



The First 1000 Days

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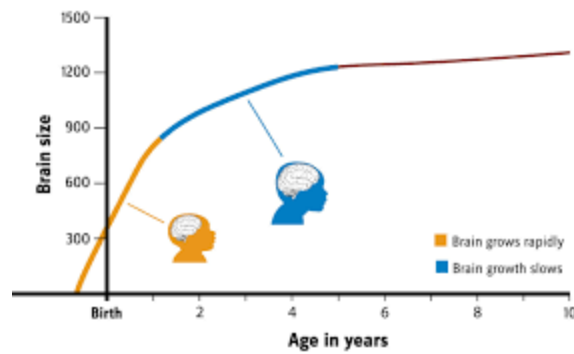
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This scrapbook will be evaluating the important role of an early years practitioners in the first 1000 days.

According to Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom MP (2021), The period of conception until age two (the first 1000 days) is recognised worldwide as a critical time, this is the time where lifelong building blocks for emotional and physical health are laid down. It is also recognised as an essential time to begin forming bonds and relationships and has also been recognised by neurological science as the period of rapid growth for the brain. C. Nutbrown (2005) suggest that babies are born with a powerful motivation to learn and the people around them can influence and promote their rapid development as babies learn from experiencing healthy, positive relationships during the first 1000 days.



1 - copy + paste image (Healthcaretimes.com, 2022)

As you can see from this graph the most traumatic growth occurs before the age of 3 years old. Which suggests that 85% of the brain is formed during the first 1000 days.

Parents in Wales are fortunate to have midwives, health visitors, social workers and early years practitioners to help during the first 1000 days of an infants life and they all have a very important role to play. Early year practitioners have a role to encourage babies to learn healthy learning habits for example; problem solving, creativity and a love for learning. This Scrapbook will explore three main elements that will guide an early years practitioner to provide a successful first 1000 days for a child. The three main elements that will be discussed are The Enabling Adult, An Enabling Environment and Enabling Experiences.

An Enabling Environment:



An enabling environment provides a safe space for babies and toddlers that protects them from harms way. An enabling environment encourages babies and toddlers to be who they want to be and allows a sense of belonging. It is a space where babies and toddlers are allowed time to explore

and take risks. It is also an environment that is communication rich and aims to meet every child's individual needs.

A practitioner may refer back to the theorist Maslow when aiming to meet a child's needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs represents a pyramid with five different stages of needs to be met, which are physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs and self-actualization. At the bottom of the pyramid is basic needs such as food, water, warmth and rest, then at the top of the pyramid are more fulfilling needs like self improvement. A child can not move up the pyramid until all their needs are met. therefore a practitioner's role is to ensure each child's needs are met so a child can focus on reaching their full potential.



2 - copy + paste image (<https://worldbuilding.stackexchange.com/questions/10645/what-would-poverty-be-like-if-there-was-an-infinite-supply-of-food>, 2015.)

A practitioner who ensures that each individual child meets their basic needs may find that the child will start to begin to feel safe and secure in the setting as they can rely on the practitioner to provide them with their basic needs.

To ensure that babies and toddlers' needs are being met in a early years setting it's important for practitioners to encourage good nutrition and healthy habits. Professor J. Buttriss, director general of the British Nutrition Foundation, (2017) states that "It is vitally important that children eat well in early life, not only to provide them with nutrients they need to grow and develop but also for their lifelong health".

Parents and practitioners should be role models when implementing healthy habits. If a baby or toddler see the practitioners eating healthy options it will encourage the babies and toddlers to do the same. J. Segal and L. Robinson (2021) states that a healthy habit like having a good breakfast every day has proven to have many benefits for babies and toddlers such as better memory, more stable moods and score higher on tests.

A daily routine helps babies and toddlers to feel more in control of their environment therefore practitioners should prioritise routines in the setting. Zerothree.org (2010) suggest routines help babies and toddlers learn self control. It helps to provide comfort and a sense of safety to young children as they will know what comes next, which gives babies and toddlers confidence. It also helps them to trust the practitioner as they will learn that the practitioner will provide what they need. Routines can also help to develop social skills as babies and toddlers will learn routine

greetings, for example saying hello when they see someone new or waving goodbye when someone leaves.

M. Kaplan-Sanoff (2021) states that children in a stimulated and safe environment should have the freedom of movement and opportunities to experience the world by using different senses. When a practitioner is setting up an indoor play space they should be encouraged to look at it from a child's perspective and ensure all activities are at a child's eye level. Observing the children in the setting can also help the practitioner to provide activities in which support children's schemas and help encourage their new skills. Children can find too many toys or a cluttered play space overwhelming and prefer an orderly environment. Practitioners could use the Montessori approach as guidelines to help them succeed in providing an enabling environment. As stated by Aubrey and Riley (2019) Maria Montessori stressed the importance of a prepared environment which means, an environment that is calm and organised and everything in the environment has a purpose and a learning potential. This type of environment was created to encourage freedom and self-discipline in children. She also believed that educational environments for young children should attend the holistic needs of each individual child. Montessori spaces are known for displaying toys on low shelves rather than using toy boxes as she believed that less is more and by displaying only a few different toys, it allows children to make independent decisions. Due to less toys there are also less distractions therefore it improves children's concentration skills. An indoor enabling environment could promote different areas of development for example a dedicated role play area, shelving for problem solving activities, a crafts table for painting and messy play and a quiet corner for reading and sensory opportunities such as different fabrics to touch or a light projector to watch colours changing and moving around.



3 - [copy + paste Image] Willow Dene School, 2018.

