

BEYOND NURTURE GROUPS TO NURTURING APPROACHES: A FOCUS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF NURTURE IN THE SCOTTISH CONTEXT

Maura Kearney¹, Gail Nowek²

¹ Glasgow Psychological Service, 12 Ardnish Street, Glasgow G51 4NB

² Education Scotland, Optima Building, 58 Robertson Street, Glasgow G2 8DQ

Corresponding author: Maura Kearney, Maura.Kearney@glasgow.gov.uk

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ABSTRACT

In this paper the spread and direction of nurture within the context of Scottish schools is outlined. Through the process of interacting with key education stakeholders and consideration of the evidence base a picture of the development of whole establishment nurturing approaches in Scotland has emerged. The views of 27 of Scotland's 32 local authorities were identified through a questionnaire to establish the extent to which nurture groups and nurturing approaches are a priority for local authorities and then a 'drill down' activity was undertaken with a further 10 stakeholders. By speaking to four schools and six representatives from educational psychology services across Scotland a confluence for the rationale of implementing a nurturing approach is noted; an understanding of what a nurturing approach is and the challenges and benefits that sit alongside the embedding of the whole school approach are examined. From the process of consultation with stakeholders and literature review, next steps are proposed that will help the continuing development of an evidence base for nurturing approaches and link this to other emerging priorities within the wider landscape.

INTRODUCTION

From the turn of the 21st century, nurture and nurture groups have had a slow and steady rise across Scotland and have evolved and changed from being delivered solely as a traditional targeted intervention to becoming a whole school approach. This approach seeks to inform how schools and early years establishments support wellbeing and promote positive relationships within the wider school community. Wellbeing and positive relationships are a key focus within Scottish policy guidance and it could be argued that the focus on whole school nurturing approaches has been facilitated by this guidance. Education Scotland has now produced a national framework entitled 'Applying nurture as a whole school approach' which provides a national definition of a 'nurturing approach' (2017, p12) and supplies a framework for whole education establishments to plan, implement and self-evaluate a nurturing approach.

This article attempts to explore in some detail how we have moved from nurture groups to nurturing approaches in Scotland; what the current landscape is with regard to local authorities' focus on nurture groups and nurturing approaches; what the potential

benefits of taking such an approach might be as well as highlighting the possible limitations and challenges inherent within the implementation of a universal nurturing approach. It asks whether Scotland has developed a clear rationale for a nurturing approach, and whether there is a shared understanding of what is meant by a nurturing approach. There is exploration into how a nurturing approach links with other similar approaches and how the evidence base around nurture and other approaches can strengthen the rationale for a nurturing approach. Finally, it explores what needs to be done to further develop a shared national understanding of nurturing approaches and how we might go about developing an evidence base for the impact of a nurturing approach.

The evolution from nurture groups to nurturing approaches

Nurture groups were initially developed in England where much of the concomitant early research was undertaken (Bennathan and Boxall, 2013; Cooper and Lovey, 1999; Cooper et. al. 2001, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007). The first nurture group was created in London in 1970 due to the recognition by Marjorie Boxall that some children and young people demonstrated

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a profile of needs relating to the self-regulation of emotional and social behaviour that were underpinned by attachment issues arising from early adversity.

In England there was structural endorsement of the approach of nurture groups (Warnock Report, (DES,1978); The Fish Report, (ILEA,1985) but specifically the Department of Education and Employment (1997) produced a report that influenced the decision of Scotland's largest local authority to develop and fund four nurture groups. Glasgow City Council was one of the first councils in Scotland to commit significant funding to nurture groups and then to further create a strategy for additional nurture groups across the city. From this 2001 beginning many other local authorities have also developed nurture groups across the early years, primary and secondary sector but have also focused on developing nurturing approaches across schools. While many local authorities continue to combine both targeted nurture group support with more universal nurturing approaches, a number of local authorities have solely focused on a nurturing approach. The spread of nurture across Scotland has underpinned the need for a national definition and understanding of what is meant by a nurturing approach and a need to examine whether such an approach can have a positive impact on improving wellbeing, behaviour and attainment in Scottish schools.

