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The International Journal of Nurture in Education

In this issue:

The International Journal of Nurture in Education

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Editorial Advisory Board

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: https://www.nurtureuk.org/research-evidence/international-journal-of-nurture-in-education/

The call for papers for the Volume 10 of the International Journal of Nurture in Education will be open from 6 November 2023. A guide for authors wishing to submit their research is accessible at: https://www.nurtureuk.org/research-evidence/international-journal-of-nurture-in-education/

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Contents

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Larissa is an educational psychologist working in Glasgow. They are passionate about nurture and early years and are part of these two strategic City Lead Groups within Glasgow. Larissa completed their doctoral training in educational psychology at the University of Southampton.

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Maura is the principal educational psychologist for Renfrewshire Council and was previously the deputy principal psychologist in Glasgow. Maura has researched the area of nurture groups and nurturing approaches over the past 20 years and continues to have a keen interest in the area.

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Leah's is a nurture development officer within Perth and Kinross Council with a remit to develop whole-school nurturing approaches in collaboration with the educational psychology service. A graduand of a BA in childhood practice, Leah's passion for nurture stems from extensive prior experience within nurture groups in a support capacity.

Welcome

Tristan Middleton, Editor of the International Journal of Nurture in Education

It is with great pleasure that I introduce the 9th volume of the International Journal of Nurture in Education.

I firmly believe that recognition of the importance of nurture in education, and more widely in professional practice, is gaining traction and momentum. In education there is a growing interest in relational pedagogies as a fundamental aspect of an inclusive education approach.

The articles available in this journal contribute to the growing evidence base of how nurture can make a significant difference to learning and what nurture looks like in practice.

The first two articles in this journal reflect the historical strength of the support for nurture in schools in Scotland.

Dr Larissa Cunningham and Maura Kearney pick up on more recent work which considers a whole-school approach to nurture. This article focuses on early years settings and the use of a professional development framework created by an educational psychology service.

Rachel Rennie and Leah Smart provide us with an interim report about the Nurturing Relationships programme, where 28 schools were supported to embed nurture principles within their setting. They identify the importance of leadership and research-active practitioners to support effective whole-school nurture approaches.

In our third article, Dr John Kirk presents their research into the curriculum of three established nurture group settings. Their findings present some of the key differences between the experienced curriculum in nurture groups and their mainstream classes, as well as the key elements that lead to the success of the nurture provision.

The final article is from Natalie Callaghan. This offers us findings from a study into a nurture group in a special school setting, exploring the effectiveness through the use of the Boxall Profile® and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, and considers the success of re-integration to the classroom.

Readers may remember from volume 8 that we had planned to register the journal with the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). This has proved to be more difficult than initially anticipated, but we hope to gain full registration soon and that you will soon see the content of the International Journal of Nurture in Education reflected more widely in library catalogues.

Please do remember that we are committed to nurturing authors at the International Journal of Nurture in Education. We offer constructive feedback and a timely review process to all authors who submit an article, as well as a direct conversation with the editor. Please do contact me if you would like to author a review of a recent relevant publication for the next volume.

I look forward to receiving your articles for Volume 10, to be published in 2024.

A nurturing approach in the early years: supporting implementation at a whole-establishment level

Dr Larissa Cunningham and Maura Kearney
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Abstract

This article builds on previous literature considering the role of educational psychology services in promoting whole-establishment nurturing approaches but with a specific focus on implementation within the early years context. It outlines work undertaken by Glasgow Educational Psychology Service (GEPS) to support the rollout of whole-establishment nurturing approaches within local authority early years establishments across the city. The article provides an overview of why nurturing approaches are crucial within early years establishments and how a successful whole-city implementation plan to support the professional needs of a complex workforce was developed. It also presents a professional development framework created by GEPS and shares helpful learning reflections for other local authorities and Educational Psychology Services looking to roll out similar whole-establishment nurturing approaches within early years settings.

Introduction

"...We continue to see an overemphasis on policies and programmes for school readiness at the expense of holistic interventions through the life course, particularly in the first 1000 days of a child's life" (Shonkoff, Radner and Foote, 2017, p.15).

This discussion paper outlines and reflects upon the contribution of an Educational Psychology Service in supporting the implementation of whole-establishment nurturing approaches within Early Learning Centres (ELCs). It will provide an overview of the national and local context around nurturing approaches within Scottish education.

The evidence base around whole-establishment nurturing approaches is considered and as noted throughout the paper, there is limited research in this area, particularly within the early years. This paper aims to contribute towards the discussion around how best to effectively implement nurturing approaches in early years settings. As such, no evaluation data is reported.

National context

The importance of early intervention, both in a child's life and at the point where a child presents with additional support needs, has been well documented within the literature (e.g. Campbell et al., 2002; Gorey, 2001; Karoly, Kilburn and Cannon,

2005; Reynolds et al., 2007). In particular, the long-lasting outcomes of a high-quality early years' experience for children and families impacted by the effects of poverty is noted. These include better learning and attainment, maintaining a mainstream placement in later education, fewer interactions with the criminal justice system and less poverty in late adolescence and early adulthood (Bakken, Brown and Downing., 2017).

Part of the Scottish national context, and why a relational approach is woven throughout policies, is that of the levels of poverty which exist. Within Scotland, levels of poverty have been on the rise since 2010 and this trend has continued between 2017 and 2020 (Birt et al., 2021). It is estimated that around 240,000 children and young people in Scotland live in poverty with single parent families, unemployed families and minority ethnic families (with rates more than double that of white families) most at risk (Birt et al., 2021). The Joseph Rowntree Report (Sosu and Ellis, 2014) introduced the concept of the 'poverty-related attainment gap' and stated the need for securing quality local data and evidence-based practice to break the cycle of poverty. Building upon this, Scotland's National Improvement Framework (NIF) (Scottish Government, updated 2022) has driven a further focus on the importance of the quality and consistency of data for planning to meet the needs of all children and young people.

In the recent review of implementation of Additional Support for Learning (the ASL review, Scottish Government, 2021), Angela Morgan re-emphasised that the most vulnerable need a trusting and relational environment to thrive within. The review clearly outlines factors believed to support all children and young people and allow them to fulfil their potential.

> "...a school's culture, ethos, values and team mind-set, evidenced in practice by the school's leadership, is critical in establishing the positive environment in which all children and young people feel included and can flourish. This underpinning is essential for a culture where children and young people are respected. Rights are a prominent reference point for promoting and encouraging positive communications, trust and relationships between staff, children and young people" (Scottish Government, 2021 p.14).

This sits with a continued focus nationally on implementing the 'Getting It Right for Every Child' (GIRFEC) policy framework (Scottish Government, 2012). GIRFEC aims to ensure that all children and young people grow up feeling loved, safe and respected so that they can realise their full potential; a premise which is now also at the core of other Scottish policies including 'The Promise' (The Promise Scotland, 2021).

The Glasgow context

Over the last 20 years, Glasgow Education Services has dedicated itself to developing and improving nurture across the city. From a small scale beginning with the introduction of the first nurture groups in 2001 to the launch of the 'Towards the Nurturing City' strategic policy in 2012, Glasgow strives to ensure positive relationships and children's wellbeing are at the heart of education. In essence, the development of relational establishments.

The levels of poverty, as noted above, and the impact this has on the families of children and young people across Glasgow is well documented (McKendrick, 2015; McKinney et al., 2012; Worrell, Perry, Wells and MacKay, 2021). However, poverty is not a Glasgow specific issue and research has provided many examples of how it has a direct influence on educational outcomes (e.g. Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development OECD, 2018; Sosu and Ellis, 2014; Scottish Government, 2013). Children and young people who live in the most affluent areas are more likely to develop stronger numeracy and literacy skills and higher levels of academic self-efficacy in comparison to their peers living in more deprived areas (Perry, Dempster and MacKay, 2017). Nevertheless, the experience of poverty is not simply about performance on tests, rather it is about the impact on children and young people's wider world of self-belief and resilience and how these help to support and extend (or hinder) academic performance (Agasisti et al., 2018).

Whole-establishment nurturing approaches

The benefits of targeted nurture groups are well documented (e.g., Kearney, 2004; Gerrard, 2005; March and Healy, 2007; Binnie and Allen, 2008; Reynolds, MacKay and Kearney, 2009; MacKay,

Reynolds and Kearney, 2010; Grantham and Primrose, 2017). However, the concept of whole-establishment nurturing approaches and their evidence base is less well-developed and less researched (Nolan et al., 2021). At the time of writing, there is no research specifically focused on the implementation of nurturing approaches within the early years. As such, the following definition of nurturing approaches was used by GEPS within the implementation process:

> "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/ELC 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." (Education Scotland and Glasgow City Council, 2017, p.13).

Nurturing establishments understand the need for children and young people to have key adults in their lives as secondary attachment figures and the importance of positive relationships in allowing them to thrive within education (March and Kearney, 2017). When children and young people feel 'connected' to their classroom peers, they have an enhanced participation in their own education (Frisby and Martin, 2010). This is coupled with better academic outcomes when they have good relationships with staff and others in their establishment (Prisbell et al., 2009; McLaughlin and Clarke, 2010). How those relationships are established and the skills and training that are used to ensure that all staff that make up an educational environment are supportive and sensitive is a large part of a nurturing approach.

> "If relationships are where things developmentally can go wrong, then relationships are where they are most likely to be put right." (Howe, 2005, p.278).

Nurturing approaches within the early years

Stable, caring relationships in early life are essential for all children's development (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010). Healthy attachment relationships with key adults throughout infancy and childhood are important factors affecting children's development, particularly their language, social and emotional skills, alongside their cognitive development (Jones et al., 2016; Shonkoff, 2011). Central to attachment theory, and particularly relevant to nurturing approaches, is the premise that infants are born with a biological predisposition to form emotional attachments with their primary caregivers (Bowlby, 1969, 1980). Through these early caregiving experiences, Bowlby suggested that children develop internal working models or representations of themselves, others and relationships which guide their future social interactions (Hughes and Schlösser, 2014).

Although internal working models become resistant to change, Bowlby argued that they can be reshaped with changes in children's caregiving environments (Sroufe, 2005). This view fits with an ecosystemic perspective (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979), whereby children's development is influenced by the interaction between themselves and their environment, which includes their educational settings. A growing body of literature specifically highlights the influential nature of the quality of relationships and experiences in early years settings, and emphasises the importance of children's relationships with consistent, attuned adults to ensure children feel safe and secure in their caregiver's absence (Bowlby, 2007; McCain, Mustard and Shanker, 2007).

Several risk factors have consistently been identified as having the potential to impact on the development of healthy attachment relationships. Such factors include: parental mental health (Cicchetti, Rogosch, and Toth, 2000; Goodman et al., 2011; Koutra et al., 2013; van Doesum et al., 2008); substance abuse (Suchman et al., 2010); poverty (Negrão et al. 2014); multiple home and school placements (Pasalich et al. 2016); and premature birth (Barlow et al., 2016). Early intervention to address inequalities and disadvantage continues to be a core theme within government policies across the UK (Stone et al., 2017).

The Children and Young People's Act (Scotland) (Scottish Government, 2014) highlights the

importance of ELCs for the future of children, their families, and practitioners. All children have the right to high quality relationships, optimal learning environments and access to services to holistically meet their needs (The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). This is equally reflected in 'Realising the Ambition' (Education Scotland, 2020), the national practice guidance for early years settings across Scotland. It is widely accepted that high-quality provision in the early years gives the best opportunity for positive developmental and later life outcomes for children (Wilson-Ali, Barratt-Pugh and Knaus, 2019). Thus, getting it right in the early years, for all children, is key to reducing the poverty-related attainment gap, raising attainment and improving health and wellbeing – the national priorities within Scottish education (Scottish Government, 2022).

In Scotland, the early years landscape and context has undergone a significant period of change in recent years, with the workforce expansion related to the introduction of 1,140 hours of funded provision for three- and four-year-olds and the inclusion of two-year-olds who meet the category of 'vulnerable' (Scottish Government, 2016). Furthermore, changes around deferred entry to school now mean that more children are eligible for an additional funded year of early years provision. The ASL Review (Scottish Government, 2021) highlights that approximately 30% of children and young people have additional support needs. This is a significant proportion of children, the majority of whom are attending mainstream establishments (including early years provision) with increasingly complex needs. With the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the development and experiences of younger children, particularly with regards to their language and social and emotional development (Tracey et al., 2022), this number is likely to have increased. The rising cost of living may also bring with it a negative change of financial circumstances, both for families working and those without access to work.

Considering the theory and evidence base above, there is a clear rationale and need for a skilled and confident workforce within the early years sector if education wishes to support families and mitigate against these factors. The role of early years practitioners as attuned key adults cannot be underestimated. Practitioners should have a secure understanding of attachment theory and nurturing approaches to ensure that children are given the best experiences, opportunities and care, alongside access to safe and nurturing physical environments. Creating a skilled and knowledgeable early years workforce with an emphasis on positive relationships and social emotional wellbeing, combined with effective pedagogy, will support better developmental outcomes for children (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Importantly, this will also help deliver on key national priorities in Scotland pertaining to the poverty-related attainment gap.

'Towards a Nurturing City' in the early years

In 2008, 'nurture corners' (see Stone et al., 2017 for more detail) were set up in 20 of Glasgow's early years' establishments. These were a targeted input for children who had a known history of trauma, loss or a disruption of their care experience. The early years' setting was selected because early years establishments are a universal provision and also because of the importance of early and effective intervention. Training in the nurture principles, attachment and parental engagement was received by all 20 establishments. Moving from a targeted intervention to a universal approach across Glasgow's early years establishments was motivated by vision and values related to equity, alongside delivering a financially effective initiative which is measured in relation to impact.

Glasgow City Council continues to aspire to move towards becoming a nurturing city. As part of the Integrated Children's Services Plan for 2020-2023 (Glasgow City Council, 2020), Maureen McKenna, director of education in Glasgow for 14 years (2007-2021), gave an explicit commitment to enacting Glasgow's vision in ensuring that all early years settings are working towards implementing and embedding a whole-establishment nurturing approach.

> "Nurseries won't look different, but they should feel different. Staff should be able to evidence how they are using the principles of nurture and the impact on their work. They will have the language to be able to do this…Parents and carers should be able to describe how well they feel supported. Staff should be able to notice

changes in children and their families and then take steps proactively to support." (M. McKenna, 23 December, 2021).

Developing and implementing nurturing approaches in Glasgow's ELCs

Prior learning

While most of the research in the area of whole-school nurturing approaches has been located in the primary and secondary sector, the approach and thinking could also be applicable to early years establishments. However, in line with core principles of implementation science (Fixsen et al., 2009), it is important to note that what works in one context cannot simply be transplanted to another. In approaching this task, learning was thus taken from the primary and secondary context, but specific information about the early years context was gathered and considered from the start.

Previous research (e.g., March and Kearney, 2017; Kearney and Nowek, 2019) has outlined the contribution of a psychological service in supporting establishments in developing their nurture practice. As such, a team of educational psychologists (EPs) from GEPS were involved in leading and supporting the planning and implementation of whole-establishment nurturing approaches across early years settings. The plan was co-constructed with an early years reference group (a group consisting of EPs, early years managers and practitioners). All decisions of practice, the rollout of the materials, and the content of training was discussed and overseen by the reference group.

To ensure an evidence-based approach to implementation, Kearney and Nowek's (2019) paper on nurturing approaches within the Scottish context was used as a starting point when considering whole-establishment nurturing approaches across the early years sector. In their paper, Kearney and Nowek highlighted key benefits and challenges of implementing whole-school nurturing approaches noted by both EPs and practitioners across Scottish local authorities. Reported benefits included improved staff wellbeing (school culture and ethos felt safe and calmer for staff); better understanding amongst staff with regards to children and young people's needs and barriers to learning; and increased confidence in meeting and supporting the needs of children and young people. However, as with most large-scale initiatives, several challenges to implementation were also identified. These included ensuring consistency in staff training; developing a shared understanding of practice in supporting children and young people; ensuring that staff feel empowered to reflect on and make changes to their practice; and ongoing training for staff (sustainability). An additional key challenge noted was the difficulty in measuring and demonstrating impact solely in relation to nurturing approaches. These were collectively reflected upon and considered by GEPS and the reference group throughout.

Implementation science

Implementation science is the study of how interventions and processes are delivered and embedded to maximise successful outcomes when applied in real-life contexts (Kelly and Perkins, 2012; Moir 2018). It uses a systematic and scientific approach to identify the range of factors that are likely to facilitate successful intervention (Moir, 2018). Within education, implementation science is still a relatively new concept for practitioners; however, it is increasingly used by EPs when developing and delivering training to ensure that an approach (or 'intervention') is applied with fidelity and has the greatest impact. Implementation science acknowledges the importance of systems and aligns with ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) which emphasises the importance of wider political, social, and cultural influences, particularly in relation to organisational change. EPs have a strong understanding of implementation science, alongside frameworks to support this in practice (Kelly, 2016) and routinely draw upon this approach when developing and delivering training, rolling out new initiatives, and supporting establishments to bring about change at the systemic level.

The Implementation Components Framework (ICF) (Fixsen et al., 2009) outlines key elements necessary for implementation to be successful and highlights important competency drivers which underpin and sustain implementation: staff selection, staff training, consultation and coaching,

and staff performance evaluation. In line with the core principles of implementation science (Kelly, 2016; Fixsen et al., 2009), GEPS developed a full implementation plan to rollout of nurturing approaches within the early years. The plan was reviewed rigorously and adaptations were agreed based on the views of stakeholders (through the reference group), research team and EPs delivering on the input. GEPS took Fixsen et al's (2009) four stages of implementation, alongside the core competency drivers, and adapted their naming convention to suit Glasgow's context and audience. The stages identified were vision and leadership, capacity building, evaluation and sustainability, and these were the organising structures that the implementation plan was developed under. In accordance with Fixsen et al. (2009), they were not seen as linear aspects of implementation to be moved through; rather they were fluid and cyclical.

This paper focuses on the aspects of vision and leadership and capacity building, and the related implementation issues. Evaluation and sustainability will be outlined at a later date.

Vision and leadership

A vision – and leaders' promotion of this vision – is key to helping individuals to adopt change and motivating them to overcome challenges (Aarons et al., 2014). At a national level, nurturing approaches are recognised as being at the heart of education policies across Scotland. The development of 'Applying Nurture as a Whole-School Approach – a framework to support self-evaluation' (Education Scotland and Glasgow City Council, 2017) further signalled the importance of nurture for educational establishments. Within Glasgow Education Services, there was a clear vision for early years establishments and commitment at local authority level (as discussed above).

When implementing any initiative, leadership is key, and so is reflection on the environment and its dynamics. Leadership strongly influences the success of interventions or approaches by the extent to which they are driven forward. Kapur (2018) outlines the reach of this influence, not only in selecting a workforce that is suitable for implementing new and creative approaches, but also establishing a working environment in which to grow the approach. Ensuring that resources (e.g., staff time, access to relevant professional development opportunities), and modelling the values of an approach, are important leadership tasks. However, having leaders at multiple levels is paramount to supporting and driving implementation. 'Applying Nurture as a Whole-School Approach (Education Scotland and Glasgow City Council, 2017) also includes a clear focus on the leadership of learning, and the need for senior management teams to prioritise nurturing approaches, in setting the ethos both for children and young people and for staff. Getting all staff involved and building a philosophy of joint working is crucial to the success of any new initiative, especially at the individual establishment level.

As such, the rollout was predicated on establishments identifying an implementation team and developing a shared staff vision for what nurturing approaches might look like in their setting through a process of self-evaluation. Through consultation with EPs, establishments are encouraged to ensure that the team consists of a mixture of staff, including members of senior management and practitioners. This helps to ensure distributed leadership opportunities, alongside shared ownership of the vision and the implementation of nurturing approaches.

To support heads of nursery in understanding the wider strategic vision for nurture, EPs developed and supported the launch of 'Early Years Nurture', involving presentations at area heads meetings and the development of two short videos outlining the vision for ELCs and how to get involved. Feedback from the local authority needs analysis (see below) was also included. Heads of nursery were given these videos to share with their practitioners and social media platforms were used to aid sharing.

Capacity building

Staff training, consultation and coaching are emphasised within the ICF as key elements necessary for successful implementation (Fixsen et al., 2009). Research highlights that one-off training is relatively ineffective (Stokes and Baer, 1977) and has little impact on the transfer of skills to practise (Fixsen et al., 2005). Training is more effective at enhancing skills and abilities and supports implementation when combined with consultation and coaching (Kelly, 2017). This increases the

overall effectiveness (Moir, 2018) and fidelity (Carroll et al., 2007) of implementing new initiatives and also boosts the likelihood of sustainability. However, before developing and delivering training, conducting a needs analysis is a core component of implementation science (Fixsen et al., 2009). A needs analysis is important for identifying gaps in knowledge and areas for staff development, and also in understanding the context within which the training will be delivered. The analysis was conducted across early years establishments prior to developing the training materials.

Local authority needs analysis

A nurture audit questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was developed by GEPS and sent to all local authority early years establishments. The questionnaire was completed anonymously, and data was stored in line with the Data Protection Act (2018). Responses were received from more than half of the 110 establishments. All responding establishments reported some level of understanding of what a nurturing approach was and almost all establishments (98%) were able to outline the benefits of a nurturing approach. Most establishments (87%) reported accessing a range of previous training on nurture. However, of the responding establishments, most (78%) also described potential challenges in rolling out nurturing approaches at a whole-establishment level. These challenges included: reference to the difficulties in terms of time and access to professional development opportunities; the range of skills, experiences, and attitudes amongst staff; and using a self-evaluation framework.

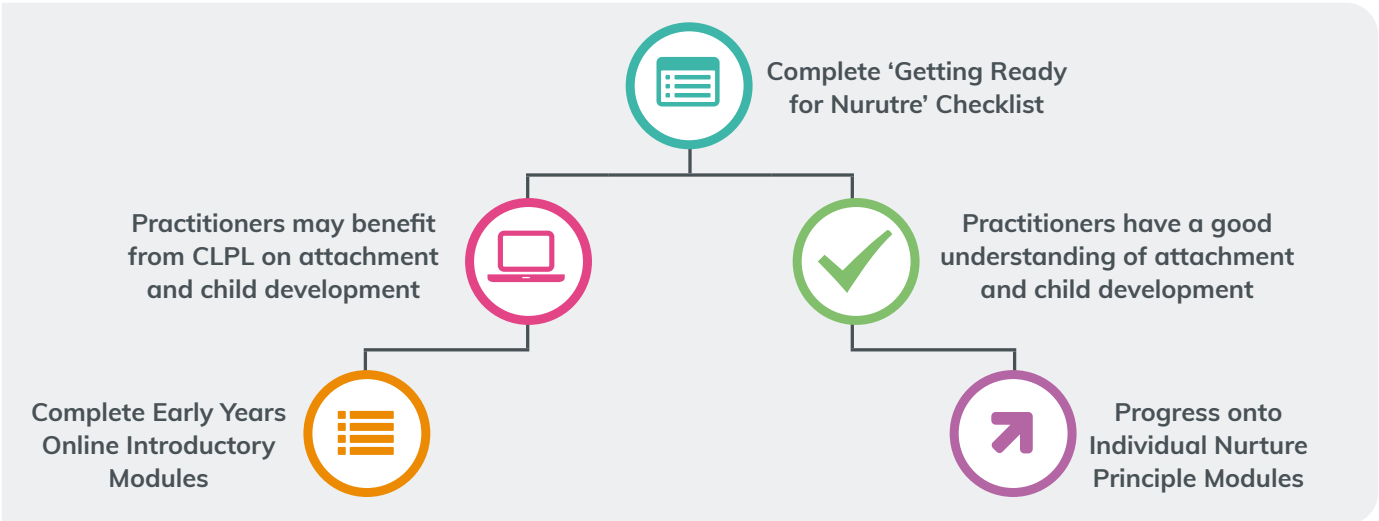
Supporting staff professional development

Based on the information gathered from the local authority needs analysis, a professional development framework for nurturing approaches within early years establishments was developed. This drew upon the principles of implementation science and adult learning theories, alongside consideration of the specific challenges identified by the early years sector. Moir (2018) highlights that a challenge when developing effective training is predicting the training needs and commitment from staff. As such, before commencing any training, pre-readiness checks are seen as best implementation science practice. Figure 1 provides a summary of the professional development framework created and more information on each stage is outlined below.

Individual establishment needs analysis

When introducing change, "assessment of needs, readiness, and capacity for change is essential" (Franks and Schroeder, 2013, p.11). To support individual establishments with their own needs analysis as part of the self-evaluation process (orange section shown in Figure 1), a 'Getting Ready for Nurture' checklist was developed (Appendix 2). This provides early years establishments with a more bespoke version of the readiness checklist within 'Applying Nurture

Figure 1: Summary of professional development framework for nurturing approaches in early years establishments.



as a Whole-School Approach' (Educational Scotland and Glasgow City Council, 2017). It also incorporates scaling questions to assess practitioners' knowledge and confidence in attachment, nurture, child development and early language development; foundational knowledge required before accessing more in-depth training around nurturing approaches.

