Keeping Our Difficult Kids in School: The Impact of the Use of the 'Boxall Profile' on the Transition and Integration of Behaviourally - Disordered Students in Primary Schools

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Practice Paper

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the Boxall Profile as an assessment and intervention framework designed to support disadvantaged children in mainstream schools. The Boxall Profile was developed in the 1970s in the United Kingdom by Marjorie Boxall to identify children who had come into school unprepared to meet the demands of classroom life and needed support in a nurture group. The nurture group provided the emotional/social support the children needed to prepare them for mainstream classes. The Boxall Profile shows how the processes of early child development play a central role in a child's ability to learn and succeed at school. It helps teachers in mainstream school to understand the emotional problems that lie behind difficult behaviour. A case study example demonstrates how the Boxall Profile provides evidence of deficit in social and emotional competence when attachment has been disrupted and a child has experienced trauma, neglect or abuse.

Introduction: What is the Boxall Profile?

The Boxall Profile provides a framework for the structured observation of children in the classroom. It was developed by Boxall, an educational psychologist, and her school colleagues for use by teachers in the Inner London Authority in the 1970s and 1980s to support the work of nurture groups (Bennathan & Boxall, 1996, 1998). Nurture groups are small classes set up to support children entering school who are already exhibiting signs of emotional and behavioural difficulties. The Nurture group provides a structured and predictable environment in which children can begin to trust adults and to learn.

Historically, the use of the Boxall Profile has been integral to the success of nurture groups which have operated in the United Kingdom (U.K.) for the last thirty years. Nurture groups in the U.K. enable many children who are at-risk of exclusion or of special educational placement to continue in mainstream school and to make good progress. The Boxall Profile is used as the analytical and diagnostic tool that guides the selection of students for placement in nurture groups.

The purpose of the Boxall Profile was to provide a means of assessing the areas of emotional and behavioural difficulty of severely disadvantaged and deprived children so as to enable teachers to plan focused intervention. The Boxall Profile can be, and should be, completed by whoever knows the child best, e.g., teacher, teacher-aide, social worker, Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO).

The Boxall Profile consists of two sections; the Developmental Strands, and the Diagnostic Profile, each consisting of 34 items and a histogram. The teacher rates the student's behaviour against a set of norms that apply to children with 'no problems evident' aged between 3 years 4 months and 8 years (but can be used with older students). The Boxall Profile was normed for reliability and validity by Inner London Education Authority, Research and Statistics Branch.

The profile for the individual student is created from the teacher ratings scores. Once a profile has been completed, the two sections (developmental and diagnostic) need to be looked at together, and attention given to identify areas of strength as well as areas where the student appears to be having difficulty. These areas of strength and difficulty become evident on closer examination of the strands within each of the sections – developmental and diagnostic (see Figures 1-4: The Developmental Strands & Diagnostic Profile). Norms are indicated by the 'shaded' areas on the profile.

The developmental strands consist of items which describe different aspects of the developmental process of the pre-school years. The developmental strands are made up of two clusters, each with five sub-clusters:

Cluster One – The organisation of experience (reflects levels of engagement with the world, describing a child who is organised, attentive and interested, and is involved purposely and constructively in events, people and ideas).

Cluster Two – The internalisation of controls (reflects levels of personal development and awareness of others, describing a child who is emotionally secure, makes constructive, adaptive relationships, is able to cooperate with others and has internalised the controls necessary for social functioning).

Children in need of support have **low** scores on the developmental strands. The outline on the histogram is irregular because the number of items varies from column to column.

The second part of the Boxall Profile is the Diagnostic Profile. The diagnostic profile consists of items describing behaviours that inhibit or interfere with the childs satisfactory involvement in school. They are directly or indirectly the outcome of impaired learning in the earliest years. They may possibly be a result of abuse and/or neglect.

The diagnostic profile is made up of three clusters:

Cluster One – self-limiting features (identifies children who lack the normal 'thrust for growth').

Cluster Two – undeveloped behaviour (identifies children who have had too little help in the early years to provide them with the inner resources to relate to others and engage at an age-appropriate level).