The legislative, policy and research context

Many aspects of Scotland's legislative and policy framework have laid the groundwork for the flourishing of nurturing approaches that has taken place. The Children and Young People Scotland Act (2014) *Getting it Right for Every Child*, places children and young people's wellbeing at the centre of all assessment, planning and intervention. It recognises the part that the wider environment plays in the development of children and young people and places a responsibility on all adults to provide the appropriate support to help children to grow and develop in order to reach their full potential. This is now enshrined in legislation in the Children and Young Person's (Scotland) Act (2014) which reinforces the rights of children and young people and emphasises the need to support all pupils, including the most vulnerable. The National Improvement Framework (Education Scotland, 2018), one of the key pieces of guidance set out by the Scottish government to support improvement in Scottish education, sets out clear priorities to deliver excellence and equity, including closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people and improving children and young people's health and wellbeing. The Scottish Attainment Challenge is the key approach taken in Scotland to reducing the poverty related attainment gap and the Scottish government has invested funding at local authority, school and individual pupil level to tackle

this. The most recent iteration of this funding, the Pupil Equity Fund, has seen many schools investing money in developing either targeted nurture groups or whole school nurturing approaches. Additional funding has also been provided to the nine local authorities with the highest levels of deprivation and many of them have used part of their funding to focus on nurturing approaches as a key means of supporting wellbeing to reduce the poverty related attainment gap.

A nurturing approach has been promoted as a key means to support behaviour, wellbeing, attainment and achievement in Scottish schools in a number of policy documents including 'Included, engaged and involved, Part 2: a positive approach to preventing and managing school exclusion' and 'Better relationships, better learning, better behaviour' (Education Scotland 2013). Recent research that explored school staff experience of young people's behaviour in schools as well as identifying how they supported positive behaviour – Behaviour in Scottish schools research (BISSR), (Scottish Government, 2016) – demonstrates that a nurturing approach, along with other relationship-based approaches, is one of the most commonly cited approaches used to support positive relationships and behaviour and to prevent serious and disruptive behaviour in Scottish schools.

The context of poverty and the Scottish Government's focus on breaking the cycles of poverty by using early intervention (Kearney et. al. 2016) has a particular focus on health and wellbeing and how this can help to reduce stress for children as well as fostering learning (Roffey, 2016). More recently, there has been an increased interest in Scotland due to the research evidence provided by the Adverse Childhood Experiences Studies (ACEs) that have been carried out in the USA (Felitti et. al. 1998; Herman et. al. 1997), England (Bellis et. al. 2014) and Wales (Bellis et. al. 2015). These studies clearly demonstrate the links between adversity in early childhood and later negative outcomes for children, young people and adults. This has led to a renewed focus on how early adversity impacts on children and young people's health outcomes, stress levels, ability to self-regulate and their consequent capacity to settle and do well in school. This research also emphasises the importance of having a buffering adult who can mitigate against many of these adverse childhood experiences. These key elements of understanding the importance of early adversity and early intervention; supporting health and wellbeing and learning lend themselves well to a nurturing approach.

Previous research (Mortimore, 2014; Myers, 1996) indicates that the environment of the school is important for developing positive behaviour. This research stated that schools that are highly considerate of ethos by evolving the elements of curriculum, leadership,

shared beliefs and relationships can help shape and support its pupils. The recent BISSR research (2016) also highlights a clear correlation between education staff perceptions of the levels of positive behaviour in school and their perceptions of whether a positive ethos and culture existed in the school.

The 'Growing up in Scotland' study (Anderson et. al. 2007), a large longitudinal study, currently following two cohorts of children across Scotland found that between 5% and 15% of those children studied fell within the borderline range for a spectrum of behavioural difficulties. Those researchers involved in the collection of data noted that there is still work to be done in understanding the extent and nature of the emotional and behavioural development of children in Scotland. This evidence provides a clear rationale for placing the wellbeing of all children and young people at the centre of any policy and approaches within Scottish education.