The purpose of the checklist is to help establishments understand their readiness to take forward nurturing approaches and guide next steps in terms of practitioners' professional development (green section shown in Figure 1). This checklist is a tool for establishments to support continuous reflection on staff development needs and to identify gaps. For example, it would be a helpful checklist for new staff to complete or when there has been a large change in staff teams.

When establishments are ready to progress to the individual nurture principles modules, staff complete self-evaluation questionnaires from 'Applying Nurture as a Whole-School Approach' (Education Scotland and Glasgow City Council, 2017). The information from this is used to identify the priority nurture principle(s) to work on and any other action points. Electronic versions of the questionnaires were created (on Microsoft Forms) to help promote establishment engagement with self-evaluation and to make the analysis process easier and less time consuming; reflecting the challenges noted by practitioners in the initial needs analysis around self-evaluation.

Professional development materials

As indicated in Figure 1 (blue section), early years practitioners have access to two different sets of professional development materials based on their own self-evaluation of the needs of their staff.

Early years online learning modules

As part of ongoing development work within the early years City Lead Group, a team of EPs designed a series of short online learning modules for early years practitioners. The modules were developed as a creative solution in response to feedback which indicated that early years practitioners find it hard to access professional development opportunities due to time constraints from different shift patterns and the introduction of 1,140 hours. Within the early years sector, there is often a high turnover of staff or staff rotations and staff with a breadth of experience and skills, which can make accessing and embedding learning from professional development more challenging. It is hoped that the online nature of the modules provides practitioners with increased flexibility to access professional development opportunities at a time that suits them.

The purpose of the modules is to raise awareness and provide general information on early child development and how practitioners can support this. Core modules cover attachment and nurture, child development and language development. To complement these core modules, there is an activity-based module which focuses on the role of the adult and brings learning from all the modules together. These modules were included as part of the roll out of nurturing approaches in the early years for practitioners who are developing their foundational knowledge in these areas, prior to engaging in the individual nurture principles modules.

Individual nurture principles modules

Individual nurture principles modules were created with a specific early years focus and audience in mind (e.g., links to relevant legislation in the early years, appropriate examples to link theory to practice). The modules provide in-depth information and practical strategies/ideas for each of the Six Principles of Nurture, as shown in Figure 2 (Lucas, Insley and Buckland, 2006). Although the modules are delivered separately, thereby allowing establishments to explore each principle in depth, core messages (and links) underpinning all nurture principles are explicitly woven throughout each one.

Within the modules, content is also provided for staff around 'plan do review', which is based on the principles of practitioner enquiry but using language and processes that early years practitioners are familiar with. At the end of each module, practitioners are given time to work in small groups to self-evaluate their practice as an establishment (strengths and next steps) with regards to the nurture principle they are working on. Individual self-evaluation documents were created for nurture principles using the 'features of effective practice' in the playroom from 'Applying

Figure 2. The Six Principles of Nurture as outlined by Lucas, Insley and Buckland (2006).

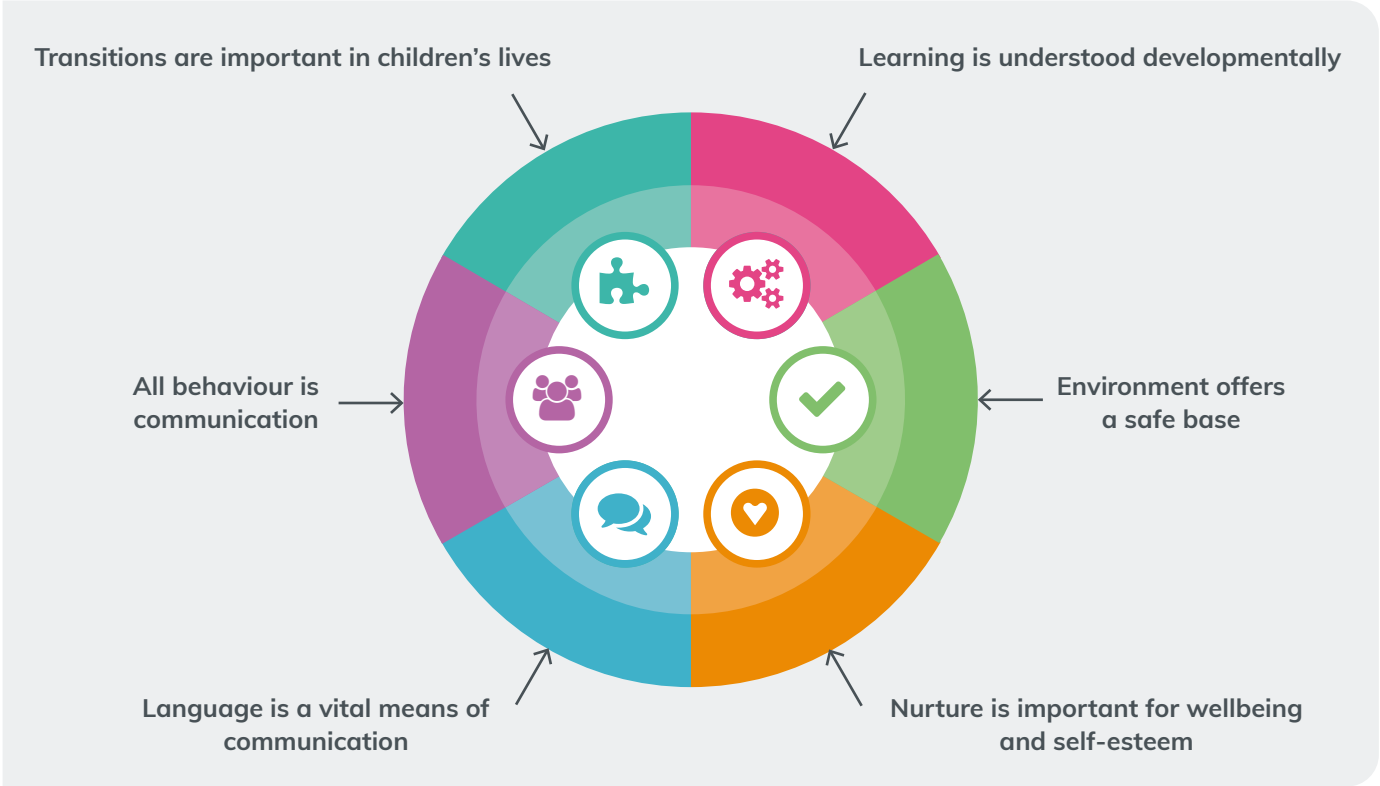
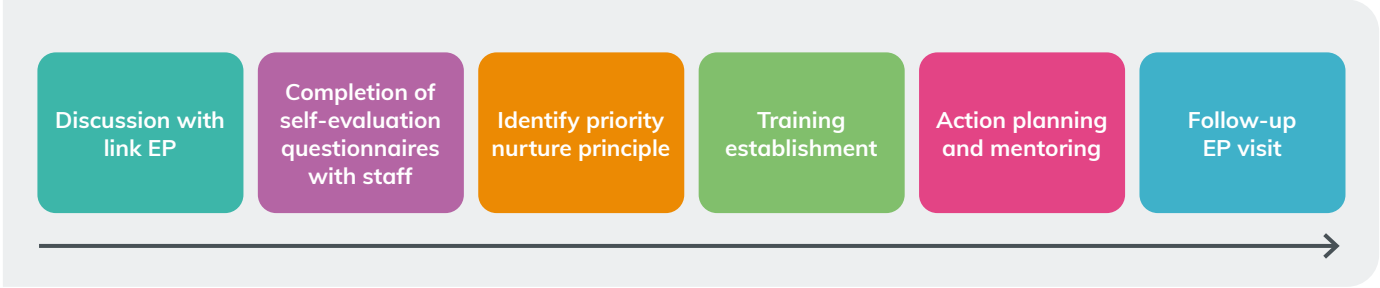


Figure 3. Summary of implementation process for the individual nurture principles modules.



Nurture as a Whole-School Approach' (Educational Scotland and Glasgow City Council, 2017). Establishments use the information gathered from this exercise and in consultation with the EP, develop an action plan for the principle they are working on. It is recommended that most establishments will require around six to nine months to implement and embed their action plans, although this may vary for different nurture principles and across establishments.

EPs offer support through consultation and coaching with members of the establishment implementation team during this period. A follow-up EP visit is offered as a formal consultation to review progress with establishments. The visit is used to review the establishment's action plan and consider next steps, which may include establishments progressing to another nurture principle or further embedding their learning and practice for the current principle. A questionnaire was created to provide a structure for the consultation meeting (see Appendix 3). Alongside a summary of the establishments pre- and post- self-evaluation data, stakeholder views are gathered about the model of training and implementation, how they have applied their learning in practice, and observed impact for staff and children. See Figure 3 for a summary of the implementation process.

Reflections and implications for practice for whole-establishment approaches

The implementation of whole-establishment nurturing approaches within the early years is an ongoing rolling programme. Data collected by GEPS at the end of the first year highlighted that more than half of local authority early years establishments are now engaging in professional development to support the implementation of nurturing approaches. Feedback from EPs and practitioners has indicated that they value the structure of the professional development framework and that this is supporting establishments with implementation, as they can see each stage of the process. EPs have reported that they are able to adapt the training content to suit the local needs of the individual establishment and that this flexibility is appreciated, thus allowing for better implementation. Establishments have also expressed valuing the individualised nature of the needs analysis. which is helping them to make links with and understand the relevance of the modules content. The EP team responsible for developing the professional development modules explicitly made links to key priorities and legislation within the early years context, including 'Realising the Ambition' (Education Scotland, 2020), alongside highlighting relevant Children's Rights (UNCRC, 1989) and recent Care Inspectorate Standards (2022). Establishments reported that this helps link national drivers to nurturing approaches.

However, through information gathered from follow-up EP consultation meetings, there have also been some challenges identified across different levels. A main challenge is the time commitment required to support establishments through the professional development framework, especially with regards to self-evaluation as not all early years staff feel confident in this. Most success is evident in establishments where there is significant 'buy in' from staff and the confidence to take full ownership of the process from the start. This is in line with the core components and principles of implementation science (e.g. Fixsen et al., 2009). A further challenge, especially within a large local authority and large educational psychology service such as GEPS, is the number of different priorities and potentially competing demands for EP time. EPs highlighted concerns about their capacity to support the number of early years establishments requesting training based on only five in-service days throughout the year. One way around this has been to deliver the module content to multiple establishments simultaneously. However, establishments still require individualised support and consultation around their action plan.

At the establishment level, resistance to change was highlighted as a barrier by some heads of nursery, with them reporting that not all staff see the value and benefits of adopting universal nurturing approaches. As such, this re-emphasises the importance of establishing 'readiness' as part of the implementation process and considering what supports could be put in place to help address this. For example, a role for educational psychology services could be to work with establishment heads and support them in how to share and develop a vision with staff, manage change (drawing upon principles from organisational psychology) and introduce new approaches within their teams. This would also link to a learning point at the local authority and educational psychology service level. While the 'big vision' was initiated at the local authority level (within education services), this was shaped and communicated to heads via the educational psychology service. It may promote more 'buy in' from staff if there is a joint delivery and communication of a 'launch' of a whole-establishment approach. Furthermore, it would be helpful for the vision to also include information around the benefits of whole-establishment nurturing approaches (i.e., the evidence base). However, as noted, this evidence base is still developing (e.g. Nolan et al., 2021) and thus there is an ongoing role for educational psychology services to help contribute to this.

Conclusion

This discussion paper aimed to build on previous research considering the role of educational psychology services in promoting whole-establishment nurturing approaches (e.g., March and Kearney, 2017; Kearney and Nowek, 2019) but with a specific focus on implementation within the early years context. The Scottish legislative and policy context give a clear rationale for the need for universal nurturing approaches in relation to the early years context, however, the complexity of

the workforce and the training and development of a large number of establishments is not without its challenges. It is hoped that the honesty of these issues, and the desire to deliver on national priorities related to improving wellbeing and attainment, are helpful. The paper seeks to provide a useful professional development framework and helpful learning reflections for other local authorities and educational psychology services looking to roll out similar whole-establishment nurturing approaches within early years settings.

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Appendices

Appendix 1
Local authority needs analysis questionnaire

'Towards a Nurturing City' – A nurturing approach in the early years

Glasgow has a vision to be a 'Nurturing City' in which a nurturing approach is embedded in all establishments. In the early years sector this builds on current practice which recognises that positive relationships are central to both learning and wellbeing. An understanding of attachment theory and how early experiences can have a significant impact on development is also key to a nurturing approach. We would be grateful if you could complete the questions below to help us to understand the development needs of early years establishments across the city in the journey to becoming a 'Nurturing City'.

1 What is the name of your establishment?

2 What is your role? (For example, head of nursery, lead practitioner of attainment, child development officer etc.)

3 What training, if any, have you/your establishment received on nurturing approaches? Please include who attended the training, who delivered it and when.

4 Please describe what ways, if any, your establishment is already implementing a nurturing approach.

5 How much understanding do you think the staff in your establishment have of what a nurturing approach is?

- ☐ High level of understanding
- ☐ Medium level of understanding
- ☐ Low level of understanding
- ☐ No understanding at all

6 Has your establishment had a nurture corner in the past?

☐ Yes ☐ No

7 Do you still use this model – i.e. a dedicated worker who works with a small group of identified children?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Other (please detail)

Appendix 2
'Getting Ready for Nurture' checklist

'Getting Ready for Nurture' in the early years

This checklist is designed to be completed by practitioners individually.

Section 1: Nurturing approaches

1 Nurturing approaches are part of our establishments' improvement plan.

☐ Yes ☐ No

2 The senior management team (SMT) is willing to fully support and model the implementation of nurturing approaches.

☐ Yes ☐ No

3 Information about Glasgow's vision for 'whole-establishment nurture' has been shared with me.

☐ Yes ☐ No

4 I know about the general aims of nurturing approaches.

☐ Yes ☐ No

5 I am confident that I have the time, skills and resources to implement nurturing approaches effectively, including time for training.

☐ Yes ☐ No

6 I have considered ways to inform parents/carers and involve them in nurturing approaches.

☐ Yes ☐ No

7 I understand the importance of evaluating impact and will complete all evaluation required.

☐ Yes ☐ No

Section 2: Practitioner knowledge

8 Please rate from 1 to 5 how well you feel you understand the principles of attachment theory (1 = not at all well, 5 = very well). When answering this question, think about your knowledge in relation to:

- Key concepts of attachment theory and how this might look in the playroom.
- The importance of attachment relationships for children's brain development.

9 Please rate from 1 to 5 how well you understand the Six Principles of Nurture principles (1 = not at all well, 5 = very well). When answering this question, think about your knowledge in relation to:

- The Six Principles of Nurture and what these might look like in terms of practice in the playroom.

10 Please rate from 1 to 5 how well you understand child development (1 = not at all well, 5 = very well). When answering this question, think about your knowledge in relation to:

- The importance of early experiences on children's overall development.
- The key 'domains' of development (physical, social, emotional and play).

11 Please rate from 1 to 5 how well you understand children's early language and communication development (1 = not at all well, 5 = very well). When answering this question, think about your knowledge in relation to:

- The different stages of language and communication development.
- How language and communication impacts on children's ability to learn and develop.

Appendix 3
EP follow-up consultation questionnaire

EP follow up questionnaire

Date:

Designation of staff member:

Establishment:

Nurture principle training received and how was this identified:

Please give a summary of establishment responses pre-training (self-evaluation).

Please give a summary of establishment responses post-training (self-evaluation).

Benefits: Limitations:

Section 1

1 How did you find the model of training and implementation (i.e. self-evaluation leading to targeted training; was the self-evaluation questionnaire easy to administer and to analyse?; what supports were required?; was the training effective in meeting your goals?).

2 What have you used from the training / what would you like more or less of? Please give details of supplementary materials used (e.g. plan-do-review proforma/ additional resources).

3 What impact have you observed following the staff CLPL on your whole establishment (you may tick multiple)?

- ☐ Enhanced staff wellbeing
- ☐ Increased parental engagement

- ☐ Consistency of language used by staff with and about children
- ☐ Increased knowledge and understanding of children's wellbeing needs
- ☐ Other _____

4 What impact have you observed from using nurturing approaches for the children in your establishment (you may tick multiple)?

- ☐ A decrease in distressed behaviours
- ☐ Children are responding to routines
- ☐ Successful transitions
- ☐ Developing relationships (with other children and/or adults)
- ☐ Children are able to ask for help
- ☐ Children are engaging in developmentally appropriate self-help behaviours
- ☐ Children are accessing a wider variety of activities
- ☐ Children are making progress in their play/ learning relative to developmental stage
- ☐ Other _____

5 What support have you valued most from your EP (you may tick multiple)? Please give details to inform future planning.

- ☐ Providing training in nurture principles
- ☐ Supporting action research (plan-do-review cycle)
- ☐ Individual casework
- ☐ Resources and materials

Section 2

1 What are the next steps for your establishment in terms of your nurture journey?

2 How could GEPS offer support in this next step?

Thank you

Applying nurture as a whole-school community approach: an interim report into developing a universal programme to support the practical implementation of whole school nurture within a local authority in Scotland

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Corresponding author: Rachel Rennie, rachelrennie@pkc.gov.uk
Data availability statement: *The data that support the findings of this study are available on reasonable request from the corresponding author.*
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Abstract

This article starts with an outline of how the core concepts of attachment, child development, neuroscience and the impact of trauma have influenced the educational landscape in Scotland. An account is provided of how key Scottish education policies promote nurturing relationships as beneficial for children and young people's wellbeing and healthy growth. The article continues with an account of the process undertaken to create a universal whole-school nurture programme that interweaves professional learning through action research and improvement methodology. The programme known as 'Nurturing Relationships' is intended to provide schools with a framework to embed the Six Principles of Nurture into the heart of their school communities over several years through training supported by a coach-consult model. Action research has been used to continually review and develop the programme; this interim evaluation captures progress to date through feedback gathered using a mixed-method approach. Findings suggest the programme has supported practitioners to increase their confidence, knowledge and understanding of the application of nurture. Limitations related to longitudinal data around the impact of the approach on school communities are discussed alongside implications for practice. The article aims to contribute to the limited body of research and national sharing of practice associated with universal nurturing approaches.

Introduction

'Nurture' is an evidence-based approach grounded in an understanding of attachment as "a lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (Bowlby, 1982). Secure nurturing relationships between an infant and their primary caregiver are critical for the optimal development of children's cognitive and social functions (Gillibrand, Lam and O'Donnell, 2016). Nurture groups were developed as a short-term, targeted intervention to support children whose additional support needs were associated with their early attachment experiences (Boxall and Lucas 2012). Over the past three decades nurturing approaches have continued to be developed within schools and a significant amount of research has been undertaken to explore the benefits on children's social and emotional functions (Cooper, Arnold and

Boyd, 2001; Colwell and O'Connor, 2003; Binnie and Allen, 2008; Kearney and Nowek, 2019; Nolan, Hannah and Lakin, 2019).

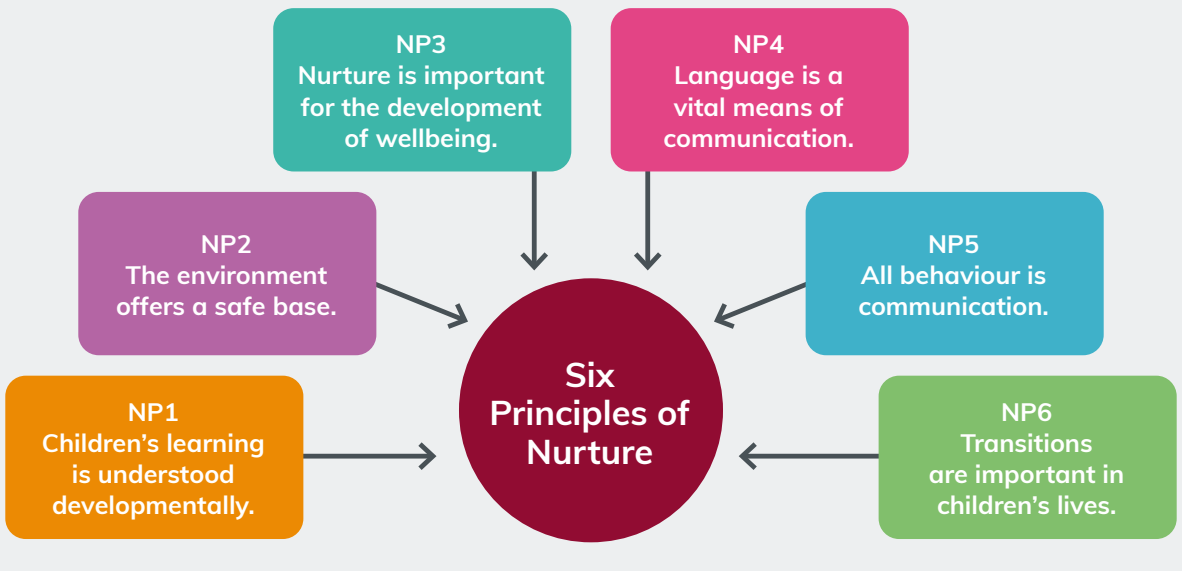
International research suggests relationships are key for children's wellbeing and developmental growth (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015). This has been conceptualised from an understanding of attachment theory, child development, impact of trauma and adversity, alongside recent advances in neuroscience (Education Scotland, 2018). Ongoing research into resilience highlights the rationale for relational approaches within education, where the impact of adversity can be mediated through positive relational experiences with key adults (Leitch, 2017; Perry and Winfrey 2021). In addition, Durlak et al. (2011) carried out a meta-analysis of over 200 studies into universal, school-based social and emotional learning programmes and found that universal approaches had a positive impact on attainment, emotional wellbeing and behaviour.

Where does a 'nurturing approach' sit within the current Scottish education system?

Within Scottish education, the phrase 'nurturing approach' encompasses a holistic understanding of the range of social and environmental factors that can impact on children's development. This understanding has emerged from national legislation, frameworks and priorities which govern children's services in Scotland. Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) (Children and Young People's Act, 2014) recognises that children and young people's lived experiences are unique, and it is their right to receive appropriate support from all professionals which nurtures their growth. This wellbeing agenda is firmly rooted within two key education policies. 'Realising the Ambition: Being Me' and 'The Curriculum for Excellence' (CofE) (Scottish Government, 2019 and 2020) both advocate health and wellbeing as critical to supporting children and young people to flourish as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

In 2009, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland (HMIE) published a report which proposed that nurture should be further integrated as a universal approach to address the wider needs of the pupil population (HMIE, 2009). The Scottish Government has since created a legislative and policy landscape for nurturing approaches to be further developed (Scottish Government, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2020 and 2021). The publication of 'Applying Nurture as a Whole-School Approach' (Education Scotland, 2016) provides a framework which assists schools in meeting their wellbeing responsibilities. It outlines the Six Principles of Nurture (Figure 1) and demonstrates how these are linked to the quality indicators to ensure that wellbeing is at the heart of school improvement (Education Scotland 2018).

Figure 1. The Six Principles of Nurture (Education Scotland, 2016)



This framework advocates the creation of an education environment supporting children and young people to develop capabilities, attributes, skills, knowledge and understanding which they need for optimal mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing. Subsequently, local authorities across Scotland have endorsed nurture as a key, universal approach to promoting wellbeing and closing the poverty related attainment gap (Education Scotland, 2016; Coleman, 2020; Kearney and Nowek, 2019), which continues to remain a concern within Scotland (Sosu and Ellis, 2014). Nurture has been found to promote the development of positive relationships and supportive ethos which create optimal conditions for educational attainment to be improved (Hattie, 2008; March and Kearney, 2017).

Nurturing practice

'Nurturing practice' describes an approach which is based on a balance between high warmth and challenge (Gill, Ashton and Algina, 2004; Dinham and Scott, 2008; Gregory, Cornell and Fan, 2012; Kearney and Nowek, 2019). This approach incorporates containment, co-regulation, positive relationships and attunement alongside structure, routine, high expectations and attainment (Kennedy, Landor and Todd, 2010; Boxall and Lucas, 2012; Education Scotland, 2016; Kearney and Nowek, 2019). Nurturing practice could be described as 'a way of being' and subsequently requires professional development to implement effectively (Boxall and Lucas, 2012). To achieve this, practitioners need to understand the ethos and values of nurture and be confident they can incorporate the nurture principles into everyday practice (Kearney and Nowek, 2019). 'Applying Nurture as a Whole-School Approach' provides a framework to support schools in the development of a universal approach (Education Scotland, 2016) and contains a range of self-evaluation tools underpinned by theory (Bowlby, 1982; Kennedy, Landor and Todd, 2010; Boxall and Lucas 2012). These self-evaluation tools can support practitioners to reflect, review and develop their own style of nurturing interaction and support leaders to review their wider contexts from a nurturing perspective (Education Scotland, 2016).

