subjective positions of students considered subpar, making them part of a community of high-achieving scholars (Tough, 2014).

Feelings of not belonging can be detrimental to students' abilities to achieve academic success, hence the high dropout rates and low retention of disadvantaged students. These students are marked with stigma, fear, limitations and ignorance. Before long they find themselves back where they came from resentful, demoralised, and in debt (Tough, 2014). In response, Tough suggests we move beyond material obstacles:

“If you want to help low-income students succeed, it's not enough to deal with their academic and financial obstacles. You also need to address their doubts, misconceptions, and fears. To solve the problem of college completion, you first need to get inside the mind of a college student.”

Nurturing principles address students' feelings directly and offer resilience building environments that increase chances of graduation, and success beyond university. The following case studies highlight university-wide nurturing practices and more intimate nurture groups that cultivate both belonging and ability; therefore success.

Case study 1:

The University of Texas Communal Socioeconomic Approach

The University Leadership Network (ULN) is part of a broad complement of initiatives at the University of Texas (UT) aimed at increasing student success and improving graduation rates. In line with the first principle of nurturing, learning is understood developmentally, so UT's network of student success services offers academic, social, and developmental support to students lacking in these aspects as they begin their studies. The student support programmes aim to nurture systematically identified students so they develop the skills and competencies required to succeed both socially and culturally, thereby increasing student retention and chances for individual success. Advanced identification strategies are imperative for the investment of resources towards student success. Where the classic nurture-group model consists of a teacher and an assistant, universities require more sophisticated apparatus and administration to yield noteworthy results due to the size of higher education institutions. Creativity and innovation are necessary to reach students falling through the cracks, therefore common elements of these programmes include community building, peer leadership and mentoring, faculty engagement, and individual attention from culturally competent and sensitive staff.

UT uses a predictive analytics model to identify the incoming students most likely to benefit from nurturing when they start their first semester. Designed to avoid misconceptions and discriminatory practices, the algorithm identifies incoming students with the greatest need for support based on their predicted four-year graduation rate. As with any intervention, early identification is crucial to prevent avoidable crises and dropouts. ULN, as a nurturing model, recognises the importance of transitions in student life (as with principle 6) and implements nurturing interventions as early as possible, helping students adjust to life on campus and the independent, self-directed learning requirements of academia. According to Lindsey Kaschner, one of the facilitators of the UT Student Success Initiatives, the model developed using more than 10 years of historical data, and the calculation includes 14 academic and demographic factors like SAT score, high school class rank, high school academic credits, parent income, and first generation in college status. Approximately 500 students enrolled in student success programmes receive support for academic, developmental, and social growth. As a group, the socioeconomic background of ULN students differs from that of the overall student population, meaning without nurturing an entire demographic group is at high risk of dropping out.

It is important to note, according to Kaschner, that the programme maintains the belief that this prediction does not reflect a student's potential for success. Rather, the programme helps students develop not only as successful college students but also as leaders, through self-reflection, experiential learning, peer mentoring, professional development, and community service. Nurturing, viewed as a social reconstructionist practice – a measure of social justice – provides those traditionally oppressed in education a means of finding their place and value on campus. To this end, ULN nurtures from a position of leadership development aimed at students developing leadership skills, achieving academic success consistent with graduation in four years, and continuing on to a successful career. An unofficial programme motto, often repeated by director Jennifer Smith, is: “Lead from where you are, in the classroom, community, or workplace”. As part of this development, students are encouraged to be fearless, ask questions, and learn from mistakes.

Professor Laude is one of the faculty practising nurturing under the ULN programme. Tough (2014) explains: “As a freshman at the University of the South, in Sewanee, Tennessee, Laude felt bewildered and out of place, the son of a working-class, Italian-American family

from Modesto, California, trying to find his way at a college steeped in Southern tradition, where students joined secret societies and wore academic gowns to class. 'It was a massive culture shock,' Laude told me. 'I was completely at a loss on how to fit in socially. And I was tremendously bad at studying. Everything was just overwhelming.' He spent most of his freshman year on the brink of dropping out."