Cluster Three – unsupported development (suggests children who have marked negativism towards others, are anti-social, and/or angry. This marked negativism toward others may be a result of a lack of early nurturing or intrusive negative experiences).

Children in need of support have **high** scores on the diagnostic strands. Again, the outline on the histogram is irregular because the number of items varies from column to column. Although originally designed for those in the 3-8 year age group, the Boxall Profile has been redesigned and extended for use with older children and adolescents.

Who are the children who will benefit from a Boxall Profile?

As Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) with 12+ years of experience, we are familiar with the characteristics of some typical learning and behaviour referrals. These children present very early in their school career with characteristics that make up the following typical profile: they do not respond to the teaching offered; they either withdraw or behave aggressively towards teachers and their peers, they make little progress in educational achievement; and they may be stood down and even excluded during their early days at school. They may come from transient families, frequently moving house and changing schools. Many come from families where stressors shown to disrupt the parent-child attachment are experienced. Poverty, single parenthood, marital conflict, mental illness and substance abuse may reduce the parents' ability to provide a structured, predictable, safe and nurturing environment. These students typically take up a disproportionate amount of teacher time and attention. Their presentation and demeanour challenges even the most experienced and skilful of teachers. Teachers are often bewildered by the behaviour and lack of response to teaching strategies that succeed with other children. By using the information provided by the Boxall Profile, much of this difficult behaviour can be understood and skill deficits can be addressed.

A Case Study: The story of 'A'.

'A' was a 6-year-old male referred to the RTLB for behavioural and emotional difficulties. He had a very short attention span, about 30 seconds, was constantly moving and distracted, didn't return to class at bell times, was non-compliant to direction from adults, and was not engaging in any academic tasks. He had been excited about the prospect of starting school. 'A' also had soiling issues.

He had been in a number of different foster placements from 18 months of age after being removed from the maternal home due to care and protection issues. At pre-school he presented with non-compliance, soiling, swearing, verbal and physical violence, unpredictability, and marginalising the safety of others. His social worker predicted that transition to school was unlikely to be successful. A medical report confirmed no physical reason for the soiling and suggested this was likely to be caused by anxiety. 'A' was initially transitioned to school with teacher-aide (TA) support for two hours per day.

At school his teacher, who had 40 years teaching experience, found his behaviour to be a greater challenge than she had ever experienced. The TA was unable to describe a time when there was an absence of unwanted behaviour. 'A' said he wanted friends, but lacked the social skills to form friendships, and frequently hurt others. After 'A' had been at school for 3 months, his behaviour included threatening to kill other children, self-harming, hurting others, and often inaudible speech. He did not attempt required tasks and would not sit with the other children. The first assessment with the Boxall Profile was completed by
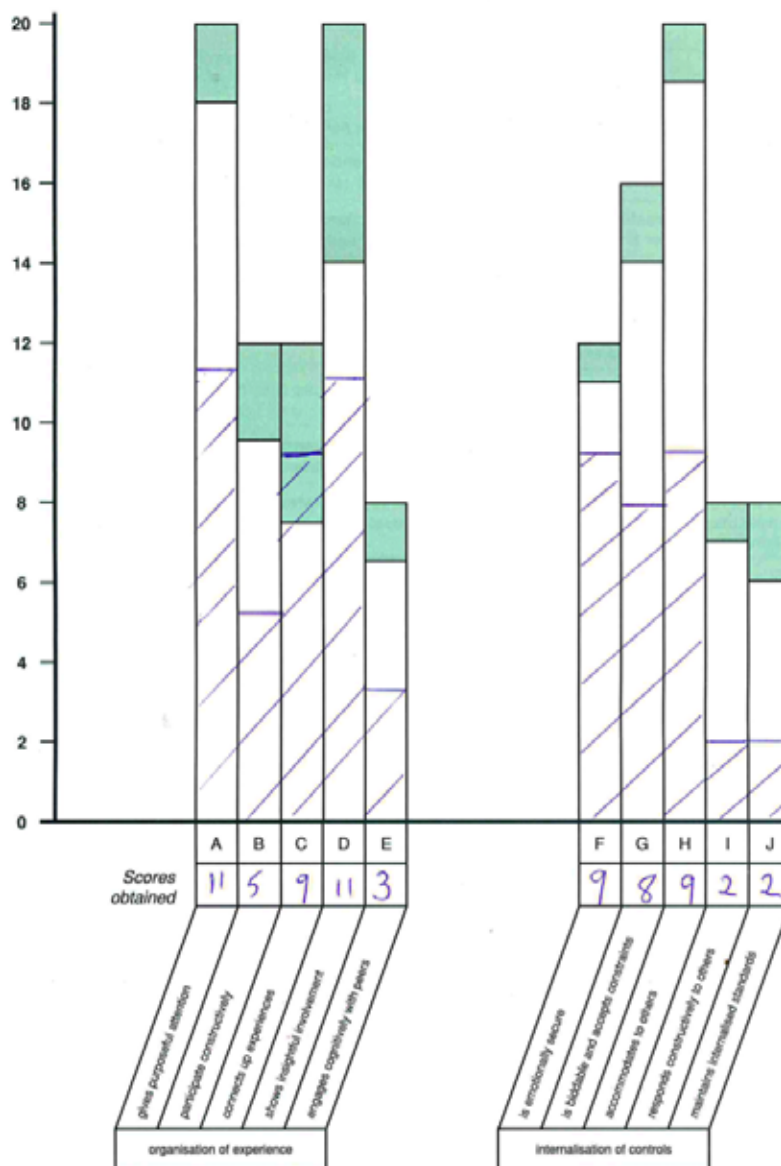
his classroom teacher in collaboration with the RTLB. The completion of the Boxall Profile involved a thirty minute session where the teacher and RTLB worked together through the behavioural statements in the profile, rating 'A' against the expected norms for his peers, i.e., the Boxall Profile norms for competently-functioning three to eight year-olds. When completing the profile, the teacher was asked to specifically consider 'A' in terms of his usual presentation in school rather than focusing on extreme or one-off events.

