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2418871

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Cover Sheet

Digital scrap book

First 1000 days digital scrap book

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The first 1000 days

The first 1000 days refers to the critical developmental period from when the child is conceived and continuing through to a child's second birthday (Karakochuk *et al.*, 2018 CARE, 2021; House of commons, 2019). Indrio *et al.* (2023) highlights key stages during this critical period and emphasises the importance of interventions such as proper nutrition, healthcare, support for parents and access to stimulating environments that promote holistic develop. Each stage builds on the previous one, showing how early care and experiences lay the foundation for a child's growth. According to Karacochuk *et al.* (2018) research has shown that the first 1000 days is identified by fast physical and cognitive growth which can lead to long-term impacts. Early years practitioners play a crucial role in supporting expectant mothers with information on nutrition and ensuring access to regular medical check-ups for a healthy pregnancy. After birth, parents receive ongoing support from community midwives, who monitor the child's growth, feeding and developmental milestones. Additionally, early years practitioners create a safe, nurturing and stimulating environments that encourage exploration and holistic development. Furthermore, the first 1000 days provides an opportunity for practitioners to identify developmental delays and put proactive strategies into place, ensuring children have the best possible start in life.





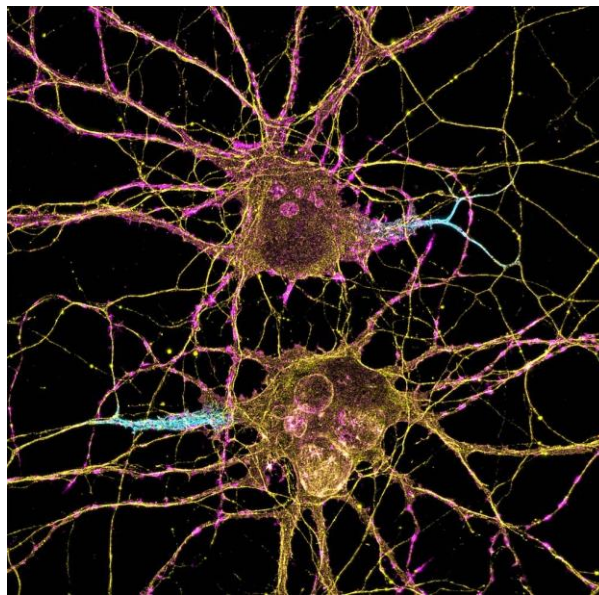
Importance of the first 1000 days



1 - Yates (2015)

According to Yates (2015) studies have shown that children with poor nutrition, lack of stimulation, and high stress tend to do less well than others in school, earn less and experience health issues. Yates (2015) highlights that the brain uses 97% of energy in the early year stages, therefore any malnutrition can limit this energy, and this is why early interventions can make a difference.

Garvey (2023) explains that the brain consists of a network of neurons that are mostly formed before birth, although not all neurons are fully developed. Garvey (2023) adds that neurons communicate through synapses, which become stronger with repeated activation. Therefore, a stimulating environment can aid with building these strong connections. For example, a baby playing with colourful, textured toys by focussing on the objects and motor skills by repeatedly reaching for them. In addition to direct benefit for children, investing in the first 1000 days can help reduce government costs. Early intervention, such as nutritional support, developmental monitoring and access to stimulating environments, can lower the need for health care and additional support later in life.



2 - Neurons

What is exceptional care

O'Malley *et al.* (2023) defines exceptional care as the delivery of a high-quality support that is safe, effective, efficient, timely and focusses on individual needs. This care goes above and beyond, it minimises risk, ensures the child's well-being and achieves intended outcomes.

Inclusive practice

According to Knowles (2018) being inclusive means creating an environment that reflect and accommodate children's diverse experiences, home background and individual learning needs. These factors influence how children engage with learning and must be considered to ensure all children can achieve and experience wellbeing. Emmi Pikler's ideas supports this inclusive approach as highlighted by Brodie (2024b) by emphasising respect for children's independence, encouraging consistent relationship with caregivers, and allowing natural development through interrupted play. Department of Education (2023) emphasises that high quality early education is particularly vital for children from disadvantaged

backgrounds, as they often begin school significantly behind their peers. Department of Education (2023) adds that it helps close the gap by ensuring all children including those with special needs get the support they need. Additionally, Early Years Alliance (2015) highlights that high quality inclusive setting help address inequality and discrimination by offering young children's equal opportunities during their critical early year's development. Furthermore, children rights, as stated in the UNCRC are emphasised by UNICEF (n.d.) article 6, the essential right for every child to life, survival and development which is critical during the early years. Welsh Government (2014) Flying Start programme is an example of exceptional care, supporting disadvantaged families through parenting advice, health service and free childcare for two-year-olds. The programme aims to improve developmental outcomes and reduce inequalities early on.



