PRIMARY SCHOOL NURTURE GROUP

In place for 10+ years

CASE STUDY

The following case study of a Lancashire school was written and researched by researchers from Lancaster University – Jo Warin and Rebecca Hibbin in researching the impact of Nurture Groups in local Primary Schools.

Age of children – KS1 (5-7 yrs old)

8-12 children in unit at any point in time.

Principles that can be presented as drivers of nurture-in practice as a psychosocial intervention for vulnerable children are:

- commitment to the creation and maintenance of ongoing relationships;
- an understanding of behaviour as communication which naturally leads to less punitive, more restorative, forms of behaviour management;
- a commitment to the support and training of the staff who have to handle, on a daily basis, complex and challenging social and emotional relationships with vulnerable children.

"I think as well it's when they leave nurture it's that link back to nurture, quite a lot of children come back to you don't they? Whether it's at lunchtime or anytime they can drop in." SENCO

Relationships are viewed as being crucial and children were observed to be attached to the nurture practitioners. Children were able to build on the NG attachments and then form good relationships with other adults throughout school. In addition to their relationships with staff, children also had strong attachments to the physical location of the nurture room:

The rooms aligns with nurture group principles by creating a family type environment with comfortable relaxing spaces, sofas and easy chairs, a dining table area for shared eating, and a kitchen.

Alternative/ complimentary services were available to support children across the school and in the Nurture Group eg a dedicated Art Therapist, access to counselling, mentoring, a personalised curriculum for NG children and a parent support worker.

Nurture/ specialist approaches are integrated throughout the whole school not just the Nurture Group, ensuring effective reintegration from the Nurture setting through the use of shared pedagogical devices such as the TEACHH approach (an autism-based approach designed to organise the physical environment, develop schedules and work systems, make expectations clear and explicit, and use visual materials).

This requires a commitment to whole school training and support from Senior Leadership. The SLT were committed to ensuring that there was a balance between children with 'externalising' and 'internalising' behaviours.

> **"...we had some training when we first started...worked with the whole school on being a nurturing school so that we could get those nurturing principles in the classroom, because the children are only in the nurture group in the morning and then they go back to class in the afternoon. So there has to be that same approach and an understanding of what they've been doing in the morning, in the classroom..." Head**

Relatedly, the Head suggested that the quieter more internalised children tended to be easily missed when the focus of staff attention was on the behaviour of children who presented the greatest disruptive challenges in school. There was also an awareness of the gender composition of NG groups. Such pitfalls were avoided through the rigorous use of admission panels that reviewed progress , reintegration readiness and the induction of new pupils.

Very good relationships between NG staff and senior leadership were evident with staff feeling supported in their roles within the NG "We go to peer support meetings with other mentors and staff, and the amount of times we go in and share practice...and the amount of times you hear the phrase 'my Head won't go for that'. It's unbelievable...I think some schools are paying lip service" Nurture Teacher.

Timetabling – the children were in the Nurture Group setting every morning for an average period of two terms, returning to their mainstream class each afternoon. This prioritised nurture whilst also incorporating academic aims at a much slower pace so that they had their "foot on the accelerator the whole time" Head

> **"...it's split 50 50 - we never let them regress...so if something needs to be put in place for their individual academic targets - they have an IEP through the Pupil Passport system - we will spend time on those targets, and include those targets in the continuous provision as well as activities guided by an adult" Nurture Teacher**

CHILDREN IN THE NURTURE GROUP SAY:

Child A - "I like the NG because everyone is kind to me...it's different to my class because there's not many people in here."

Child B - "I used to feel angry before I went [to the NG].....it's helped me not to feel angry anymore."

The Boxall Profile (Boxall and Bennathan, 2000) was used to measure and track children's progress, indicating the success of interventions and the child's readiness to be considered for reintegration, at which point the Reintegration readiness tool was used to track progress of reintegration. Child A had been in Nurture provision for 14 months, their scores had improved by 60 points on the Boxall assessment and was almost completely reintegrated into mainstream classroom again. Child B had been in NG setting for 9 months had made 21 points progress and was preparing for reintegration.
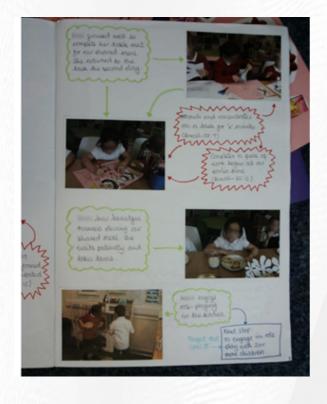
The main findings in relation to parents highlight the importance of involving parents in the process of nurture; the importance of cooperation and consent, and the importance of forming good communicative relationships between home and school. The issue of parental consent for NG placement was central to this:

"I wouldn't put the children in [without consent] because you need that co-operation, it isn't going to work if you don't have it...what you're doing is fighting against not only the problems that exist and are real and huge and entrenched but you're also inviting a family that doesn't want you to be doing it so every time the child goes home with the story of what they've been doing, they're going to complain about it. They're going to find something that they don't like." Head

Bringing parents on board was aligned with a multi-targeted approach where other practitioners, such as the family support mentors or counsellor, who provided parents with someone else they could talk to and confide in who was seen as being outside the formal authority of the school. Nurture was viewed as the 'ice breaker' that would then funnel parents into various levels of pastoral support including multiple groups such as cookery skills, academic skills, child development, a parent managed support group and an adult college group as examples of different routes parents could take within school.

Evidence to demonstrate progress against Boxall targets from a Nurture Group child.

Staggered transitions whereby children were slowly phased back into the classroom context was seen as being ideal :

"...[the children] view it as I'm not part of the [NG] anymore, but because we do it so slowly – Child A is added to the mentoring list, and still comes back to that room for mentoring sessions, still with those familiar adults, still following those same principles for as long as she needs it. So for children there isn't actually a final - gone." Nurture Teacher

There was a particularly considered approach to reintegration, whereby the end of nurture provision was something that was very carefully thought about for each child: "...particularly with Child A at the moment, she's had the slowest resettlement ever, in all the years we've been doing... and we're still supporting her, but we've got to the stage where 'you go, you've got to go'. Because every time we got to a positive place, something would happen at home and we were right back again. And it's how long can you keep doing that for...but we hold onto them until they're absolutely ready, if there's a grey area we hold back..." Nurture Teacher.