Nurture Corners in Nurseries
Exploring Perspectives

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• Acknowledgments
Nurture Principles

- opportunities are offered in response to children’s developmental progress rather than milestones or attainment levels associated with chronological age
- consistent routines, expectations and arrangements minimise anxiety and include experiences that relate to both domestic and educational settings.
- focus is on shared activities and valuing individuals, responding to and praising all achievements.
- children helped to identify and describe their feelings in words rather than actions and to learn to communicate with others.
- adults respond to children’s behaviour as an expression of their social and emotional condition.
- moving between home and the educational setting and different contexts in that setting is carefully managed for children in the nurture group.

- A separate room or corner for the nurture group
- Small group size
- One or two trained adults
- Integration of time spent in the nurture group and the main playroom or classroom
- Children’s needs and targets are identified by the Boxall Profile.
Study Aims

• The aim of this study was to explore the ways in which parents/carers and practitioners experienced the nurture approach developed in preschool settings in Glasgow and their perspectives on the impact that this provision has had on the development and wellbeing of young children and family engagement in learning.

• 4 clusters of objectives – to explore:
  – Staff perspectives
  – Parent/carer perspectives
  – Collaborations with other sectors
  – Innovative practices

• 5 work packages – including exploration of characteristic practices
Study Methods

• **Design**
  – Purposive sample
  – Rich situated data
  – Systematic observations
  – Semi-structured interviews & focus groups
  – Thematic content analysis
  – Illustrative examples

• **Settings & Participants**
  – 6 nursery settings
  – Nurture practitioner, playroom practitioner & manager at each setting
  – 11 parents
  – 4 health visitors
  – 3 third sector staff
Research Findings

People & Spaces
Typically 4 children in the group, 3-5 year olds
2 hours in nurture, 3 or 4 times per week
1 trained practitioners at 5 nurseries – 2 trained at one nursery
Separate room in 5 settings, partitioned space in one
Space influences practices
Some resources mirror main playroom, some domestic furniture
Richness of resources varied

Routines and Activities
Children collected from main playroom and returned there
Typical playroom phases: free play, adult-directed activity, snack, story, tidy-up
Consistent routines and patterns of activity
10-20 minutes adult-directed
10-30 minutes free play

• 2.37 pm J is constructing the cars and caravan from parts lying in a basket in the ‘living room’ area. Nurture practitioner offers to help. J puts people in garage – says is going to be a flood. Nurture practitioner and J talk about weather, shoes, socks and football (practitioner using opportunity to extend J’s language use).

• 2.45 pm J and nurture practitioner discuss what they can see out of the window then look at expressions on faces of puppets. As move to group work table J indicates interest in the hospital play and begins to gather equipment.

• 10.48 am All children at table with NP who introduces the picture dominoes game. NP rehearses the instructions stressing ‘you have to wait for your turn’. J starts the game. C fiddles with his cards – is reminded to put them so can see them all. J needs lots of prompting from NP to find a match. NP says which pictures are needed for each child’s turn. S and M find their matching cards quickly. J needs help. C sometimes finds his card. At end M asks to play it again – NP says will play again tomorrow.
Research Findings

• *Talk and interactions*
  – Practitioners use language to explain, narrate, manage, praise, discipline, model, teach
  – Children asked questions, made requests, described their actions, labelled their feelings, defended their position
  – No raised voices – adults repeat instructions calmly

• *Innovation in practices*
  – Focus on fidelity not innovation
  – Creative use of premises & staff resource
  – Enhanced ways of engaging with parents
  – Some activities & resources specific to nurture groups
  – Some innovation in age range participating
Practitioner and Manager Perspectives

• Nurture experience transformational for children
• Benefits for all children and staff
• Nurture approach is coherent with nursery ethos and focuses all on nurturing practices
• Value: small group size; secure, calm space; consistent routines; individualised targets; warm interactions
• Needs ‘the right’ practitioner and benefits from having two practitioners involved in nurture corner
Staff said . . .

