



# *Centre of Excellence for Behaviour Management*

*Commission scolaire Riverside School Board*

7525, chemin de Chambly, St-Hubert, QC J3Y 0N7

Tel: 514-352-4649. [edegosztanyi@rsb.qc.ca](mailto:edegosztanyi@rsb.qc.ca)

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## **The NURTURING CLASS – for Elementary students**

Prepared by: Eva de Gosztanyi, Centre of Excellence for Behaviour Management  
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### **BACKGROUND TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS MODEL**

Typically, programs for children with behavioural challenges are designed using behavioural and cognitive-behavioural approaches that rely on the use of rewards and consequences, and social skills training including anger management programs. Results are not always satisfying, as many students seem to revert to former behaviours once they have returned to their regular classrooms.

In the search for a more effective intervention approach, two options emerged that seemed to hold promise: the Neufeld attachment-based developmental paradigm, and Nurture Groups. Both, one in theory (Neufeld paradigm) and the other in practice (Nurture Groups), advocate looking at children in the context of their attachment needs and through a developmental lens.

At this time as well, the newest brain research is confirming that children, teens and even young adults are far from full brain development. Upon understanding that the part of the brain responsible for Executive Functions was only developing in young children, it no longer made sense to either consequence children for their natural immaturity, nor expect them to learn skills and apply them as one could expect of an adult.

Finally, research on the effect of trauma and deprivation on the brain clarified that not only are these children naturally immature because of their age, but because of what they have experienced, they are even more immature, from a brain development perspective, than their peers. All this made a convincing argument that a very different approach was necessary and pointed to another way of helping these children.

### **THE MODEL**

The Nurturing Class is a concept that was developed to specifically help students in distress. It was inspired by the Nurture Groups of Great Britain (Boxall and Bennathan) and its functioning is guided by the attachment-based developmental approach of Dr. Gordon Neufeld. Both emphasize children's need for strong attachments with caring adults and view misbehaviour as serving a developmental purpose and as being a function of immaturity and vulnerability.

The Nurturing Class emphasizes attachment and structure as ways of providing students with an environment in which natural maturation and learning can take place. Adults in the class work to develop, deepen and protect their relationship with the children in their care. They provide the structure necessary to compensate for a student's immaturity. They protect the developing child's vulnerability and interpret challenging behaviour as a function of the child's inherent vulnerability and immaturity.

In the interactions with a child, attachment is respected in all of its complexity, allowing the adults to both care for and take charge of the child's well being. In a developmental approach, it is understood that change takes time. While students are helped to cope with immediate situations, a long-term view is held and an optimism, that with time the child will develop the capacity to handle more challenging situations as maturation occurs.

Ideally, children are encouraged and permitted to fully feel and live their vulnerability in the safety of a caring adult relationship.

And so, when children misbehave, the adults, rather than focusing on changing the behaviour, attempt to understand what the child is trying to communicate about what is not working in his life. Often the demands of the classroom are out of sync with the child's developmental level and the child "misbehaves" because she cannot carry out the task as requested. The adult will then try to rearrange the child's environment so as to compensate for the child's lack of capacity, such as putting a routine or structure into place that would make it easier for the child to carry out the behaviour successfully.

At times, the child's "misbehaviour" is an indicator of emotional distress due to a sense of vulnerability. The adults work at understanding the child's needs from this perspective and respond in a comforting way.

The model for the Nurturing Class concept has been fine-tuned in the eight full years of operation and continues to be reflected and improved upon. Riverside School Board has had a Nurturing Class called NEST (Nurturing and Education Students in Transition) since the fall of 2005. A number of other such classes at other of the English School Boards in Quebec (Lester B Pearson School Board, and Western Quebec School Board) also use this model to serve the needs of students with significant behavioural, emotional and learning needs. In the French school boards in Quebec, a similarly inspired model is called "Les classes kangourou".

### **PURPOSE:**

The Nurturing Class creates an environment in which students who are immature and over-reactive can thrive, both developmentally and academically.

### **THE STUDENTS:**

The students are of a similar age, e.g. Cycle 1 (Grades 1 & 2), Cycle 2 (Grades 3 & 4) or Cycle 3 (Grades 5 & 6), with a possible 3-year age span, who are experiencing significant emotional, behavioural and, very often, learning difficulties. Some express their frustration by acting out and others through internalization. Many have had difficulty coping with the demands of a regular classroom, spending a good part their day, week or school year outside of the classroom and/or out of school because of the extreme nature of their behaviours

The families of these students agree to their child participating in this programme and also agree to co-operate with interventions suggested by the Social Worker (Family Support Worker), Psychologist and the Nurturing Class team.