For each of the two histograms (Developmental Strands and Diagnostic Profile) to score within the expected average scores, the student is expected to achieve scores in the shaded areas of each histogram (Bennathan & Boxall, 1998).
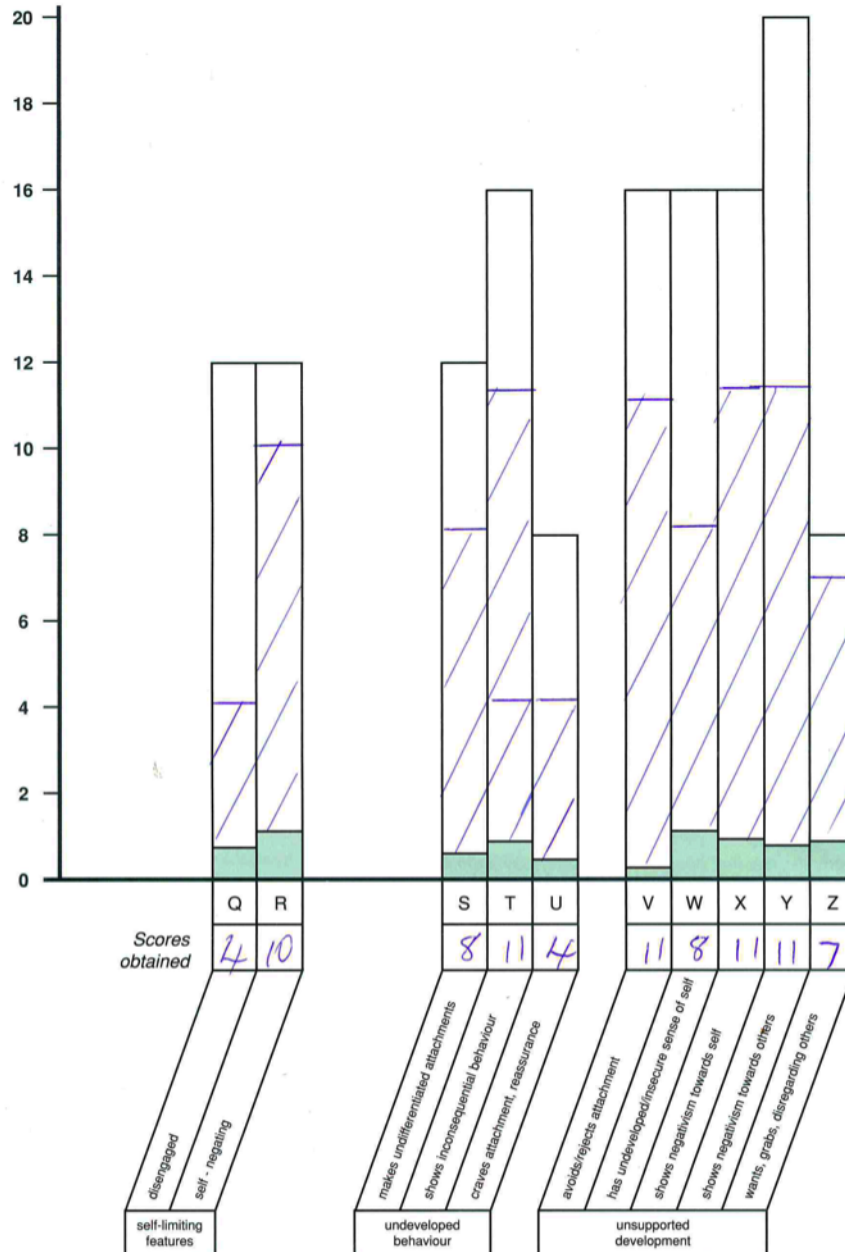