Laude's personal experience as a socially and emotionally underdeveloped first year student gave him insight into the struggles of his students. His response began with the provision of a place for identified students to work in smaller comfortable and containing groups. The act of separating them from their peers was not to lower expectations but to maintain and facilitate high expectations. This fulfils the second principle of nurturing: the classroom as a safe base. As an extension of this basic strategy, Laude also communicated an important message right from the beginning: they were expected to do as well as everyone else. He insisted all communication convey the idea that engagement in the special programme is not because students were marked for failure, rather, there was confidence in their success. His actions, in line with principle 4 and 5, illustrate that all behaviour is communication and language is a vital means of communication. The impact went beyond his chemistry class as students statistically on track to fail returned for their sophomore year at rates above average for the university as a whole (Tough 2014). Three years later, they had graduation rates that were also above the university average.

As Laude proves, the attitude of educators makes a significant impact on student retention. Levine-Rasky (2001) argues, the efficacy of pedagogy lies in the attitude of educators; and identifies three signposts that progress a culturally reconstructionist education framework. First, the educator must identify with inequality and social injustice, meaning they can connect to their students across race, ethnic and economic lines because of personal experiences of marginalisation and discrimination. This indicates a great need for diversity in university staffing so that students can identify with the people measuring their success. The second signpost is the use and value of critical pedagogy, which is student-centred and multicultural. The third signpost is a desire to learn more about educational inequality and its causes, including the social domination manifest in institutional racism and the practice of whiteness. These signposts correspond with the principles of nurturing; in particular, all behaviour is communication. An institutional approach to racial, social, and cultural disadvantage (such as a determined recruitment of diverse educators capable of responding to the needs of marginalised students through nurturing attitudes and practices) communicates the value of diversity. Through attitudes that foster equity, inclusivity, and diversity, universities offer pedagogy that is culturally responsive to the needs of students traditionally marginalized in higher education.

Principle three of nurturing states the importance of nurture to the development of wellbeing. To this end, culturally responsive and

relevant pedagogy is an approach that asserts: "...the value of focusing classroom curricula and practice upon students' cultural frames of reference. An examination of teacher training programmes reveals that many newly minted teachers are still unclear on what culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy entails. It is a pedagogy that recognises students' differences, validates students' cultures, and asserts that upon cultural congruence of classroom practices, students will discover increasing success in school" (Parhar and Sensoy, 2011 pp.191-192).

Pahar and Sensoy present the tenets of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy some of which are teaching from diverse perspectives; building bridges between academic learning and students' prior understanding, knowledge, native language and values; and holding students to high standards with high expectations for all students. Also included are encouraging a 'community of learners' or encouraging students to learn collaboratively by motivating students to become active participants in their learning, and attempting to create a climate of caring, respect, and the valuing of students' cultures in the classroom by validating students' cultural identity in classroom practices and instructional materials. Economies of scale make these tenets virtually impossible when we consider the ratio of educator to student (O'Brien, 2010). Another barrier to culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy is the lack of educators' understanding of their students' frames of reference (Hadley, 2013). As O'Brien states:

"We still often struggle with how to care and how to show we care. Caring about others requires respecting them as separate, autonomous people worthy of our care."
(p.114)

That means responsiveness comes through an assurance of nurturing.

Unfortunately, university curricula, like elementary and secondary curricula, are still biased towards whiteness, which means universities admit culturally diverse students, who either assimilate or drop out (Parhar and Sensoy, 2011; Joshee and Sinfield, 2010; Volante and Earl, 2002). Students drop out of university when both pedagogy and culture neither make sense to their personal experiences nor offer practical solutions to their subjective problems. In response, and as a solution, nurturing addresses problems associated with diversity because it provides a framework from which educators can offer a culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy. For marginalised students in programmes where the curriculum and profession is Eurocentric and privileged against them (Hadley, 2013), nurturing re-contextualises pedagogy.

Case study 2: York University's Socially Responsive Nurture Group Approach

The needs of doctoral students must take into account their professional positions as graduate teaching assistants as well as their studentships. As part of the student body, doctoral students often fall through the gaps of student support but have the duty to provide supportive responses to undergraduates in their care. Supervising faculty may be supportive but the limitations are vast and continue to change with political, economic, and cultural dynamics. Adversely, faculty may not be keen to advocate for doctoral students' subjective needs (Kozlowski, 2014). Doctoral students need nurturing that fosters personal wellbeing, and a professional sense of responsibility for the undergraduates under their tutorship. Struggling and socially isolated doctoral students cannot be effective in their pedagogy, which ultimately means the undergraduates are at a further disadvantage. In the following case study, the nurture group fosters both the professional and academic development of doctoral students.

