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

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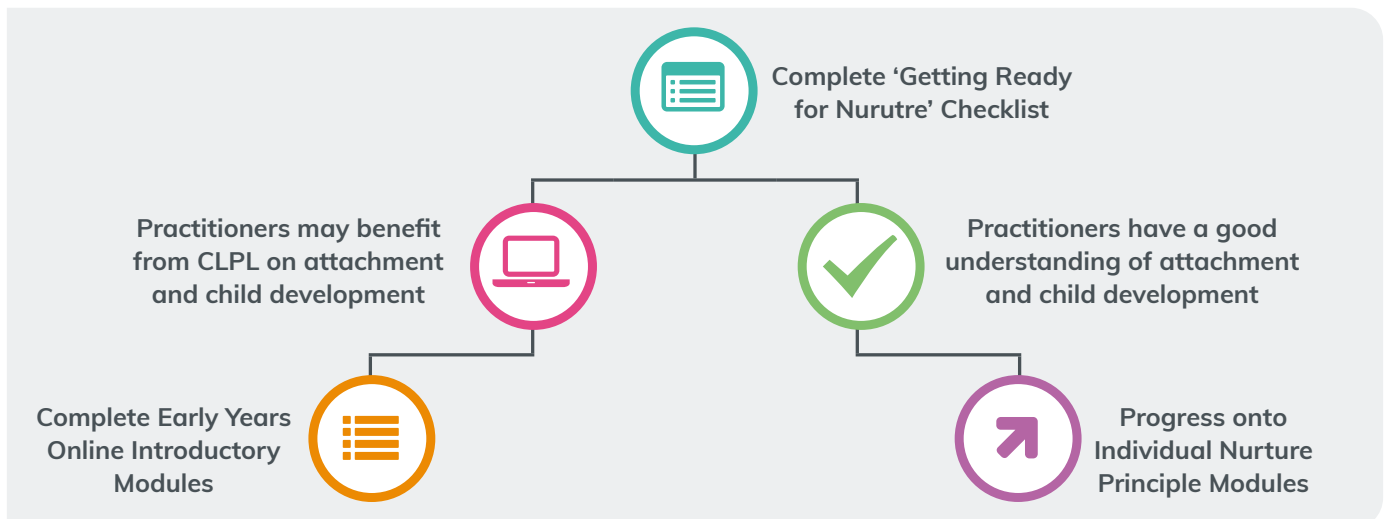
as a Whole-School Approach' (Educational Scotland and Glasgow City Council, 2017). It also incorporates scaling questions to assess practitioners' knowledge and confidence in attachment, nurture, child development and early language development; foundational knowledge required before accessing more in-depth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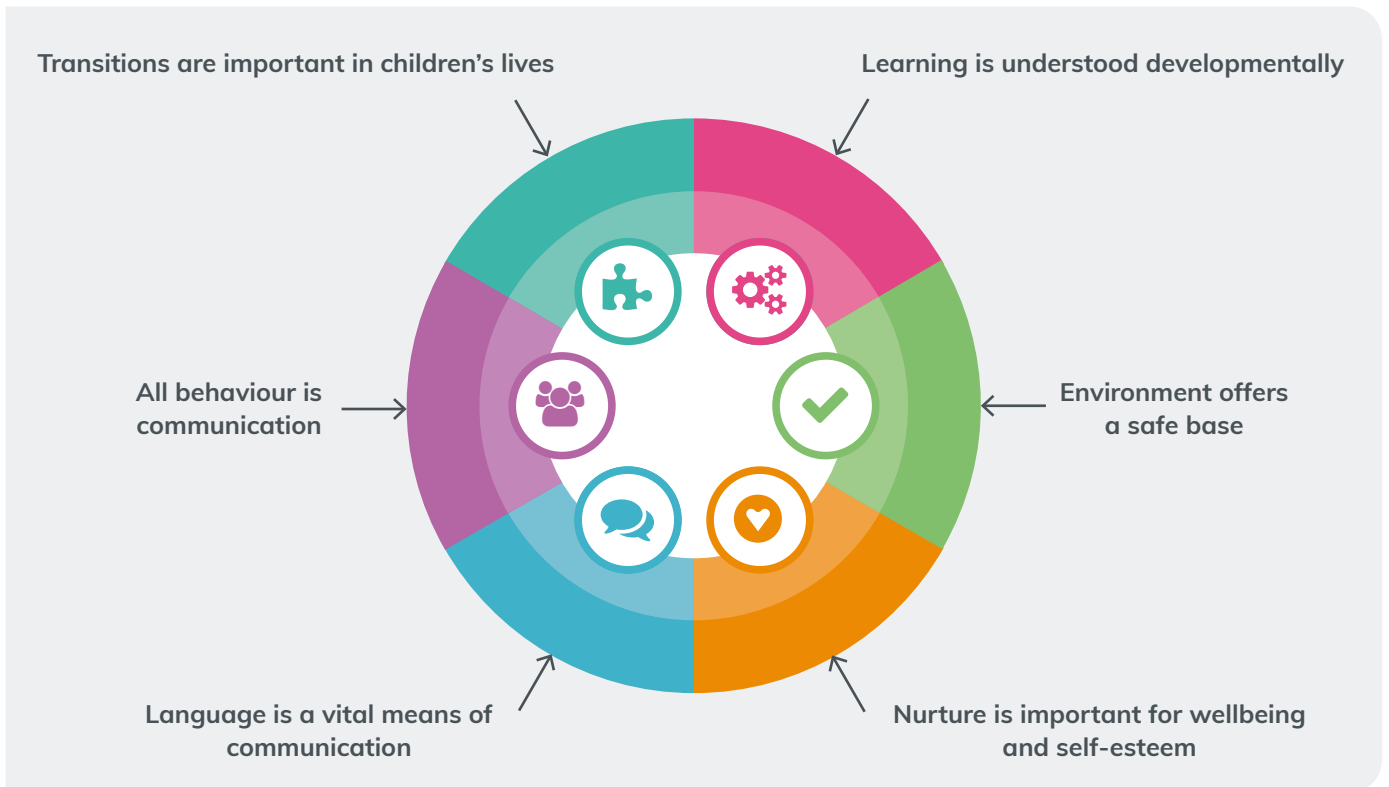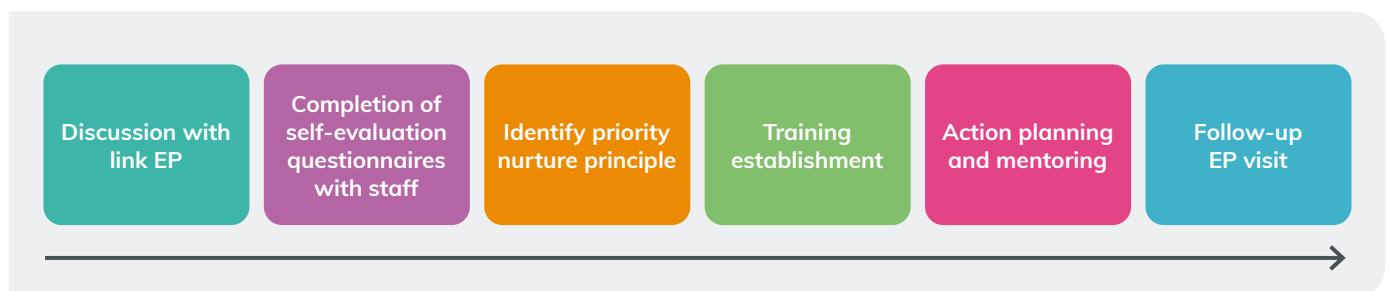


Transitions are important in children's lives

Learning is understood developmentally

All behaviour is communication

Environment offers a safe base

Language is a vital means of communication

Nurture is important for wellbeing and self-esteem

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



Discussion with link EP | Completion of self-evaluation questionnaires with staff | Identify priority nurture principle | Training establishment | Action planning and mentoring | Follow-up EP visit

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