Education Scotland (2016) established key values that underpin a whole-school nurturing approach (Figure 2) which were developed in consultation with education staff, pupils and parents and are derived from research around nurture and the broader literature on social and emotional learning.

Figure 2. Key features of a nurturing approach (Education Scotland, 2016)

- **Whole school community included within inclusive and respectful schools.**
- **Opportunities for second chance learning are provided.**
- **Balance of high expectation/high warmth (2 Pillars of Nurture).**
- **Positive relationships underpin learning and teaching.**
- **Staff view behaviour from an ecological perspective.**
- **Nurturing approach embedded and underpins school priorities.**

In terms of practical application, the topic of whole-school nurture has been relatively unexplored, with only a limited number of studies beginning to address this gap (Warin, 2017; Kearney and Nowek, 2019; Coleman 2020; Nolan, 2020).

Nurturing practice across Scotland

Glasgow City Council was bold in its ambition to apply the Six Principles of Nurture across its entire local authority with the ultimate vision for Glasgow to become 'a nurturing city.' Significant development work has taken place and its vision has been delivered using a staged approach with 8,000 members of education staff across 313 establishments having undertaken nurture training (Kearney and Nowek, 2019). While Kearney and Nowek (2019) expressed that measuring

the impact of an approach on this scale brought challenges, there were several positive findings attributed to the approach. School staff reported holding an increased understanding of the theory of nurture and confidence putting this into practice (Kearney and Nowek, 2019). Across the local authority there were significant improvements in inclusive practice evidenced by reduced exclusion rates, higher levels of attainment and attendance, and an increase in pupil engagement beyond school (Kearney and Nowek, 2019).

In Renfrewshire Council, an empirical research evaluation was undertaken to explore the impact of Renfrewshire's nurturing relationships approach (RNRA) which aims to build the capacity of mainstream school staff through training and coaching (Nolan, 2020). The evaluation found that school staff who engaged in the programme benefited from an increase in skill, knowledge and understanding related to nurturing approaches, which led to changes in practice and new interventions. In addition, staff held a better understanding around the complex causes of behaviour, reflected by a shift in mindset and language with both pupils and staff reporting improved relationships (Nolan, 2020).

Within the research by Kearney and Nowek (2019) and Nolan (2020), their whole-school nurturing approaches are incorporated into a wider picture with other key inclusion initiatives which promote trauma informed and rights-based practice rather than being stand-alone interventions. The wider links are to avoid a fragmented approach, which the Scottish government recommends for effective implementation (Scottish Government, 2018).

From the literature (Warin, 2017; Kearney and Nowek, 2019; Nolan, Hannah and Lakin, 2019; Coleman, 2020), a consensus has emerged on the critical factors for developing and embedding whole-school nurturing approaches:

- All staff to hold an informed understanding of the underpinning concepts of nurture.
- A need for quality ongoing professional development.
- Committed leadership teams.
- A strong vision that is shared by the wider staff base.

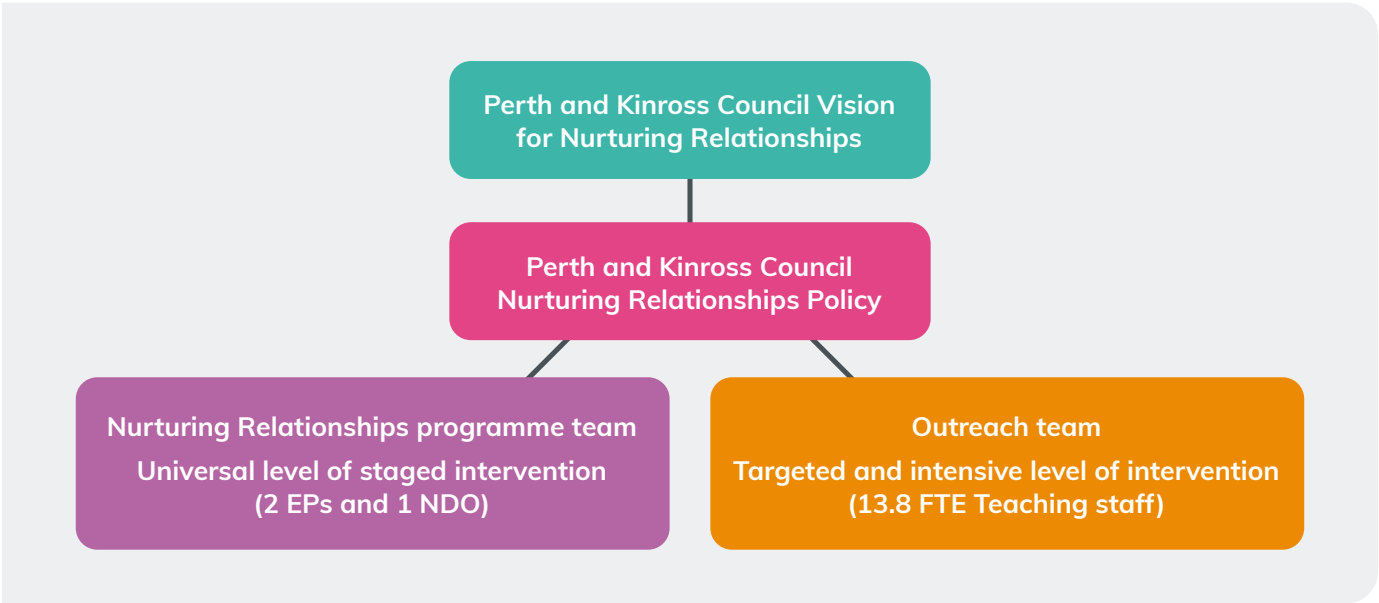
Nurturing practice in Perth and Kinross

In 2020 Perth and Kinross Council set about creating a vision of inclusivity centring on excellent relationships within schools. A core understanding of nurture and attachment through attuned and healthy relationships were created as the bedrock from which children and young people can get the most out of their education. To bring this vision alive, all classrooms should offer an inclusive environment underpinned by an ethos of nurture and positive relational approaches, while taking care of each other as staff. The 'Curriculum Learning and Education Collaboration' (CIRCLE) (Maciver et al., 2020), was used as a universal approach for schools with all education staff receiving training and support around implementation and the tools within. Alongside CIRCLE, there was a refresh in the way Perth and Kinross used trained teachers working within nurture groups in designated schools. The refresh brought staff into a central resource that all schools could draw on, with nurture teachers continuing to offer teaching support on a needs-led basis. This was to allow for a wider reach and equity of service to all pupils, as not all schools had a nurture group.

A further element of the local authority vision required a mechanism through which all staff could be upskilled in terms of applying nurture across the school and be supported to adopt each of the Six Principles of Nurture (Education Scotland, 2016). The aim is to have 100% of schools enrolled on their nurturing relationships journey by June 2026. Once enrolled, the length of an individual school's journey will depend on their contexts. However, it is anticipated that schools will take between four and six years to complete the programme.

The role of nurture development officer (NDO) was created to support the work of the educational psychology service (EPS) and schools involved in the programme. The NDO and two educational psychologists formed the nurturing relationships programme team (Figure 3) and created a sustainable programme that promoted positive outcomes.

Figure 3. Strands in Perth and Kinross Council



Nurturing relationships vision

The strands of the vision provide an all-round model of implementation of support for all children, young people and staff at all levels and stages of intervention (Figure 3), with both strands supported by the Perth and Kinross (PKC) nurturing relationships policy.

Perth and Kinross Council is the fifth largest local authority by geographical area in Scotland, with schools spread across a vast area covering 5,286km² which is mainly rural except for Perth City. 54% of schools are classified as rural (Table 1). With the wide variety within our educational establishments, the programme needed to be flexible and easily adaptable to meet the needs of all learners.

The programme team reviewed existing research around applying nurture as a whole-school approach which influenced the resulting programme. In addition, research around steps to create transformational change were factored into the design process to promote opportunities for success (Kotter, 1995). An evaluation strategy and accreditation process were designed alongside the programme to provide both evidence of impact, support commitment and ensure sustainability.

As the long-term programme started with a pilot group in autumn 2021 all schools are currently in the early stages of embedding nurturing approaches within their contexts. This article includes a summary of the impact of the approach to date; however caution should be applied as longitudinal data required to triangulate findings

Table 1. School demographic details for Perth and Kinross as of May 2022.

Total Schools	Primary	Secondary	Specialist	Urban	Rural
87	70	11	1	35	47*
Pupil Population					
Total Pupils	**Early Learning and Childcare**	**Primary**	**Secondary**	**% ASN**	**% FSM**
21,010	2930	10240	7840	34%	11% Primary 8% Secondary

*Classified as accessible rural, remote rural or very remote rural areas (Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010).

are currently in the early stages of collection. In contrast, a significant amount of evaluative data have been gathered around the process of developing and delivering the programme for quality assurance purposes. Subsequently, this interim report is primarily focused on the 'process evaluation' and seeks to explore the following research question: How can using improvement methodology in developing a whole-school nurture programme improve the confidence of staff in their delivery of nurturing relationships.

Perth and Kinross model and implementation science

Setting aims

The programme team was clear that for any programme to be successful it would require interweaving implementation science, academic and contextual knowledge. Elements of Action Research (Lewin, 1946), along with the Model for Improvement (Langley et al., 2009) and quality improvement (QI) resources would be the tools used to direct and measure change. In terms of creating the culture and environment suitable for such a change, Kotter's (1995) eight steps to transformational change were considered. At the start of the information gathering process, educational psychologists (EPs) from Perth and Kinross Council contacted colleagues from the EP service in Renfrewshire Council to discuss their model for whole-school nurture. The programme team reviewed the needs and context in Perth and Kinross and designed a model to suit.

Structure

The programme team's initial task was to create clear and achievable aims which could be linked to visible outcomes and evidenced with evaluation data (Table 2). The aims include developing practice for the whole-school community, this is written to highlight the importance of all parties

Table 2. Aims, outcomes and evaluation measures for the nurturing relationships programme.

Aim	Outcome	Measures
To improve wellbeing and promote resilience through an emphasis on quality relationships within the whole-school community.	Improved resilience and wellbeing for children and young people.	• Pupil focus groups. • Staff questionnaire. • Glasgow Motivation and Wellbeing tool.
To promote individual and collective understanding and confidence in the importance of nurturing relationships.	Children and young people benefitting from confident and nurturing practitioners leading to improved relationships in class.	• Pupil focus groups. • Staff questionnaires at various time points.
To enhance progressions in learning through applying nurture as a whole-school approach.	Progression in learning is enhanced for children and young people through effective application of the Six Principles of Nurture.	• Staff questionnaires. • Staff tracking information using Curriculum for Excellence. Experiences and Outcomes (CfE) • Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA).
To use implementation science to promote nurturing approaches, support developing practice and ensure sustainability.	Staff report greater confidence and understanding in the use of nurturing relationships.	• Coaching sessions. • Achievement of school aims. • Feedback from school leads.

Figure 4. Role structure within the nurturing relationships programme

involved around a school and includes staff, pupils, parents, carers, local businesses and third partner agencies. While Table 2 outlines the aims, outcomes and evaluation measures for the PKC nurturing relationships programme, schools involved are supported to create their own aims against which to measure individual school progress and successes.

The programme team used Kotter's concept of the 'guiding coalition' to consider how best to link in with schools (Kotter, 1995). The school lead teams are made up of one member of senior management and one or two members of staff in the school (Figure 4). This could be teaching, administration staff or anyone who works within the school who has a passion for nurture and ability to support and drive change (Warin, 2017; Coleman 2020).

Implementation

The process of the programme for a school is outlined in Figure 5 and recruitment begins in October/November when schools are starting to consider their improvement plans for the next academic session. The application process opens in December, with applications discussed in January. From here, schools take part in a readiness discussion based on the readiness document within 'Applying Nurture as a Whole-School Approach' (ANWSA) (Education Scotland, 2016). From here they can either be accepted onto the phase

Figure 5. Implementation plan

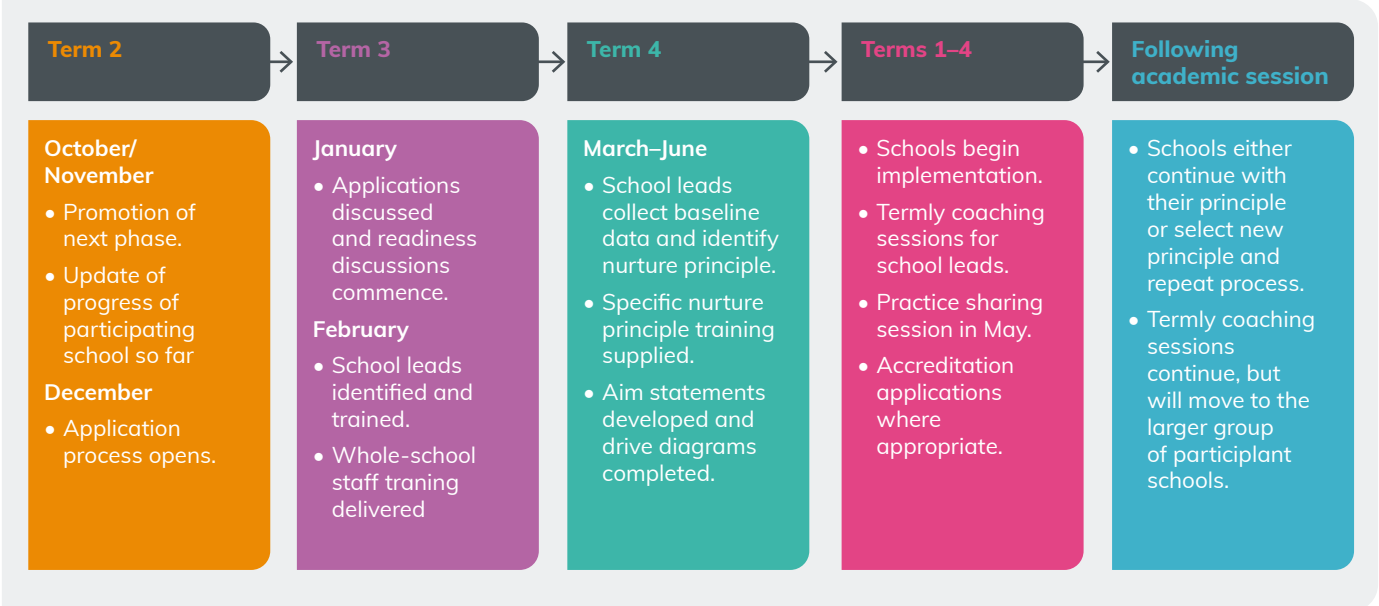


Figure 6. Nurture principles and core concepts from individualised principle training

NP1 – Learning is understood developmentally	Brain development, executive function and self-regulation, stage theories of development, physical, social and emotional development, types of trauma and the impact of trauma.
NP2– Environment offers a safe base	Social Environment: Relationships, attachment, interactions and shame. Physical Environment: Structure, boundaries, routines and Nurture Nooks.
NP3 – Nurture is important for the development of wellbeing	Staff wellbeing, GIRFEC and UNCRC, relationships, trauma informed practice, resillience, strategies and resources.
NP4 – Language is a vital means of communication	Reframing behaviour and language, attunement, trauma informed practice, emotional literacy, communication methods, emotional containment and co-regulation.
NP5 – All behaviour is communication	Defining behaviour, behaviour as communication, the impact of trauma, reframing, responding, relationships, support and strategies.
NP6 Transitions are important in children and young people' lives	Types of transitions, difficulties and challenges, window of tolerance, managing transitions, relational approaches, strategies and resources.

for which they have applied or deferred to the following year. Deferral can be based on schools not meeting the minimum criteria of having nurture within their improvement plan or not having the baseline level of CIRCLE use within the school. If a school is deferred to the next year, it is supported during that gap year by its link EPs, to ensure readiness for the following phase. Schools who are accepted on the phase are tasked to identify their school leads team who undergo training in February.

School-based process

The whole-school staff attend a core training session that takes place on the February in-service day. The core training covers the concepts of attachment, attunement, the pillars of nurture, the sensory system and trauma informed practice along with resilience. The idea being to create a universal understanding of the core concepts underpinning nurture for all. These concepts are organised through the Six Principles of Nurture:

The school leads collect baseline data to provide evidence of need within the school. Once complete, school leads use this information to decide which of the Six Principles to focus on. The school leads team are provided with pre-recorded training in relation to their chosen nurture principle (Figure 6). They are supported to use QI tools to write an aim statement, complete driver diagrams and identify potential change ideas to implement. In the first year of implementation, they are encouraged to focus on one principle. This is to allow them to become more accustomed to the model and encourage a deeper dive into the concepts introduced and how they can change practice through using the plan, do, study, act cycles (Langley et al., 2009) (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Adapted from Langley et al (2009)

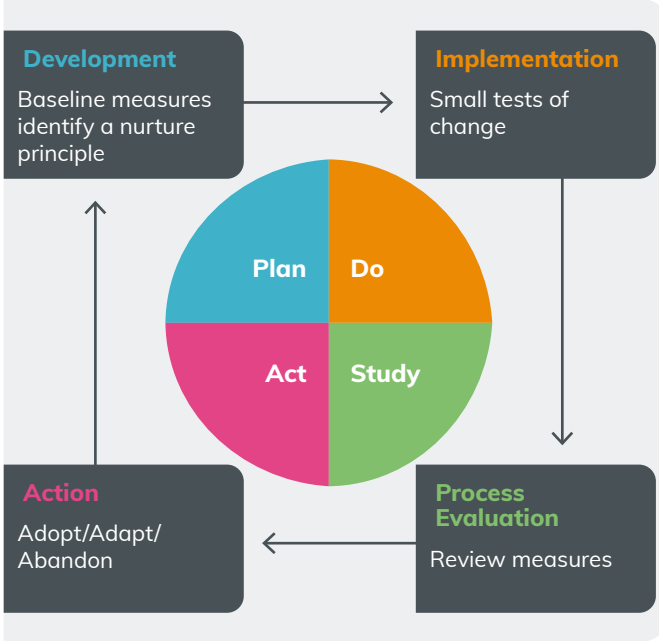
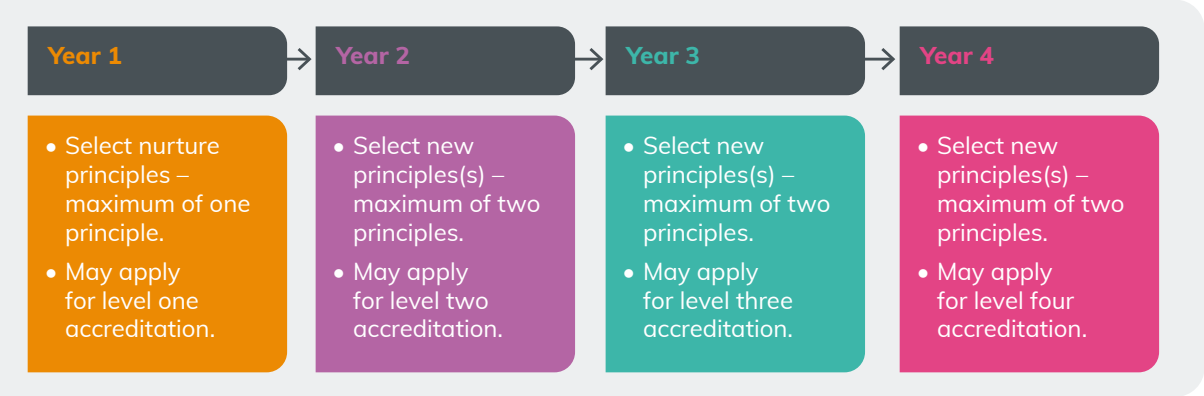


Figure 8. Timeline of participation in the PKC nurturing relationships programme



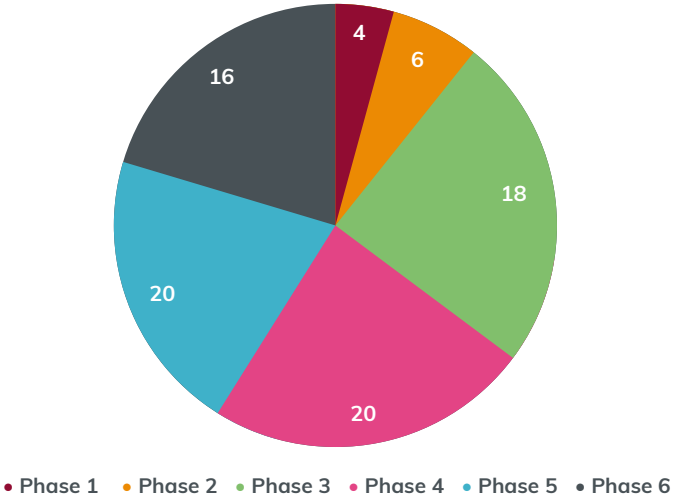
When ready, implementation begins and school leads are expected to attend termly virtual coaching sessions, joining with school leads from other participating schools. The coaching sessions follow the same model of reflecting on what is going well, what is not going so well and their next steps. This cyclical nature of reflection from Action Research and the plan, do, study, act (PDSA) process (Lewin, 1946; Langley, et al., 2009) helps the school leads to consider any adaptations needed to change their ideas and how they plan to overcome barriers to implementation. The coaching sessions create a peer network within which school leads can engage in problem solving conversations and is aimed at encouraging a strong network of support beyond the programme.

Depending on the context, schools will take a minimum of four years to complete the programme (Figure 8), some may take considerably longer. The programme allows schools to progress through the principles and model of accreditation at their own pace.

The pilot for the programme began with four schools in November 2021. They were joined by six schools in phase two, beginning in May 2022 and a further 18 schools in phase three of the programme in February 2023. As the overall aim for Perth and Kinross is to have 100% of schools having started their nurturing relationships journey by June 2026, there will be a total of six phases to the programme (Figure 9).

The PKC model is supported by an accreditation process (Figure 10) that builds on success and towards the incorporation of the whole-school community. The idea is to give participant schools a mechanism by which they can share

Figure 9. Percentage of schools already engaged in the nurturing relationships programme



practice with the wider community and have their efforts and work validated and accredited. The process itself requires schools to complete a self-evaluation form which is shared with a chosen peer reviewer. The peer reviewers are members of a quality improvement team or link EPs who have a connection with the school. This allows for reflective discussion with a peer who has knowledge of the context and keeps nurture central to any other support or planning around the school.

To widen the reach of the programme and develop a shared understanding within Education and Children's Services (ECS), the programme team developed and delivered training to promote awareness and create a shared ECS vision. ECS colleagues can keep up to date via regular updates on social media or through a termly update on school's progress. The termly update details which phase a school is on, their current nurture principle of focus and their aims. It is hoped that

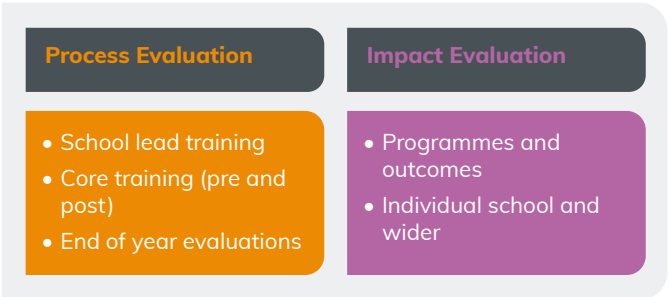
Figure 10. Levels of accreditation

when a school applies for accreditation, the wider ECS team will already have the required level of awareness to support and strengthen their application.

Evaluation

The programme team developed an evaluation strategy to measure the impact of the programme across two areas (Figure 11). The process evaluation looks at data around the development, implementation and delivery of the programme. This evaluation is mainly for quality assurance purposes. The impact evaluation of 'Nurturing Relationships' focuses on impact relating to staff practice, children and young people's wellbeing and attainment, and is evaluated against the programme outcomes across the local authority (see Table 2). The data presented in this article will focus on the process evaluation, as data related to the impact evaluation is still being collated. However, a summary of impact evaluation to date is outlined having been generalised across phases 1 and 2. The programme team are in the early stages of collecting longer-term data for the impact evaluation methods include: SNSA information, CofE levels, incident monitoring forms, absence figures etc.