Figure 1: *Histograms Student 'A': Profile prior to Classroom Intervention.*

Section II

DIAGNOSTIC PROFILE

The scores for the items in Section II are entered in the histogram below in the column indicated by the relevant letter (Q, R etc ...Z). The outline is irregular because the number of items varies from column to column.

The shaded green areas indicate the range of average scores in a sample of competently functioning children in five age groups from 3 years 4 months to 8 years.

Figure 2: *Histogram Student 'A': Profile prior to Classroom Intervention.*

Assessment on Section I, Developmental Strands:

Low scores, below those expected for competently-functioning three to eight year-olds, were recorded for 'A' on both clusters of the developmental strands. The only score achieved within the expected range was for 'connects up experiences'. This score indicated that, despite his behavioural presentation, he was purposeful and self-motivated, capable of coherent and sustained thinking, and of relating events to each other, appropriate for his age (Evans, 2008). On the first cluster of strands of the developmental strands histogram, 'organisation of experience', 'A' scored a total of 39 out of a possible 72. On the second cluster of strands of the developmental strands histogram, 'internalisation of controls', he scored a total of 30 out of a possible 64.

Assessment on Section II, Diagnostic Profile:

Higher scores, above those expected for competently-functioning three to eight year-olds, were recorded for 'A' on all three clusters of the diagnostic profile. This meant he was not scoring as well as competently-functioning three to eight year-olds. He scored 14 on self-limiting features; 1.6 or less was the required score. He scored 23 on undeveloped behaviour: two or less was the required score, and he scored 48 on unsupported development; when 4 or less was the required score.

The profile reflected that 'A' was a student who had come to school unprepared to meet the demands of classroom life. He was functioning more typically as a developmentally younger child, and was not yet able to meet the Curriculum Key Competencies of Participation, Managing Self, and Relating to Others. The recommendations for addressing the emotional/social competency deficits shown on the profile were researched from the Boxall Profile companion resource - 'Beyond the Boxall Profile:Strategies and Resources' (Evans, 2008). This informed the intervention planning.

After completion of the Boxall Profile and analysis of it, in collaboration with the RTLB, an Intervention Plan (Appendix 1) was implemented. The teacher changed aspects of her practice. She gave 'A' prior warning when there were any changes to the usual routine; she acknowledged that he had better days when there was more predictability in the day's

programme. She related her success in turning his anger around to her focus on giving him positive assurance, allowing him to sit close to her, providing physical contact, and responding positively to his developmental needs, including allowing him to hug her around the legs. The teacher began to understand the merit in providing 'A' with frequent, genuine, consistent, specific descriptive praise, immediately he was compliant to any request.

After 'A' had been in school for 6 months, his teacher reported that she felt she had developed a trusting relationship with him. His parent was now confidently approaching the teacher: previously his parent did not come into the school at all. The teacher now allowed the close physical proximity and the nurturing he sought.