3 - Welsh Government (2014) Flying Start programme

Enabling environment

Gerhardt (2014) compares a child's brain to a plant seedling, emphasising the importance of the environment in supporting growth and development. Just like a seedling requires good soil, adequate water and nurturing conditions to develop strong roots, a child's brain requires a stimulating, supportive environment to develop strong foundation. The Welsh Government (2022) state that the environment should meet both physical and emotional needs, creating opportunities for exploration, curiosity and problem solving. An enabling environment celebrates diversity, allowing children to engage with and learn from a variety of cultures and experiences. According to Sagastui, Herran, and Anguera (2022) Pikler's approach to children free play is important for their development and should be encouraged to help them become independent. This aligns with UNICEF (n.d) article 31 of the UNCRC, that children have a right to play and engage in a wide range of cultural activities. In practice, enabling environments provide various opportunities to support children's holistic development. For example, safe, accessible, authentic experiences and stimulating indoor and outdoor spaces encourage play, such as climbing, exploring and being creative, supporting many areas of development. Additionally, providing healthy meals encourage positive eating habits supporting physical health. Furthermore, access to quiet areas where children can relax, engage in calming activities or sleep. This supports children to manage their emotions, reduce stress and promote well-being. Early years setting also ensure safety by creating a secure and child friendly environment and nurturing relationships with practitioner, which is key to exceptional care. These practices align with Maslow's Hierarchy as highlighted by Johnston *et al.* (2018) the importance of meeting basic needs to reach ones potential.



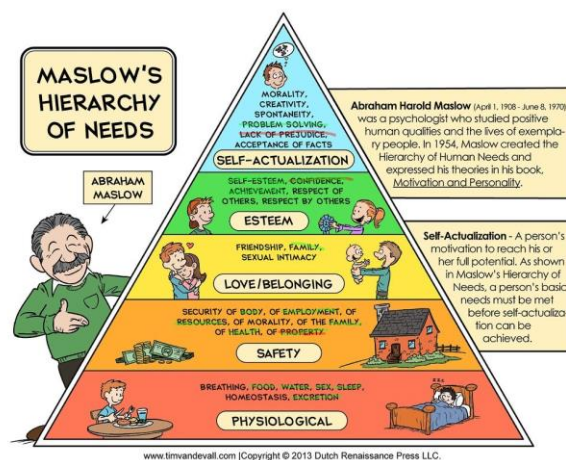
4 - Stimulating sensory exploration



5 - Access to healthy meals



6 - Safe area to rest and sleep



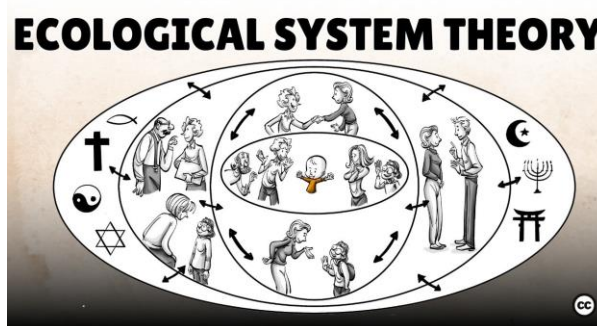
Role of an early year's practitioner in supporting children and families in the first 1000 days

Brodie (2018) states that the first 1000 days is a critical period that lay the foundation for a child's future growth and development. According to Welsh Government (2022), the role of the enabling adult is to create a supportive, safe environment for children to express themselves and manage their emotions. They emphasise the importance meaningful learning by linking subjects effectively and adjusting planning to meet children's needs and interest.

setting and the exosystem looks at the indirect influence of external factors on the child. In practice, multi-agency teams can work within the mesosystem when they collaborate between early years setting and home. They work within the exosystem when they involve professionals such as health services, that impact a child's development indirectly. In multi-agency working, professionals collaborate to strengthen relationship through a consistent approach, positively impacting the child's development during a time when critical brain connections are being formed. Collaboration between professionals helps identify needs early and provide consistent support which is considered crucial in the first 1000 days. For example, during the first 1000 days, early years practitioners and health professionals can work together to identify developmental concerns early, ensuring the child receives the right support for healthy growth. Sprout (2021) states that poor relationships between parents and early year practitioners can negatively impact a child. Multi agency working can help to strengthen a child's support network, especially when relationships break down in one area. It brings together different professionals to provide ongoing support, helping the child's development during the first 1000 days and beyond.



