

**Nurture Groups from pre-school to primary school:
How effective are they?**



WHAT WORKS FOR CHILDREN?

The following is a list of studies on nurture groups in pre-school and primary school, looking at how effective they are. The studies have been read and appraised for quality. Abstracts in italics are reproduced from databases and have not been critically appraised.

Search conducted by: Madeleine Stevens

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Databases searched: Pubmed, <http://www.pubmed.gov>, ERIC <http://askeric.org/Eric/>, Google, <http://www.Google.co.uk>

Keywords used: nurture group*

Nurture groups are aimed at children in primary school who are experiencing social, emotional or behavioural difficulties, or who have problem with adjusting to school. Under the nurture group scheme a number of children with difficulties are taken into a small class with a higher staff : pupil ratio and a nurturing approach.

Cooper, P., Arnold, R. and Boyd, E. The Effectiveness of Nurture Groups: Preliminary Research Findings. British Journal of Special Education 2001;28(4):160-66.

This paper reports on the first results from an evaluation being carried out by the University of Leicester School of Education. Study is well designed, and, although not a randomised controlled trial, two comparison groups are included alongside the children in nurture groups (n=216); one of children with a similar level of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) but in mainstream classes (n = 64), and one of children without SEBD in mainstream classes (n = 62). It is not clear whether these comparison children were in different or same schools as the nurture groups, although it appears that the latter is probably the case. It is not explained why the comparison group children with SEBD were not given places in the nurture group and how nurture group placement was decided. We therefore do not know whether the children in the comparison groups had different sorts of problems from those selected, which made them unsuitable for nurture group placement. The 25 schools included were from 8 Local Education Authorities from geographically and demographically diverse areas of England. At the beginning of the study 84% of the children were aged between 4 and 7, while 16% were aged between 7 and 10.

As indicated in the title these results look at children's progress after only 2 terms in the nurture group. It remains to be seen whether the improvements reported here will be maintained after children return to mainstream classes. These preliminary results show that children in nurture groups improved on average on all aspects measured (Organisation of Experience; Internalisation of Controls; Self-Limiting Features; Undeveloped Behaviour; Unsupported

Development) In addition, of the nurture group children 37% scored 'normal' levels on the Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire after 2 terms (compared to 8% at the beginning of the placement) while 25% of those in the comparison SEBD group scored 'normal' levels (compared to 16% at the beginning of the placement), a statistically significant difference.

Findings from interviews with teachers, parents and students are reported. Teachers were very positive about the perceived influence of the nurture group on the school as a whole. Only 4% indicated no impact while all other responses were positive. There was a broader range of responses from parents and some were negative about the effect of the group on the social, emotional and behavioural development of their child. The majority of parents were positive, including some who had initially been resistant to their child being placed in the group. Only a small minority (<5%) felt their child was doing less well since placement in the group.

Children also gave positive responses, but the authors report that the children's accounts may be unreliable since many children seemed not to want to be disloyal to their teachers and schools.

The report does not highlight any stigmatising effect of being in the nurture group. 25 nurture groups were studied - not enough for the results to shed any light on strengths or limitations of differing formats. These preliminary findings are only presented as averages across all 25 groups - it would be valuable to see a breakdown of results for the different groups, to see how consistent positive results are. Unfortunately this is not provided.

O'Connor, T. and Colwell, J. The Effectiveness and Rationale of the 'Nurture Group' Approach To Helping Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties Remain within Mainstream Education. British Journal of Special Education 2002;29(2):96-100.

Abstract

A study compared scores on the Developmental Diagnostic Profile for 68 children with emotional/behavioural difficulties on entry to a nurture group, on exit, and after two years of mainstreaming. Emotional/behavioural difficulties were significantly reduced upon exit. Current data reveal that in 16 of 20 sub-strands, improvement has been primarily maintained.

Comment: A small study where clear improvement in emotional and behavioural difficulties of 68 children attending nurture groups was noted. Only 12 children were followed up after 2 years. There was no comparison group and so no way of knowing whether these improvements may be normally expected during this time period without the intervention.

Doyle, R. Using a Readiness Scale for Re-integrating Pupils with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties from a Nurture Group into Their Mainstream Classroom: A Pilot Study. British Journal of Special Education 2001;28(3):126-32.

Abstract

This article describes the evolution of the Nurture Group Reintegration Readiness Scale, a scale that helps identify needs of students with emotional and behavioural disorders. Two case studies are provided to illustrate the kinds of progress that can be made by students with emotional and behavioural disorders using nurturing approaches. (Contains references.)

Bennathan, M. and Boxall, M. (Boxall, M. is the originator of the idea of nurture groups) Effective Intervention in Primary Schools: Nurture Groups. Bristol: Taylor and Francis; 1996

Abstract

This book summarises the experiences of nurture groups (small special education classes started in 1970 in London schools), where young children from disadvantaged environments are prepared to access the full primary school curriculum. Chapter 1, "Children at Risk of Failure in Primary Schools" (Marion Bennathan), discusses the incidence and early identification of psychosocial disorders; emotional and behavioral problems as a special educational need; and the impact of the 1988 and 1993 Education Acts and the 1994 Code of Practice. Chapter 2, "The Nurture Group in The Primary School," reproduces Marjorie Boxall's 1976 pamphlet, describing nurture group organization and operation, measurement of child progress, and return of children to the mainstream.

Chapter 3, "Nurture Groups in the 1990s" (Marion Bennathan), describes implementing and evaluating nurture groups, especially how they meet the educational prescriptions of the 1988 and 1993 Education Acts. Chapter 4, "Responding to Children's Needs" (Marion Bennathan), examines educational deficits present in children participating in nurture groups, teaching practices used to help children relate to others, and strategies for creating an intellectually stimulating atmosphere. Chapter 5, "Preventing Educational Failure" (Marion Bennathan), examines assumptions that have influenced thinking and policy about children's education, including the use of the IQ as an explanation for educational failure, interest in social deprivation, increased special education services for "maladjusted" children, the mystique of special schools, the impact of the Warnock Report and the 1989 Children Act, and the views espoused in Instrumental Enrichment, High/Scope, Vygotsky's and Bowby's theories. Contains 54 references. (KDFB)

Other information

There is a course, **Understanding the Theory and Practice of Nurture Groups** at University of Cambridge Faculty of Education, <http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/ptpd/c111sept.html>

Nurture Groups UK:

<http://www.nurturegroups.org>The site reports that Children's Funds are now funding nurture groups and that NGs are mentioned in two recent government documents, Intervening Early: A snap shot of approaches primary schools can use to help children get the best from school. Copies from DfES Tel: 0845 6055560 quote ref: DfES/0131/2002 - also last year's document Promoting Children's Mental Health in Schools. (These are not evaluations)

The website includes extensive links to setting up and running a nurture group and there is a small section for parents.

A new book is available by the originator of the nurture group idea: Boxall, Marjorie, (Paul Chapman Publishing) called **Nurture Groups in School, Principles and Practice**. Published in January 2002 is 224 pages, costs £16.99 ISBN: 0-7619-7343-5. Copies can be ordered from the NGN office (kate-admin@nurturegroups.org)