The Boxall Profile had provided succinct evidence of his need to be nurtured and supported in a kind and loving but consistently firm and fair manner. This evidence helped the staff of the school to understand that 'A' had emotional needs more typical of a much younger child. It gave the staff permission to attend to his needs, particularly those of needing to be nurtured and liked, and to belong.

The information from the first Boxall Profile provided evidence on which to build an understanding of this child's needs and enabled trusting relationships to develop. A better 'goodness of fit' had developed between the student and the school, providing opportunities for him to succeed in the school setting.
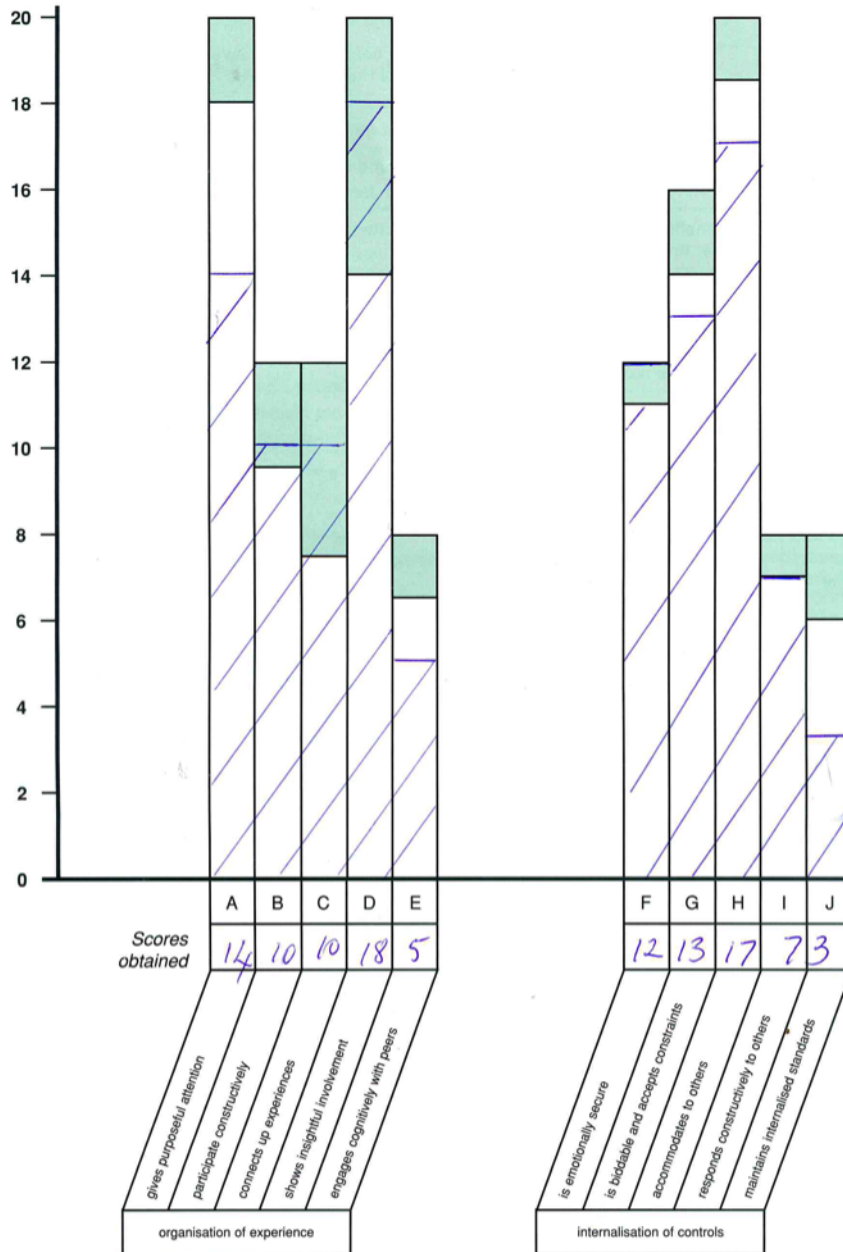
SECOND PROFILE