Figure 11. Nurturing relationships evaluation strategy



Data collection and ethical considerations

A mixed-method approach was used to gather data, including scaling surveys, qualitative questionnaires, school visits and coaching sessions (primarily collected anonymously through Mentimeter and Microsoft Forms to protect the confidentiality of participants). This has been collated across each phase of the programme and summarised for the present article to ensure there are no identifying factors for participants or participant schools. At times, it was necessary to gather identifiable information in order to provide additional tailored support on the programme. However, this was then anonymised when processing in relation to the evaluation of the programme. In terms of ethical considerations, consent to collect data has been granted by the schools and individuals involved. They were made aware of this interim report and that their information would be included, but also that there would be no identifying features of the individual schools involved in the programme. All data were gathered and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018).

Whole-school data are gathered at two time points (pre-core training and end of academic session) and data from school lead teams are gathered on an ongoing basis during coaching sessions, school visits, observations and training sessions.

Process evaluation

School leads training

Following school lead training, participants are asked to scale their 'readiness' to undertake their role as school leads (Appendix A). Across phases 1-3, participants reported an overall 'felt' readiness of 3.8 out of 5. Themes emerged of staff

experiencing the training as 'clear,' 'informative' and 'structured.' While overall responses appeared relatively high, analysis revealed fluctuations in confidence according to role, with senior leaders reporting the highest confidence averaging 4 out of 5.

'Very informative and our role was made very clear...'

"...Very clear with the steps that we as a school need to take."

"Clearly explained the process of becoming a nurturing school."

Source: Comments from school leads who hold a senior leadership role.

Similarly high confidence was reported from school leads who were teaching or support staff (average 3.5 out of 5).

"The training itself was easy to follow... with (the project team) taking us through the aims and process clearly and succinctly. It appears to be a very structured and manageable programme with a lot of support in place if required..."

Source: Comment from school leads who hold a teaching or support staff role.

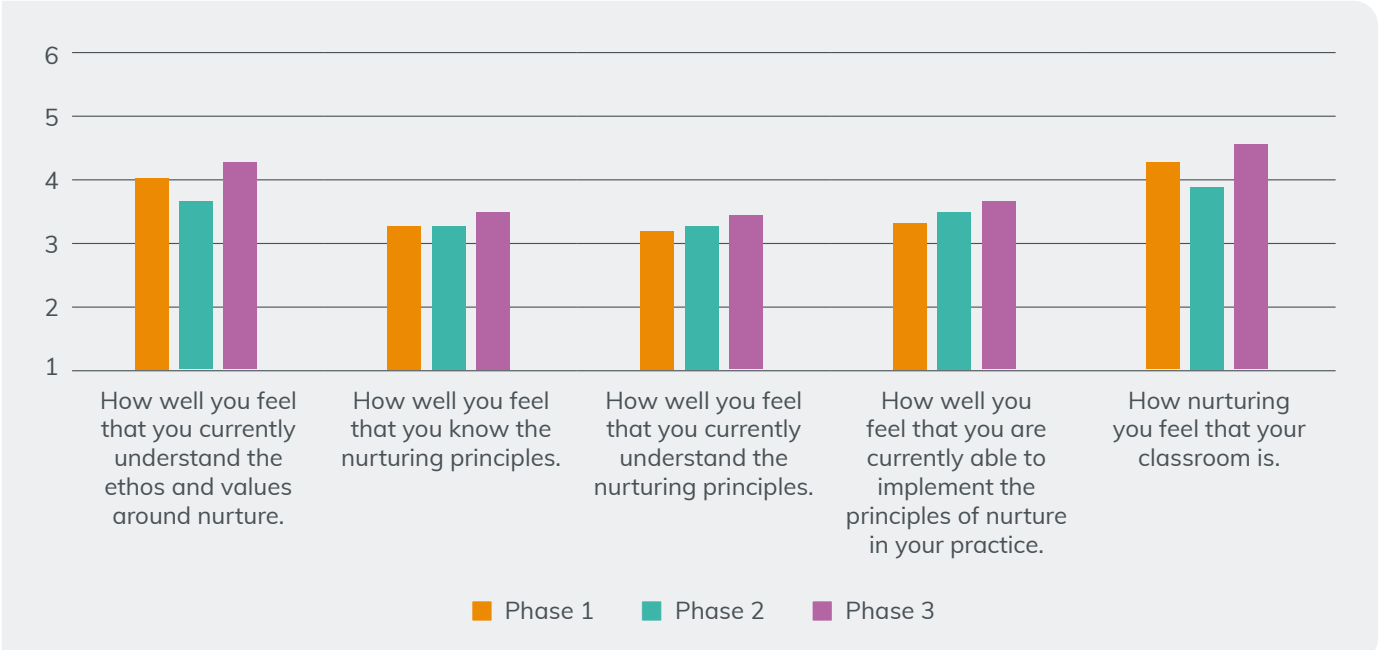
While overall 'felt' readiness is sufficiently high, teachers and support staff did appear to feel less equipped to carry out their roles as school leads in comparison to those in management roles. Qualitative feedback received during the pilot year suggests the disparity in readiness amongst training attendees may be related to the concepts of action research and implementation science. Some participants reported they were unfamiliar with the language associated with these approaches. This indicated a need for the programme team to develop guidance, resources and planning documents and offer additional coaching input around these concepts for those in teaching and support staff roles.

Core training – pre-intervention evaluation

Prior to any input from the programme team, core training participants took part in 'readiness for nurture' activities (Appendix B).

This consisted of a scaling activity (Figure 12) and a simple three-question questionnaire (Figure 13) which aimed to capture 'felt' pre-existing knowledge and practice across each phase of the programme. Both activities were presented and recorded using Mentimeter within the introduction of the Core Training.

Figure 12. Baseline scaling activity across Phases 1-3 at core training (pre-measure) – rating scale out of six



Core training – post-intervention evaluation

Following the core training, participants were asked to provide feedback via Microsoft forms (Appendix C), around the theoretical knowledge shared during the training and were asked to rate on a one to five scale (one being not enough and five being about right), whether the training had provided enough information around the core concepts of attachment, attunement, trauma and resilience, as well as rating the overall training on the same scale.

End of year evaluation

At the end of each academic session, the baseline scaling activity from the core training was repeated (Appendix D) (Figure 14). Data collated so far relates to Phase 1, as Phases 2 and 3 have not yet reached the end of their first year of implementation at the time of writing.

Within Phase 1, there has been an improvement across the board in terms of participant understanding of nurture, the values, ethos and

Figure 13. Key themes across Phases 1-3 at core training (pre-measure)

Question 1 – If someone was to visit your school setting, what evidence would they see in terms of it being a nurturing school?	Question 2 – What do you feel are your strengths in terms of being a nurturing individual?	Question 3 – What do you feel are the areas which you would like to develop in terms of becoming a nurturing individual?
• Environment • Caring qualities (staff) • Wellbeing • Positive interactions • Inclusive practice	• Qualities of care • Nurturing skills • Relationships • Responsiveness	• Knowledge and development • Communication • Regulation skills • Confidence • Strategies and resources

Figure 14. Post core training ratings across Phases 1-3 relating to understanding of theoretical concepts and overall training – rating scale out of five

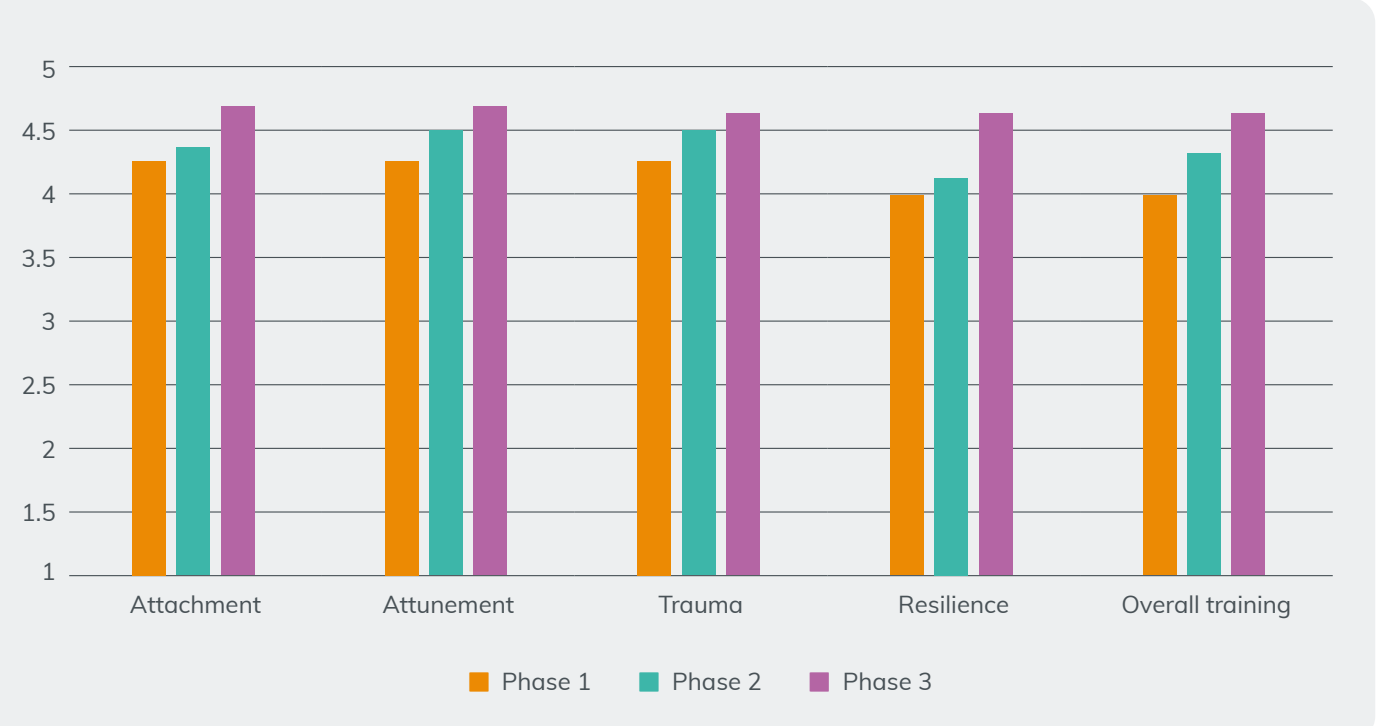
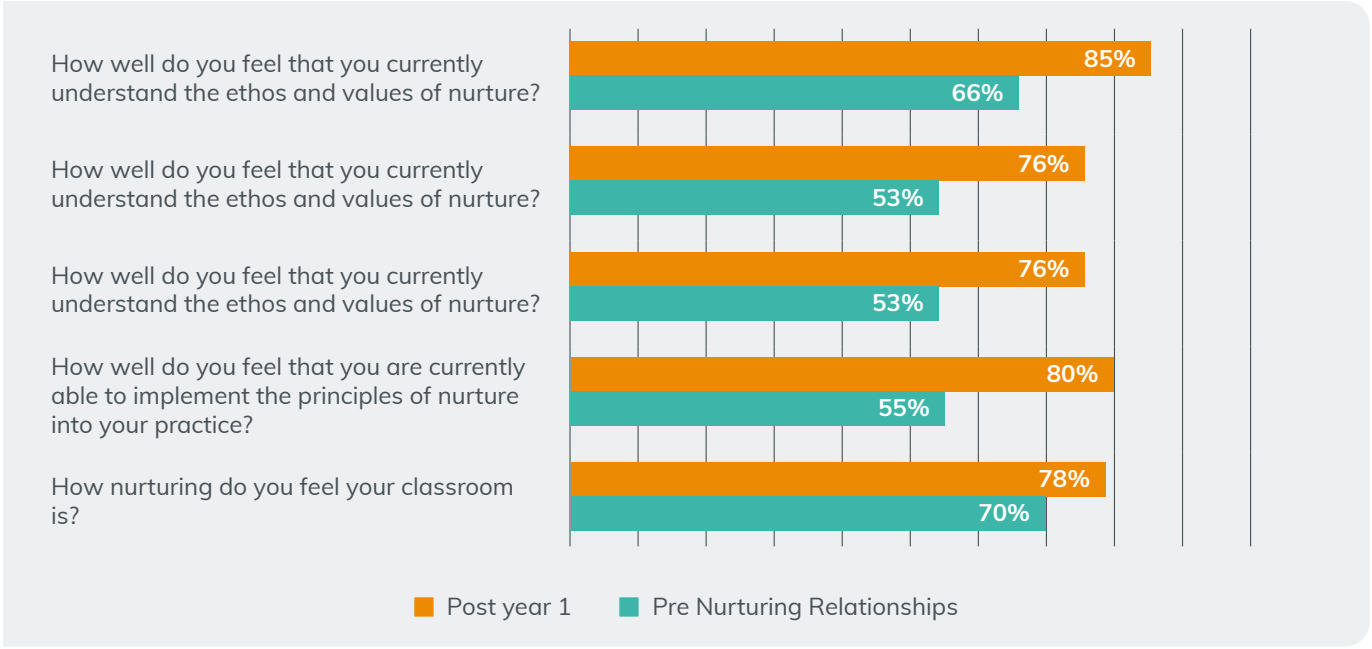


Figure 15. End of year evaluation data from Phase 1



principles, as well as the felt knowledge of how nurturing their classrooms were (Figure 15). The same measures will be repeated at the end of each academic session.

Impact evaluation

Programme aims and outcomes.

Figure 16 shows the measures and tools used to gather evaluative data in relation to the aims and outcomes of the programme. Early indications suggest that progress is being made across the four outcomes. Staff are reporting confidence in their ability to build positive relationships with pupils and valuing the importance of these relationships within education.

> *"Relationships are key. The more time you invest in relationships in the classroom the better all aspects of daily life will be..."*
>
> *"...positive relationships – the most important part of teaching."*
>
> **Source: Whole-school end-of-year evaluation.**

Individual school and wider authority evaluation data

Impact evaluation in terms of the individual school

Figure 16. Project outcomes and evaluation tools

Improved Resilience and Wellbeing for Children and Young People	Children and Young People benefiting from confident and nurturing practitioners leading to improved relationships in class	Progression in learning is enhanced for Children and Young People through the effective application of the nurture principles	Staff report greater confidence and understanding in the use of nurturing relationships
• End of year questionnaire. • Focus and steering groups Glasgow Motivation and Wellbeing Scale.	• Focus and steering groups. • Staff Questionnaire Appendix 4a (Education Scotland 2016). • End of year	• Staff questionnaires. • Tracking data using CfE E and Os. • SNSA data.	• Schools' achievement of aims. • Coaching session feedback. • Feedback from School Leads.

and wider authority levels is currently in the initial stages, as only Phase 1 has completed their first year of implementation and Phase 2 are nearing the end of their first year. In the main, schools have chosen to focus on the environment (NP2) and have been gathering views from children and young people and creating targeted focus groups to support wellbeing, creating spaces within the school to support feelings of safety and focusing on staff development in the theory around positive relationships.

Using the coach-consult model during sessions with school leads has allowed the programme team to support the development of appropriate evaluation methods to gather impact data. The cyclical nature of the PDSA process used during these sessions has led to greater reflection and understanding of context and direction of the work they are doing. As the programme matures and develops, more data will be gathered to look at the wider authority and whole-school community implementation. In preparation for this, tools to gather the required data have been identified and will be collated as they become available.

Discussion

The evaluation strategy has provided some encouraging evidence for the PKC nurturing relationships programme as a method of implementing nurture as a whole-school community approach. Following the school leads training, those who held a senior management role within the school felt more ready to take on their role of leads (rating of 4 out of 5). This links with the research around creating a guiding coalition from those within the school who have the passion and motivation to carry out the role (Kotter, 1995; Warin, 2017). The commitment and readiness of senior school management members within the school leads team has been shown as a critical factor in the development of whole-school nurture (Coleman, 2020).

In terms of the three questions asked prior to the core training, when viewing the free text provided by participants, qualities of care emerged as a strong theme from responses. These qualities align with nurture 'as a way of being' and provide a solid foundation for practice to be developed. Absent from most responses were phrases or words that would indicate an understanding of the theoretical knowledge which underpins the approach. A possible explanation for this being the concept of nurture may be misunderstood or oversimplified, as other responses from participants suggested nurture was related to welcomes and soft furnishings.

The content of the training has varied slightly across the delivery of the core training to Phases 1, 2 and 3. Variations have been around the structure of the sessions, with the content being relatively constant. Pre-core training measures were gathered to provide a baseline from which to compare end of year results. While at the time of writing Phases 2 and 3 had not yet completed their first year of implementation, feedback gathered at their core training sessions suggested the content and level of training was pitched appropriately. Comparisons of core training baseline and end of year training with Phase 1 suggested significant increases in participant understanding of the concept, ethos, values and implementation of nurture. This increase in confidence is critical to the adaptation of nurture as part of normal practice and to be fed into every aspect of school life (Boxall and Lucas 2012; Kearney and Nowek, 2019).

From school leads' feedback, it would seem the Six Principles of Nurture on the surface appear simple, but when applied to real-life contexts, they are more complex, which supports the above-mentioned misunderstanding of the concept of nurture. This reflection came from school leads engaging with the plan, do, study, act cycles and has prompted and supported them to gain a deeper level of understanding in their contexts (Langley et al., 2009). As such, some Phase 1 schools have opted to remain on their initial principle beyond the first year of implementation, to incorporate more of their change ideas into practice and have a greater sense of completion before moving on to the next principle. While the programme allows for this level of flexibility, this is a consideration for future practice in terms of the sustainability of the coaching offer for participant schools.

In addition, practitioners are reporting confidence in their ability to build positive relationships with pupils and valuing the importance of these relationships within education, which links with existing research (Colwell and O'Connor 2003;

Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007; Binnie and Allen., 2008; Gillibrand, Lam and O'Donnell, 2016; Kearney and Nowek, 2019; Nolan, 2020).

The impact evaluation of the programme is measured against the programme aims and outcomes. Individual school evaluations from coaching sessions and accreditation applications will begin to provide a greater depth and quality of evidence for the PKC model. In relation to the wider authority data, this will be an ongoing process with evidence to be collated over the coming years.

Implications for future practice and next steps

Regarding future implications of developing a large scale, whole-school nurture programme there are several considerations which have emerged from the evaluation to date. From the outset, establishing a clear vision of nurture requires all staff members in school to develop consistent knowledge around the concept of nurture. As mentioned by Kearney and Nowek (2019) and Coleman (2020), adopting a professional development model that incorporates action research, coaching and consultation provides a collaborative method of embedding both individual and collective understanding and is critical to successful implementation. However, substantial central resources are required to facilitate this on a large scale, thus requiring significant investment from local authorities. While providing this support builds the capacity for schools to engage in the development of nurture, there is recognition that this remains a significant undertaking for schools. Readiness for implementation should be reflected in schools' key priorities to establish capacity for effective implementation through committed leadership teams (Warin, 2017; Coleman, 2020). Finally, consideration must be given to how local authorities prioritise support for developing nurturing practice alongside ensuring practice is sustained beyond a school's involvement in the programme. It remains to be explored whether a self-sustaining model which incorporates nurture into regular school improvement visits would support this.

Implications for research

As discussed in the introduction to this article, currently there are few examples of how nurture can be applied as a whole-school approach and fewer that provide longitudinal evidence (Kearney and Nowek, 2019; Nolan, 2020). As this programme builds, participant schools will collate data in terms of case studies of individual pupils to provide further evidence on the long-term impact of nurture as they progress through their education. As the programme matures, the volume of quantitative and qualitative data will increase and this could be drawn upon to fill the gaps.

The development of a sustainable, large-scale whole-school nurture programme has required comprehensive, evidence-based planning. This has encompassed continual review and adjustment, and an action research model has been adopted to review the effectiveness of the programme's development and delivery. The cyclical nature of this is likely to uncover new areas to consider as the programme develops.

Conclusion

Nationally there has been an increased awareness of the importance of relationships to promote the wellbeing and growth of children and young people. This is reflected in Education Scotland (2016) endorsing nurture as a key universal approach to meeting the wellbeing needs of students and closing the poverty related attainment gap. In recent years, the benefits of this new paradigm of nurture have been evidenced within a limited number of studies (Warin, 2017; Kearney and Nowek, 2019; Coleman, 2020; Nolan, 2020). It is anticipated that the evaluative information outlined in this interim report alongside future longitudinal studies will further contribute to the steadily increasing body of research around whole-school nurturing approaches.

This interim report offered insight into the process of developing a comprehensive whole-school nurture programme using improvement methodology within a local authority with a varied demographic. The authors aimed to contribute to the national sharing of practice which benefited the programme team during the early development stage of the PKC approach. Initially, the model drew on national examples of good practice (Kearney and Nowek, 2019; Nolan, 2020) and has since been adapted considerably to the contextual needs of schools within the area. In relation to the research question, early indications show an improvement

in staff confidence in their delivery of nurturing relationships.

The nurturing relationships programme is being evaluated across two areas that have been referred to throughout the article as the 'process' and 'impact' evaluation. A significant amount of evidence has been collated relating to the process evaluation, which indicates that the programme offers a comprehensive professional learning process. This is further reflected in evidence from Phase 1 schools; participants are collectively reporting an increase in their conceptual knowledge of nurture and confidence of implementation into practice. Continuous review has ensured the quality of the programme continues to be enhanced and the article outlines that committed leadership provides optimal conditions for nurturing approaches to be developed. In addition, action research has been associated with the flexible nature of the programme. This approach is supporting schools to develop a sustainable nurturing approach that is relevant to the needs of their individual contexts. It is recognised that as a long-term approach the programme is currently in its infancy, so longitudinal evidence required to evaluate the impact of the approach is limited. Nonetheless, there are promising signs that progress is being made across the programme's four outcomes.

Since the programme was piloted in 2021 it has grown significantly, with a third of PKC schools currently enrolled over three phases. It is anticipated that a further 56 schools will start their nurturing relationships journey over the next three academic years. Through a coach-consult model the programme team provides extensive support to schools during the early stages of implementation. To assist schools to maintain momentum during the later stages of their journey, it is envisaged that they will require a self-sustaining coaching network, in conjunction with incorporating nurturing relationships into pre-existing support.

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Appendices

Appendix A – School leads post training questionnaire.

School Leads Questionnaire	
Q1	What did you like about the school leads training?
Linkert Scale	Having attended the session, please rate how equipped you feel you are to carry out your role as school lead? (1=Not equipped at all 5=Fully equipped)
Q2	Following on from the previous question, is there any further information that you feel you would need to be able to move forward with your role as a school lead?
Q3	Do you know who you can approach for support with your work on the nurturing relationships project?
Q4	Any other comments?

Appendix B – Whole-school staff baseline activity.

Mentimeter Baseline Activity	
Q1	Please rate how well you feel that you currently understand the ethos and values around nurture?
Q2	Please rate how well you feel that you know the nurturing principles?
Q3	Please rate how well you feel that you currently understand the nurturing principles?
Q4	Please rate how well you feel that you are currently able to implement the principles of nurture in your practice?
Q5	Please rate how nurturing you feel that your classroom is?
Linkert Scale (1-6)	If someone was to visit your school setting, what evidence would they see in terms of it being a nurturing school?
Linkert Scale (1-6)	What do you feel are your strengths in terms of being a nurturing individual?
Linkert Scale (1-6)	What do you feel are the areas which you would like to develop in terms of becoming a nurturing individual?
Adapted from: Applying Nurture as a Whole-School Approach (Education Scotland 2016)	

Appendix C – Whole-school staff post training questionnaire.

Overall training	
Linkert Scale (1-6)	Do you feel the training provided enough information around PKC vision and approach?
Linkert Scale (1-6)	Do you feel the training provided enough information around the PKC Nurturing Relationships project?
Linkert Scale (1-6)	Do you feel the training provided enough information on attachment?
Linkert Scale (1-6)	Do you feel the training provided enough information on attunement
Linkert Scale (1-6)	Do you feel the training provided enough information on the impact of trauma?
Linkert Scale (1-6)	Do you feel the training provided enough information around resilience?
Linkert Scale (1-6)	Do you feel there was an appropriate balance of taught input and activity/ discussion opportunities?
Linkert Scale (1-6)	Do you feel the session was paced appropriately?
Q1	Having completed the core training, is there any further information or training you feel that you would need to be able to move forward with the PKC nurturing relationships project?
Q2	Any other comments?

Appendix D – Whole-school staff end of year evaluation.

