



Exceptional Care in the 1st 1000 Days

Introduction:

The first 1000 days is the period from the minute a baby is conceived up until they are two years old. As described by Raghavan,C and Ruta,V (2022) the earliest years of a babies life is considered a crucial period where an opportunity to infiltrate a child's development is available. The first 1000 days is a time where the brain is most sensitive to influence, a duration which will help structure a child's future. A baby's experiences in the first 3 years help shape the brain and dictate the organisation of the brain. The pruning of connections takes place in this time, helping baby to develop a sense of self and the world around them. All aspects of development for a baby including physical, emotional, social, communication and cognitive are developed throughout the first 1000 days as indicated by McEvoy,W and McEvoy,K (2008). Exceptional care within the first 1000 days emphasise's the importance of not only caring for children but nurturing them. Exceptional care has many benefits for children's development. A child that has been cared for in a stimulating way are more likely to grow healthier and happier. Promoting exceptional care allows relationships to form between parents as they are aware that their child is safe and truly cared for within setting, as well as offering the most nurturing and beneficial environment to allow children to flourish.

A meaningful care:



As described by the Education Hub (2020) early years practitioners have the responsibility to provide meaningful rich learning experiences for the children in their care. Necessary tasks like feeding, nappy-changing and dressing offers a great opportunity for responsive, one to one, relaxed interactions. Encouraged joint attention and vast language exchanges with care giver can also be inspired during these everyday tasks. For example child led weaning is a great opportunity for practitioners to support a baby's curiosity through a necessary task, when baby is exploring different tastes and textures it is important that practitioners encourage this. By asking baby questions like "does that taste yummy?", "what does that feel like?". Through these one to one interactions baby gets to learn new words, sounds as well as developing their fine motor skills. During times of caregiving a supreme opportunity for partnership, closeness and shared joy is provided between care giver and baby. The routines of caregiving are regularly structured and expected giving the child a sense of stability and security. Caregivers and children through these routines develop an understanding of the objective of caregiving like getting dressed after sleep. The objective of the care routine assists the coordination between the respective roles and actions of caregiver and child. For example the caregiver holding a garment whilst the child puts their leg in. Children's language skills develop, as well as the capacities of their independence and self regulation.

Indicated by Kayir, G (2022) when citing Dr Emilie "Emmi" Pikler was a child paediatrician from Austria strongly believed in the concept of meaningful care and offered a new approach to child education. In 1935 Pikler opened her own private practice for children where she could explore her progressive pedagogical views on the pace of which children should develop. In her practice Pikler had an opportunity to observe the relationships between parents and their children as well as their development on a frequent basis. Pikler offered parents advice which promoted the upbringing of

young children in a calm and hands on environment. Later in life Pikler was offered a place at an orphanage where she was able to guide other practitioners to view and respect each individual child as a human being as well as providing them with the individual support they needed according to their needs, without penetrating the current developmental stage of the child. During Pikler's time at the orphanage she was able to conduct a more wider research pool. Pikler described her findings in seven key principles that were based on her two main ideas the importance of a calm and respectful relationship with young children. The other to allow the complete freedom of movement based on the child's current developmental stage.

Challenges:



When working with young children practitioners are confronted with many challenges, which can include:

- Struggles when maintaining each individual child's routine.
- A bigger child to practitioner ratio, for example four children to one practitioner can be a barrier for providing meaningful learning experiences to each child.
- Debates with parents or other staff members when considering modern and non-modern ways of care.
- Difficulties building a trusting relationship with families.
- Low funding for settings which can have great influences on the quality of care for children.

- In the period of 2020-2022 the impression of Covid became an impactful challenge to overcome.