A further Boxall Profile was completed seven months after the first one with positive changes clearly evident. A comparison between the scores recorded on the first and second histograms is evidence of the success of the intervention, informed by assessing 'A' with the Boxall Profile.
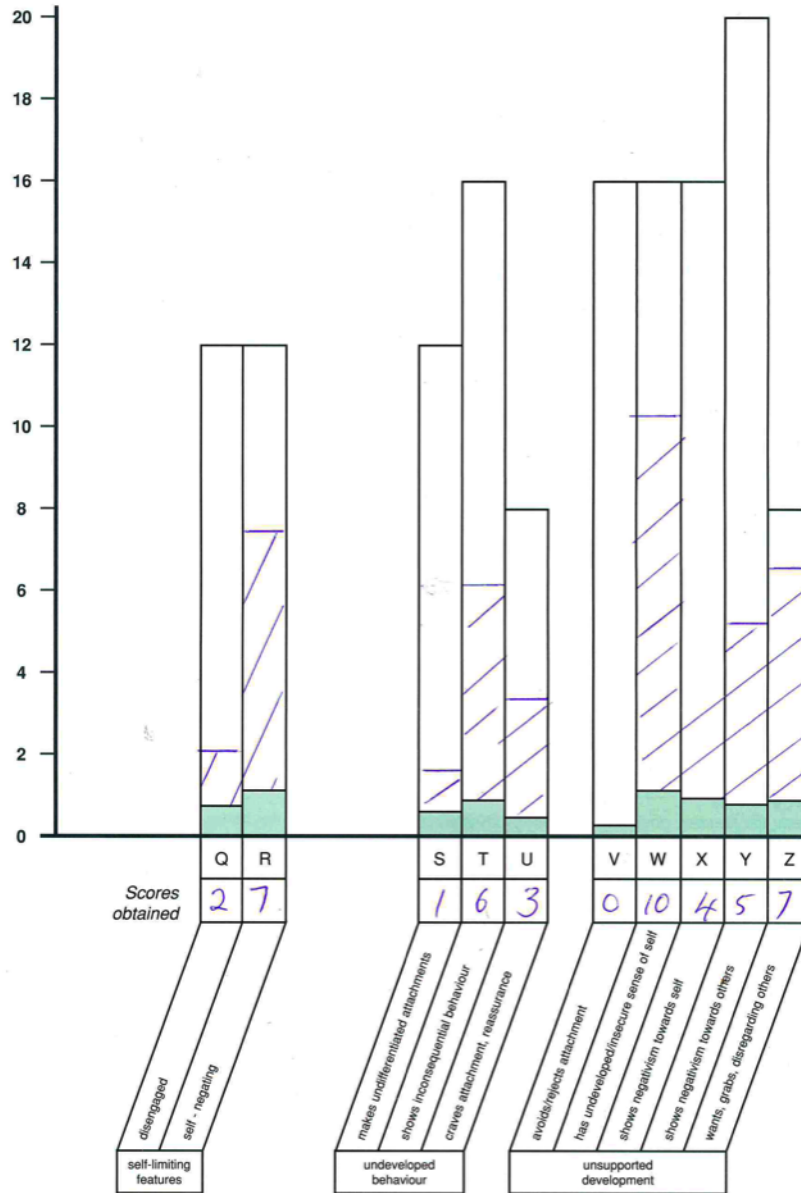
Figure 3: *Histogram Student 'A': Second Profile After 7 months Classroom Intervention.*

Section II

DIAGNOSTIC PROFILE

The scores for the items in Section II are entered in the histogram below in the column indicated by the relevant letter (Q, R etc ...Z). The outline is irregular because the number of items varies from column to column.

The shaded green areas indicate the range of average scores in a sample of competently functioning children in five age groups from 3 years 4 months to 8 years.