Evidence base for nurture groups and a wider nurturing approach

The last 16 years of the embedding of nurture, in its various forms, has led to a body of Scottish research that has demonstrated the benefits of nurture groups (Kearney, 2004; Gerrard, 2005; March and Healy, 2007; Binnie and Allan, 2008; Reynolds et. al. 2009; MacKay et. al. 2010; Grantham and Primrose, 2017). There have been fewer articles relating to whole establishment approaches even across the UK (March and Kearney, 2017; Warin, 2017, Doyle 2004 and Lucas, 1999). This said, the benefits that have been highlighted – increased attainment, increase in pro-social behaviours, the reduction in behaviours relating to attachment needs (Reynolds et. al. 2009), increase in self-esteem (Kearney, 2004) and the increase in the positive perceptions of the parents whose children have experienced nurture groups (March and Healy, 2007) – are important. Much of the research into nurture groups also indicates that the presence of a nurture group, when properly implemented and supported, can have a much wider impact on culture and ethos and children's outcomes than those who are only supported within the nurture group. The presence of nurture groups in schools can help schools to develop an increased capacity to support those with social, emotional and behavioural needs and make adaptations to their curriculum and pedagogy used by teachers (Binnie and Allen, 2008, Cooper and Whitebread, 2007; Sanders, 2007).

Bergin and Bergin (2009) also clearly articulate that while attachment to parents has often been demonstrated as having a positive outcome for children and young people in terms of learning and behaviour, attachment to teachers is also important. Attachment to teachers plays an important part

in developing positive outcomes for children and young people, including ability to maintain attention; improved attainment; increased academic motivation and more positive behaviour in school. Research into authoritative schools (Gregory et. al. 2012; Gill et. al. 2004; Dinham and Scott, 2008) highlights the importance of developing a school climate that is high in expectations and structure as well as being high in warmth and support.

In addition, there is strong evidence to support the importance of good relationships in a learning context. Frisby and Martin (2010) undertook a study of 232 students and their perceptions of the quality of rapport between students and between the instructor and students. This research highlighted the significance of the perceived rapport and those classrooms where there was felt to be a 'connectedness' between participants. This connectedness related to enhanced student participation. Importantly it is the relationship with the instructor, when positive, that predicted affective learning and cognitive learning. Similar results were found in the study by Prisbell et. al. (2009) and McLaughlin and Clarke (2010) who cited over 130 papers that demonstrate positive relationships in schools impact directly on positive academic outcomes. These studies highlight the need for the pupils and teachers to feel part of a school to support good academic outcomes. Hamm et. al. (2011) undertook a very small-scale intervention that found when teachers had undertaken a professional programme that focused on developing their attunement to social dynamics and early adolescent development, there was an impact. Students in the intervention schools noted that their teachers were more attuned to peer group affiliations and that this had a positive impact on the school social environment. Thus, concluding that teachers have an influence in making the context more supportive for young people.

Research into the importance of attachment and connectedness in schools; the importance of pupil-teacher relationships and the need for a balance between structure and support, provides a clear rationale for a nurturing approach, which emphasises these aspects.

What is a nurturing approach?

As indicated, there has been a definite move in Scottish education towards promoting a culture that focuses on building relationships across all of the establishment. In common with many education systems, the Scottish education system historically focused on a more behaviourist approach. March and Kearney (2017) outline how, prior to the citywide introduction of universal/whole school nurturing approaches, the predominant model of behaviour management in schools had been characterised by the principles of

behavioural psychology with a non-relational approach and ethos. Nurturing approaches are seen by many as a means of helping schools to move beyond a behaviourist approach to create: 'positive, emotionally and socially healthy environments that help promote good behaviour and the growth of...emotional wellbeing' (Weare, 2006). Nurture groups, and subsequently nurturing approaches, were conceived as a means of understanding and helping meet children's relational and attachment needs to support their inclusion in a mainstream context (Boxall, 2002). One of the main aspects of a nurturing approach is an emphasis on how a key adult can support the attachment needs of a young person, particularly where this early attachment relationship has been missed. The importance of a key adult in mitigating against the impact of early adverse experiences has been outlined in much of the recent research around Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (Hughes et. al. 2018). Cooper et. al. (2000) took first-hand accounts of pupils with SEBD and found that:

School regimes that were characterised by mechanistic and impersonal approaches to pupils' management were associated with pupil disaffection, whereas regimes that pupils and staff experienced as being underpinned by values of respect and care for all persons were associated with positive challenges to disaffection and lower levels of exclusion.