Mentimeter Baseline Activity			
Q1	Please rate how well you feel that you currently understand the ethos and values around nurture?		
Q2	Please rate how well you feel that you know the nurturing principles?		
Q3	Please rate how well you feel that you currently understand the nurturing principles?		
Q4	Please rate how well you feel that you are currently able to implement the Six Principles of Nurture in your practice?		
Q5	Please rate how nurturing you feel that your classroom is?		
Q6	What did you particularly appreciate about the overall training?		
Q7	What would you like to see changed about the training?		
Q8	Is there anything that you would like to find out more about?		
Q9	Is there any further support you need?		
Linkert Scale (1-6)	If someone was to visit your school setting, what evidence would they see in terms of it being a nurturing school?		
Linkert Scale (1-6)	What do you feel are your strengths in terms of being a nurturing individual?		
Linkert Scale (1-6)	What do you feel are the areas which you would like to develop in terms of becoming a nurturing individual?		
Selection	Please select all those that apply to your experience of this training		
	Inspiring	Helpful	Frustrating
	Boring	Difficult	Relaxed
	Motivational	Challenging	Informal
	Confusing	Fantastic	Well delivered
	Interesting	Depressing	Overwhelming
	Fun	Thought provoking	Daunting
Adapted from: Applying Nurture as a Whole-School Approach (Education Scotland 2016)			

Primary school nurture group curriculums: an exploratory study of the curriculum in primary school nurture groups

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Abstract

Nurture groups aim to replace missing early experiences by developing secure relationships in a supportive environment that aim to promote a readiness to learn and a sense of wellbeing. This small-scale, qualitative study investigated the primary nurture group curriculum based on the perceptions of pupils, parents/caregivers and staff through face-to-face interviews supported by observations in both nurture groups and mainstream classrooms. Previous research indicated that primary school nurture groups can be successful, but research into the specific characteristics including curriculum provision is sparse and required further investigation. Thematic analysis of data was based on classroom observations and interviews with 16 pupils, 10 parents/caregivers and eight staff members from three primary schools in the North West of England. Findings highlight the similarities and differences between the nurture group and mainstream curricula alongside the perceptions and experiences of all stakeholders. Common themes identify increased levels of both pupil and parental confidence, improved pupil concentration and independence that led to a greater desire to learn. In conclusion, implications for pupils, parents, nurture groups and schools are discussed.

Introduction and literature review

A nurture group is a school-based intervention of up to 12 students that aims to replace missing early experiences by developing positive pupil relationships with both adults and peers in a supportive environment (Boxall, 2002). Nurture groups originated in the late 1960s in a London borough where the psychological services were struggling to cope with high rates of pupil exclusions and unprecedented rates of referrals relating to social issues (Boxall, 2002). Early nurture groups were influenced by attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) that related to the bonding process of parents and their children. The psychological understanding of nurture groups is based on socio-cultural theory relating to social interaction (Vygotsky, 1962).

Effective nurture group practice follows the Six Principles of Nurture (see Figure 1).

In setting up the early nurture groups, Boxall and Bennathan (2000) emphasised the influences of attachment theory research by John Bowlby (1969, p.126) who identified that a child's relationship with their primary caregiver develops an internal working model that is "a cognitive framework supporting their understanding the world, self and others". This theory has been translated into the classroom setting to provide valuable guidance for practitioners in planning an appropriate curriculum,

especially for those pupils who may have an insecure attachment (Bombér, 2007; Delaney, 2017; Geddes, 2018).

Figure 1. Nurture principles (Lucas, Insley and Buckland, 2006)

Parallels could be drawn with the social culture behind the need for these early groups and the post-COVID-19 (UK Government, 2019) climate regarding mental health issues and the cost of living pressures (nurtureuk, 2023). For example, 75% of children and young people who experience mental health problems are not getting the help that they need (Mental Health Foundation, 2021). A survey by Young Minds (2020) revealed that the coronavirus pandemic had a profound effect on young people with existing mental health conditions. Many of those who took part in the survey reported increased anxiety, problems with sleep, panic attacks or more frequent urges to self-harm. Therefore it is highly relevant that the current research identifies strategies that may encourage pupils to enjoy, engage with and benefit from the curriculum to help address the most common form of permanent exclusion in primary schools caused by persistent disruptive behaviour in mainstream classrooms (DfE, 2016).

Typical nurture group timetables (see Table 1) tend to follow a routine for each session (Boxall, 2002; Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007). Foulder–Hughes (2023) emphasises the importance of regular routines to promote positive wellbeing. The 'welcome' and 'closing session' tend to be based on a Circle Time model (Mosley, 2003). The majority of the nurture group activities are collaborative that aim to promote social interaction (Vygotsky, 1962) and encourage dialogue (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007). These activities need to be carefully differentiated, as some pupils may need small independent steps such as turn taking that need to be modelled by a more experienced peer or adult (Geddes, 2018).

Table 1. Typical nurture group daily routine (Adapted from Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007)

1. Registration with mainstream class and transfer to nurture group room
2. Welcome: share news, review previous session and set agenda for the day
3. First activity
4. Snack time
5. Second activity
6. Closing session that reviews the session and plans ahead for the next session

In the context of the current study, the 'total curriculum' needs to be defined (Kelly, 2004, p.4). The first published nurture group curriculum (AWCEBD, 2001) was based on Boxall's 'Earliest Learning: a summary chart' (Boxall, 2002, pp. 5-9) that emphasised the need to access a broad and balanced curriculum that developed early learning skills and personal, social and health education (PSHE).

The mainstream curriculum may not be appropriate for all pupils, as some pupils need a modified curriculum (Sonnet, 2010). Boxall (2002) emphasised the need to plan the curriculum based on pupils' developmental age rather than their chronological age and that the curriculum may need to be modified depending on pupils' circumstances. Cooper and Tiknaz (2007, p.29) emphasise the importance of building on "what pupils at a particular stage of development are likely to know, understand and do in a given area". A recent example of this relates to the post COVID-19 (UK Government, 2019) provision as Carpenter and Carpenter (2020) identified

the need for a "recovery" curriculum to support pupils returning to school after a long absence. School closures at this time resulted in widely varying home provision so on return to school the curriculum needed to be based on prior skills and competencies. For example, discussions with school-based staff identified that many pupils showed a regression in fine motor skills, resulting in an inability to use a knife and fork when eating and a deterioration in handwriting skills (Carpenter and Carpenter, 2020).

Effective nurture group curriculum planning is a highly complex process that needs to take account of identified social and emotional targets identified by the Boxall Profile® (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998); relevant National Curriculum age-related programmes of study (DfE, 2013); the Six Principles of Nurture (Lucas, Insley and Buckland, 2006); and relevant mainstream planning. Many nurture groups use a thematic approach to planning based on cross-curricular themes that can be defined as "a framework in which existing curricula can be organised" (Lau, Lee-Man and Lung, 1999, p.18). Also, the nurture group curriculum needs to take account of unplanned effects of teacher activity (Kelly, 2004) that allows the necessary flexibility to promote effective dialogue (Mercer, 2009) and adapt to the need for support through appropriate modelling (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007) and/or reciprocal scaffolding (Holton and Clarke, 2006).

The value of play has been identified in early childhood experiences (Wood and Cook, 2009) that relates to an important element of the nurture group curriculum in developing relevant social skills and independence through play based activities to build self-esteem, confidence, self-awareness and resilience (Boxall, 2002). Although much of children's play in the nurture group is through enactment of everyday events it can also provide a way of "working through turbulent events in a child's life as an outlet for any stress" (Boxall, 2002, p.97). Vygotsky (1978) discusses the importance of the use of play to develop social rules, such as when children adopt the role of different family members.

The nurture group curriculum emphasises the importance of language and communication (Boxall, 2002) to provide both structured and informal opportunities for pupils to explore language through natural conversation in a relaxed social context (Cooper and Tiknaz 2007). Mercer (2009) discusses linguistic ethnographers who emphasise that language and social life are mutually linked and exploratory classroom talk may be needed to replace a lack of social interaction at home. Wegerif et al. (2004) discuss exploratory talk in the classroom in relation to its importance in the learning process. Colwell and O'Connor (2003) and Bani (2011) discuss nurture group dialogue and stress its importance in the possible development of pupil self-esteem. 'Snack time' (Lucas, Insley and Buckland, 2006, p.50) is a key activity where adults and pupils share breakfast or a mid morning snack within a formal dining scenario. Foulder-Hughes (2023) emphasises the importance of eating around a dining table with place settings in an attractive environment and cites the Mental Health Foundation (2021) that suggests that there are lots of social, psychological and biological benefits to be gained by sharing meals with other people. Ingram (1993) comments that a conversation over lunch identifies a number of cues that participants use may relate to their upbringing and advises that if these cues are not already familiar to the participants then they need to be taught.

Methodology

A qualitative methodology was adopted based on an exploratory study of the curriculum in primary school nurture groups. Four research questions were considered:

RQ1: What are the perceptions and experiences of pupils in relation to the impact of the nurture group curriculum?

RQ2: What are the perspectives of parents regarding the nurture group curriculum in relation to the experiences of their child?

RQ3: What are the perspectives and experiences of staff regarding the nurture group curriculum and how it may relate to the mainstream curriculum?

RQ4: How did the observations identify any similarities and differences between the curriculum in the nurture groups and mainstream classrooms?

The participants in this research were 16 pupils (m=12, f=4) aged between six and nine years (mean=7.0), 10 parents/caregivers (m=2, f=8), six nurture group staff (m=0, f=6) and two mainstream

staff (m=0, f=2) in three primary schools in a county in the North West of England.

Selection

To identify schools and pupils, purposive sampling was used based on identified criteria and the subjective judgement of the researcher. The sample was not intended to be statistically representative as selection was based on specific features within the sampled population. The selection procedure for schools was based on the following criteria: the nurture group was well established and had run for at least five years; all nurture group staff were trained and fully certificated; the nurture groups were based on the 'classic' or 'new variant' model (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007); pupils were between the ages of 5 and 11 years; and the nurture group was within a mainstream setting. Six schools met these criteria and three agreed to take part in the research. Full initial consent was obtained from all head teachers followed by a meeting with a key contact from each school to discuss possible participants and consider any ethical issues.

The selection procedure for pupils to take part in the research was based on the following criteria: pupils needed to have been in a nurture group for at least one term to ensure familiarity with the nurture group curriculum; and pupils needed to represent both key stage 1 (KS1) and KS2. The selection of parents and staff was based on a non-probability voluntary participation approach based on the judgement of the researcher (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and snowball sampling, where existing research participants identify possible new participants (Robson, 2002). Consent was obtained from all pupils, staff and parents. A pilot visit was arranged to each consenting nurture group to enable the researcher to meet potential participants and begin building a rapport before the interviews. Also, all participants were given the opportunity to meet the researcher before their interview so any queries or concerns could be addressed.

Data collection

The chosen forms of data collection were face-to-face interviews using a semi-structured protocol with observations in nurture groups and mainstream provision. Careful consideration was given to the feasibility and possible barriers of using face-to-face interviews with pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties through asking appropriate questions and establishing a high level of trust between the interviewer and interviewee (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). The researcher has extensive experience of conversing with pupils with SEMH difficulties through previous roles that included nurture group provision. Following consultation, pupils preferred to be interviewed with a friend or peer. As nurture group staff needed to adhere to their school's current safeguarding policy, it was agreed that pupils were interviewed in pairs in the nurture group room with one member of the nurture group staff present in the room but not taking any part in the interview process.

The chosen approach for parents and caregivers was an individual one to one interview. The individual in-depth interview gives the researcher the opportunity to discuss more personal issues with participants and offers greater confidentiality than group interviews (Dicicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006).

Nurture group staff and mainstream staff were given the choice of being interviewed individually, in pairs or as a group. Mainstream staff chose to be interviewed individually, whereas nurture group staff asked to be interviewed in pairs. To ensure rigour and consistency careful consideration was given to the questions asked of all participants through the first question in each interview being broad and open-ended to get the interviewee talking (Dicicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006).

Observations

Observations in nurture groups and mainstream classes were unstructured as the purpose of the observations was to develop a narrative account of participant behaviours "in their natural settings... without using predetermined categories of measurement or response" (Adler and Adler, 1994, p.384). In addition, a reflective journal was used following each observation. To ensure a high degree of rigour in the observation process it was based on five characteristics of observations and settings defined by Patton (2002 cited by Mertens, 2005).

Ethical considerations

Full compliance with the British Educational

Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018) ensured that all participants gave their voluntary informed consent. Written informed consent from parents and caregivers was obtained to allow their child to be a participant in the research. Informed consent was then obtained from pupils, parents and caregivers and staff. Correspondence with participants emphasised the confidential nature of the data and its storage with all participants having the right to withdraw from the research at any stage (Robson, 2002). It was made clear that all data in the current study would be fully anonymised. The Open University ethics committee gave ethical approval for the research.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) was used to analyse and interpret qualitative data with the aim of identifying recurring patterns of meaning (themes) across the data that relate to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2013). To ensure rigour the six phases coding framework was followed alongside data reliability and authenticity techniques including keeping a detailed audit trail and reflexivity notes throughout the entire analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Participants were numbered ensuring their anonymity. The resulting themes and sub-themes were generated from this process. Emergent codes were reviewed against the research questions ensuring that only the codes that made a significant contribution were included (Braun and Clark, 2006).

4. Results

As a result of coding the transcripts through TA the following themes and sub themes emerged (see Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of themes and sub themes

	Themes	Sub themes
Observations	**Curriculum planning and activities** **Dialogue** **Modelling and scaffolding** **Environment**	
Staff interviews	**The nurture group curriculum** **Supporting parents**	• Links to the mainstream curriculum • Confidence and self-esteem • Feeling welcome • Emotional support • Homework
Nurture group pupil interviews	**Curriculum**	• Learning • Confidence • Attitude to school
	Relationship	• Friendship with peers • Nurture group staff • Empathy
	Environment	• Physical environment • 'Safe' environment
Parent and caregiver interviews	**Pupil confidence** **Parental confidence**	• Completing new tasks • Independence • A desire to learn • Feeling welcome • Behavioural issues at home • Emotional support

Observations

Six observations were completed that comprised one in each of the three nurture groups and one in each of the three mainstream classrooms that included at least one nurture group pupil. Four themes emerged: curriculum activities; dialogue; modelling/scaffolding and environment.

Theme 1: Curriculum planning/activities

There was a marked difference in the range of activities offered, the classroom management and the planning of these activities between the nurture groups and mainstream classrooms. Approaches to planning varied as the nurture groups used a thematic approach; the planning for mainstream provision was based on individual National Curriculum subjects (DfE, 2013). Although planned, the activities in the nurture groups adapted to the needs and moods of the pupils throughout the session. This flexibility was not apparent in the mainstream classrooms, as the lessons did not deviate from the planned approach.

A key focus of the nurture group activities was to support the development of social skills identified through the Boxall Profile® (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998). There was no evidence of this in the mainstream classrooms, as the focus was on meeting academic targets. Many of the nurture group activities gave pupils freedom of choice especially during play-based learning sessions. Generally there appeared limited freedom of choice in the mainstream lessons observed, as they appeared to be teacher-led. However, in the science lesson observed pupils were given some freedom of choice in the main body of the lessons, as paired children freely moved around the classroom to elicit data from other groups of pupils.

Theme 2: Dialogue

There appeared to be a significant difference in the opportunities for dialogue between the nurture groups and mainstream settings. In each of the nurture groups observed, there was high emphasis given to peer-to-peer and adult-to-pupil discussion throughout the sessions. Some of this interaction and discussion was pre-planned through snack time, board games and play-based activities to encourage interaction and dialogue. Other discussions occurred as a natural interaction during activities. In contrast there were few opportunities in the mainstream lessons observed for any dialogue between peers or adults. For example, the mainstream numeracy lesson observed provided the least opportunity for peer-to-peer discussion as the only opportunities were the whole class question-and-answer session led by the teacher, where only a very limited number of pupils responded.

Peer-to–peer discussion in the nurture groups was encouraged, whereas peer-to-peer discussion in the mainstream classes tended to be suppressed by the teacher, as pupils were told they needed to be quiet and get on with their work. An interesting comparison in one school identified that pupil discussion of football matches and Christmas presents was encouraged in the nurture group, whereas in the mainstream classroom a similar conversation was suppressed as it appeared to hinder progress.

Theme 3: Modelling and scaffolding

Observations in the nurture groups provided evidence of numerous examples of modelling and scaffolding that on the majority of occasions was pre-planned. In a variety of observed activities the adults modelled appropriate behaviour, social skills, correct language usage and encouraged eye contact. Reciprocal scaffolding supported any children who were challenged by the curriculum (Holton and Clarke, 2006).

In the mainstream classrooms there was evidence that the two adults modelled appropriate communication skills that included listening skills and responses to questions. There were a number of occasions in the science lesson where the two adults independently modelled how to carry out the experimental testing to a number of groups. However, there was no evidence of the two adults working collaboratively to model or scaffold learning experiences. For the majority of time, the role of the teaching assistant (TA) in these mainstream lessons appeared to be dealing with off-task pupil behaviour rather than modelling or scaffolding the learning process.

Theme 4: Environment

There were a number of differences between the nurture group and the mainstream environment. The nurture group rooms were smaller, more colourful and more representative of early-years provision than the mainstream classrooms. The

most significant differences in the two physical environments were the kitchen and soft furnishings in the nurture group rooms that created a more 'homely' scenario. Seating arrangements in the nurture groups were flexible and varied according to the activity, whereas in mainstream class they were more static as pupils sat in the same seat for the whole lesson.

Staff interviews

Two themes were identified: the nurture group curriculum and supporting parents.

Theme 1: The nurture group curriculum

Two sub themes were identified: links to the mainstream curriculum, and confidence and self-esteem.

Sub theme 1: Links to the mainstream curriculum

All nurture group staff interviewed appeared fully aware of the mainstream curriculum relevant to the pupils in the group and the need to follow current National Curriculum requirements:

> "*We know what they cover in classes as they give us their timetable. We try to match up with this as much as possible, so if they are doing a Romans topic we will follow the theme.*"
> **(NG1, interview 1, lines 3-5)**

Sub theme 2: Confidence and self-esteem

There was evidence that the nurture group staff planned the curriculum around the individual needs of each pupil:

> "*We plan the curriculum around the needs of the group. If a number have low self-esteem then we need to build in activities to support this and make them feel better about themselves. This group struggles to share and take turns so we play lots of games where we model how to do this.*"
> **(NG4, interview 2, lines 10-12)**

Theme 2: Supporting parents

Staff in each of the nurture groups emphasised the need to fully support and involve parents in the learning process, especially those who were regarded as 'hard to reach'. Three sub themes were identified: feeling welcome; emotional support; and homework.

Sub theme 1: Feeling welcome

All nurture group staff interviewed gave high emphasis to making every parent welcome through regular events and the opportunity for parents to pop in for a chat:

> "*Many parents do not attend formal events so invite them in for informal chats and a cuppa and are encouraged to help with activities in the group so they are working with their child in a comfy room that's non-threatening.*"
> **(NG4, interview 2, lines 23-25)**

Sub theme 2: Emotional support

All nurture group staff commented that they supported the emotional needs of the parents. One member of staff accepts there are limits to her counselling skills:

> "*She calls in each night for a chat. I'm not a counsellor but I try to listen and support to help her son. She has a lot of personal issues so I have advised her to go for professional help to the relevant person.*" **(NG4, interview 2, lines 27-29)**

Sub theme 3: Homework

There was evidence from the data analysed that a high number of parents were very keen to support the homework given from the nurture group and relied on support from nurture group staff to give guidance. The great majority of this homework related to reading and phonics awareness:

> "*We give homework once a week. Parents are really interested and want to help but need a bit of support in knowing what to do. We are happy for them to pop in on homework night.*"
> **(NG6, interview 3, lines 40-44)**

Pupil interviews

Three themes were identified: curriculum; relationships; environment.

Theme 1: Curriculum

The data for this theme identified three subthemes: learning; confidence; and attitude to school.

Sub theme 1: Learning

Ten pupils commented that they felt they had learned more in the nurture group because learning was fun and enjoyable:

> "*We do more fun stuff in the nurture group. It's different and I learn better.*"
> **(PU8, interview 4, line 12)**

However, some pupils felt the work in the nurture group that specifically related to numeracy, although enjoyable, was easier compared to that provided by mainstream provision:

> "*I enjoy the group work but it's easy for me as I'm good at numeracy.*" **(PU5, interview 3, lines 22-23)**

Sub theme 2: Confidence

Several pupils commented that they felt more confident following nurture group provision.

> "*I felt I was getting better at writing in the nurture group so it made me more confident to give it a try in my class.*" **(PU6, interview 3, line 22)**

Sub theme 3: Attitude to school

Three pupils had a very negative attitude to school prior to nurture group provision:

> "*I hated school 'cos all the teachers had a downer on me. Now it's better and I can go into class without her (class teacher) screaming at me. It's better but I still don't like it.*"
> **(PU2, interview 1, lines 16-19)**

Theme 2: Relationships

Three sub-themes were identified: friendship with peers; nurture group staff; and developing empathy.

Sub theme 1: Friendships with peers

Three pupils interviewed commented that a positive outcome of nurture group intervention was making new friends:

> "*I have new friends now in the nurture group but I did not have any real friends before. I didn't like having no proper friends in class as I wanted to join in and make friends but they wouldn't let me.*"
> **(PU10, interview 5, lines 14-18)**

Sub theme 2: Nurture group staff

The majority of pupils spoke very highly of the nurture group staff.

> "*I love Mrs A and Mrs B* [nurture group staff] *as they helped me to be better.*"
> **(PU11, interview 4, lines 13-14)**

Sub theme 3: Developing empathy

Four pupils expressed the view that making news friends in the nurture group alongside shared experiences had lead to an increased understanding of their viewpoint and difficulties:

> "*We made this viking ship. I helped Leanne 'cos I knew she couldn't do this stuff as she is rubbish.*"
> **(PU3, interview 2, lines 14-15)**

Theme 3: Environment

Two sub themes were identified: physical environment; and 'safe' environment.

Sub theme 1: Physical environment

Seven pupils made reference to the homely nurture group environment:

> "*I can read cuddled up on the sofa like at home.*"
> **(PU11, interview 6, line 8)**

Sub theme 2: 'Safe' environment

Some pupils made reference to the nurture group being a 'safe' environment.

> *No one makes fun of me here.*"
> **(PU 10, interview 5, line 21)**

Parent interviews

Two themes were identified: pupil confidence; and parental confidence.

Theme 1: Pupil confidence

Three sub themes were identified: completing new tasks; independence; and a desire to learn.

Sub theme 1: Completing new tasks

Several parents commented that their child appeared more outgoing and were more willing to

try new things that they would have not attempted before nurture group intervention:

> *"She's so much more confident since September when she came into this group ...she tries all sorts of things now she wouldn't have had the confidence to do before."*
> **(PC3, interview 3, lines 12-15)**

Sub theme 2: Independence

Several parents commented their child had became more independent:

> *"I always had to take her to school even though she was 7 as she did not want to go by herself. It was the same until Christmas when she suddenly said 'I want to go by myself like everyone else'. It was such a relief."* (Laughs out loud). **(PC3, interview 3, lines 6-9)**

Sub theme 3: A desire to learn

Several parents commented that as a result of increased confidence their child had an increased desire to learn:

> *"He suddenly took an interest and wanted to learn to read."* **(PC1, interview 1, line 19)**

Theme 2: Parental confidence

Three sub-themes were identified: feeling welcome; behavioural issues at home; and emotional support.

Sub theme 1: Feeling welcome

A number of parents commented that they now felt more welcome and confident when coming into school to meet the nurture group staff.

> *"I hated school... [becoming agitated]... So it's taken me years to walk in.... but I've done it for our (pupil x) but it's OK in here 'cos they treat me good. I even get a cup of tea* (laughs out loud)."
> **(PC6, interview 5, lines 18-19**

Sub theme 2: Behavioural issues at home

Several parents expressed their concerns about their child's challenging behaviour at home and how they struggled to cope because of a lack of strategies to encourage positive behaviour. These parents expressed their gratitude to the nurture group staff for giving them a range of strategies used in the nurture group to try out at home. As a result, some parents expressed the view that they were more confident in dealing with negative behaviour at home following advice from nurture group staff:

> *"I pop in every night to see how he's got on and Mrs. X [nurture group staff] tells it straight like so I follow her advice. She says I'm too soft and need some rules so I'm working on it."*
> **(PC1, interview 1, lines 23-25)**

Sub theme 3: Emotional issues

A number of parents welcomed regular discussions with nurture group staff to discuss issues at home that appeared to impact on their child's behaviour.

> "I have a lot of issues at home that get me down so I pop in for a chat with Miss X ... it has really helped me. She is good and listens as she knows the family well and understands my problems. She doesn't give me advice but gets me to sort it out myself." **(PC4, interview 4, lines 22-25)**

5. Discussion

This research is based on the central question: How do pupil, parent and staff perspectives contribute towards an exploratory study of the curriculum in primary nurture groups? To answer the central question, four sub questions were considered:

RQ1: What are the perceptions and experiences of pupils in relation to the impact of the nurture group curriculum?