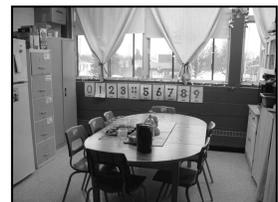
### **STAFF:**

There is one teacher and 1 aide (technician) for the group, as well as other support staff to cover recess and the lunch hour. In an ideal situation there would be a third person in the class, allowing for the possibility of taking a child to a quiet location to deal with their emotions, and not leaving the rest of the students with only one adult.

### **PHYSICAL SET-UP:**

The classroom is divided into 3 areas:

1. **A kitchen area** with a table, microwave and fridge. In this area the group eats together (Sunshine Snack) and cooks together once a week. Students are encouraged to practice basic table manners and to use conversational skills.



2. **A relaxation area** in which there is a couch, cushions, blanket, carpet and soothing toys. The students are encouraged to use this area when they are feeling upset, having difficulty or are tired. The staff use the opportunity to help students talk about their emotions. This area is also used for activities such as reading books to students.
3. **The formal teaching area**, which is set up like an elementary classroom.



### **ACADEMIC FOCUS:**

The day is structured, as the students need predictability and routine in order to function. A sample schedule for Cycle 1 students would look like this:

- Morning Message
- Calendar and carpet time
- Problem of the day
- Sunshine Snack
- Individual academic work
- Structured Playtime
- Physical Education
- Academic Work

Teachers of older students will prepare a predictable schedule that is appropriate to their developmental level. Playtime, however, will be, at least initially a scheduled time for the students at all age levels.

In September and October not much academic work is demanded of the students. These weeks are used to establish routines, to practice habits that help classroom functioning, and to deepen relationships with the adults to lay the groundwork for academic learning.

Literacy and numeracy are taught initially through the Morning Message and Calendar/Carpet time, and activities such as baking and crafts. The SoundPrints approach is used to develop specific literacy skills. Science is used as the content area to stimulate interest in the written word. As the year progresses, the teacher will introduce the Daily Five structure to eventually permit students to develop the stamina to work independently or in pairs. Numeracy skills are introduced and practiced through activities such as baking and using multisensory approaches such as Touch Math and other alternate Math programmes that require less reading.

### **SPECIAL ACTIVITIES:**

- Weekly baking; setting/cleaning the table for a meal; walks around the neighbourhood; planting flower gardens; special celebrations; helping in the school and in classrooms with younger students, etc.

### **RECESS AND LUNCHTIME:**

The students have a different recess period than the rest of the school or play in a restricted area in the playground under close supervision, as most of them have particular difficulty managing their behaviour in situations where there is a lack of structure and/or high emotion.

The children eat lunch in their classroom with a designated and trained Lunch Monitor and if possible, the classroom Behaviour Technician. They eat for 30 minutes then they go outside to play in a designated area. During inclement weather, they have organized activities in the gym, computer room or the classroom.

**OTHER KEY FEATURES:**

- In June: All new students are brought for a visit to the class and school by their parents in order for both the parents and the child to meet the adults who will be responsible for them.
- In-take meeting with the parents and Nurturing Class Team in June and again in August (to finalize details) to discuss the child's needs.
- Beginning of the School Year: **Progressive Entry** over two weeks to allow students to develop attachment to the adults in the programme and to minimize the stress of learning new class routines.
- Staff-Parent communication via e-mail, phone calls or through the Social Worker (Family Support Worker). **Behaviour concerns are not communicated in the daily agenda**, as this has not been found to be of help in past years. Students become fearful of showing their parent(s) the agenda because of problems experienced in the day. When parents try to take action to ensure the student has a "good" day the next day, this usually increases the emotional pressure on the child and while there may be some improved behaviour for a few days, in actual fact behaviour tends to deteriorate or become displaced.
- Rewards and consequences are NOT used, as these strategies are not seen to be helpful in "growing" children's behaviour over the long term. Staff show delight, when appropriate, in the student and in what they are able to do. Staff also provide structure and limits to take charge of behaviour that would be hurtful to the other students.
- Students are helped with their behaviour through lots of visual cueing e.g. Daily Schedule using Pictograms, use of Time Timer clock, etc.
- Time Out is NEVER used as a consequence, although students are permitted and encouraged to withdraw if they need time away.
- Students are given a variety of options when they need calming, sometimes alone or, ideally, with a staff member, and are permitted to use these when needed.
- Sometimes a student is required to leave the room because their behaviour is a disruption to the others, but the student is accompanied by an adult and readily accepted back.
- If child has a major crisis, for the sake of the other students, he is, at times, asked to stay at home for a few days. She is always welcomed back with delight. This time away is also often used to help the parents to sort out possible contributing factors to the child's behavioural difficulties.