Nurturing approaches with a focus on attachment and relationship-based learning can be seen as an antidote to the more traditional, behaviourist approach and a means of supporting pupils who experience social, emotional, behavioural needs.

In recognition of the growing trend towards schools developing whole school nurturing approaches – a framework was developed in Scotland that supported an understanding of this approach and supported self-evaluation. This built on previous self-evaluation frameworks such as 'How nurturing is our school?' (Glasgow, 2014) and also made use of Scotland's effective broader approach to self-evaluation within education – currently seen in How good is our school? 4 (Education Scotland, 2015) and How good is our early learning and childcare (Education Scotland, (2016). Within the Applying Nurture (Education Scotland, 2017) as a whole school approach framework, a definition of a nurturing approach was outlined for the first time:

A nurturing approach recognises that positive relationships are central to both learning and wellbeing. A key aspect of a nurturing approach is an understanding of attachment theory and how early experiences can have a significant impact on development. It recognises that all school/Early Learning Centre settings staff have a role to play

in establishing the positive relationships that are required to promote healthy social and emotional development and that these relationships should be reliable, predictable and consistent where possible...the school environment...incorporates attunement, warmth and connection alongside structure, high expectations and a focus on achievement and attainment (op. cit., p13, 2017).

As part of the development of Applying Nurture framework, a literature search and consultation with key stakeholders (including children and young people) was undertaken to identify some of the key features which were felt to be important aspects of a nurturing approach. This literature search included many of the key studies cited within the evidence base for nurturing approaches above but also took into account research into effective practice in terms of wider social and emotional learning (Durlak, 2016; Yoder, 2014; Noble and McGrath, 2008). Some of the features that were highlighted as being important aspects of a nurturing approach included: the application of nurturing principles at a whole school level; the need for a focus on social and emotional learning across the school; a focus on play and developmentally appropriate curriculum; a focus on relationships at the heart of the approach; an inclusive approach that supports all learners; the need for a clear vision/aims and objectives and a consistent approach; an emphasis on practitioners being able to understand, support and predict the behaviour of children and young people; and clear focus on attachment and child development.

In addition, the national improvement agency Education Scotland has delivered a freely accessible four-day national training on primary and secondary nurturing approaches throughout Scotland. This has to date been attended by 31 of Scotland's 32 local authorities with many of those attending training cascading it further within their own school or local authority. This training focuses on an understanding of attachment, early adversity and trauma and its impact on development; the implementation of the nurturing principles across the wider school community and the use of implementation science to support the implementation of a whole school approach with a focus on the evaluation of impact.

This work and the subsequent development of the framework have helped to move the national conversation around nurturing approaches on and it was of interest to the authors of this paper to explore whether these themes continued to emerge in the discussions with local authorities and schools.

METHODOLOGY

The key research questions in this study were:

- how has nurture evolved in a Scottish context;
- has this led to a shared understanding of a nurturing approach;
- what is the rationale for employing a nurturing approach; and
- how has its impact been measured?

The literature base and the practitioner knowledge of the authors indicated that two of the key stakeholders across education services with regard to the implementation of nurturing approaches were senior school managers and educational psychologists and so, they were selected as the main participants in the research.

A brief questionnaire was developed by the authors (with initial direction and consultation with an Emeritus Professor) that focused mainly on the evolution of nurture within Scotland as well as the extent to which it was a local priority. At this stage the questionnaire was kept brief to engage as many stakeholders as possible. It was then trialled on four educational psychologists (EPs) who had worked in the area of nurture as well as being part of the Education Scotland group responsible for the development of the document 'Applying nurture as a whole school approach'. Feedback was taken in relation to the relevance of the questions to Local Authority-Educational Psychological Services (LA-EPS) staff as well as grammar and clarity of meaning. Minor adaptations were made to the questions following this focus group. The first set of semi-structured questionnaires was sent to all of the 32 LA-EPS by the authors. This was undertaken by linking with each principal educational psychologist (PEP) in Scotland through the Association of Principal Educational Psychologists (ASPEP). Each PEP either completed a short questionnaire themselves or delegated this to someone within the service or local authority who had some direct responsibility for developing or implementing nurturing approaches in their context. This questionnaire was kept brief to ensure a high response rate.