8 - Interaction between child and practitioner



9 - Sprouts (2021) Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems

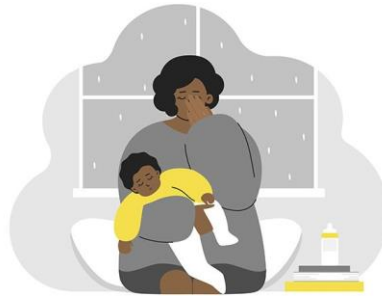


10 - Working in partnership can help support the child

Maternal factors that could impact development and what support could be offered

According to Capitani *et al.* (2023) several factors impact early development, including maternal nutrition, mental health, social support, exposure to environmental pollutant and others. Likhar and Patil (2022) emphasise that a mother's diet during pregnancy and breastfeeding directly impacts a child's development. If a mother's diets are inadequate, it can negatively affect the child's development. This highlights the importance of maternal nutrition for the well-being of both mother and child. In practice, health services will support parents by providing nutritional guidance. If difficulties arise due to poverty, parents can be signposted to support programmes and financial aid. Additionally, the midwife provides information on breastfeeding, highlighting the importance in supplying essential nutrients to support the child's development.

Additionally, according to Indrio *et al* (2023) postnatal depression in mothers can significantly affect a child's development due to the mother's inability to interact with the child. When a mother is unable to respond with the child, it can interfere with the early interaction between them. These interactions, like talking, comforting, and playing can help the child's brain to develop. Health visitors can support mothers by identifying the signs of depression and offering regular check-ups to monitor both the child and the mother. Health visitors can also signpost mothers to counselling or mental health services if needed. By providing early support, health visitors can ensure that both mother and child receive the care needed for healthy development.



11 - Postnatal depression

Fruits  Choose: MyPlate.gov	• Vitamins: Vitamin C, folate, vitamin A (in the form of beta-carotene) • Minerals: Potassium
Vegetables  Choose: MyPlate.gov	• Vitamins: Vitamins C & K, folate, vitamin A (in the form of beta-carotene) • Minerals: Potassium, magnesium
Protein  Choose: MyPlate.gov	• Vitamins: Vitamins A, D, & E; B vitamins • Minerals: Iron, zinc, magnesium
Grains  Choose: MyPlate.gov	• Vitamins: B vitamins • Minerals: Iron, magnesium, selenium
Dairy  Choose: MyPlate.gov	• Vitamins: A & D (fortified), vitamin B12 • Minerals: Calcium, potassium, phosphorous

12 - Vitamins and Minerals

Challenges in providing high quality care

The first 1000 days are considered a critical period for development, yet practitioners can face challenges that can affect the delivery of high-quality care. Early Years Alliance (2018) highlighted that one in four practitioners considered leaving profession due to high level of stress caused by financial pressure and insufficient government funding. For example, a budget cut may force setting to reduce practitioners, which can increase the workload for the remaining staff, leading to burnout, stress, and time off work, which ultimately affects the ability to provide high quality care. Without sufficient staff the adult to child ratio is reduced, leading to less individualised care and reduced meaningful interaction which are considered crucial for brain development.



13 - Work related stress

Impact of lockdown

According to a survey by Anna Freud Centre, highlighted by Lawler (2021) that practitioners noticed that lockdown has impacted children's emotional well-being. Many practitioners are working with children with complex and challenging needs, which they feel unprepared to manage which increases stress among practitioners. For example, in early years setting, a practitioner might be supporting a child who exhibits severe separation anxiety and frequent emotional outbursts. At the same time, another child in the group may have delayed communication skills, requiring one to one attention. Without additional staff or specialised training to manage these complex needs, practitioners may struggle to provide high quality care for these children while maintaining care for the rest of the group, leading to overwhelming stress and potential burnout. A practitioner under stress may struggle to build strong attachment with children, which are essential for brain development as explained by Bowlby's Attachment Theory highlighted in (Brodie, 2024a). Possible solutions to these problems begin with seeking volunteers to support interactions, this not only helps the child's development but also offers volunteers valuable skills and experience. Additionally, early years settings can collaborate with specialist setting to observe good practices and learn from their expertise, gaining insight into additional needs support strategies. Furthermore, providing mental health support, such as access to counselling services can help practitioners manage the demands of their role, resulting to high quality care that has a lasting impact on a child.