**SUPPORT FOR THE STAFF:**

The teacher and aide(s) require a lot of support because of the nature of the emotional needs of their students. Regular weekly supervision by a Board psychologist, Behaviour Specialist and/or Special Education Consultant is recommended. Also available to the staff and students are the services of a Special Education Consultant, Speech and Language Pathologist and other specialists as needed.

Ideally, the local CLSC should provide the support of a Social Worker for a few hours per week. The main role for this person is support to the parents of the students in NEST. The Social Worker acts as a liaison with Youth Protection and other interveners involved with the child and the family to ensure that resources are accessed, co-ordinated and used to full potential. A Family Liaison Worker or School Social Worker is an essential part of the Nurturing Class model. Support to parents is necessary to help the students with their challenges.

**PROGRAMME RESULTS (2005-2010):**

The NEST class has been in operation since the fall of 2005. As of Spring 2010 48% had stayed in NEST for 1 year; 52% for 2 years; 37% returned to a regular classroom; 42% went to a Special Class, and 21% went to another type of placement (hospital programme, special class at a French School Board, or programme for students with mental handicaps, etc.) All students improved their academic performance and increased their school attendance significantly. The parents have been very grateful for their child's participation in the programme and note improvements in behaviour at home as well.

**REQUIREMENTS THAT FAVOUR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION**

In order to best meet the needs of students who are experiencing problems behaving and learning, certain conditions have been found to be necessary to ensure successful implementation of these programmes. While not every suggestion listed below is absolutely necessary, most have been found to be very helpful in setting up an environment and preparing the staff to receive these students so that they can remain in school and enter into the learning process.

**PERSONNEL**

Students referred to the Nurturing Class are immature, frustrated, prone to aggression, likely to explode, reluctant to engage in learning activities (especially writing), have difficulty co-operating, are poor at following directions, resist changes in routine and are hypersensitive and quick to change moods. The staff who deal with these children must be willing to understanding their dynamics. At Riverside School Board, Human Resources works closely with the Unions to ensure the best fit in terms of staff for the program. Staff must also receive adequate support in order to continue to be able to meet the emotional and learning needs of their students.

**I. Staffing (4 to 1 ratio):**

1. Teacher
2. Aide(s)
3. Designated Lunch Monitor(s)
4. Administrator with designated time for the Nurturing Class
5. Psychologist/Behaviour Specialist
6. Family Liaison worker or Social Worker trained in the attachment-based developmental paradigm in order to provide parent support and parent education.
7. Daycare staff, to provide before and after school care as well as emergency daytime care.
8. Designated Bus driver and possibly a Bus Attendant

**II. Staff Training:**

1. Teacher trained in
  - a. Attachment-based developmental approach (Neufeld paradigm) and the effects of trauma
  - b. Daily Five
  - c. SoundPrints
  - d. Alternate Math programme
  - e. Non-Violent Crisis Intervention (CPI)

2. Aide trained in:
  - a. Attachment-based developmental approach (Neufeld paradigm) and the effects of trauma
  - b. Non-Violent Crisis Intervention (CPI)
  - c. Daily Five
3. Psychologist\*, Consultant\*, Family Liaison Worker\* and Administrators trained in:
  - a. Attachment-based developmental approach (Neufeld paradigm - \*up to Level II Intensive at least)
  - b. Understanding the effects of Trauma on brain development and behaviour
  - c. Non-Violent Crisis Intervention (CPI)
  - d. Daily Five (at least familiar with)
4. Other staff trained in:
  - a. Attachment-based developmental approach (Neufeld paradigm) (basic introduction)
  - b. Non-Violent Crisis Intervention (CPI)

### III. Staff Support (1/2 day per week):

1. Weekly support meetings with Psychologist/Behaviour Specialist and Consultant– (Specifically structured to maximize meeting time). Suggested agenda:
  - a. Attachment/Greeting ritual
  - b. Sharing frustrations
  - c. Issues
  - d. Goals
  - e. Plans
  - f. PD using one of the Continuing Ed Courses (PLC model)

### IV. Classroom visits by Psychologist, Consultant and Family Liaison Worker

Although care must be taken to not overwhelm the students with too many visitors, the key support professionals must be aware of class dynamics. A reasonable visiting schedule should be set up.

