

Title

Developing a whole-school nurturing approach in a West Dunbartonshire secondary school.

What did we ask? (Research Questions)

Will introducing all staff to nurture principles improve whole school ethos where staff use nurture principles as a shared framework for understanding social and emotional needs and challenging behaviour?

Following attending nurture principles training, will there be evidence of the implementation of nurture principles in the classroom e.g. awareness of body language, modelling of positive relationships?

Will introducing a nurturing approach whole-school lead to more young people being included in mainstream school throughout their secondary education?

What is the evidence base? (link to your definition of the poverty gap)

The impact of the research evidencing successful outcomes of nurture groups, including increases in academic attainment and improvements in emotional and behavioural functioning (Reynolds et al., 2009), has led to an increase in popularity of nurture groups across Scotland. Additionally, a recent review recommended nurture groups as an intervention to reduce the impact of poverty on educational achievement (Estyn, 2013). There is also some evidence to suggest that embedding the principles of nurture across the whole-school environment can lead to improved school ethos and more effective teaching and learning for all children, including the most deprived (Lucas, 1999). Nurture UK (2018) suggest that schools should take a graduated approach to nurture where it is implemented as both a targeted and whole-school approach. They suggest that this will allow nurturing values to permeate across all school levels so that everyone's wellbeing is taken into account - pupils, staff and leadership.

Nurture is an important intervention to consider in the local authority as 26% of children are growing up in poverty. Within the West Dunbartonshire context this means that a high percentage of children are living in SIMD 1 and 2. Life expectancy rates are statistically significantly worse than the Scottish average, 20.8% of the working-age population derive some or all of their income from benefits and higher levels of crime and offenses are reported than the national average. At age 16 there is a 16% gap in attainment levels between pupils most affected by poverty and their classmates.

As part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge in West Dunbartonshire, one secondary school has focused on developing a nurturing approach whole-school with the aim of putting the health and wellbeing of the young people at the forefront of their project. A nurture group was previously established in the school to respond to students who have struggled with the transition to secondary school and subsequently did not settle into their new learning environment. It was recognised that adopting a whole school nurture approach would both benefit the children receiving targeted support through these nurture groups, and meet the needs of the wider population of the school by promoting supportive relationships between staff and young people. It is hoped that by adopting nurturing principles throughout the school, children will receive consistent responses from staff, and staff will have a shared framework around which to build relationships.

What did we do?

A seven module training programme was devised based on materials obtained during training from Education Scotland, 'Applying Nurture as a Whole School Approach'. These materials were adapted to suit the West Dunbartonshire context and the target school. The programme consisted of one introductory session, and the subsequent delivery of one module per week per school with each module being based on a nurture principle. The programme consisted of the following modules:

1. An introduction to attachment and nurture
2. Children's learning is understood developmentally
3. The classroom offers a safe base
4. Nurture is important for the development of wellbeing
5. Language is understood as a vital means of communication
6. All behaviour is communication
7. Transitions are significant in the lives of children and young people

The training ran from September 2017 until June 2018. Staff were required to attend an introductory session before attending the other modules, which could be completed in any order. One module was delivered every week and the school released around 10 members of staff to attend each module. In session 2017-18:

- 36 nurture principles training sessions were delivered
- 63 members of staff from the school attended at least one training session; including teachers, learning assistants, clerical staff, pupil and family support workers and Senior Management Team (SMT).

- 28 members of staff completed all nurture training modules (representing 19% of the whole school staff).

Several methods of quantitative and qualitative data collection were used to evaluate the nurture principles training. This included all participants completing the 'Teacher and Early Years Practitioner Staff Questionnaire' before and after attending the training, an interview conducted with a school DHT and a focus group with young people.

What have we found?

Quantitative Results

Pre- and post-training Teacher and Early Years Practitioner Staff Questionnaires' were available for 13 participants who attended all of the modules.

This first section consisted of 5 questions that considered how well staff felt they understood nurture and its application. Repeated measures t-tests were carried out on the average of participants' scores on these 5 questions before and after the training. They were significantly different before ($M= 3.2, SD= 1$) and after ($M= 5.2, SD= .05$) training; $t(12)=-6.86, p<0.01$.

Section two of the questionnaire asked participants to read and answer 30 statements. Each statement is an element of practice linked to one of the 6 nurture principles and participants were asked how often the statement applies to their practice. Repeated measures t-tests were carried out on the pre- and post- training total scores across the 30 statements for this section. There was a significant increase in total nurture principles scores when comparing pre-training ($M=77.1, SD=24.6$) to post-training ($M=94.9, SD=25.9$) scores; $t(12)=-2.67, p<0.05$.

An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was carried out to investigate the differences between the results according to Nurture Principle and time point (pre- or post-intervention). The ANOVA indicated that there was no interaction between time and Nurture Principle, suggesting that gains were made equally across all principles. Figure 1 below displays the pre and post scores for each nurture principle.