Barrier to providing stimulating environment

Funding issues not only impacts staffing, but also a barrier to providing a stimulating environment. Gerhardt (2024) emphasises that enabling environments are crucial for brain development. Without access to adequate resources and outdoor play areas, setting may struggle to offer engaging and stimulating experiences, which are important for brain development. Possible solution to this issue is securing grants for resources and equipment. For example, early years specialist setting successfully secured a grant to equip their sensory room with lighting, tactile panels and other stimulating resources. fund sensory equipment. This provided the children with a safe stimulating environment where they were able to manage their emotions and make positive interactions allowing them to develop. Additionally, low-cost natural materials or recycled materials can be used to create sensory and play resources, offering stimulating activities that are both stimulating and cost effective.



14 - Recycled resources

Activities

In the first 1000 days, various activities can offer valuable experiences that support children's learning and development. The Curiosity Approach (2024) state that play activities supports children develop key skills like coordination, creativity, and social abilities, preparing them for future learning and challenges.

Treasure baskets

A podcast by [Manning- Morton \(2024\)](#) highlights Elinor Goldschmied's development of the treasure basket, which encourages hands on exploration for babies using natural objects. Manning- Morton (2024) adds that the role of the adult is to observe and allow the baby to freely explore. This aligns with the Pikler approach highlighted by Sagastui, Herran, and Anguera (2022) who supports the freedom to explore and engage independently.

In practice, the treasure basket approach involves giving a child a basket of natural objects, like wooden spoon, pinecones, or fabric to explore independently. The child may manipulate the items in their own way, which helps to develop their senses and motor skills. The practitioner observes to ensure safety, however, will not interrupt. This approach allows the child to learn independently by exploring different textures, shapes and cause and effect at their own pace. The treasure basket approach is meaningful as it helps babies learn by

exploring different objects. As they play, they develop skills like using their hand to manipulate in various ways which can be transferable skills developed for other areas of learning.



15 - Treasure baskets

Playdough



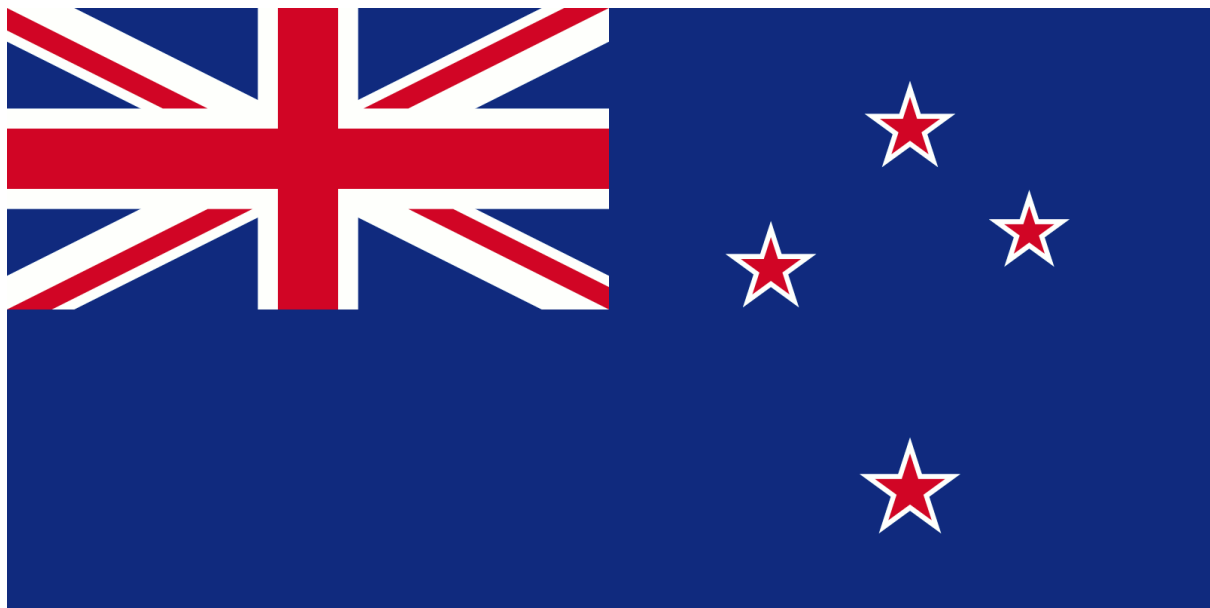
According to McIlroy (2024) playdough offers developmental benefits for young children, including, development of fine motor skills, language, creativity, maths, cause and effect, as well as a therapeutic resource. Parker (n.d) states that from a Froebelian view, clay is a valuable

resource for children and supports children's holistic development. Parker (n.d) adds that children are drawn to materials like clay, which offers endless opportunities for play and development. Playdough can serve a similar purpose to clay in early years.