Scores obtained	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
	2	7	1	6	3	0	10	4	5	7

Figure 4: *Histogram Student 'A': Second Profile After 7 months Classroom Intervention.*

Post-Assessment on Section I, Developmental Strands:

'A' had higher scores on both clusters recorded on this histogram. His scores were now within the average range of competently-functioning children from three to eight years, in 5/10 of the developmental strands (compared to histogram Profile 1, 0/10). Histogram 2 recorded that he had reached the range of expected scores in three of the five developmental strands in the 'internalisation of controls' cluster. 'A' now had scores typical of competently-functioning children aged three to eight years, in five of the ten areas of the developmental part of the assessment; 'participates constructively', 'connects up experiences', 'shows insightful involvement', 'is emotionally secure', and 'responds constructively to others'. He also had improved scores in all other areas of assessment recorded on the second developmental strands histogram (Figure 3).

Post-Assessment on Section II, Diagnostic Profile:

While 9/10 of his diagnostic profile scores remained outside those of average scores of competently functioning children aged three to eight years, his scores on all of the 10 items of the diagnostic profile had improved towards the expected average scores. In the sub-cluster 'avoids/rejects attachment', 'A's score was now within the competent range, indicating that a greater ability to trust adults had been developed. He also had a slightly improved score in the category of 'undeveloped/insecure sense of self'. Assessment data from the Boxall Profile and intervention based on recommendations from 'Beyond the Boxall Profile', informed evidence-based intervention which assisted the classroom teacher to effectively address this student's emotional needs. His ability to comply with the school's expectations of learning and behaviour, and progress towards achievement on the Key Competencies, was beginning to develop. He was arriving at school ready to learn. The behavioural difficulties that he had presented with when he transitioned to school were much less problematic. He was viewed through a more positive lens, regarded as a student needing support, but able to demonstrate positive participation as a class member.

DISCUSSION:

Why would using the Boxall Profile be useful to educators?

The Boxall Profile has been developed from observing behaviour in the classroom, i.e. it is based on sound behavioural observation. The structured observational framework enables teachers to understand behaviour that had seemed incomprehensible and to understand the behaviour in terms of impairment and delayed development. The Boxall Profile allows the teacher/ school staff/parent to view the child through a different lens. It takes the focus off where the child should be according to chronological age and turns it to where the child is actually, socially and emotionally. "Once teachers understand the early causes of children's failure and are shown ways in which these can be addressed there is a great change of attitude" (Evans, 2008, p.4). Evans comments that instead of teachers having negative feelings that lower their morale, they become positive. It is this change in understanding that gives the staff permission to attend to the child's needs rather than the behaviour. The teacher can then effectively address the children's needs and help them to progress in the school system. The Boxall Profile provides detailed information that enables teachers to plan focused intervention to develop the social and emotional competence of children and to enhance their academic achievement.

However, using a Boxall Profile to help a teacher see a student in a new way is not always enough. The nature of classrooms, the numbers of students, the ratio of adults to students and the focus on curriculum can form barriers that make implementation of Boxall Profile-directed interventions unfeasible and ultimately unsuccessful. The emotional and behavioural difficulties of some children will require a 'wrap around' intervention such as the nurture group can provide. In New Zealand there is now an organisation, Te Pito Mata nurture groups NZ, which has been set up to support the establishment of nurture Groups (Appendix 2).

RESEARCH

Research that discusses the Boxall Profile has generally been confined to within the nurture group context and in the U.K. (Bennathan & Boxall, 1996, 1998; Cooper, Arnold & Boyd, 2001; Cooper & Tiknaz, 2005). However, there are many studies on the importance of promoting social and emotional competence in behaviourally-disordered students (Denham, 2006; Doyle, 2001; Webster-Stratton & Lindsay, 1999). There is also meta-analyses which review various approaches and instruments that measure social and emotional competence (Edmunds & Stewart-Brown 2004; Scottish Office Education Industry Department, 2000). There is certainly a research niche for testing the use of the Boxall Profile in mainstream contexts in a whole-school setting.

CONCLUSION

From our own experiences with using the Boxall Profile in mainstream settings in New Zealand we would conclude that the information the Boxall Profile provides is extremely useful for teacher-understanding of specific students. The detailed analysis of the students' stage of learning, their strengths and weaknesses, emotions and behaviours, means help can be precisely focused to meet the identified needs.

