

Nurture groups for primary schools



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NURTURE GROUP REPORT

Background to the Boxall Profile Nurture Group

Nurture Groups were originally devised in the 1970's by Margaret Boxall in response to high levels of distress and upheaval in primary schools (Bennathan & Boxall, 1997). It was at a time of unmanageable levels of referrals to special schools for children who were seen as having social, educational and behavioural difficulties, together with a high level of staff turnover in mainstream schools. Nurture Groups were introduced as an alternative way of seeing how a child's behaviour may be getting in the way of their social and behavioural needs, which was supplementary to their educational requirements

The Ethos of a Nurture Group

A Nurture Group is described by The Nurture Group Network (2013) as being a group of around six to ten children, within a mainstream educational environment, which is staffed by two or more supportive adults. The aim is to offer a short term, dedicated intervention, in a setting which is dedicated to the Nurture Group and is considered by the children to be a safe place, to address the issues arising from social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties faced by the children. There are six main principles of a Nurture Group, (Boxall, 2002) which are:

- Children's learning is understood developmentally.
- The classroom offers a safe base.

- Nurture is important for the development of self-esteem.
- Language is understood as a vital means of communication.
- All behaviour is communication.
- Transitions are significant in the lives of children.

The Aim of a Nurture Group

The underlying principle of a Nurture Group is that every child should be able to participate with education and no child is left behind. With the aim that each and every disadvantaged or disengaged child is able to access a nurturing intervention programme, with the goal of arming them with the ability, spirit and resilience they need to make the most of their time spent in school. Boxall stated that the children should feel safe and cared for whilst in the Nurture Group. In return the children should follow a few simple rules of

- Saying “ please” and “ thank you”
- Making friends
- Having fun
- Taking turns with toys
- Tidying up when play is finished

How a Nurture Group differs from a Classroom

The designated space differs from that of a conventional classroom setting, in that it is designed with nurture in mind; with the key areas including a sofa and a cooking area. Boxall deemed that cooking, and snacks, were a fundamental element of Nurture Groups and they offer an opportunity for the children to develop social learning skills, whilst being supported and supervised by adults. Areas need not be confined to the inside; gardening

and animal petting areas have been found to be beneficial to children with development needs, (The Nurture Group Network, 2013) although it is acknowledged that financial restraints and space available, may prohibit such activities.

The Effectiveness of a Nurture Group

Research has shown that Nurture Groups have a positive effect on the development of children in many different areas (Seth-Smith, Levi, Fonagy, & Jaffey, 2010). Children who attend Nurture Groups, as evidenced by research, significantly improve in areas of social and emotional development (Sanders, 2007). Children who had previously attended Nurture Groups reported that they had made friends within the group, which could suggest that they were being provided with support and opportunities to develop friendships. The Nurture Group Network (2013) reported on the results of a Nurture Group which was implemented in a primary school of children with social, emotional and behaviour difficulties which exceeded the national average; with 75% of the children coming from ethnic minority backgrounds, and with English as their second language. The results were evidenced through the children being reintegrated into maintain classrooms with improved learning skills; improved behaviour and social skills; better self-esteem, confidence and self-worth; improved attendance; positive change to social and emotional functioning at home; and positive feedback received from the parents via a self-reporting questionnaire.

There are now more than 1000 Nurture Groups in the UK (Colley, 2009) and not restricted to primary schools, but have in recent years been successfully implemented in secondary schools also (Colley, 2009)

Nurture Group and the Mainstream School

Research (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007) has shown that Nurture Groups have significantly added to the beneficial and constructive work which is carried out within mainstream schools when working with pupils who have been identified as having social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Cooper & Whitebread (2007) found that even where the schools which had Nurture Groups on site, which identified pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties did not attend, they profited from the non-Nurture Group staffs' supportive manner, which had grown out of their connection and association with the Nurture Group staff. This could suggest that there are palpable benefits to pupils who attend Nurture Groups, who then interact with mainstream staff by way of an improved performance within the mainstream school by the pupils. A study by Connor (2003) found that in the long term, pupil improvement is maintained. However, there is evidence that pupils who have benefited from Nurture Groups may require additional support which reflects the Nurture Group principles, which are not easily duplicated in a mainstream classroom (O'Connor & Colwell, 2002). It is therefore possible that former Nurture Group pupils would benefit from smaller class sizes with more individual attention from staff, when going forward with their educational needs.

A report by OFSTED recommended that schools and local education authorities should take into account the benefits and value of well-run Nurture Groups when considering their policies and guidance in relation to children with identified social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. (OFSTED, 2011).

After the Nurture Group

OFSTED (2011) found that when the schools were asked to provide case studies of pupils who had been in the Nurture Group during the previous academic year, the information provided typically painted an optimistic picture. It also revealed that the children who had left the Nurture Group and carried on into mainstream education demonstrated the encouraging influence that the Nurture Group had had upon them in their attitudes and interactions with other pupils and staff, which bodes well for the consequences and futures of numerous children.

Summary

Research appears to show that Nurture Groups, when well implemented and led, have a positive impact on children with identified needs, which would appear to have long-lasting effects once the child leaves the Nurture Group with the social, emotional and behavioural tools it requires to integrate within mainstream schooling

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