### V. Suggested Professional Development Program:

TOPIC	TIME REQ'D	STAFF INVOLVED	COST
1. General Overview of Attachment-based Developmental Approach	<b>4-5 hours</b> Presentation	ALL – teachers, aides, attendants, supervisors, administrators, and professionals	none
2. Session for setting up the rooms and working out details	$\frac{1}{2}$ <b>day</b> schools $\frac{1}{2}$ <b>day</b> professionals	a.m. teachers, aides, admin p.m. Professionals	none
3. Understanding the effect of Trauma on the developing Brain	<b>4-5 hours</b> Presentation	ALL – teachers, aides, attendants, supervisors, administrators, & professionals	none
4. Making Sense of Aggression  Neufeld Institute Course	4-hour NI* Continuing Ed DVD PLC course with discussion for a total	Teachers, aides, attendants and the school, and administrators under the supervision of a trained SB	\$90** per person includes a DVD set for each individual

	of <b>8 hours</b> over 6 to 8 weeks	Professional or Neufeld Facilitator	
5. Heart Matters: The Science of Emotion Neufeld Institute Course	6-hour NI* Continuing Ed DVD PLC course with discussion for a total of <b>12 hours</b> over 2 to 3 months	Teachers, aides, attendants and the school, and administrators under the supervision of a trained SB Professional or Neufeld Facilitator	\$135** per person includes a DVD set for each individual
6. Teachability Factor Neufeld Institute Course	8-hour NI* Continuing Ed DVD PLC course with discussion for a total of <b>15 hours</b> over two or three months	Teachers, aides, attendants and the school, and administrators under the supervision of a trained SB Professional or Neufeld Facilitator	\$165** per person includes a DVD set for each individual
7. Intensive – Level I Neufeld Institute Course	20-hour NI* Continuing Ed DVD PLC course with discussion for a total of <b>40 hours</b> over the course of 10 months	Board professionals and NC staff supervised by Neufeld Institute Faculty	\$400** per person: 6-month pass on the Neufeld Virtual Campus and access to support materials
8. Intensive – Level II Neufeld Institute Course	15-hour NI* Continuing Ed DVD PLC course: <b>40 hours</b> over 10 months	Board professionals & NC staff supervised by Neufeld Institute Faculty	\$500** per person includes the same as Intensive I

\* NI = Neufeld Institute

\*\* The fees to the Neufeld Institute cover the costs of DVDs, the copyrighted materials, course development and support materials.

### PHYSICAL SET UP

Students with emotional difficulties (i.e. with behaviour and learning problems) are hypersensitive and immature, hence their classroom setting needs to be organized, structured, and warm and welcoming in order to help them to cope with their challenges. They also need to be able to find acceptable ways to “tune out” when their world becomes overwhelming so that they do not explode or behave in a manner that interferes with the learning of other students. These students also require extra attachment activities, of which providing food is a key one, hence the need for a kitchen area.

#### I. Work areas:

1. Table and chairs for eating and working
2. Individual desks
3. Daily 5 teaching desk (kidney shaped)
4. Baskets for supplies, work, individual
5. Shelves and counters for holding the baskets

#### II. Quiet area:

- |                                   |                          |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Couch                          | 3. Carpet                |
| 2. Rocking chair or beanbag chair | 4. Basket of fidget toys |

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|------------------------------|--|
| 5. Weighted animals          | 6. Blankets and pillows  |
| III. <u>Kitchen area</u>     |  |
| 1. Sink                      | 4. Dishes and utensils   |
| 2. Fridge                    | 5. Cupboard for dry food and equipment                                   |
| 3. Microwave                 | 6. Table for eating  |
| IV. <u>Toy Centre:</u>       |  |
| 1. Lego                      | 4. Blocks  |
| 2. Doll Centre               | 5. Toy cars  |
| 3. Plastic animals/Farm etc. |  |
| V. <u>Other:</u>             |  |
| 1. Time Timer clocks         | 5. Books – leveled, general interest, science oriented, information text |
| 2. CD player(s)              | 6. <b>Telephone</b> – ideally a cell phone                               |
| 3. Weighted Animals          | 7. Budget for purchasing daily food                                      |
| 4. Fidget toys               | 8. Computer – mainly for teacher use                                     |

