# Notes on Nurture from an Aberdeenshire Event with Helen Stollery

## Attachment theory and neuroscience

For more information please refer to the Nurture Group Network

* The importance of the connection between learning and early development is understood throughout education
* Children requiring additional input to nurture need a carefully routine day where there is a balance of learning and teaching, affection and structure within a home-like atmosphere

Nurture principles are those of:

* Understanding
* Safety
* Development of wellbeing
* Language
* Behaviour is a form of communication
* Importance of transition

Teachers need to focus on social skills and concentration.

Children need a safe base to which they return for emotional sustenance. The quality of response makes the difference. Generally the children don’t have the language skills to relate feelings and adults need to facilitate communication. Transitions require the teaching of strategies to cope as otherwise the child perceives loss and unpredictability. A significant number of children requiring nurturing approaches have mental health problems.

Three speakers at the Nurture Group Network: Professor Thomas McKay, Dr Souzu and Dr Les Moscardini – please use Internet search for more information.

## Secure attachment

Children have the propensity to make strong emotional bonds, but self-regulation is crucial to the ability to learn and this is developed from emotional stability. In order to self-regulate children must be able to reduce their fear, attune to others and have self-understanding and empathy for others together with moral reasoning.

Insecurely attached children require:

* Time
* Predictable routines
* Adults understanding
* Clear boundaries
* Specific attachment figures
* Challenge to negative internal models

Behaviours of insecurely attached children may be avoidant, ambivalent and/or disorganised. Disorganised suggests fear (for example a freeze on reunion with an adult when he/she re-enters the room after departure), ambivalent often presents as attention demanding – the child won’t allow the person to ignore them.

**Reference: Why love matters** by Sue Gerhardt. This book details how affection shapes a baby’s brain.

The internal working model: an insecurely attached child has an internal model of themselves as worthless and sets out to prove this as correct. They provoke a hostile reaction to reinforce feelings of self-doubt and insecurity. The safe base is this default position.

Empathy is a higher order thinking skill – the top of Maslov’s triangle

Risk factors

Protective factors

If balance is not achieved then children won’t succeed.

## Risk factors

**Environmental / family**

* Single parent / teenage mother
* Psychiatric disorder, especially depression
* Poor parenting / supervision
* Discipline (harsh or inconsistent)
* Family conflict
* Criminal activity
* Parental attitudes (condoning anti-social behaviour / criminal behaviour)
* Low income, poor housing, large family size
* Bereavement

**School**

* Poor pre-school learning experience
* Low achievement beginning in primary school
* Peer group- aggressive behaviour including bullying
* Lack of commitment to school, including truancy
* School disorganisation

To engage with school requires the ability to take risks and have resilience.

Dr John Hattie (Melbourne University) described the child/teacher interaction as very important.

Seth Smith et al 2010 described how peers make use of their observations of the teacher/child interactions to inform their own interactions with the same child.

**Boxall Profile Assessment Tool**: view the world through the child’s eyes! Research Marjorie Boxall for further information.

## Nurturing environment

A nurturing environment is defined by the following:

* Positive relationships
* Rich in sensory stimuli
* Fosters achievement and celebrates success
* Meets needs
* Is safe and secure
* Is respectful
* Promotes self-esteem
* Empowers to support decision making
* Is free from negative stressors

Closing the attainment gap needs to start with bridging the relationship gap

## Nurture group

The following are typical of a nurture group (please note this does not need to meet in a specific nurture room)

* Small
* Children attend regularly and for a substantial part of the day
* There is a focus on emotional and social development
* The children return to their own class full-time in 2-4 terms
* The group is staffed by two adults
* Children are included in their mainstream classes and link with the class for appropriate activities

## Nurturing approaches

Nurturing approaches may be developed in all classrooms but for some specific activities use of a life skills area would be appropriate. The area will contain a dining area, kitchen, living and work space. The areas may be different between primary and secondary, but have the following 6 principles which are interconnected by not hierarchical.

1. Approaches in class need to match the development level of the child and social /emotional levels develop at different rates
2. Targets need to be set and understood with the child and evaluated together. Children can then develop and inform their own next steps
3. Safe base: calm, consistent adults provide an organised structure and routines and a sense of community and belonging within the class group. The safe base may be a classroom, playground, office, entrance, dining room or other. Extend thoughts to parents and staff and discuss their ‘safe bases’ – what are the quality of relationships?
4. Presenting a curriculum that is rich in experiences e.g. outdoors. Consider the use of language and don’t make assumptions. Consider body language, pragmatics (use of language) – if a child doesn’t have the works they use other behaviours such as pushing.
5. Understand the language of emotions and development of empathy. Thoughts and feelings influence behaviours – adults need to dig down to find the underlying causes and impairments.
6. Transition points – need to be supported, information shared and acknowledge that smaller transitions can be significant for some youngsters

## Map nurture principles against wellbeing indicators

Nurturing schools consider the following:

* Pupils as individuals as well as part of a group
* Values – the quality of personal relationships matter
* Rules and routines are explained with reasons
* Systems are in place to ensure that the child’s voice is heard
* Consistency is crucial
* Modelling is carried out by staff to demonstrate positive relationships
* Solution focused approaches are employed
* A secure environment is provided
* The curriculum takes account of emotional wellbeing

## Resources to use:

* Panicosaurus
* Disappointment dragon
* Read beast
* Time to talk
* Starving the anxiety gremlin
* Transporters
* Perfect skills
* Lego – build and express toys
* A volcano in my tummy
* Wendy Rinaldi – social use of language programme
* 60 mindful minutes
* Talkabout for teenagers / Talkabout It
* Socially speaking and games
* The incredible 5 point scale

## References

Widening the circle by Myra Sapon-Shavin

It’s being done: Academic Success in Unexpected Schools by Karin Chenoworth

Circle of Friends by Marcia Hunt

Far from the tree: a dozen kinds of love by A Solomon (2013)

## The importance of reflective practice for staff working in nurture groups

Reflection is a social practice and central to development of critical perspective. A mentor is required and the group should consider the following:

* Reflection in action (occurs in the midst)
* Reflection on action (after the event)

Modelling is part of the nurturing environment. Nurture group staff have commented that they want to be listened to more, valued more, taken seriously and be given time to share practice. Reflection is important as it can reveal the hidden part of the iceberg for the effect on the teacher and their subsequent behaviour:

**An obsession with the problem can quickly become the problem!**

Positive questions bring a different type of answer.

The mirror or empathy neuron – do you absorb feelings? Suffer from compassion fatigue? Are you suffering from cumulative effects of exposure to others’ feelings? Are you beginning to feel angry? It is important to get time to reflect and redirect!

Opportunities to reflect are provided during formal meetings, mentor meetings, peer mentoring and coaching, collaboration with colleagues through professional enquiry, network meetings, reflective journal, post it notes, weekly meetings with senior management team, video interaction guidance

## Final thoughts

We all need a sense of belonging

Hegemonic – we need to bring about change

Caring for self- we need to look after and nurture our own buoyancy and resilience

Replenish you spirit

The nurture group network website can be sourced at:

<https://nurturegroups.org/>