In practice, playdough is a great resource for children to explore and play. As they squish, roll, pinch or poke the playdough, they build their hand muscles and improve their fine motor skills. When children create things like animals, they may practice using new words to describe what they have created. For example, the child may create a snake and talk about the colour or the size. The child may engage in counting, by making several snakes and lining them up. The child may explore cause and effect by mixing two coloured playdough and observe the changes in colour. Additionally, playdough is calming and the manipulation of squishing and rolling provides deep pressure, which can help the child stay focused and calm. This is meaningful to the first 1000 days as it supports early brain development, helping children to build various skills during the crucial early years.

International approaches

Te Whariki



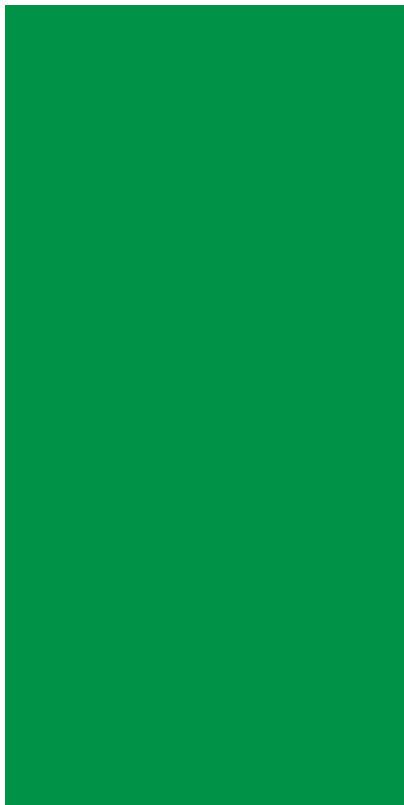
According to NZEI Te Riu Roa (2016) Te Whariki is a curriculum developed collaboratively with input from approaches such as Montessori and Steiner. NZEI Te Riu Roa (2016) adds that the curriculum is bilingual, bicultural, and takes a holistic approach, emphasising reciprocal and responsive relationships. The Te Whariki curriculum, outlined by the Ministry of Education (2017), is based on four key principles and five strands and is symbolised by a woven mat.

The first 1000 days are key for brain development. Te Whariki supports this by focussing on nurturing and responsive relationships, which helps build strong neural connections. In practice, a practitioner might respond to a baby's cry by offering eye contact, close contact and comforting words, helping to build trust in their relationship. The holistic approach encourages practitioners to provide experiences that looks at all areas of the child's development. The integration of culture in the curriculum promotes a sense of belonging and wellbeing.



16 - NZEI Te Riu Roa (2016) Te Whariki Curriculum

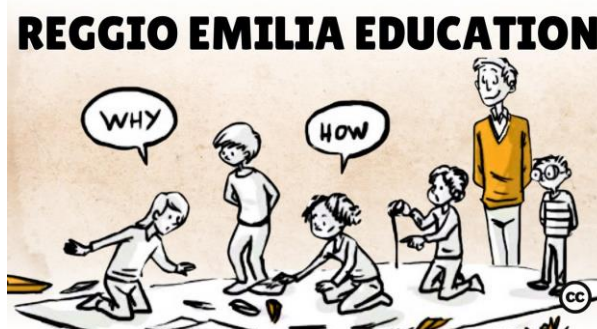
Reggio Emilia Approach



Sprouts (2019) state that the Reggio Emilia approach, created after world war II, focusses on child led learning without a fixed curriculum, where children explore and create with the support from teachers and the environment. Sprouts (2019) adds that children express

themselves through 100 languages, like art and play, with parents continuing their learning at home.

In practice the teacher guides while the children lead their learning, making decisions and solving problems together. For instance, a child pours water from one container to another, noticing it spills. The teacher asks. “What do you think will happen if we try pouring slower.?” The child experiments with the new idea, pouring slowly to avoid spilling. This encourages curiosity, learning about cause and effect and supports problem solving, key aspects of development in the first 1000 days. Additionally in practice, children may express themselves in many ways. For instance, a child tells a story through role play, they may act out different characters and emotions. They explore their creativity and imagination, which is considered crucial for brain development especially during the first 1000 days.



17 - Sprouts (2019) Reggio Emilia approach

Comparing international early years approaches

Te Whariki offers a flexible curriculum with principles and strands that support holistic development through actions and respect for children's ideas. It emphasises, culture, relationships with families and communities to support children's development. In contrast, Reggio Emiliass approach is flexible but entirely child led, focussing on learning through real life experiences and play. Both approaches support inclusive environments, but the Te Whariki provides a clearer structure for practitioners, while Reggio Emilia allows for a more individualised and exploratory learning opportunities. Both approaches recognise the importance of responsive and engaging experiences which is important for brain development especially in the first 1000 days.

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