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### I. Access to school resources

#### 1. **Resource Teacher:**

- a. Nearly all of the students referred because of behavioural difficulties will also have learning difficulties. Although at first they may not be willing to work with the Resource Teacher, these students should be considered to be on the teachers “list”. The RT and teacher should work out a plan for having the students develop a relationship with the RT before they are expected to work with him/her, e.g. class visits, story reading, helping with preferred activities, asking the student to help with a project, etc.
- b. Will work with the staff to provide appropriate materials and intervention strategies in literacy and numeracy.
- c. Will assess student levels of academic functioning at the beginning and end of the school year.

#### 2. **Gymnasium:**

- a. These students should have their own Physical Education class with the Physical Education teacher in the school gym (especially for older students).
- b. Ideally, especially for the younger student, this person should have some idea of exercises that promote sensory integration and relaxation.

### II. Data Gathering and Recordkeeping:

1. Assessment of academic functioning at beginning and end of each school year
2. IEP
3. Tracking of behavioural issues
4. Monthly progress e.g. “slice of life”
5. Year End report by teacher, aide, professional
6. Communicating with parents
7. Parent year end comments

**III. Academic Programme needs:**

1. Daily Five – as a structure to promote literacy and to teach habits for future integration.
2. SoundPrints – a literacy framework that addresses the learning needs of students with a variety of learning disabilities.
3. Alternate Math programme, such as Touch Math – for those students for whom reading and language processing are a challenge.

*“When dealing with the immature, we need to win their hearts to open their minds to our influence.” **Gordon Neufeld***

*“All the behaviour we see in Nurture Groups: clinging, attention-seeking, panic, anger, restlessness, low self esteem etc. can be understood in the context of how a child’s attachments are developed and the interventions we offer use that knowledge.” **Marion Bennathan***

*“Accepting students for who they are, rather than for what they do, is integrally related to the idea of teaching the whole child.” **Alfie Kohn***

For more information about the **Nurturing Class** model, please do not hesitate to contact:

Eva de Gosztanyi, Co-ordinator Centre of Excellence for Behaviour Management

514-352-4649 or 514-771-4649 (cell) [edegosztanyi@rsb.qc.ca](mailto:edegosztanyi@rsb.qc.ca)

**RESOURCE LIST**

***Effective Intervention in Primary Schools - Nurture Groups*** Marion Bennathan | David Fulton Publishers, Ltd. | 1996 [www.nurturegroups.org](http://www.nurturegroups.org)

***Nurture Groups in School: Principles & Practice*** Marion Bennathan & Marjorie Boxall | Marjorie Corwin Press Inc. | Nelson Education Ltd. |2002

***Nurture Groups in School and at Home*** Paul Cooper | Jessica Kingsley Publishers| 2007

***Hold on to Your Kids*** Gordon Neufeld & Gabor Maté | Random House | 2012 [www.neufeldinstitute.org](http://www.neufeldinstitute.org)

***Why Students Underachieve*** Dr. Regalena Melrose, | Rowman & Littlefield Education| 2006 [www.drnelrose.com](http://www.drnelrose.com)

***The Daily 5*** Gail Boushey and Joan Moser| Stenhouse Publishers | 2006 [www.the2sisters.com](http://www.the2sisters.com)

***Unconditional Teaching*** Alfie Kohn |Educational Leadership| 2005 <http://www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/uncondtchg.htm>

***The Boy who was Raised as a Dog*** Bruce D. Perry and Maia Szalavitz |Basic Books| 2006 [www.childtrauma.org/](http://www.childtrauma.org/)

***Educating Oppositional and Defiant Children*** Philip S. Hall and Nancy D. Hall |Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development| 2003

***The Explosive Child*** Ross W. Greene, Ph.D. |Harper Collins Publishers| 2014

***The First Days of School: How to be an Effective Teacher*** Harry K. Wong |Harry K. Wong Pub| 2004 <http://teachers.net/gazette/wong.html>

***Secrets of Discipline for Parents and Teachers and With All Due Respect – Keys for building effective school discipline*** Ronald G. Morrish These books are available from [www.realdiscipline.com](http://www.realdiscipline.com)

***Real Boys*** William S. Pollack |Owl Books| 1999