Most pupils enjoyed the engaging curriculum, as it appeared to be fun and practical. Pupils gave specific examples including gardening, art, design technology and food-related activities that were similar to findings by Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001); Kourmoulaki (2013) and Shaver and McClatchy (2013). Many pupils enjoyed play-based activities that included role-play and valued freedom of choice. These findings are consistent with research by Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001), Scott and Lee (2009) and Kourmoulaki (2013). However, some older pupils felt that specific areas such as numeracy could have been more challenging.

Some pupils felt that the nurture group curriculum improved their levels of personal confidence that promoted a greater desire to learn and improved perceptions of themselves as learners as discussed by Sanders (2007). This greater desire to learn is highly significant and is described by Bandura (1997, p.195) as "self-instructed performance", one of the "modes of induction in performance accomplishments". Also, there was evidence suggesting that this greater desire to learn can be transferable to the mainstream setting and the home environment.

Pupils described their nurture room environment as calm and emotionally safe, which supports earlier research by Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001) and Kourmoulaki (2013). Pupils identified improved learning that was based on the comfortable furnishings that reminded some pupils of the home environment of their grandparents. Also pupils commented that the calm and relaxing atmosphere improved levels of concentration, as identified by Bishop and Swain (2000a); Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001); Kourmoulaki (2013); and Griffiths, Stenner and Hicks (2014).

RQ2: What are the perspectives of parents regarding the nurture group curriculum in relation to the experiences of their child?

The findings identified increased levels of confidence for both parents and their child. Parents valued the open-door policy and informal events that allowed them to meet nurture group staff on an informal basis to discuss their personal issues and pertinent issues relating to their child as identified by Taylor and Gulliford (2011). Also, parents highlighted that their children were more confident and more independent in a variety of situations at home supporting the research of March and Healey (2007); Sanders (2007); and Scott and Lee (2009). One parent gave the example of their child being able to go to school on their own, which made her mornings less stressful and thereby allowing her to spend more time with her younger children and allowing this pupil the opportunity to socialise with their peers and build friendships.

RQ3: What are the perspectives and experiences of staff regarding the nurture group curriculum and how it may relate to the mainstream curriculum?

All nurture group staff were aware of the importance of curriculum liaison with mainstream staff to avoid any misconceptions, gaps or duplication. A number of nurture group staff raised the issue identified by mainstream staff that by attending the nurture group pupils would 'miss' core lessons such as literacy and numeracy. In part-time groups this was resolved through nurture group attendance in the afternoon.

Nurture group staff emphasised the importance of planning relevant curriculum activities based on developmental needs. They highlighted their role in modelling appropriate behaviour and scaffolding pedagogy through shared and co-operative activities. Finally, they appreciated that mainstream staff could not replicate this high level of support, but hoped the principle could influence mainstream practice.

RQ4: How the observations identified any similarities and differences between the curriculum in the nurture groups and mainstream classrooms.

The curriculum activities in the nurture groups and mainstream classrooms varied quite markedly. In the nurture groups there was much higher emphasis on practical activities, informality, freedom of choice and freedom of movement. Nurture group staff had a greater freedom to plan relevant activities based on the needs and interests of the pupils, whereas the mainstream classes based their planning on the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013)

The nurture group curriculum planned for opportunities to promote dialogue between adults and pupils in shared activities, whereas there was less evidence of this in mainstream planning. Cubeddu and MacKay (2017) identified guiding and deepening discussion as one of the Six Principles of Attunement. In one mainstream class there was effective use of 'talk partners' and in another group science tasks promoted discussion, but the majority of mainstream activities were on an individual basis. A key area of contrast was the interpretation of effective dialogue by staff, as some conversation was encouraged by nurture group staff but not by the mainstream staff.

The roles of the adults varied. In the nurture group the two adults worked both independently and

cooperatively in teaching, facilitating, modelling and scaffolding roles. The nurture group adults planned the work together and during the observations it was not clear who was the teacher and who was the TA. In all mainstream classrooms the teacher planned and led each lesson with the TA taking a more subservient role. In the mainstream classroom both adults worked independently and apart from the science lesson there was little evidence of any modelling or scaffolding of the learning process. The scaffolding observed in the nurture group observations can be defined as reciprocal scaffolding (Holton and Clarke, 2006). In the mainstream classroom there was no collaborative scaffolding evident, but there was evidence of 'soft scaffolding' (Simons and Klein, 2007) where both the teacher and TA circulated the classroom and talked to some pupils, mainly answering questions and providing constructive feedback.

The most noticeable difference between the nurture groups and mainstream classroom environment was the layout of the rooms. The nurture group had a more informal 'homely' layout that included a kitchen area and comfortable seating. The mainstream classroom was a 'typical' classroom environment with sets of tables surrounded by chairs and a carpeted area used mainly for the introductory and plenary sessions.

5.5 Limitations and Implications for future research

This small-scale study has limitations due to its small sample size that will be difficult to replicate. It could be extended to other areas of the country and also investigate secondary school provision. Although parents and mainstream staff were informed about pupil selection there was no discussion with pupils to support their transition. Further investigation could explore the consultation processes with pupils selected for nurture group provision and extend pupil involvement in planning an appropriate curriculum. Parents/caregivers appeared to have a better understanding of the principles and practice of nurture groups, resulting in increased confidence in dealing with their child's behavioural issues at home. This appears to be a successful model of parental involvement that is worthy of further investigation. Based on the data collected, nurture group staff must be made fully aware of the importance of their pivotal role in the success of nurture group provision. At a whole school level, nurture groups need to be supported by the head teacher and other senior management, governors and all members of the school staff, including lunchtime supervisors.

6. Summary

This research explored the curriculum in primary school nurture groups from lesson observations and gaining the perceptions of key stakeholders. There is wide-ranging evidence to suggest that primary nurture groups are a positive form of intervention in supporting primary aged pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007; Reynolds, MacKay and Kearney, 2009; Seth-Smith et al., 2010; Sloan et al., 2016). However, these studies have tended to focus upon children's measured SEBD outcomes with little research that identifies the characteristics as to why primary nurture groups appear to be effective.

Data analysis indicated that the nurture group curriculum is different to that of mainstream provision, as it appears to be more flexible and takes greater account of identified social and emotional needs through the Boxall Profile® (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998) and importantly takes account of pupil interests. The planning of the nurture group curriculum emphasises the importance of building language and communication skills through planned and informal activities, including play-based learning and cooperative activities that allow children to learn at their developmental not chronological age. Parents of children attending nurture group provision benefitted through their involvement in attending formal and informal events and there was evidence of empowerment that encouraged a number of parents to support the nurture group provision as a helper on a regular basis. A key finding of the research data was 'a desire to learn', which is a very powerful and positive statement.

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Appendix 1

Interview schedules

Pupil schedule

- What do you enjoy best about school?
- Are you enjoying being in the nurture group?
- How often do you come to the group?
- Can you tell me about the things you enjoy doing in the nurture group?
- Is it different to what you do in your classroom?
- Tell me about Circle Time?
- Tell me about the snack time
- What do you like doing in your classroom?
- What do you enjoy doing in your classroom?
- What would you like to do more / less of?
- Does everyone get on in the nurture group?
- Do you miss being in your class? If so, why?
- (Supplementary questions will be asked based on the responses to the above questions)

Parent / caregiver schedule

- How long has (name of child) been in the nurture group?
- Tell me a bit about (name of child)?
- Why do you think they went in the group?
- How did you feel about it at the time?
- How do you feel now?
- Does (name of child) tell you about the things they do in the group?
- Do you know the sort of activities/curriculum they do in the group?
- Have you been to visit the group?
- Have you met or chatted with the staff?
- How well do you think (name of child) was getting on in school with learning and behaviour before starting the group?
- Do you think (name of child) has changed after being in the group?
- Have you noticed any difference in them at home?
- (Supplementary questions will be asked based on the responses to the above questions)

Nurture group staff schedule

- How long has the group been running?
- When does it run?
- How did you plan the room?
- Why was the group set up?
- How do you decide who goes into the group?
- How long do they stay in the group?
- What do you want the children to learn in the group?
- How do you go about planning the curriculum?
- Which areas of the curriculum do you enjoy teaching?
- Which bits of the curriculum do the children enjoy?
- How do you plan your roles in the group?
- How much freedom do you have in your planning?
- Do you have breakfast and snack time?
- Of all the things they have learned, what have they taken back into the classroom?
- How do you know when they are ready to go back into class full time?
- How do parents react to their child being in the nurture group?
- How do you keep in touch with parents?
- Do you think parents have an understanding of nurture group practice?
- Do you think parents know about the nurture group curriculum?
- Are there any skills that children have learned in the group that they can take home?
- How do mainstream staff respond to the group?
- (Supplementary questions will be asked based on the responses to the above questions)

Mainstream staff schedule

- How long has (name of pupil) been attending the nurture group?

- What is your experience of the nurture group in school?
- When do the pupils in your class attend the nurture group?
- How do you keep in touch with the nurture group staff about curriculum planning?
- Do you have any concerns about the curriculum areas they miss?
- How long do pupils stay in the nurture group?
- What sorts of activities do the nurture group pupils enjoy/find challenging in your class?
- Have you noticed any changes in the pupils since they started the nurture group?
- How do you keep in touch with the nurture group staff about pupil progress?
- How do you track pupil progress in your class?
- Would you know if the progress was due to the nurture group?

(Supplementary questions will be asked based on the responses to the above questions)

Nurture – Is it too late? A research project into the effectiveness of nurture groups for boys with social, emotional and mental health needs in a secondary special school

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Data availability statement: *The data that support the findings of this study are available on reasonable request from the corresponding author*
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Abstract

This quantitative study investigates the impact of a nurture group for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs in a secondary special educational needs (SEN) school. The researcher explores the social construction of the classroom and adaptations made to support the needs of the pupils, to analyse the impact of attending a nurture group can have on pupils who have previously been excluded from mainstream settings and those who have not had their needs met in other specialist SEN settings. Over the course of two years, pupils were educated within the nurture group for 80% of their school week, with opportunities to apply their skills with peers outside of the nurture group during social times. Through careful observations, analysis of Boxall Profiles® and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs), the researcher adapted the provision to meet the needs of the pupils within to enable them to make significant developmental progress, which impacted not only in school but also at home, with parents and pupils alike commenting on the progress they had made.

Results of the study emphasise the positive impact of nurture groups for the pupils, compared with a control group in the same setting. Furthermore, it highlighted the needs for a whole-school approach to be adopted when it came to embedding the principles of nurture, as those pupils who left the nurture group and reintegrated back into school showed a rapid decline in their developmental progress and in their mental health and wellbeing through the SDQ.

Research into nurture groups in SEN settings is still in its infancy so there is still much to be learned and understood about working with such vulnerable pupils within a nurture group setting. In this research, there is a lack of generalisability with the small sample size based in the North-West of England. Future research would need to implement nurture groups in a range of SEN settings across the country with established and highly trained nurture group teachers to increase the generalisability of the findings.

Introduction

While the research into nurture groups in special educational needs (SEN) settings is still in its infancy, Lyons (2017) ran a pilot study to ascertain the effectiveness of nurture groups for pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SMEH) needs in a special SEN setting. This research showed some positive outcomes relating to the behaviour and attitudes of pupils, social and emotional literacy, along with how happy and confident pupils felt. However, there was a lack of generalisability due to the small sample size and the length of the study only being over the course of an academic year. This research looks to build on Lyons' work with a similar premise but being conducted over a two-year academic period, using a control group in the second year to ascertain the impact nurture groups could have on pupils' social and emotional development in comparison to their peers in the same setting.

Additionally, some pupils in the control group were former pupils of the nurture group and were being monitored to see if the progress they had previously made could be maintained outside the group. This nurture group was set up and implemented by the researcher, who understood the challenges faced by other secondary schools who tried to implement similar groups in their settings. This gave freedom and flexibility to operate the nurture group in line with the traditional model in a setting that was not confined by the same academic and resource pressures as mainstream primary and secondary schools.

The overarching research question was to ascertain if nurture groups were effective in supporting pupils to access education in a secondary SEMH school. Within this there were three specific questions:

1. *Can a nurture group support the development of age-appropriate behaviours?*
2. *Does attending a nurture group impact positively on the wellbeing of pupils?*
3. *Is a nurture group an effective singular intervention or does it need to be implemented as an approach to teaching?*

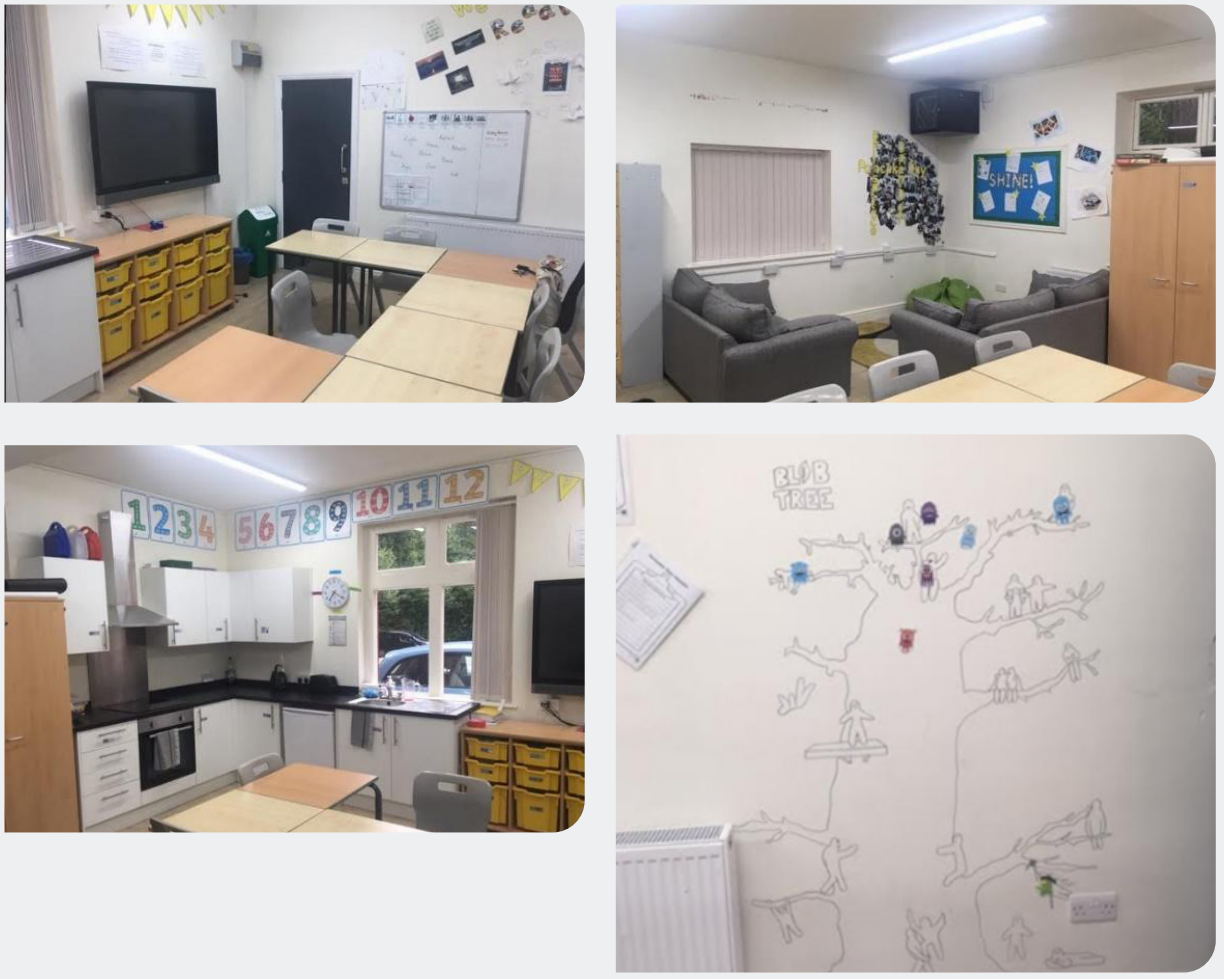
What are nurture groups?

Nurture groups are teacher-led, psychosocial intervention focused on supporting the social, emotional and behaviour difficulties of children and young people (nurtureuk, 2019), pupils attend the group for between two and four terms (Sloan et al., 2016); their purpose is to prepare the children to re-integrate (Boxall, as cited in Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005) based on the Six Principles of Nurture (nurtureuk, 2019). Typically, groups consist of no more than 12 children (Colley, 2011), although there is evidence of practise with smaller groups (Sloan et al., 2016), supported by a trained teacher and a teaching assistant in an environment which reflects that of the home and school (Fig. 1); kitchen, living room, reading area, and working space. This setting is thought to provide a more familiar and relaxed atmosphere (Garner and Thomas, 2011); children will spend some time in their base classes as well as time in the nurture group. The role of the staff in the nurture group is to form positive, caring relationships with the children (Colley, 2009) and to model positive engagement and behaviours through carefully planned activities which require teamwork, co-operation, speaking and listening and being consistent (Sanders, 2007).

The aim of the nurture group environment is to embrace a more relaxed atmosphere (Garner and Thomas, 2011) with staff working with the pupils to build secure attachments with the pupils to create a "secure base" (Bowlby 2008), and to allow the pupils to develop skills needed in order to soothe themselves and regulate their own emotions (Linsell et al., 2019). In settings where this is achieved, there is the aim that this will allow pupils to develop necessary skills and therefore be able to play an active role in school life, thus leading to less exclusions and disruption due to poor behaviour because of missed early childhood experiences.

The literature explores how nurture groups are being implemented for children starting school with SEMH difficulties, yet concerningly not for those who had the same SEMH difficulties and those who have been excluded from school. In a bid to improve practice and the quality of education for those with SEMH difficulties who had been excluded from mainstream schools, this research sought to build on the work of Lyons (2017) to ascertain if nurture groups could be as effective in a special school for secondary aged boys with a primary diagnosis

Figure 1: Photographs from the nurture group; (left to right) learning area, home area, kitchen area and 'blob tree'



of SEMH. Notably, research implies that during adolescence the brain undergoes a secondary stage of development where the neural pathways are more malleable and new behaviours can be learned, which suggests that this could be a "second window of opportunity" (UNICEF, 2017) to support those excluded from education.

Effectiveness of nurture groups

For pupils in key stages 1 and 2, there is a plethora of research which shows that there is significant progress made by pupils with regards to their social, emotional and behavioural skills as a result of attending nurture groups (Colwell and O'Connor, 2003; Cooper and Whitbread, 2007; MacKay, Reynolds and Kearney, 2010). More recently, research completed on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE) at Queen's University in Belfast has evidenced that in primary schools there are highly successful outcomes for children across a range of subgroups including children who are looked after to those not eligible for free school meals (Sloan et al. 2019). However, it was noted that there was not a control group in this research and therefore the results should be met with levels of caution when considering generalisability. Research of nurture groups in key stages 2 and 3 showed that this had varied levels of success (Colley, 2009; Garner, 2011; Kourmoulaki, 2013; Perkins, 2017), with Symonds (2015) commenting that nurture groups simply will allow these pupils to go through a natural transition with a higher level of phyco-social maturity. Research conducted by Lyons (2017) looked to cross a bridge with nurture groups and measure their effectiveness in a secondary special school – where arguably there is a higher level of needs to equip these pupils with the necessary social, emotional and behaviour skills needed to navigate school given that these pupils have often been excluded from

mainstream school and this is there only other opportunity to succeed in education. At the time of this research, figures from the DfE (2019) highlight that between 2017 and 2018 in state-funded primary, secondary and special schools, 7,905 pupils were permanently excluded; and a further 410,753 receiving fixed term exclusions. When focussing on permanent exclusions, 42% (3550) of pupils had either a statement; Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) or special educational need (SEN) support, a statistic which is consistently higher than average each year (DfE, 2017). More specifically, for those pupils who were registered as having SEN, 56% (1,982) had a diagnosis of social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties, which Bowman-Perrott et al. (2013) have previously argued has a disproportionate rate of exclusion compared to other pupils with and without SEN. The number of pupils being excluded since 2018 has significantly declined, in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the after effects. The data from 2017/2018 is the most accurate data currently relating to exclusions.

Over the course of a year, Lyons (2017) carried out observations, completed Boxall Profiles® and conducted interviews to gather data to understand the effectiveness of nurture groups relating to improving confidence and self-esteem; improved attitudes towards learning; and improved behaviour. While the data trends were positive, with parents and staff commenting on the change they had observed, there was a lack of generalisability due to the timeframes of the research, the small sample size and lack of a control group to compare with.

Methodology

This action research took place in a SEN school for boys with SEMH needs and who had been excluded from mainstream education; the researcher was the nurture lead for the school, and was also the full-time class teacher for all pupils in the nurture group. Once presentations were made to pupils and parents, where opt-in consent was gained, the decision was made that structured observations would take place on a bi-weekly basis so that behaviours linked to the Boxall Profile® could be monitored and show progression or regression in key areas. However, due the intervention being so intensive it became apparent that the 'Hawthorn effect' (Thomas, 2013) began to have an impact, where the pupil's behaviour was changing, not necessarily in a positive manner, because they were being watched. Upon conversation with one pupil about his behaviour he commented that "I have to behave like that when people are watching me because then they'll help me". From this, the decision was made to switch to unstructured observation, sometimes known as participant observation as the observer is engaged and fully involved; this was also in the best interests of the pupils and in running an effective nurture group. In participant observations, researchers are not simply observing situations, they are talking to the participants, watching scenarios unfold, reading documents (Individual Education Plans (IEPS), Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), educational psychologist reports) and keeping notes on events which help understand the situation (Burgess, 1982, cited in Thomas, 2009, p. 186). In this study, the researchers are 'complete' participants as they are integral to the situation, as within the nurture group parameters the staff often take on the roles of parent and sibling to support the pupils in developing appropriate behaviours. However, the work of Thomas (2009) should also be considered as he discusses the idea that there may be occasions where a participant moves from one type of observation to another and therefore observations themselves are a continuum.

Data collection

Raw data was collected through the completion of Boxall Profile® assessments of the children and SDQs which were all completed three times in the academic year at termly intervals for both 2018 (Cycle 1) and 2019 (Cycle 2 and control group); the SDQ data comprised of the teachers, parents, and child assessments (Fig. 2). The SDQs, which use the Likert scale for scoring, were administered to pupils at three points in the school year, along with the Boxall Profile® assessments. In line with the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) it was decided that they would be administered by the pupils' key worker, as this was a person who the pupils were familiar with but who would be less likely to inflict 'participant bias' (Smith and Noble, 2017) as they had no investment in the effectiveness of the nurture group. During the administration of the questionnaires, pupils could have the question read aloud if they wished and an example of this could be given to allow the pupil

Figure 2. Research cycle

to choose the option which best suited them. All pupils were given the same SDQ as they all fell into the same age category. For parents, the researcher spoke to each parent to explain the questionnaire to them and the purpose of completing; it was recognised that there was a need to be mindful when it came to "prestige bias" (Thomas, 2013). It was felt that completing the SDQs at only three points in the year would minimise the impact as parents, pupils and teachers would be unlikely to remember their previous answers and an honest questionnaire would be returned.

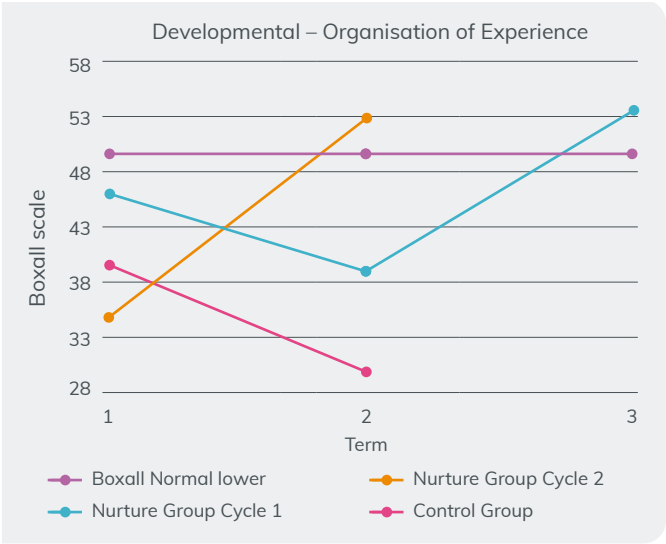
During the second cycle, which sees the introduction of a control group, the inferential statistics were scrutinised to assess whether the nurture group principles allow for greater social and behavioural development while improving the mental wellbeing of pupils. Asking parents to complete SDQs for pupils at home also allows for the analysis of how the pupils can transfer the new skills and behaviours learned at school into the home setting. Over two years, the data was continuously analysed and discussed as the nurture group continued to be developed. To ensure this was carried out successfully the research underwent a process of recursion, summary and synthesis of the data.

Results

The first piece of crucial data lies in the Developmental Strands of the Boxall Profile® which consist of 'Organisation of Experience' (OE) and 'Internalisation of Controls' (IC).