- You can see the difference – the evidence is there. . . [You should] have no doubt that it will make a difference, once you have tried [a nurture corner] you will never go back. (Head, Jumping Jacks Nursery)
- The nurture corner is an asset in every way – I love that it is making a difference for the children – seeing that wee person growing. (Nurture practitioner, Killy Nursery)
- C has had a total turn around. She was a selective mute, did not talk in the playroom and would only whisper to her friend. Now she is very talkative and can even be bossy and a bit loud. (Nurture practitioner, Puppets Nursery)
- They go into nurture and come out different children. (Practitioner, Donald Nursery)
Perspectives of Parents

• Parents saw positive impact of nurture corner experience on their child
  – Increased confidence
  – Enhanced communication and social skills
  – Child calmer at home
  – More ready for transition to primary

• Parents rapidly overcame any initial anxieties

• Parents
  – feel welcome and value advice given
  – appreciate special activity events for parents and children

• Want all nurseries to have nurture provision and 2 trained practitioners at each setting
Parents said . . .

• I was a bit iffy as he’s my first, but he has come on leaps and bounds since starting. The staff have noticed a big difference in him which is great. (Parent E)
• It’s a wee safety net and it’s structured as well, so they know when it is snack time, when it’s time to go outside and play. . . It helps them with their confidence, and that is the most important thing. It has to be consistent, has to be the same time, every day of the week. It’s been very well thought out, the nurture room. (Parent F)
• I’ve noticed a big change in his behaviour. He was easily led by other children and that but in the [nurture] room they tell him not to follow others. He is sharing a lot more with his sister and cousins. He’s a lot calmer. (Parent A)
• I’ve been given good advice about behaviour – she can be hyper and fidget – and how to handle it. They always try to help. They’re really supportive here. (Parent J)
• I didn’t think he was ready but he is in P1 and he’s doing well. If it wasn’t for the [nurture corner] he wouldn’t have been ready. It made all the difference. (Parent D)
Perspectives of Other Professionals

- **Health Visitors**
  - Limited contact with nurture provision and practices
  - Could see potential benefits of nurture corner experiences for children and parents
  - Observations in nurture corner could be useful contribution to joint assessments

- **Third Sector**
  - Limited contact with nurture provision and practices
  - They focused on skills of parents but suggested improving children’s communication and interactions with others could enhance engagement with parents
  - Saw potential of practitioners modelling interaction with children
Other professionals said . . .

• The nurture [practitioner] might contact me about a family I visit a lot and they want to share information with me about them, I might contact the nurture group about a child I know is having difficulties and might suggest the nurture group would be good for them. (Health Visitor)

• It helps parents to understand the importance of talking to their children and really engage in child led play, which a lot of parents don’t understand as ‘parenting’. (Health Visitor)

• [With nurture because it is modeling it is all about warmth, it’s unconditional. If something has gone wrong at home staff ask, ‘Okay, that’s happened, now how are we going to deal with this?’ (Third sector respondent)

• The worker could help continue the nurture group at home – with confidence building, developing skills, showing parents how to continue it at home. (Third sector respondent)
Returning to the Research Objectives

• Enthusiastic support for impact of nurture approach on children’s behaviour from parents, practitioners and managers
• Children – helped to overcome language and communication difficulties, develop social skills, begin to self-regulate behaviour and expression of emotion
• Opportunities to engage with parents limited
• Some parents helped to have more positive relationship with their child
• Other professionals supportive of nurture corners but not actively engaged in approach
• Creative use of resources to provide nurture corners but little development of distinct ‘nurture pedagogy’
Points for Discussion

• Impact is on dispositions rather than cognitive attainments
• Influence on family engagement in learning appears limited
• Focus on fidelity and lack of opportunity to articulate practice results in little development of nurture in nursery pedagogic practices – could build on relationship building practices, use of talk as a pedagogic practice and assessment approaches
Points for Discussion

• Tensions
  – Extending nurture practices to all children, possible or putting playroom in deficit
  – Capacity to engage with parents in tension with focus on children and consistent experiences
  – Risk of polarising thinking on development, holistic perspective or focus on health and wellbeing
  – Attention to gaps in development can result in ‘labelling’ rather than attention to bridging the learning culture gaps
Our Recommendations

• Articulate, develop and share nurture corner pedagogic practices
• Review methods for recording targets and evidence of progress
• Consider what resources and activities are appropriate in nurture corners
• Review expectations about engagement with parents and carers and develop partnership with other agencies.
• Consider what practices and lessons from nurture corners practices can be extended to three-to-five year olds.
• Extend the number of practitioners with accredited nurture training to ensure absence cover, minimise disruption due to staff turnover and increase capacity to support interventions with parents.
• Include health visitors and third sector staff working with nursery settings in training in the principles and practice of nurture.
• Facilitate more collaborative working practices between staff in nurseries and health visitors.