The questions asked included:

1. Do you have nurture groups within your local authority?
2. Are nurturing approaches being taken forward in your local authority?
3. Is this a whole authority priority?

Answers were received via email and a thematic analysis was undertaken by an independent research assistant.

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis can often be seen as lacking in a thorough definition, yet it is a qualitative analytical tool that many psychologists use. In essence it is an approach that helps identify themes or patterns in relation to different topics or ontological positions. Indeed, Ryan and Bernard (2000) suggest that thematic coding, as a process, is performed within 'major' analytic traditions rather than a specific approach in its own right.

Without clear and rigid guidelines to identify precisely what thematic analysis is there are two strains of thought. One is that thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool which allows a complex understanding of qualitative data. The other view is that when thematic analysis is used, 'anything goes' in relation to the data (Antaki, et. al., 2002).

It was a tool that was used in the interpretation of the local authority data in this paper as it helps minimally organise the data set but still allows the rich detail to remain. The six-step approach (or six phases of thematic analysis) that Braun and Clarke (2006) set out in their document was the process that was undertaken in this paper. These steps are: familiarising yourself with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; producing the report.

From the initial semi-structured questionnaire 27 returns were obtained from 32 local authorities within Scotland that provided a clear snapshot of how nurturing approaches (including nurture groups) were being implemented in Scotland. To obtain a more detailed understanding of what both educational psychologists and managers in schools perceived as to the benefits and challenges of implementing a nurturing approach and what a nurturing approach looked like in their context, a further follow up semi-structured questionnaire with a number of the respondents was undertaken. The themes that emerged from the initial questionnaire also helped to develop the questions that were included in this more detailed questionnaire. This questionnaire was then delivered as in-depth interviews with five educational psychologists and one nurture development officer within six local authorities and four in-depth interviews with senior managers from four schools (two primary and two secondary schools). The participants from the local authorities were selected to ensure a spread of those who had high levels of deprivation and lower levels of deprivation in their local authority; those who worked in larger cities and those in more rural areas and those who had been developing their nurturing approaches for some time and those who were at an earlier stage in the development of their nurturing approach.

This in depth semi-structured questionnaire was trialled on three school staff who were also part of the Education Scotland development group for the 'Applying nurture as a whole school approach' document. Again, small changes were made to structure, grammar and clarity of the questions. Examples of the questions are as follows:

1. What is the rationale for nurturing approaches and its implementation in your local authority?
2. How are you evaluating the implementation of nurturing approaches within your school – have you been able to see any impact of it so far?

As noted above 10 education staff members undertook the second semi-structured questionnaire. All staff members who were approached to undertake the questionnaires agreed to this. Both the authors interviewed five individuals each and answers were transcribed verbatim as the interviewee progressed through the questionnaire.

An independent research assistant compiled the information. Both authors discussed the information and any ambiguous responses before undertaking a second thematic analysis.

Neither questionnaire was standardised and despite research into this area, no suitable publications were found that had been tested for reliability and validity. This meant that the authors were reliant on the research question they wished to answer and their knowledge of the subject area to develop the questionnaires. Consultation with an Emeritus Professor who had written extensively on the subject of nurture allowed the questionnaire to be developed with a significant degree of academic knowledge about nurture.

RESULTS

As indicated, 27 out of 32 local authorities returned the short survey, which is a return rate of 89.9%. Of these returns, 25 out of 27 stated that they have nurture groups within the local authority (LA). Twenty-seven out of 27 also said that they were implementing nurturing approaches in some form within their LA. Twenty of the 27 LAs indicated that implementing nurturing approaches across the LA was a priority, with one other indicating that they were implementing a relationship approach. The largest number of nurture groups in a LA was 96 and these were present across early years, primary and secondary settings. Many other LAs also indicated they had them across different sectors with primary having the most. The initial questionnaire asked a limited number of questions but many of the respondents added additional information about the training, implementation and evaluation of nurturing approaches in their local authority. For example, many respondents provided information on funding for

nurture groups which was a combination of LA funding, schools' own funding, funding through the Pupil Equity Fund and additional funding from the Scottish Attainment Challenge as a challenge authority. Of the 15 respondents who mentioned who was delivering training for nurture groups and nurturing approaches, the Educational Psychology Service was central to this training.