The data from OE (Fig. 3) illustrates that pupils who were in the nurture group for both Cycle 1 (C1) and 2 (C2) made significant progress and achieved within the average scores for "competently functioning children" (CFC). For those in C1 this process was much slower which could be attributed to them being pupils already at the school and therefore they needed to re-adjust to the new rules, boundaries, and settings that the nurture group maintained. It should also be considered that this was the first time the researcher had implemented a nurture group so the progress may have been slowed as a direct result of the teacher's inexperience.

Figure 3. Organisation of Experience data



In the C2 of the nurture group, which consisted of some children who already attended the school and some new admissions, the progress was rapid and significant with the pupils being assessed within the 'normal' range after one term. This rapid increase could also support the idea that the progress in the first term of C1 was slow and gradual as the teacher became more experienced in her role and once experienced was able to ensure rapid progress with the second group; a trend that can be seen in each set of the data. As a direct result of attending the nurture group, the data highlights a positive trend in pupils' ability to engage more with peers, adults and in beginning to connect their experiences.

In contrast, the control group (CG) data illustrates a gradual decline in the OE Strand of the Boxall Profile®. For this class, they had no fixed teacher and their timetable changed weekly as a reaction to the previous week's attitude and behaviour. During the first term they had four different supply teachers all of whom left suddenly which each time made the pupils more reluctant to form relationships as they were untrusting of how long staff would attend the school. In relation to this strand the experiences that they were having were negative and fleeting which explains their decline in this developmental skill. The data from the ICs (Fig. 4) suggests a similar trend for the C1 and C2 groups, again with a rapid improvement being illustrated in C2, although in this the pupils were not in line with the averages of the socially functioning children of their age group.

Figure 4. Internalisation of Controls data

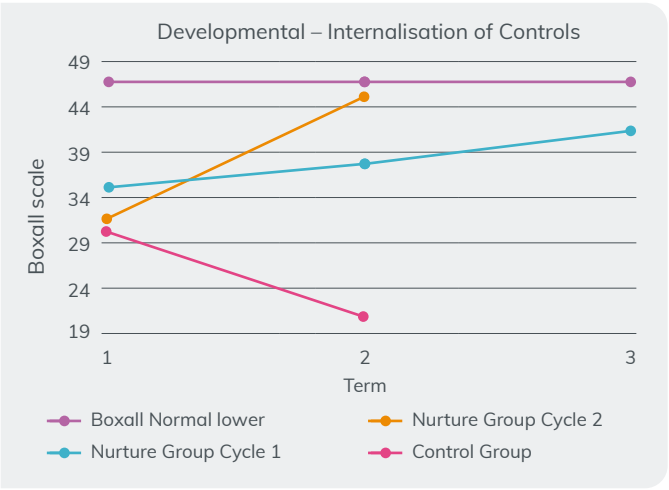


Figure 5. Self-limiting Features data

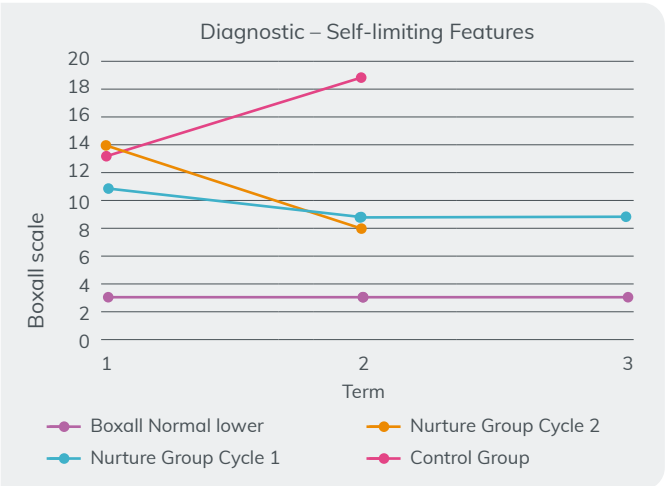


Figure 6. Undeveloped Behaviour data

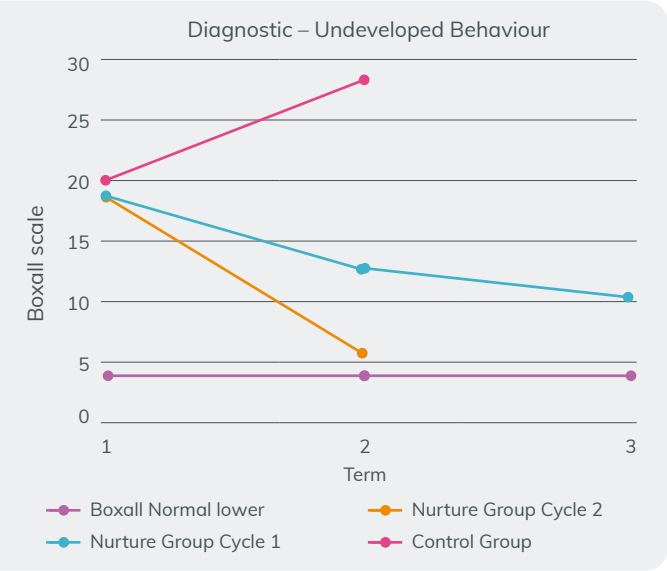
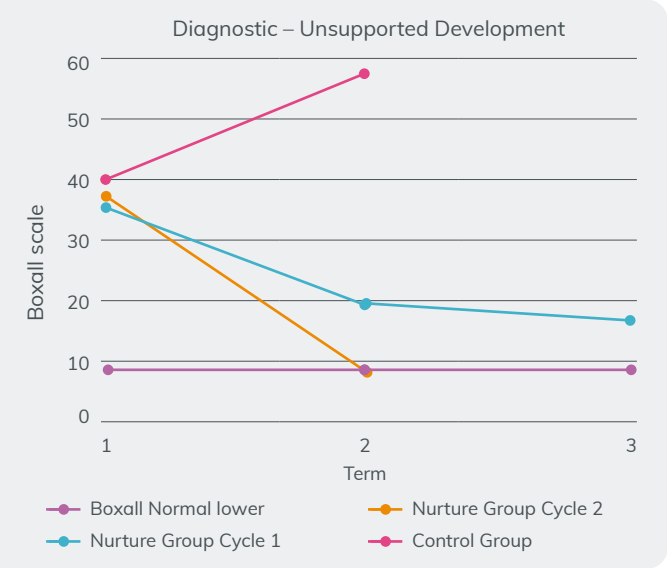


Figure 7. Unsupported Development data



For the CG, the data suggests a similar pattern of decline as in the OE Strand: these children have had numerous supply teachers and have faced many changes to their timetable, causing them to form negative relationship experiences which impact the templates they hold for others. At this stage in the data there is a significant difference in the development of these children where those in the nurture group can make significant progress as a result of their environment in contrast to their peers.

Boxall works on the premise that as a child or young person secures the gaps in their developmental learning, there then should be a decline in their scores on their Diagnostic Profile, as they are, in theory, better equipped and more emotionally stable to manage the challenges they face. The Diagnostic Profile in the Boxall Assessment consists of three strands: Self-limiting Features (Fig. 5), Undeveloped Behaviour (Fig. 6), and Unsupported Development (Fig. 7).

Self-limiting Features focus on if the child is disengaged and self-negating, in a typical profile as a child builds better relationships with adults and their peers (Developmental Profile), they would become more engaged and there will be fewer self-negating moments resulting in a lower score. The data (Fig. 5-e) illustrates this decline for both the nurture groups, although in C1 the average scores plateaued after the second term which is somewhat of an anomaly in the data as the lessons were still being delivered in the same way to provide engagement and interaction and there were no changes in the strategies implemented to praise the pupils as a tool to raise self-esteem.

With further critique of the data, it became apparent that pupil C could be the cause of this anomaly as he had a scattered score as a result of significant life-changing experiences outside of school. The data (Appendix A) shows that in the third term there were only three of the five children left in the nurture group; the other pupils (A and B) were assessed as having made progress which supported their transition back to their base class. Of the three children remaining in the nurture group, pupils D and E continued to make substantial progress, whereas pupil C regressed in areas of 'Self-limiting Features' and 'Unsupported Development', and thus this anomaly had a greater impact on the average of the smaller group. Subsequently, in C2 the assessment for Self-limiting Features saw a significant decline in the score suggesting pupils were more engaged and less critical of themselves. Within this group there were seven pupils who all maintained rapid progress over the two terms of the data collection which is demonstrated in the consistent gradient of the graph.

'Undeveloped Behaviour' centres around the pupil's attachments and their response to rules and boundaries. The nurture group's principal emphasis was to have a 'safe base', with key members of staff and consistency in the day-to-day running of the group. This should allow for

pupils to build positive relationships resulting in secure attachments where the child does not need to crave and 'act out' to be subject to the attention they feel they need. C1 and C2 in the nurture group show a decline in these behaviours (Fig. 6).

'Unsupported Development' evaluates how well supported the pupil feels on a day-to-day basis when it comes to their basic needs and having them met. It would be expected that pupils no longer must seek attention as they know it will be given and they are happy to share attention with others because they feel confident about who they are and their social status in the classroom. As with all other graphs there is a clear improvement in the C1 and C2 scores (Fig. 7), specifically in C2 where the average score is within the range of CFC. It is worth noting that there appears to be less significant decline in the data from C1 between terms two and three, as previously discussed the data for this group was impacted by a small group size and one pupil regressing in his progress because of outside factors. However, this could also be impacted by pupils beginning to transition back into their base classes.

This often prompts feelings of insecurity and anxiety while becoming sceptical in the relationships they have formed so far as they prepare to meet their next teacher. However, without data from C2 it would be inappropriate to draw a definitive conclusion as to why the scores did not decline further, instead it would be the professional judgement of the researcher based on their knowledge of the setting and its pupils.

The data from the control group is conclusive across all strands of the Diagnostic Profile; the pupils regressed at a significant rate in comparison to their peers. In two of the three strands ('Self-Negating' and 'Undeveloped Behaviour'), the pupils were assessed at a similar level to those in the C2 nurture groups, but by term two they were at opposite ends of the graph. As discussed earlier, the lack of consistency for these pupils in terms of their timetable, staffing, expected standards of learning and boundaries is causing them to show concerning behaviours resulting in Boxall Profile®, which suggests they are experiencing high levels of difficulties. Consequently, the pupils are unable to access education or form positive relationships with those around them.

SDQ and Boxall Profile® correlations

As part of the nurture group practice, each pupil completed the SDQ as did the child's parent and teacher, within the same week that the Boxall Profile® was completed, to measure the impact on the child's wellbeing and to assess risks of mental health issues. It was predicted that as the pupils improved in the OE Strand, they would also improve their Pro-Social Behaviours and decline in Peer Conduct and Hyperactivity Difficulties. The data gathered supports the initial prediction and illustrates that pupils improved their SDQ scores from previously falling in the 'high' to 'very high-risk categories' to 'slightly raised' to 'close to average' risk in C1 and 'close to average' in C2.

For pupils in C1 there was a noticeable difference between pupil and parent results in the first assessment of 'Pro-Social Difficulties' (Fig. 8) which demonstrated that the pupils did not report having issues with their peers, nor did their parents. Often this could be the result of pupils and their parents not being aware of any difficulties as that is how the dynamic has always been.

However, as the pupil made progress in the nurture group, the scores began to correlate more closely with parents commenting on the changes they have seen in their child. In C2, at the final assessment point there was an awareness and an alignment of the data submitted by the pupil, parents, and the teacher. This closeness in correlation was also illustrated in the data of the CG, however instead of improving, they have regressed; information which is supported by the data of the OE Profile where they also regressed; this supports the concurrent validity of the two tools.

As suggested by the concurrent validity, the 'Peer Difficulties' (Fig. 9a) and 'Hyper-activity Difficulties' (Fig. 10) scores declined for those in the nurture groups. Pupils who scored within the 'very high' classifications in 'Peer Difficulties' on the first data point then scored within the 'slightly raised' category in the third term. On the 'Hyper-activity Difficulties' there were significantly diverging results throughout the data. This could be attributed to pupils in the group having a diagnosis of ADHD, which may limit the progress and impact the data that is given by parents from the home setting and the teachers within the school setting.

However, the data does show a closer aligned agreement in the third term in C1 and the second term in C2 where the scores fall in the 'close to average' categories.

As expected, the data for the CG shows scores that increase with pupils' scores, placing them in the 'high' risk category, and parents' and teachers' scores placing the risk factor as 'very high'. Often the parents and teachers are in agreement about the strengths and difficulties of the pupils, while the pupil often scores themselves significantly lower, either caused by participant bias or through not truly understanding the difficulties they face.

Figure 8. Pro-social Difficulties data

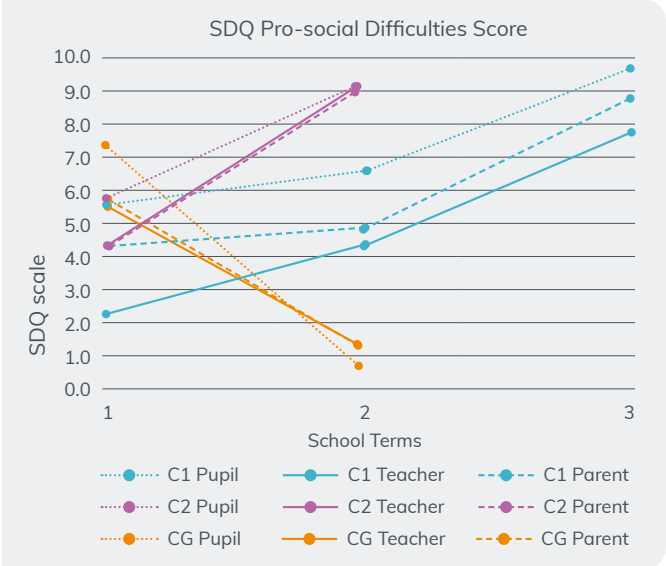


Figure 9. Peer Difficulties score

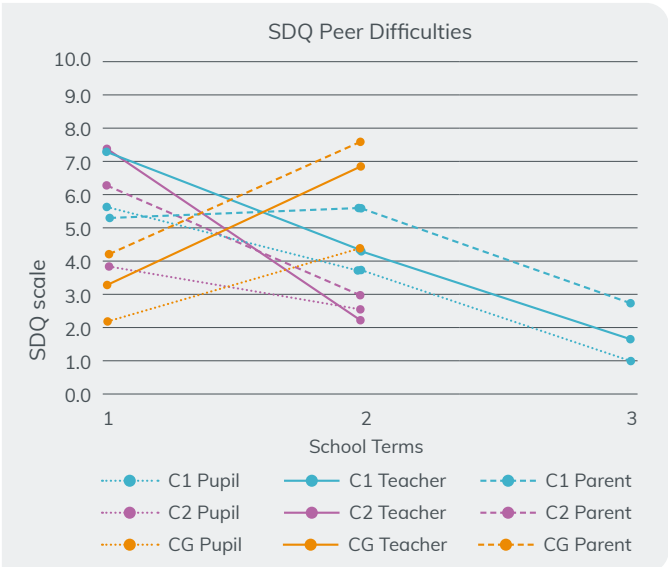


Figure 10. Hyper-activity Difficulties data

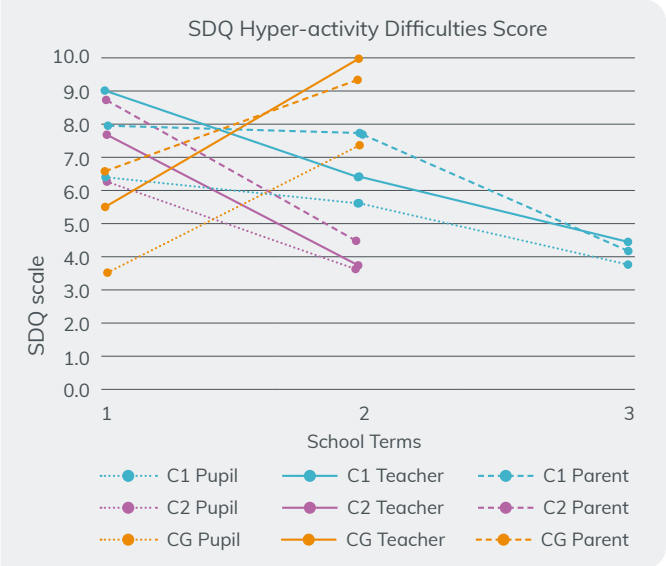
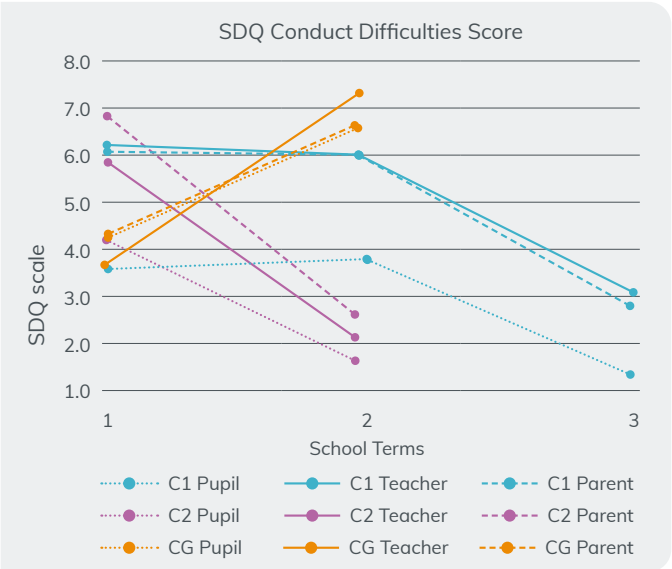
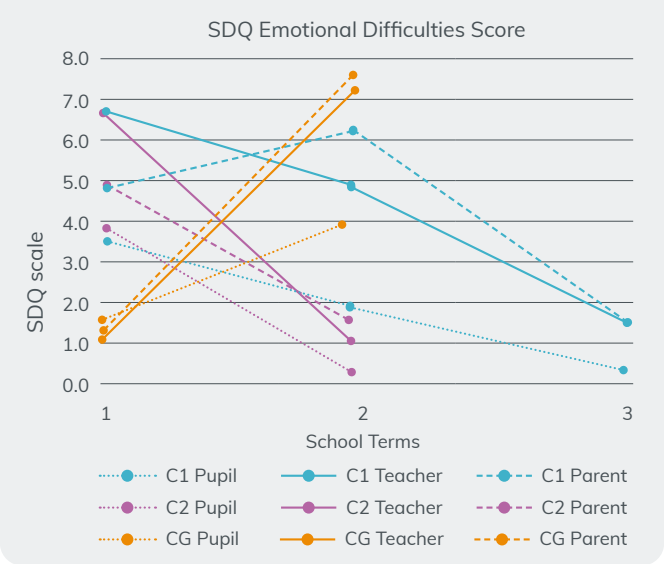


Figure 11. Conduct Difficulties score



The final two SDQ scores relate to 'Conduct Difficulties' (Fig. 11) and 'Emotional Difficulties' (Fig. 12), with research highlighting the link between these scores on the SDQ and 'Internalisation of Controls' on the Boxall Profile®. It is suggested that those who have better internalisation of controls will score lower on the 'Conduct' questions which is reflected in the data gathered. Within the C1 group, the progress scored by teachers and parents during terms one and two showed little progress, although in the third term there was a significant improvement, which both the parents and the teachers noticed. There was also a similar trend shown from the child's self-assessment although, on average, they scored themselves lower than the parents and teacher.

Figure 12. Emotional Difficulties data

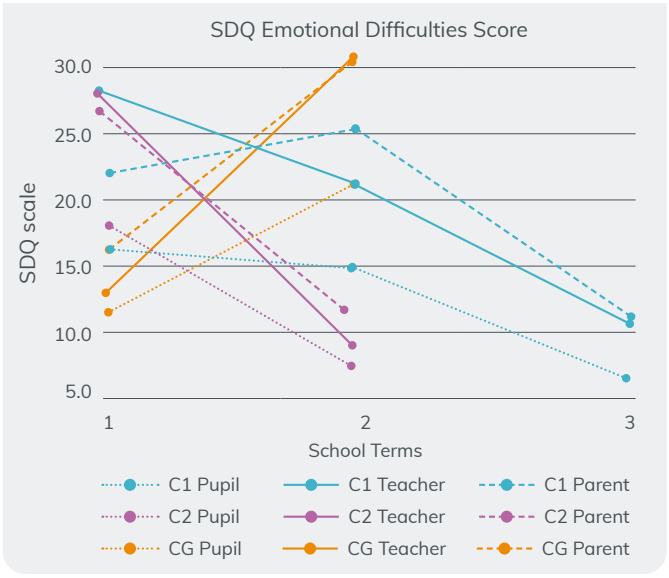


Contrary to the research (Couture, Cooper and Royer, 2011), the data recorded from the 'Emotional Difficulties' section of the SDQ also declined where it was suggested that 'the children who have better internalisation of controls tend to have...more emotional symptoms' (2011, p.24). The scores did show that the parents in C1, on average, recorded an increase in the child's emotional difficulties as the children were becoming more aware of their emotions and understanding how they felt. However, by the third term the parents and teachers scores were matched with the pupils scoring themselves significantly lower in contrast to their first term in the nurture group. In C2, as in other areas of the SDQ there was a steady decline in the scores where the pupils, parents, and teachers scored the pupil in the 'close to average' category.

As in all data, there maintains the view that those in the CG are regressing, which is scored by pupils, parents, and the staff. In terms of 'Conduct Difficulties' parents and pupils scored the same with the teacher scoring slightly higher, which may reflect the school environments and the conflict the pupils were facing. Furthermore, there was a significant increase in the scores parents and teachers recorded for the 'Emotional Difficulties' where the scores changed from being 'close to average' to 'very high'.

When grouped together and an overall score was created for the pupils in C1, C2 and the control group, the data (Fig. 13) gives a very clear illustration that those who experience the nurturing care needed for child development they become less likely to develop mental health issues in the future and have an improved sense of wellbeing based on the SDQ total scores, which allows them to engage with their peers, other adults and in the education setting, which is reflected and supported by the data gathered on all strands of the Developmental and Diagnostic Profiles where pupils made steps towards being within the CFC area. Pupils who were place in the nurture groups (C1 and C2) we scored, on average as being in the 'high' risk category, however, by the end of their time in the nurture group their average scores placed them in the 'close to average' category with pupils scores being the lowest suggesting they felt they were being less affected by their own difficulties.

Figure 13. Total Difficulties data



For those pupils in the CG, the pupil, parents, and teacher had recorded significantly high scores placing the pupil in the 'very high' risk category by then end of the second term, when in contrast, at the start of the year the pupils scored themselves in the 'close to average' category and the parents and teachers scored them in the 'slightly raised'. This data correlates with the scores of the Boxall Profile® where the CG regressed across all of the Developmental and Diagnostic Strands.

From the nurture group to the control group

Within the C2 control group (2019) three pupils had previously attended the nurture group during

C1 (2018). Whilst the nurture group was not intended to be a long-term intervention, the idea of them was that through developing the necessary developmental skills the children would then be able to function as part of the whole school community and behave in ways which were deemed socially acceptable in the school community.

Boxall data was compiled showing the journey of these three pupils from the nurture group to the control group over a two-year period; it demonstrates that perhaps the nurture group intervention alone is not enough regardless of how much progress is made. The data for the Developmental strand of the Boxall Profile® (Fig. 14, Fig. 15) shows that pupils who made progress in their three terms in the nurture group then regressed in terms four and five when they were back in the control group.

Figure 14. NG to CG – Organisation of Experience

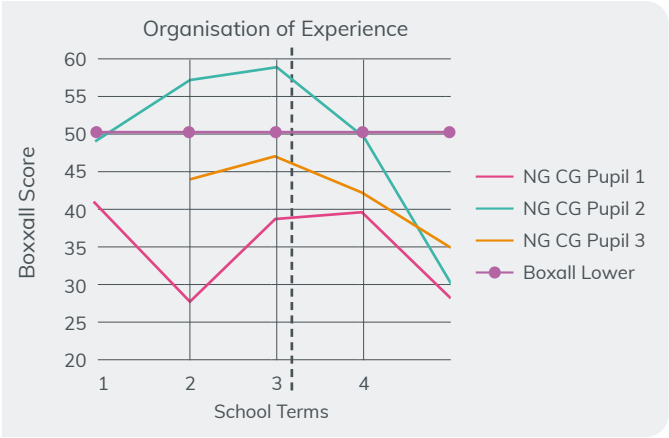
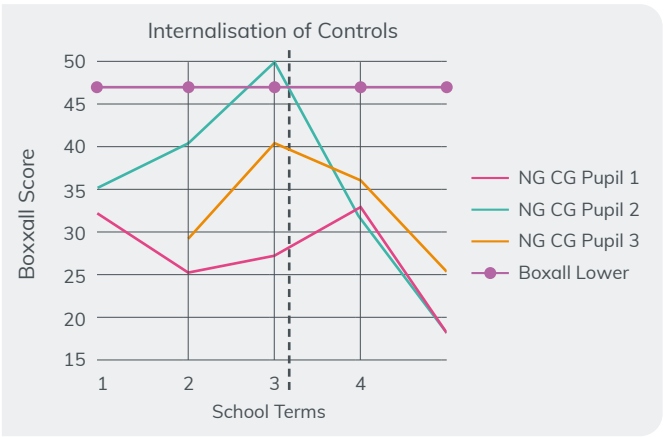


Figure 15. NG to CG - Internalisation of Controls



There was a similar trend when it came to the Diagnostic strand of the Boxall Profile®, with all pupils making progress in the nurture group and regressing below their initial assessment at the beginning of Cycle 1 level by the end of two terms in the control group (Fig. 16, Fig, 17, Fig, 18).