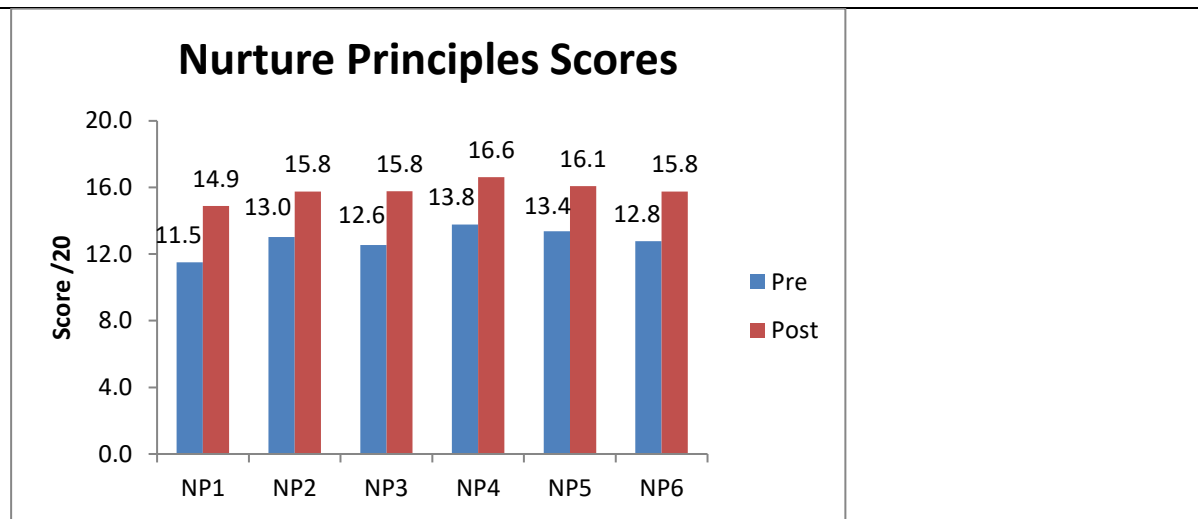


Figure 1: Mean pre and post training score for each nurture principle

Qualitative Results

In section one of the Teacher and Early Years Practitioner Staff Questionnaire, staff were asked 5 qualitative questions that examined their knowledge of nurture and its application. Pre and post-training answers were available for 13 attendees who completed the full nurture training programme. A thematic analysis was conducted on similarities and differences between participant's answers pre and post training were highlighted. A number of differences were highlighted that suggested a change in practice of staff, two of examples of these differences have been outlined below:

- Following the nurture training staff more frequently mentioned thinking about learning developmentally and based on an individual child's needs when discussing specific examples that they felt demonstrated their understanding of nurture in daily interactions. One staff member exemplified this approach to understanding each pupil's needs: *"I now try and think more before reacting to challenging behaviour. I question what is going on and what the young person might be experiencing."*
- Staff mentioned more frequently in post questionnaires that they try to greet the children by name, and that they take a "firm but fair" approach.

An interview with a Depute Head Teacher was also conducted. This interview was recorded and transcribed and a thematic analysis was carried out and four main themes were identified: what is going well, what impact has the training had on school staff, what impact has the training had on young people and what are the next steps. Results suggest that staff are more able to see behaviour from a child's perspective and are better able to manage low-level behaviour difficulties in the school. There has also been a reduction in exclusion figures and it was noted that in the last year 29 children have used the pupil

support base compared to 15-20 children per week using the room previously. Additionally, from August 2017 until Easter 2018, only one child had been taken to an education panel looking for alternative provision; previously around one child would be taken to each monthly panel.

Two focus groups also took place with pupils. The first focus group consisted of 4 pupils in S1 and S2 who have attended the nurture group. The second focus group consisted of 10 pupils in S1 and S2 who have been identified as at-risk of underachieving in secondary school. These focus groups were recorded and transcribed, thematic analysis was carried out and three main themes were identified: 'what's important to young people in a nurturing school', 'what is the school like now' and 'what could be better'. It is clear from young people that they feel supported, valued and safe in some of their classes. However, there are still future areas for development in embedding nurture across the school and the principles haven't yet permeated to every classroom, area of the school and interaction that children have with staff and each other.

In summary, it is clear from quantitative data that the training has had an impact on both participants' knowledge of a nurturing approach and their ability to implement this in their practice. This finding is supported by qualitative findings which suggest that there has been a change in school ethos as staff have a better understanding of pupils' needs and are better able to manage challenging behaviour within their classroom.

What do we plan to do next?

A number of next steps have been agreed with the school which include:

- Continuing to deliver nurture training until all staff have attended the seven modules
- Re-connector sessions to allow collegiate discussion and sharing of classroom practice to be planned for staff who have completed all seven modules
- Nurture principles will be built into SMT classroom observations and leadership for learning visits by Authority staff so that there is a clearer picture of how nurture principles are being embedded in classroom practice. This will allow triangulation with data gathered by the project staff.
- Repeating focus groups with young people to evaluate whether their views of the school learning environment change over time.
- Monitoring over time whether more children are able to remain in the mainstream setting through reviewing exclusion data and the number of children

that are brought to an education panel seeking an alternative placement. Analysis of school data by SMT staff so far is suggestive that these numbers have reduced, as outlined above. However it will be important to look into this in more detail and consider pre and post figures of a wider number of measures such as attendance figures and numbers of children brought to JAT meetings.

- Ongoing meetings to discuss the project will take place with the Principal Educational Psychologist who will continue to report progress and findings to the Senior Education Officer overseeing the project. The EP will also continue to provide up-to-date feedback in team meetings to other EPs in the team about the project.

References

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For further information contact:

Alison Fotheringham, Educational Psychologist

Alison.Fotheringham@west-dunbarton.gov.uk