An unexpected challenge that Early Years practitioners had to face during 2020-2022 was Covid. Parents, babies and young children during this period was impacted Immensely, the first 1000 days can be overwhelming and frightening without the added mental strain of being in lockdown. Practitioners like health visitors, midwives, social workers and early years educators during this time whilst working from home had the struggles of attempting to offer support and guidance without interacting with baby and care giver. According to Babies in Lockdown (2020) almost 68% of parents felt that the changes brought by Covid had a negative effect on their unborn baby, baby or young child. Covid had a great influence on parents mental health as reported 47% of parents felt that their baby became more clingy and 26% reported that their baby was crying more than usual. Parents described feeling like they had no alone time without their baby, no privacy and no support from others negatively affecting their mental health. Due to this there was a larger increase in post natal depression. The first 1000 days is a crucial period where intense bonds are formed in babies brain, being in lockdown interrupted these strong bonds to form with extended family members like grandparents, aunties and uncles. Parents as well as practitioners during lockdown were concerned about whether baby would be meeting their developmental milestones when considering their social development. Being unable to interact with other babies and other adults other than their parents could impact how baby reacts to social interactions in later life.

Enabling adults:





An enabling adult can be defined as:

- A facilitator- an enabling adult should be a guide and offer support to baby in activities like baby led weening.
- A communicator- a adult that enables must be flexible and should recognise body language of baby to support language development.
- A leader- an adult that takes a leader role within setting must contribute to encourage other staff to enable.
- A professional- an enabling adult should be passionate and motivated to provide the best quality care for baby and family.
- A expert- a adult that enables should have experience that gives them the appropriate knowledge on what children need.
- A career- the enabling adult should have a level of care and nurture to offer children.
- A educator- the enabling adult will have the idea of education in a way that provides stimulating experiences and offers the child a sense of self.

Enabling adults have appropriate responses due to their observation which allows them to create an environment that is communication rich, a attentive approach so that children can feel safe and that they belong. Adults that enable model a joyful approach to learning where not only children enjoy but practitioners too. As described by the Curriculum for Non-Maintained settings (2022) the enabling adult should set an example for learning by building an emotionally safe environment where children are encouraged and supported through their natural curiosity. This will have a positive impact on the child's well being trough a continued care fashioning empathy and understanding. A sensitive approach illustrating respect for children through their decisions and choices, guiding them during change and times of uncertainty. Practitioners have the responsibility to provide a consistent wide and stabilised curriculum, through well ordered adjustments. Through support from an adult who encourages risk taking and challenge children are able to progress in their independence, confidence and resilience.

Why babies rely on adults?

- Susceptibility to the environment: the environment for babies and young children should be safe but challenging, in order for babies to develop their competence and problem solving skills for example forest schools.

- Dependency on parents: babies should be nurtured and loved. Having emotional security can help form unbreakable bonds that grow stronger over time providing babies with their neurological development.
- Dependency on services: babies depend on their primary care giver for their needs to be met however some parents may need educational support provided by health visitors and doctors in order to achieve this.
- Dependency on social support: parents who struggle more than others may require greater levels of support. Invisibility to professionals allows parents to build trusting relationships helping practitioners to understand where children come from to offer the best support suited to that child and their family.

Enabling Environments:





The environment is a key influence on a child's growth and development. It is important that the environment surrounding a child provides them with the opportunity to gain resilience whilst encouraging their independence, the value of an enabling environment is indicated by Hodgman, L (2012). As described an enabling environment should provide children with the chance to explore the world around them through their curiosity and imagination. The enabling environment should stimulate the child whilst inspiring challenge and risk. A flexible focused learning approach through the environment including various forms of play supports a child's learning through all aspects. Creating communication skills through play and setting boundaries with rules allows children to gain more skills and exercise their current ones. Promoting children to make mistakes and take risk gives children a positive attitude towards their learning. Reinforcing children to develop a wider range of understanding of others' needs and individualism advocates equality. Practitioners have the responsibility to the children in their care to provide an enabling environment through the appropriate resources and materials. An enabling environment within the early years should be accessible, stable and include space where high quality resources can be used efficiently. The significance of the environment and the long term effects it could have on the child is highlighted through Vygotsky's research on 'The problems of the environment' (1935). Vygotsky compared the similarities and differences between an animal's brain and a human brain when considering the environment. His findings concluded that unlike an animal's brain the human brain reacts entirely to its environment and has the capacity to alter its environment to accomplish its own purposes. Vygotsky believed that both the social and cultural environments that which a child is raised participate in the child's learning.