Figure 16. NG to CG – Self-limiting Features

Figure 17. NG to CG – Undeveloped Behaviour

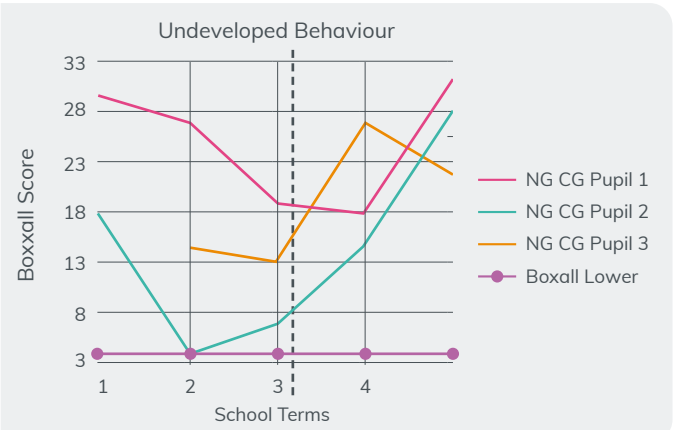
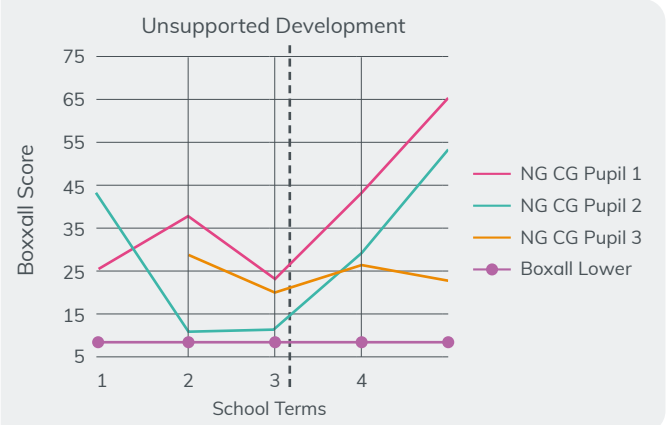


Figure 18. NG to CG - Unsupported Development



With this data it is important to consider the impact of the other two pupils in the CG and how

they may have been able to influence the behaviour of those in the group as the data shows a decline in the scores but at different rates for each of the pupils in the group.

An anomaly in the data is pupil 3 in the 'Unsupported Development' sub-cluster, where a high score indicates lack of early nurturing care, where the pupil is recorded as having a constant score in comparison to his peers. Such data could show that this pupil has benefited from the nurture group and as a result is able to separate himself from the other pupils and does trust the school staff to support him. Pupil 3 also shows better scores in comparison to his peers in the Developmental Strand of the Boxall Profile® (Fig. 14, Fig. 15) with his scores in 'Organisation of Experience' and 'Internalisation of Controls' not demonstrating as significant of a decline as his peers. This data would imply that pupil 3 is organised and interested in the world and can participate constructively because he is more emotionally secure than his peers, thus showing he has "internalised the controls necessary for social functioning".

Discussion

The results from the Boxall Profile® assessments and SDQ scores for both Cycles 1 and 2 illustrate that in this study, nurture groups were effective in increasing the scores of Developmental and Diagnostic behaviours. Such an increase towards the 'competently functioning' children highlight how nurture groups do support in the development of age-appropriate behaviour. It became clear that there were increased levels of success in C2 compared with C1; perhaps down to the specialist teacher becoming more confident in the theory and approaches used (Cooper and Whitbread, 2007), and also from other school staff making attempts to adopt the nurturing approach to teaching and learning. The control group data highlight the decline in the behaviour of those who do not receive a nurturing education and the impact that it has on their ability to engage and access education as a result of not being able to regulate their emotions.

In relation to the three more specific questions asked at the start of the research, this study set to highlight the impact of nurture groups on; developing age-appropriate behaviours; reducing the likelihood of mental health issues; and ascertaining if the nurture group was effective enough as a single intervention or whether it needed to be adopted as part of a whole-school approach to teaching and learning.

Firstly, the impact of Developmental behaviours is highlighted in the Boxall Profile® data (Fig. 5-e – 5-g), where it clearly shows that those pupils who were part of the nurture group were more able to demonstrate engagement in the classroom through the application of their more attuned social and emotional skills. Particularly, in both cycles, pupils in the nurture groups scored in line with their 'competently functioning' peers in mainstream schools when it came to 'Organisation of Experience'. This is the engagement of a young person with the adults and their peers in the classroom as a result of linking up their experiences. These pupils had formed positive relationships (Breeman et al, 2015) alongside trusting and respectful relationships (Mowat, 2010), thus allowing them to access education. This shows that pupils who are excluded from mainstream school because of their behaviour should not have been. Instead, they could have received a nurturing approach to their education which would have allowed them to learn the necessary skills needed in order to engage in the classroom, much like a pupil learns the skills needed to carry out a science experiment in order to pass their SATs or GCSE exams.

Furthermore, the SDQ scores prove that through the nurturing approach to learning there was a visible change in pupils' mental wellbeing, not only from the teacher's viewpoint but also the child's and their parents'. In all the data the scores of the teacher, pupil and parent converge towards a score which indicates that there is 'close to average' or 'slightly raised' when it comes to likelihood of developing mental health issues. This demonstrates how having positive, trusting relationships and increased self-esteem and self-confidence can impact a person's wellbeing, a notion that needs to be supported for pupils who are funded for an Education, Health and Care Plan for SEMH.

Conclusion

When considering this paper's title and the suggestion that it may be too late to support pupils with SEMH needs in a secondary setting,

the research shows that it is not too late. However for this approach to be successful there must be a whole-school approach to ensure its success. The success of the results is even more significant when comparing them with their peers in the same setting who show a significant decline in their scores on the Boxall Profile® and SDQs because of not being embraced within a nurturing approach to teaching and learning. However, it is worth noting that while the nurture group did improve self-esteem, support positive mental health and address gaps in developmental behaviours, there were limitations in its success when the pupils returned to the classroom where the nurture principles were not adopted and they showed significant regression.

To enhance the generalisability of this research and to ascertain the true picture of nurture groups in secondary SEMH settings, further consideration should be given to conducting such on a larger scale across areas of the UK. Additionally, in the control group, the wide range of extraneous variables, including supply teachers, impacts on the generalisability of the research and this would need to be carefully considered in future studies.

While consent was gained from the parents and pupils to opt into the research, the research has shown that without effective aftercare in terms of a whole-school approach to nurture, there is a significant regression in the mental health, wellbeing and behaviour of pupils when leaving the nurture group, something which needs to be considered more carefully in future research of this kind.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Boxall Profile® Raw Data

Cycle 1:

		Pupil A	Pupil B	Pupil C	Pupil D	Pupil E	Average	Boxall Normal Lower	Boxall Normal Upper
Organisation of Experience	Term 1	44	44	41	52	49	46.00	50	72
	Term 2	47	50	28	36	57	43.60	50	72
	Term 3			39	62	59	53.33	50	72
Internalisation of Controls	Term 1	29	42	32	37	35	35.00	47	64
	Term 2	40	54	25	29	40	37.60	47	64
	Term 3			27	47	50	41.33	47	64
Self-limiting Features	Term 1	9	11	9	5	19	10.60	3	0
	Term 2	7	4	17	10	4	8.40	3	0
	Term 3			15	5	6	8.67	3	0
Undeveloped Behaviour	Term 1	14	9	29	23	18	18.60	4	0
	Term 2	13	5	27	14	4	12.60	4	0
	Term 3			19	4	7	10.00	4	0
Unsupported Development	Term 1	28	26	25	39	43	32.20	9	0
	Term 2	21	6	37	20	11	19.00	9	0
	Term 3			24	17	12	17.67	9	0

Cycle 2:

		Pupil A	Pupil B	Pupil C	Pupil D	Pupil E	Pupil F	Pupil G	Average	Boxall Normal Lower	Boxall Normal Upper
Organisation of Experience	Term 1	41	29	24	43	32	28	47	34.86	50	72
	Term 2	60	49	52	63	51	50	47	53.14	50	72
Internalisation of Controls	Term 1	32	34	31	41	28	20	35	31.57	47	64
	Term 2	49	51	45	44	49	43	39	45.71	47	64
Self-limiting Features	Term 1	9	13	14	13	13	20	16	14.00	3	0
	Term 2	6	10	9	7	7	9	8	8.00	3	0
Undeveloped Behaviour	Term 1	9	18	24	15	18	26	19	18.43	4	0
	Term 2	6	3	7	4	4	8	8	5.71	4	0
Unsupported Development	Term 1	25	20	29	25	25	61	63	35.43	9	0
	Term 2	5	3	11	6	6	14	15	8.43	9	0

Control group:

		Pupil A	Pupil B	Pupil C	Pupil D	Pupil E	Pupil F	Pupil G	Average	Boxall Normal Lower	Boxall Normal Upper
Organisation of Experience	Term 1	30	42	33	49				38.80	50	72
	Term 2	22	34	32	29				29.00	50	72
Internalisation of Controls	Term 1	24	36	27	32				30.40	47	64
	Term 2	20	25	20	18				20.20	47	64
Self-limiting Features	Term 1	19	13	12	7				13.20	3	0
	Term 2	23	17	16	16				18.60	3	0
Undeveloped Behaviour	Term 1	28	26	11	15				19.60	4	0
	Term 2	31	22	24	28				27.20	4	0
Unsupported Development	Term 1	63	40	27	30				40.60	9	0
	Term 2	70	42	48	54				55.80	9	0

Appendix B: SDQ Raw Data

Cycle 1:

Question No.	Question	Term 1				Term 2				Term 3			
		Pupil	Parent	Teacher	Average	Pupil	Parent	Teacher	Average	Pupil	Parent	Teacher	Average
1.0	Considerate of other people's feelings	1.0	0.6	0.4	0.7	1.2	0.6	0.8	0.9	2.0	1.8	1.6	1.8
2.0	Restless and overactive	1.2	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.0	1.8	1.4	1.4	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.7
3.0	Complains of headaches, stomach ache or sickness	0.6	0.6	1.0	0.7	0.8	1.0	0.6	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.1
4.0	Shares readily with other children	0.6	0.6	0.2	0.5	1.0	0.6	0.8	0.8	1.8	1.4	1.2	1.5
5.0	Often has temper tantrums	0.8	1.4	1.6	1.3	1.4	1.8	1.4	1.5	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6
6.0	Solitary and plays alone	0.6	1.0	1.4	1.0	1.0	1.4	0.8	1.1	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.5
7.0	Generally obedient	1.0	1.2	1.4	1.2	1.0	1.2	1.4	1.2	0.2	0.8	0.6	0.5
8.0	Many worries	0.2	1.2	1.6	1.0	0.4	1.2	1.0	0.9	0.2	0.6	0.6	0.5
9.0	Helfpul if someone is hurt or upset	1.0	0.8	0.8	0.9	1.4	1.2	0.8	1.1	1.8	2.0	1.8	1.9
10.0	Constantly fidgeting or squirming	1.2	1.6	2.0	1.6	1.4	1.8	1.4	1.5	0.8	1.2	1.0	1.0
11.0	Has at least one good friend	1.0	1.0	1.6	1.2	0.8	1.2	1.0	1.0	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.3
12.0	Fights with other children or bullies them	0.2	1.6	1.6	1.1	1.0	1.4	1.6	1.3	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.3
13.0	Often unhappy, downhearted or tearful	0.8	0.8	1.2	0.9	0.4	1.2	1.2	0.9	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.1
14.0	Generally liked by other children	1.4	1.2	1.6	1.4	0.8	1.0	0.6	0.8	0.0	0.4	0.2	0.2
15.0	Easily distracted	1.2	2.0	1.8	1.7	1.0	1.4	1.4	1.3	0.8	0.6	1.0	0.8
16.0	Nervous or clingy in new situations	1.4	1.0	1.6	1.3	0.2	1.8	0.8	0.9	0.0	0.4	0.2	0.2
17.0	Kind to younger children	1.6	1.2	0.6	1.1	1.6	1.2	0.8	1.2	2.0	1.8	1.6	1.8
18.0	Often lies or cheats	1.2	1.0	0.8	1.0	0.4	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.2	0.4	0.8	0.5
19.0	Picked on or bullied by other children	1.4	0.6	1.0	1.0	0.0	0.4	0.6	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.1
20.0	Often volunteers to help others	1.2	1.0	0.2	0.8	1.4	1.2	1.0	1.2	2.0	1.8	1.6	1.8
21.0	Things things out before acting	1.6	1.4	20.	1.7	0.8	1.6	1.6	1.3	0.2	0.8	0.8	0.6
22.0	Steals from home, school or elsewhere	0.4	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.0	0.8	0.8	0.5	0.0	0.4	0.8	0.4
23.0	Gets on better with adults than other children	1.4	1.4	1.6	1.5	1.2	1.4	1.2	1.3	0.4	1.2	0.2	0.6
24.0	Many fears and easily scared	0.6	1.2	1.4	1.1	0.0	1.0	1.2	0.7	0.0	0.4	0.4	0.3
25.0	Sees tasks through to the end, good attention span	1.2	1.4	1.6	1.4	1.2	1.2	0.8	1.1	1.2	0.8	1.2	1.1
	Total difficulties score	19.4	24.0	29.2	24.2	14.8	25.4	21.6	20.6	6.2	11.2	10.8	9.4
	Emotional score	3.6	4.8	6.8	5.1	1.8	6.2	4.8	4.3	0.2	1.6	1.6	1.1
	Conduct score	3.6	6.0	6.2	5.3	3.8	6.0	6.0	5.3	1.2	2.6	2.6	2.3
	Hyperactivity score	6.4	8.0	9.0	7.8	5.4	7.8	6.6	6.6	3.8	4.2	4.2	4.2
	Peer score	5.8	5.2	7.2	6.1	3.8	5.4	4.2	4.5	1.0	2.8	2.8	1.8
	Pro Social score	5.4	4.2	2.2	3.9	6.6	4.8	4.2	5.2	9.6	8.8	8.8	8.7

Cycle 2:

Question No.	Question	Term 1				Term 2				Term 3			
		Pupil	Parent	Teacher	Total	Pupil	Parent	Teacher	Total	Pupil	Parent	Teacher	Total
1.0	Considerate of other people's feelings	1.0	0.6	0.6	0.7	1.9	0.6	0.8	0.9				
2.0	Restless and overactive	1.6	1.7	1.4	1.6	0.7	1.0	0.6	0.8				
3.0	Complains of headaches, stomach ache or sickness	0.6	1.0	1.1	0.9	0.1	0.3	0.3	0.2				
4.0	Shares readily with other children	1.1	0.9	0.7	0.9	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9				
5.0	Often has temper tantrums	1.1	1.9	1.7	1.6	0.7	0.9	0.9	0.8				
6.0	Solitary and plays alone	1.0	1.3	1.4	1.2	0.6	1.0	0.7	0.8				
7.0	Generally obedient	0.6	0.9	1.1	0.9	0.6	0.9	0.6	0.7				
8.0	Many worries	1.0	1.3	1.7	1.3	0.0	0.3	0.1	0.1				
9.0	Helfpul if someone is hurt or upset	1.4	0.7	0.9	1.0	1.7	1.9	1.9	1.8				
10.0	Constantly fidgeting or squirming	1.6	1.7	1.7	1.7	0.9	1.0	0.6	0.8				
11.0	Has at least one good friend	0.6	1.3	1.7	1.2	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.2				
12.0	Fights with other children or bullies them	1.1	1.4	1.1	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0				
13.0	Often unhappy, downhearted or tearful	0.9	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.0	0.3	0.1	0.1				
14.0	Generally liked by other children	0.9	1.3	1.3	1.1	0.6	0.7	0.1	0.5				
15.0	Easily distracted	1.3	1.9	1.9	1.7	0.6	0.7	0.9	0.7				
16.0	Nervous or clingy in new situations	0.9	0.9	2.0	1.2	0.0	0.4	0.3	0.2				
17.0	Kind to younger children	1.1	1.3	1.3	1.2	2.0	1.9	2.0	2.0				
18.0	Often lies or cheats	1.0	1.4	1.1	1.2	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.1				
19.0	Picked on or bullied by other children	0.4	1.1	1.3	1.0	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.6				
20.0	Often volunteers to help others	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.7	1.9	1.7	1.8				
21.0	Things things out before acting	0.9	1.7	1.6	1.4	1.0	0.9	0.7	0.9				
22.0	Steals from home, school or elsewhere	0.4	1.1	0.7	0.8	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.3				
23.0	Gets on better with adults than other children	1.0	1.1	1.6	1.2	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6				
24.0	Many fears and easily scared	0.6	0.9	1.1	0.9	0.0	0.3	0.1	0.1				
25.0	Sees tasks through to the end, good attention span	0.9	1.7	1.1	1.2	0.3	0.9	1.0	0.7				
	Total difficulties score	18.1	26.6	27.7	24.1	7.9	11.3	8.9	9.3				
	Emotional score	3.9	5.0	6.9	5.2	0.1	1.6	1.0	0.9				
	Conduct score	4.3	6.7	5.9	5.6	1.6	2.3	2.0	2.0				
	Hyperactivity score	6.1	8.7	7.7	7.5	3.4	4.4	3.7	3.9				
	Peer score	3.9	6.1	7.3	5.8	2.7	3.0	2.1	2.6				
	Pro-social score	5.7	4.3	4.3	4.8	9.1	9.0	9.1	9.1				

Control group:

Question No.	Question	Term 1				Term 2				Term 3			
		Pupil	Parent	Teacher	Total	Pupil	Parent	Teacher	Total	Pupil	Parent	Teacher	Total
1.0	Considerate of other people's feelings	1.0	1.2	1.2	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.1				
2.0	Restless and overactive	0.8	1.4	1.0	1.1	0.8	2.0	2.0	1.6				
3.0	Complains of headaches, stomach ache or sickness	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8				
4.0	Shares readily with other children	1.8	0.8	0.8	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0				
5.0	Often has temper tantrums	1.0	1.4	1.0	1.1	1.2	2.0	2.0	1.7				
6.0	Solitary and plays alone	0.8	1.2	0.0	0.7	0.8	1.6	1.0	1.1				
7.0	Generally obedient	1.0	1.2	1.0	1.1	2.0	1.2	2.0	1.7				
8.0	Many worries	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.8	1.2	1.2	1.1				
9.0	Helfpul if someone is hurt or upset	1.4	1.2	1.0	1.2	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.1				
10.0	Constantly fidgeting or squirming	0.8	1.4	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.2	2.0	1.5				
11.0	Has at least one good friend	0.0	0.8	0.6	0.5	1.0	1.8	2.0	1.6				
12.0	Fights with other children or bullies them	0.6	0.8	0.8	0.7	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0				
13.0	Often unhappy, downhearted or tearful	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	1.2	2.0	2.0	1.7				
14.0	Generally liked by other children	0.4	0.8	1.0	0.7	0.8	1.4	1.6	1.3				
15.0	Easily distracted	1.2	1.4	1.2	1.3	1.2	2.0	1.6	1.7				
16.0	Nervous or clingy in new situations	0.2	0.8	0.0	0.3	0.8	2.0	2.0	1.5				
17.0	Kind to younger children	2.0	1.2	1.2	1.5	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4				
18.0	Often lies or cheats	1.2	0.8	0.8	0.9	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2				
19.0	Picked on or bullied by other children	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.0	0.4	0.4	0.3				
20.0	Often volunteers to help others	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4				
21.0	Things things out before acting	0.0	1.4	1.4	0.9	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0				
22.0	Steals from home, school or elsewhere	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0				
23.0	Gets on better with adults than other children	0.4	0.8	1.2	0.8	1.6	2.0	1.6	1.7				
24.0	Many fears and easily scared	0.4	0.0	0.6	0.3	0.4	1.6	1.6	1.2				
25.0	Sees tasks through to the end, good attention span	0.8	1.0	0.8	0.9	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0				
	Total difficulties score	11.2	16.0	13.4	13.5	21.8	30.4	31.0	27.7				
	Emotional score	1.4	1.2	1.0	1.2	4.0	7.6	7.2	63				
	Conduct score	4.2	4.2	3.6	4.0	6.4	6.4	7.2	67				
	Hyperactivity score	3.6	6.6	5.6	5.3	7.2	9.2	10.0	8.8				
	Peer score	2.0	4.0	3.2	3.1	4.2	7.2	6.6	6.0				
	Pro-social score	7.4	5.6	5.4	6.1	0.8	1.2	1.2	1.1				

Book Review

Understanding and Supporting Refugee Children and Young People: A Practical Resource for Teachers, Parents and Carers of Those Exposed to the Trauma of War

Author: Dr Tina Rae
Publisher: Routledge (David Fulton)
Publication Location: Abingdon, Oxfordshire, United Kingdom
Year of Publication: 2023
ISBN: ISBN 9781032405568 (hbk), 9781032405506 (pbk), 9781003353607 (ebk)

Reviewer: Tristan Middleton

This book by Dr Tina Rae, a prolific author and education and child psychologist, is an accessible resource for adults supporting refugee children and young people. Employing vibrant design and images, the book draws on the skills and knowledge of a wide range of practitioners, trainers and theorists with well-established credentials in the area of supporting children and young people who have experienced trauma.

With an introduction and seven chapters, the book offers a range of information and resources:

Introduction: This sets the current context of post-Covid pandemic and resulting collective trauma, with worrying spikes in the mental health needs of children and young people, an overwhelmed support-services sector and the arrival of thousands of refugee children and young people in the UK. Information is presented about the traumatic impact of war and the impact of exposure to reporting of war in all sorts of media.

Chapter 1: This presents the importance of talking about war with those who have experienced it. It offers approaches for practitioners and additional tips for practice.

Chapter 2: This is focused on understanding trauma and the impact it can have. It also addresses some of the key worries practitioners have about their own skills and capacity to support children and young people who have experience of trauma.

Chapter 3: This presents Tina Rae's Refugee Support Plan for educational settings, where the adult is the nurturer and the school is a central community to support post-traumatic growth. This includes proposals for a range of approaches and offers resources to support the work.

Chapter 4: This focuses on the need for adults to ensure their own wellbeing, with discussion of vicarious trauma and approaches to self-care.

Chapter 5: This focuses on building relationships with refugee parents. A range of 'top tips' are provided for practitioners.

Chapter 6: This offers an extensive range of handouts and activities to use with children and young people.

Chapter 7: This offers handouts and resources to support carers and professionals in their work. A helpful list of organisations and websites are also included.

At a time where the barriers for those who are displaced from their countries are becoming more acute and the needs of learners in this context are

becoming more evident to all those involved in education, this book offers a strong combination of discussion about the needs of refugee learners. It is firmly rooted within a theoretical perspective and offers practical discussion and resources to support practitioners.

Written from extensive experience and specialist study this book emanates from the heart. It helps us to remember the fundamental importance of connection and provides enabling tools to adults to positively support children exposed to the trauma of war.

In Tina Rae's own words, this book enables all adults to "develop our own skills and knowledge so we can effectively provide refugee children with a safe space, opportunities for self-regulation and support to process some of their losses in a nurturing relationship" (p.34).

About nurtureuk

nurtureuk is the national charity dedicated to using nurturing approaches to improve children and young people's life chances. We give education professionals the proven tools, training and support they need to implement nurture in schools and remove barriers to learning. We also work with policy makers to make nurture a cornerstone of education in the UK.

Nurture gets to the heart of a child's challenges and supports children and young people to build connections and resilience. It is a highly effective way of supporting improved behaviour and increased attendance in schools, leading to better attainment and reduced exclusions.

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A registered charity in England and Wales (charity number: 1115972) and Scotland (charity number: SC042703).