York University in Canada has over 60,000 students and faculty with a relatively high number being first generation immigrants. At undergraduate level, supportive structures have developed in response to the specific needs of these students. Mature students also receive tailored support to help them succeed in their undergraduate studies. However, at postgraduate level supports specific to first generation racialised and immigrant students are lacking, which means many doctoral students struggle with feelings of isolation, despair, and detachment (Stebbleton et al, 2014a and 2014b).

“Our work can seem inconsequential and irrelevant,” reveals one black female student. In response to this deficit, Professor Carl James runs a graduate student network, a reading group for racially and ethnically marginalised students in doctoral studies under the umbrella of the York Centre for Education and Community (YCEC). The group offers a social and emotional support network as well as opportunities for the doctoral students to disseminate their work.

James' major role as a mentor involves helping the students navigate the academic system, develop social and emotional skills and competencies, as well as aid them in finishing their doctoral studies and obtain employment as educators in higher education.

The students meet regularly to read each other's work, collaborate on academic writing, conference presentations, workshops and seminars as well as to socialise. The group applies principle two of nurturing frameworks by providing a safe base where the group of ethnically diverse students coming from different departments and faculties feel comfortable, welcome, contained, and protected (Boxall 2002). Where a faculty member from a similar background may not be available to mentor the group provides a socially responsive and stimulating environment where students can develop pedagogical skills and advance their doctoral studies. A participant states:

“Since York has so few spaces where we can intensely learn from mentors of colour, having a place where we could have a frank discussion about issues we faced as racial minorities was important. Furthermore, because my work is also focused on racialised bodies in Canada, I found it made a difference to have a mentor who was well immersed in this type of work as well.”

University educators lack time and resources for individual students' needs (O'Brien, 2010). Consequently, the social and emotional wellbeing of underrepresented students suffers, which can result in poor outcomes as the sense of despair can become overwhelming. In accordance with principle three, university nurture groups may reduce the need for mental health intervention as students have a safe, containing space to work through their difficulties with support. As the practice of nurturing links to attachment theory (Bennathan and Boxall 1996), having a responsive atmosphere and structure to address student isolation and relational difficulties in university life is of particular significance. The nurture group serves as a response to feelings of detachment, dysfunction, and isolation for the doctoral students. They find others with whom they can identify and a mentor with whom they can speak at an intimate level about their difficulties. A female participant reports:

“The reading group allowed me a space where I could openly discuss both academic and non-academic experiences. It contributed to my personal development by giving me a space to express even the most uncomfortable topics and issues. It also gave me an opportunity to offer advice, constructive criticism and critiques in a place that valued my opinions. Members of this group provided me with key mentorship tips and practical advice on how I could manage my academic career. I am incredibly grateful for the friendships and bonds that developed with people in the reading group.”

Nurture groups also help students build interpersonal and community focused relationship skills. Students who require nurturing generally lack strong community-focused relationships that provide support and also expect participation from students (Bennathan and Boxall, 2000; Boxall, 2002). Nurture groups are not a space where the benefits flow in one direction. There is an expectation for students in nurture groups to help and support other students and work collaboratively in making the group beneficial for everyone (Boxall, 2002). The doctoral group expected a significant level of commitment and participation from members, which made the group members more aware of the community surrounding them and therefore alleviated feelings of isolation.

A male participant states:

“As postgraduate study is an intensely lonely endeavour I found the group supported my social development in keeping me accountable with respect to showing up and being ready to offer thoughts and critiques to other members' work or having something done as promised to the collective.”

At doctoral level learning to be an academic while teaching is common practice for doctoral students hired as teaching assistants and student support for undergraduates. Therefore learning is developmental and nurturing makes it possible to continue the learning process outside of the classroom. Being part of the nurture group helps doctoral students develop their own support and mentorship skills so they can assist other students in similar situations as well as their undergraduate students. Nurture groups help students acquire self-actualising skills and social skills that make them more valuable to the group and community as a whole.

A participant identified this:

“In terms of social development, the reading group allowed me to extensively develop my communication and analytical skills. It gave me a platform to discuss ideas, listen to interpretations of my work, and allow me a space to defend my arguments in a clear and insightful manner. Even the harshest criticisms were welcomed through support and laughter. Socially, I felt equipped enough to deal with the microaggressions I experienced in white-dominated academic spaces. I learned better strategies to navigate changing social spaces in ways that allowed for positive self-care.”