The further analysis was undertaken with a number of educational psychologists and senior managers from schools as indicated above. This was carried out as a one-to-one semi-structured interview with each respondent. This semi-structured interview built on the initial questionnaire that was undertaken by 27 EPS and asked questions in relation to the following topics: the development of nurturing approaches in schools; implementation issues in relation to nurturing approaches including evaluation and impact; the underpinning rationale for selecting nurturing approaches as a whole school approach; the 'key features' of what makes a school nurturing. Finally, there was a focus on the benefits and challenges of implementing Nurturing Approaches in schools. The themes that emerged were as follows:

Rationale for a nurturing approach

The impact of poverty was seen as a key driver for the implementation of a nurturing approach in schools by many of the respondents.

All school respondents said that changing the learning and teaching culture and promoting wellbeing for staff and pupils was part of the rationale for embedding nurturing approaches in their establishments.

Educational psychologists highlighted that they saw that a nurturing ethos and culture in schools helped to support inclusion of young people who had a profile of needs and also provided a shared language between education professionals to discuss the types of needs these young people have.

Key features of a nurturing approach

The need for whole school implementation of a nurturing approach as opposed to small-scale changes was seen as a vital feature of the approach. An establishment approach required training for all staff and needed to be led by the school's SMT. The involvement of all staff was viewed by respondents as one of the key aspects that differentiated a targeted nurture group from a whole school nurturing approach.

All school staff highlighted that a nurturing approach promoted respectful language and a consistency of language when working with and discussing young people. EPS staff also commented that a nurturing approach developed skilled and reflective practitioners. A knowledge of attachment theory

by staff, the importance of policies that focused on relationships and these in turn developing a safe environment for staff and young people were seen as key features of a nurturing approach. Many of these themes reflect the nurture principles.

Benefits and challenges of implementing a nurturing approach

As well as staff being clear in their rationale for a nurturing approach and articulating the positive features of a nurturing approach such as the use of consistent language, they were also able to identify other tangible benefits. It was felt by school staff that both the school culture and ethos were happier, safer and calmer for staff which had a direct impact on young people's learning and their wellbeing and connectedness to the school. All respondents felt that staff understood children's needs better and were more skilled in dealing with needs. Again, it was noted that when a nurturing approach was in place, that there was a consistency by staff in their approach to young people and in the language they used.

However, as in most large-scale approaches, a number of challenges were identified. These included ensuring consistent staff training, developing a shared understanding and consistent practice in supporting children and young people. The challenges were summed up by one head teacher. She noted that it was difficult: '...getting everyone on the bus. Some people aren't even at the bus stop'. A key challenge was ensuring that all staff were empowered to make changes in their thinking and practice in a way that articulated with the wider school vision. It was also important to ensure that all staff had ownership of this vision.

Again, the involvement and training of the SMT was highlighted as a key challenge to ensuring that nurturing approaches were implemented effectively. Ongoing training of staff was also important, particularly for newly qualified teachers and new staff members.

Challenges arose when working with parents such as the potential perception that nurture is 'soft' and that sanctions, such as exclusion, were more valued when dealing with aspects of difficult behaviour.

An additional challenge was the demonstration of impact in relation to the nurturing approach. EPS and school staff indicated that they were trying various ways to capture this information but collating the hard data and noting the direct impact was often difficult.

A final, but crucial point that can be seen as both a benefit and a challenge – it was reflected through the responses that supporting and developing relationships was key to developing a nurturing school.

EVALUATION AND IMPACT

The need to embed a thorough self-evaluation process in relation to the implementation of nurturing approaches was highlighted by nearly all respondents (nine out of 10 responses). Of the four schools, three indicated they were using Education Scotland materials to support this process.

One of the measures being frequently used by respondents to evaluate the impact of nurturing approaches was exclusion data. In addition, information was collated from referrals to internal and external supports, eg purchased education placements, support bases within schools, behavioural referrals to SMT. The views of young people, school leaver destinations and staff wellbeing measures were also used as a measure of impact – the last measure was gained via staff surveys etc.