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AUTHOR PROFILES

Judy Allison

Judy Allison During my teaching career, I have worked with students from aged 4 years to 15 years in NZ, the UK and Trinidad & Tobago. For the last 13 years I have been working as a Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour in Christchurch. My special interest has been in students with attachment difficulties and the impact this has on their brain development, and how we can support students with these difficulties within a mainstream school setting. I have recently relocated to Boulder, CO, USA.

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Shirley Craig

Shirley Craig My special interest is in the social and emotional competence of students, specifically attachment disorder and brain development relating to student engagement and learning outcomes in mainstream classrooms.

My interest in the area of attachment stems from the completion of two Mental Health papers while completing my M.Ed. Membership of the Christchurch Nurture Group Network (2007-9) further informed my working knowledge of the Boxall Profile.

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Appendix 2 Intervention Plan Student 'A'

Intervention Plan

Possible Triggers influencing difficult behaviours.	Ecological Factors	Preventative Strategies	Replacement Skills	Socio-emotional & Meta-Cognitive Strategies
Anxiety on arrival at school about separating from Mum. Lack of self worth. Anxiety that he can be as his peers in completing required tasks.	Historical separation from Mum for periods when she has been unable to care for him.	-Teacher /teacher-aide greet him warmly on arrival at school, while maintaining eye contact. Positive reassurance that he is a valued class member. -Positive reassurance that he will be able to complete required tasks. -To promote transition from home, encourage him to bring a photo of Mum and a treasured object to school.	-A will join in group and whole class activities.	-Positive, nurturing relationship building between Teacher /teacher-aide & target student. -Provide a safe place for his treasures.
	Unsettled presentation on arrival at school, suggesting possible setting events at home before arrival at school.	-Physical proximity to teacher. Predictable visual timetable. -Tasks should be shortened, gradually extended, using a timer. -Prior warning given of any change. -Teacher attends to target student's Reading & Maths group first.	-A will stop when an activity is finished. -A will speak politely to his teachers and peers. -A will develop the capacity to work in a group, using turn-taking, sharing, positive engagement with others.	-Use of Te Reo to greet him. Use of Te Reo throughout the day to give reassurance and affirmation. -Teacher modelling & role play with puppets, of expected polite conventions (nice talking), when speaking with his peers. -Circle time to promote Teacher modelling of social skills & opportunities to rehearse social skills.
	A wants to make friends, but lacks the social skills needed.	-Predictable teacher expectations of classroom behaviour & procedures stated clearly, fairly & consistently. -Both teacher & teacher-aide using consistent, labelled, descriptive praise, given immediately, each time he begins to comply to a request. e.g.-lining up, coming to the mat, speaking pleasantly. -Very frequent praise using eye contact & a smile paired with a 5-five & a sticker, to indicate teacher approval. Instructions visual as well as verbal, broken down into 1-2 steps at a time. -Computer or Choice reward time given on a frequent schedule contingent on compliance. -Social Story book with photos –"Who picks me up from school?' -Inclusion in whole class reward programme. -Planned downtime for play with playdough & family corner.	-A will engage positively with his peers. -A will join in with whole class and group reading . A will share his reading at home, daily. -A will willingly comply to teacher instructions.	-Use of 'Time to Talk' *with teacher-aide and one other student,to promote social skills and polite verbal interactions -Teacher modelling, support and rehearsing for engagement with his peers. -Teacher-aide support to put reading book into his bag each day. -Support for Mother to read with him each evening. -Daily contact with Mother to keep her informed of positive events and to promote a positive home-school relationship.

*Time to Talk Game (Alison Schroeder 2007).

Appendix 2 *Te Pito Mata Nurture Groups New Zealand*

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Anna explains:

'Te Pito Mata are developing a New Zealand model of transition groups and are looking for a school and kindergarten to take part in a pilot. It is planned that the transition group will be a new entrant class with a teacher and two teacher-aides. One of the adults will work with the feeder kindergartens to identify the children with social and emotional needs. They will begin to work with them within the kindergarten setting. The children will then transition straight to the new entrant class where they will be familiar with the adults and the routine. There will be places in the transition group available for children who have not had any pre-school education and are identified (through the Boxall Profile and other criteria) with social and emotional needs. The focus within the new entrant class (transition group), will be to follow the principles of the international evidence-based nurture groups and to get the children ready to learn.'