Doyle (2003) states: “A major role of nurture group provision is to provide opportunities for children to re-enact early experiences and make sense of them with support from empathetic adults, in a secure learning environment” (p.256). Similarly, having an experienced mentor to help develop ways to cope with the social and cultural pressures of academia is valuable. Some students in the nurture group reported being the only racialised student in their cohort and often feeling out of place. For racialised and marginalised students having a safe place to explore the difficulties of racism and discrimination without fear of reprisal is a valuable experience. In hegemonic spaces, students cannot be open about their experiences and often feel silenced or ostracised for pointing out any apparent injustices. Sometimes situations build up slowly into a tension that students cannot deal with effectively (Smith et al, 2007a; 2007b; 2011). In a nurture group, students can find the resources to deal with the emotional and mental turmoil of discrimination. A nurture space protects against the backlash of expressing their feelings as racialised individuals. It also contains their difficulties and offers ways to cope and overcome hardships. More importantly, in accordance with nurturing principles 4 and 5, it allows students to communicate through language and behaviour how and what they are experiencing.

Culturally responsive pedagogy relies significantly on what educators know about different races, ethnicities and cultures (Moon, 2011). Unfortunately, the educator may be mistaken in their responsiveness – ignorant of a student’s background, or inaccurately informed, which can have devastating effects. From a nurturing perspective, the importance of a mentor who has similar experiences cannot be underestimated. In the YCEC doctoral group,

students reported having a professor with first hand experiences, supportive, and positive solutions made a big difference in the nurture group. Participants reported:

“Carl James has been my supervisor since my MA degree, which began in 2009. In many ways Carl has been a mentor but also a friend and an intellectual guide in the murky waters of postgraduate school. It is without a doubt that without him I would not be working towards a doctoral degree. His unwaveringly high expectations coupled with his supportive friendship have been the perfectly challenging intellectual environment most conducive to my own development.”

“Carl was an amazing mentor. He offered practical advice as well as honest and important academic criticism of my work and theories. I found he engaged with me in an open and welcoming manner. Although, it took time to build this relationship, Carl helped support my ideas and allowed me to be honest with my feelings without fear of future reprisal. I am grateful for his mentorship.”

A critical orientation in nurturing can begin to address racial prejudices as it combines a progressive social vision with a radical critique of schooling in which education becomes part of the larger strategy to effect social justice (Volante and Earl 2002, pp.422). In other words, the nurturing of marginalised and oppressed students serves as a way of moving a larger social justice agenda forward.

When nurtured within the wider university community, marginalised students become nurturing professionals for other marginalised people. Nurturing gives marginalised students the message that they belong and they have a role to play in their immediate community as well as in the future. When racialised educators take a nurturing role, students find a role model and feel able to expand their knowledge and experience. Therefore, in hegemonic spaces diversity becomes a crucial and relevant ingredient for success.

Another participant reports: ***“I really liked the way that Carl allowed us the time to socialise alone, joining us later in our discussions. His attendance was extremely beneficial and allowed us to bounce ideas and theories off him. He also helped to keep our discussions focused wherever possible.”***

Maintaining goals and semi-formal structures is an important aspect of nurturing (Boxall 2002). The mentor, although empathetic and supportive, maintained a professional atmosphere so that the doctoral students could maintain a focus on their work. It was also a way to model academic professionalism, share differing expertise and opinions, and disagree in a critical and constructive manner. The students learned to appreciate interdisciplinary collaborations and developed the skills to utilise diversity in a productive and positive manner. One participant describes the YCEC group as a safe space where students find commonalities as well as take advantage of diversity to further each other’s goals and success. For this participant this aspect was particularly important as she felt it helped her think about ideas differently and include other methods in her work.

CONCLUSION

Nurturing is necessary in early years settings, primary schools, secondary schools, and in universities as a way of increasing opportunities for success. There are significant similarities in challenges and barriers for children just beginning their educational journeys and students beginning their journeys in higher education. Even at higher levels of education, disadvantage threatens students' success. Racially, socially, and culturally disadvantaged students require developmental resources to navigate traditional university life. Traditional measures of belonging and ability affect their ability to function socially and culturally at an appropriately effective level.

In university creativity, flexibility, and community are fundamental to addressing deficits in equity, inclusivity, and diversity. Nurturing begins with positive attitudes towards students offered with an expectation to succeed. Universities have student-counselling services, just as primary and secondary schools have pastoral care; however, nurturing is a step beyond those provisions. Nurturing might be the means to ensure a more inclusive and equitable higher education system that privileges diversity. As a framework, it provides developmental opportunities for students to thrive as leaders within a learning community.

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