CONCLUSION

The landscape in Scottish education has been changing at a rapid pace and has become more focused on the importance of wellbeing and relationships as a cornerstone of improving outcomes. This requires a whole school approach that focuses on culture and ethos and creates a shared understanding and vision. In order to achieve a positive culture and ethos with a focus on improving relationships and wellbeing, the findings of this research indicate that local authorities and schools are increasingly turning to a nurturing approach. Both nurture groups and nurturing approaches are widespread in Scotland as stated, with initiatives such as the Scottish Attainment Challenge supporting this focus. The majority of respondents reported that nurturing approaches as a system-wide approach were a priority not just within education but often within wider children's services. It was also noted that psychological services have played a pivotal role in leading this movement but local authorities are also increasingly allocating funding to a dedicated role to support nurturing approaches.

The more detailed interviews revealed that the respondents clearly see the rationale and benefits for applying a nurturing approach and many of these align with those key features of a nurturing approach that are outlined in the evidence, including providing a shared language and vision that support staff understanding of the needs of children and young people. Attachment and children's development lie at the heart of this understanding and provide a theoretical underpinning for a nurturing approach alongside the nurture principles. Respondents clearly recognised the need for whole school implementation of a nurturing approach. The broadening out of nurture to a more universal approach has meant that the key factors supporting the implementation of any universal approach need to be considered, such as

the need to ensure consistency among staff; buy-in and ownership of senior management and the wider school community and ongoing whole staff training. In this respect, nurturing approaches benefit from being developed in line with implementation science to ensure there is some fidelity to the approach. One of the key themes that has emerged throughout is the shared understanding of the importance of relationships as a core aspect of a nurturing approach. Respondents saw this as a vital component of ensuring both staff wellbeing and the wellbeing of children and young people. In the current climate of increasing concerns around the mental health of children and young people and staff wellbeing, the potential impact that nurturing approaches can have on improving wellbeing is an area that may require further research.

Another key aspect of implementation is ensuring that there is evidence of impact. Self-evaluation is a well-established approach to exploring outcomes in Scottish education (see *How good is your school?*, (HGIOS4) and *How good is our early learning and childcare?* (HGIOELC), in Education Scotland, 2015) and this has been further facilitated within nurture by the development of the Applying Nurture as a whole school approach framework. Self-evaluation can be a helpful approach for schools to evaluate the progress they are making in a nurturing approach with regard to positive outcomes for children and young people and the wider school community. However, as self-evaluation is designed to enable schools to take into account their own context, the evidence gathered through this approach does not currently lend itself to developing a national picture of the impact of nurturing approaches on children and young people. This evidence could however be gathered in a more systematic way to provide a more detailed national picture of the impact of nurturing approaches. The tools within the Applying Nurture self-evaluation framework could also be used together with other more quantitative data on wellbeing and attainment to demonstrate the evidence of impact on practitioners' practice alongside the evidence of impact on children and young people.

As Scotland has become more focused on an awareness of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma informed practice – there are many similar themes emerging (Education Scotland, 2018). A nurturing approach relies on increasing staff understanding and empathy with regard to children and young people's behaviour in schools which it is hoped will generate more inclusive and reflective practice. Being ACEs aware and trauma informed also have similar aims. A crucial aspect of this understanding is ensuring that it is rooted in evidence-based and psychologically-informed practice. A nurturing approach is a psychologically informed approach

which makes use of key theoretical concepts such as attachment theory and increasingly trauma informed and neuroscientific evidence. In Scotland, many are also making the links between nurturing approaches and the research which has been generated by the adverse childhood experiences specifically in relation to the impact of early adversity and trauma including the strong connection with poverty. A further factor that links these approaches is the recognition of the importance of resilience factors such as the child having one trusted adult.

In terms of a future direction for nurture, there is a need to consolidate the increased appetite in Scotland for nurturing approaches to ensure that it captures evidence of impact and links to other approaches that have similar aims. While some previous research demonstrates the importance of some of the key themes of nurture in terms of outcomes, eg school connectedness – future research could focus on linking nurturing approaches more explicitly with positive outcomes for children and young people.

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