Activity Ideas:



Only About Children (2023) claims that the minute a baby enters the world they begin to use their senses to help them explore the world around them. Young children and babies use all their senses to gain new information and engage with their surroundings. Sensory play approaches development by stimulating all five senses. It builds cognitive skills and can influence how children view the world. Sensory play includes touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing as well as movement this includes balance and spatial awareness. Each new experience a baby has helps to form the architecture of the brain. Language development is also supported through play as babies are able to learn how to respond through stimuli. Babies can enjoy simple sensory play like touching different objects and surfaces, hearing the sounds different materials make creates a curiosity for the baby. Within the first 1000 days toddlers are developing their thinking abilities and will begin to build their independence. Learning concepts like time and opposites through activities that compare light and dark, as well as sorting colours encourages toddlers to explore and be curious. As expressed by Conkbayir, M and Pascal, C (2014) when describing Froebels idea of play as a means to active learning. The theory of play continues to dictate contemporary early years programmes where the appropriate materials and equipment are provided to support play in class rooms. For example majority of class rooms within the early years children are provided with dramatic play areas that includes representations of kitchen equipment like a plastic cooker, food, cleaning equipment, dolls and other similar items.

Activities considered sensory play can include:

- Sensory pouch's- zip lock bags filled with leaves, shaving foam or rice. This activity allows baby's to learn about new textures.
- Sand, rice and hay pits- different textures.
- Sensory toys- lights, fidget. Helps baby to understand what different toys do.

- “Ice age rescue”- frozen animal toys with a bowl of warm water. During activity explain cold and hot, demonstrate how the ice melts in the warm water. Let the child play and explore for themselves. Great way for child to learn words like hot, cold, water, in and out. This type of sensory activity promotes problem solving, use of fine motor skills, learning temperatures and new words.
- “Cloud dough ice cream”- flower with food colouring or chalk mixed with oil with ice cream scoops and cones. An activity that promotes children to learn new textures, use of fine motor skills, as well as teaching them how to balance the flower in the cone.
- Water trays with toys- allows children to learn how objects float or sink.
- Shape activity’s- a box with shape toys (cut out the shapes). This activity provides baby to use their problem solving skills. Helps baby to focus, be patient, learn new colours/vocabulary, use of fine motor skills.
- Pulling cloth, string, straws out of box- baby learns what happens if they push or pull straw.
- Bowling with cups and bowl- helps toddler with their balance and coordination and use of gross motor skills.

An activity described as rich and beneficial for young children’s development is Treasure baskets. Froebel Trust (2023) asserts that treasure baskets are a collection of household items that offer babies an opportunity to explore a range of different materials and textures. As described a greater variety of material offered to baby offers stimulation for infants brain development and interests through using their fingers, hands and mouth. A treasure basket is an independent type of play which is safe and allows baby to explore unaccompanied. Creating curiosity and concentration for baby through a non social activity provides adults with the ability to be responsive but not directive, so baby can investigate through their own imagination.





1 - Personal image (2023)



2 - Personal image (2023)



3 - Personal image (2023)



4 - Personal image (2023)



5 - Personal image (2023)

Being inclusive:



Suggested by Nutbrown, C and Clough, P (2010) inclusivity demonstrates a sense of belonging in children, through including children in decisions involving them and evaluating their responses can have a positive impact on their learning environment. Listening and providing children with what they want to learn and enjoy can encourage their enthusiasm during their learning experiences. Based on the evidence provided and described through the 16 small projects based in settings it was founded that change in learning experiences can enhance the inclusiveness in all children. Inclusivity in the first 1000 days can include equal interactions with all babies as well as practitioners understanding and continuing to educate themselves on each individual baby's needs. This can be through practitioners educating themselves on each babies routines, likes, dislikes, family, religion and culture. As described a young child's idea of identity and self esteem are conditioned by the efficient encouragement of inclusivity and the positive conception of belonging. Promoting an inclusive approach to learning is supported by McBlain, S and Gray, C (2015) when citing Dewey (1897, 1916). Dewey believed that all children adversely engage with their learning and all settings should enthusiastically support this. A child centred approach supports the development of a child's individualism through their experiences. Reassuring differences in children prepares them for their life as adults where they can become effective members of society.

Partnerships:



Effective partnerships and relationships within the first 1000 days has a substantial impact on a child's development. Positive relationships can facilitate the development of a child as it offers a sense of security and dependancy the child has on their care giver. Building trust and recognising the awareness of intimacy can encourage the child's confidence when expressing emotions, achieving developmental milestones and through stimulating experiences. A constructive relationship between a child and their care giver can result in many positive outcomes. The influence relationships can have on a child's development is indicated by Hayes, N *et al* (2017) when

describing Bowlby's theory of attachment (1988). Bowlby believed that the developing child needs to progress a sense of trust in order for a bond or attachment to form between baby and primary care giver. Bowlby described that a parents responses to the satisfaction of the baby's needs would determine the basis of attachment. For example if a parent responds to the needs of the baby with a warm consistent approach the baby will gain a sense of security and trust that their needs will always be met inspiring a secure attachment to form. Bowlby's theory supported Bronfenbrenner's beliefs that relationships are the foremost system which children develop. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) expressed that strong beneficial relationships have the capacity to overcome the impacts of the most damaging environments.

It is important that when considering relationships and partnerships within the first 1000 days to contemplate the partnerships care givers must build with professionals. The first 1000 days can be difficult for parents and some can feel uneducated on how to met their baby's needs. Having professionals parents feel they can depend on and trust can have a exceptional influence on both baby and their care givers well being. Professionals like midwives, health visitors and social workers have the capacity to offer advice and guidance to some parents who may feel overwhelmed during the first 1000 days. Building trusting partnerships with professionals offers care givers in times of vulnerability a person they can turn to and get the support they need. Professionals have a duty to provide the children in their care with whatever support needed to best met each child's individual needs. As suggested by Stacy, S (2009) the key principle of responding to a child's evolving needs is to evolve curriculum based on professionals observations. Developing curriculum to meet the needs of children supports their engagement with their learning. Maintaining a maindain curriculum creates struggles for professionals as young children are less enthusiastic. Generating a curriculum based on what children's interests are allows children to be passionate and excited through their learning. As advocated by Montessori children learn best through what they are fascinated by.

International approaches:



Providing children with an exceptional care can be encouraged and explored through outdoor experiences. The emphasis on the value outdoor experiences offers children is practiced through the Reggio Emilia approach. As described by Reggio Children (2022) the educational philosophy of

Reggio Emilia is based on the view that all children have the capacity of extraordinary potential. When learning through exchanging process' in the context of social interactions and culture. Each individual child as well as a group can be conductors of their own learning experiences where they are competent of crediting sense and meaning. Children are able to process hundreds of language through the Reggio Emilia approach this includes children's ability to express, anticipate and encounter through the many dimensions of experiences. Reggio Emilia utilises the environment for children by allowing them to learn freely in a welcoming atmosphere where embracing culture through natural resources represents an authentic community. The significance of an open experimental view on learning is outlined by Steiner's theory on the insistence of the natural world. Space (2022) suggests that Steiner's theory of Early Years education centres the principles of Holistic Development. Steiner suggested that children learn better through using their hands where they can practice their artistic practical skills in an holistic way. The Steiner approach believed in a non academic learning perspective throughout Early Years education. The aim of this method is that children have a chance to be creative and experimental with their learning working towards the structure of their holistic development.

Reference List

Best Beginnings et al. (2020) *Babies in Lockdown*. Available at: <https://www.pmhn.scot.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Babies-in-Lockdown-Main-Report-FINAL-VERSION-1.pdf> (Accessed: 22nd January 2023)

Conkbayir, M. and Pascal, C. (2014) *Early Childhood Theories and Contemporary Issues*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Education Wales (2022) *Curriculum for non-maintained settings*. Available at: <https://hwb.gov.wales/api/storage/b1801d78-38c3-4320-9818-d9996c21aef8/220914-a-curriculum-for-funded-non-maintained-nursery-settings.pdf> (Accessed: 20th December 2022) \

Froebel Trust (2023) *Elinor Goldschimed and treasure baskets*. Available at: <https://www.froebel.org.uk/training-and-resources/elinor-goldschmied-treasure-baskets> (Accessed: 18th January 2023)

Hodgman, L. (2012) cited Vygotsky, L (1935) *Enabling Environments in the early years*. London: Practical Pre-School Books. Available at: https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=n56_BAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=enabling+environments+in+early+years&ots=l6vCMt3ETX&sig=n0zSeTt0T7UqSD_7N6rikdTdxZY&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=enabling%20environments%20in%20early%20years&f=false (Accessed: 15th December 2022)

Hayes, N. et al. (2017) *Introducing Bronfenbrenner*. New York: Routledge.

Kayir, G. 2022 'Emmi Pikler's approach to early childhood education', In Ari, A. (Ed.) *Student- friendly teaching approaches*. Newcastle upon time ; Cambridge scholars publishing. Available at: https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=vnVjEAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=Emmi+Pikler+approach+to+early+childhood+education+&ots=jpNPexEjNw&sig=QcN_XikEgIREIe7Zf2BZzMWI9I8&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Emmi%20Pikler%20approach%20to%20early%20childhood%20education&f=false (Accessed: 12th January 2023)

MacBlain, S. and Gray, C. (2015) cited Dewey, J (1987, 1916) *Learning Theories in Childhood*. United Kingdom: SAGE Publications.

Nutbrown, C. and Clough, P. (2010) 'Citizenship and inclusion in the early years: understanding and responding to children's perspectives on 'belonging'', *International journal of early years education*, 17(3), pp. 191-206. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1080/09669760903424523?scroll=top&needAccess=true&role=tab> (Accessed: 13th January 2023)

Only about Children (2023) *Exploring the benefits of sensory play for children*. Available at: <https://www.oac.edu.au/news-views/sensory-play/> (Accessed: 9th January 2023)

Personal images (2023)

Raghavan, C. and Ruta, V. (2022) 'Archives of diseases in childhood', *Early child development: Silent emergency or unique opportunity?*, 107(A1). Available at: https://adc.bmj.com/content/107/Suppl_1/A1.1.citation-tools (Accessed: 12th December 2022)

Reggio Children (2022) *Values*. Available at: <https://www.reggiochildren.it/en/reggio-emilia-approach/valori-en/> (Accessed: 21st January 2023)

Space (2022) 'Steiner's Theory and Approach to Childcare and Early Learning', Space Team [blog]. August 10th. Available at: <https://space.myxplor.com/blog/steiners-theory-and-approach-in-childcare-and-early-learning/> (Accessed: 21st January 2023)

Stacey, S. (2009) cited Montessori, M . *Emergent Curriculum in Early Childhood Settings*. Yorkton Court: Redleaf Press.

The Education Hub (2022) *The Pikler/Resources for infant educators approach*. Available at: <https://theeducationhub.org.nz/the-pikler-resources-for-infant-educarers-approach/> (Accessed: 11th January 2023)

Wendy McEvoy, Katrina McEvoy, & Siren Films (Producers), & . (2008). *The wonder year: First year development & shaping the brain*. [Video/DVD] Siren Films. Retrieved from <https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/the-wonder-year-first-year-development-shaping-the-brain>