This photo is an example of what a indoor enabling environment may look like. As you can see from the photo is has dedicated areas of interest to suit different developments. It's uncluttered and eye catching for young children.

Practitioners may be inspired by Reggio Emilia's outdoor environments when aiming to create an enabling outdoor environment. A. Haifa (2020) suggests that children in an Reggio Emilia environment children need to be able to touch, move, listen, see, taste, discover and explore the world around them in an enriching and supportive environment. An Reggio Emilia outdoor environment is aimed to be open ended with mainly natural materials so they are free to follow their own interests and direct their own independent learning. Practitioners should be aware of the

benefits that outdoor learning has on babies and toddlers and how it helps them developmentally in many ways. Being outdoors provides babies and toddlers with a rich sensory experience. It can develop babies and toddlers fine motor skills by encouraging them to pick up natural materials such as leaves, shells, pebbles and pinecones. Outdoor environments also encourage the opportunity for child led play and for toddlers to be creative and use their imagination. Babies and toddlers learn by taking risks therefore allowing them to challenge themselves outdoors will help them to develop and learn new skills. Practitioners can use the outdoor environment to teach babies and toddlers valuable life skills by inviting them to plant flowers and grow fruit and vegetables they will learn to care and respect plants and understand the world better.



4 - Montessori Minute - The outdoor learning environment, (2018)

This video is an example of an enabling outdoor environment that provides children with the opportunities they need to have enriched sensory experience and child led play. Although settings don't need acres of outdoor space for children to benefit from an outdoor environment. It is more important for practitioners to aware of how beneficial being outside and exploring is to young minds.

An Enabling Adult



The Welsh Government discuss that an early years setting should have an enabling adult. Enabling adults create an environment that is communication rich and helps to create strong connections between the child's home life and the wider community. An enabling adult should attempt to make the environment inviting for children with plenty of opportunities for imagination and challenges. They help the child to feel safe in an environment that isn't their home by modelling compassion and kindness. Enabling adults can help children to overcome transitions. They also model a joyful approach to learning by using children's interests as teachable moments.

Communication is an important role of being an enabling adult. L. Burnham (2016), considers that the key role of the practitioner is to ensure that communication is strong in the setting. Practitioners should work with parents to ensure all important information regarding the child is passed to the practitioner and the parents. Having effective communication between home and the setting is beneficial for the child as it shows the child that the practitioner and the parents are working together to support the child's development and everyone is aware of the child's achievements therefore the child experiences positive reinforcement at home and in the setting. Communication between the practitioner and the child encourages a communication rich environment that supports learning. Talking to babies and toddlers between the ages of 0-2 years old helps to fire up important synapses in the part of their brain that handles language. The more words children hear the quicker they can make connections. This process strengthens a child's language skills and their overall ability to learn as stated by GrowbywebMD (2020). Practitioners can encourage language development and communication by doing simple activities for example if a baby or toddler is playing with toy cars the practitioner could use that opportunity to discuss the colours of the cars or count how many cars are lined up.

Professional love helps enabling adults to create bonds with children. DRA. Clare (2016) explains that it is known for practitioners to struggle to be affectionate when caring for children, out of fear of being unprofessional and the media's exposure of safeguarding leaves a climate of wariness. As M. Gratzke (2015) states "love is what people say it is" and all enabling adults that use professional love in their setting have their own interpretation of it. It is a person-centred approach which means that the child is treated like a person first not apart of a business therefore if the child needs comfort or cuddles then the practitioner is available to meet the needs of the child. Practitioners who practice professional love in their setting state that hugging children and using sensitive touch helps to build a bond of security and attachment. Although not every practitioner agrees with professional love it seems that the positive rewards that children get from feeling loved, secure and safe, outweigh the negative fears surrounding the topic.



Enabling adults may take a holistic approach to learning by considering the physical, personal, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being of children, as well as cognitive learning factors. An holistic approach means seeing the child as a whole and considering each factor of the child's life because each factor may impact the child's development as explained by Scottish Social Services Council (2022).



6 - [copy + paste image] <https://birthto5matters.org.uk/holistic-development-and-learning-2/>, 2021

The diagram above shows the many skills that children 0-2 can do that impacts certain factors of their development. Birth to 5 matters (2021) state that although these are just examples babies and toddlers will accomplish many other tasks that will impact their development and will be just as important to their learning. It's critical for practitioners who promote a holistic approach in their setting to allow time for the child to practice those abilities, as well as to be prepared to help enrich their experience and deepen and expand their learning

Enabling Experiences



Enabling experiences are experiences that help a child to develop and learn, for example playing experiences help children to navigate and understand the world. P. Tassoni (2017) discussed how a diverse range of experiences also appears to aid in the development of a larger vocabulary in children. This is because each new encounter will lead to the discovery of new words. A toddler who has cooked with an egg in the mixture is more likely to learn and use the word 'cracked'. Observing how children apply their newfound knowledge to a variety of activities is one of the most rewarding aspects of presenting children with a diverse range of experiences, for example if a child has experienced baking with a practitioner they may role play baking with a toy kitchen.

Allowing babies and toddlers to experience singing, stories and rhymes in the setting enables them to expand their vocabulary and language skills. Reading to children also develops cognitive skills and helps them to learn to listen. R. Bellingham (2015) believes that reading aloud to children helps children to understand the world and gives them the opportunity to think, learn and discuss ideas about the world. When adults like parents and practitioners read to children it allows children to think and use their imagination so they can visualise the story being read to them. It also allows children to walk in the shoes of characters that are different to themselves and may not be able to experience in real life.



7 - CNN, Importance of reading to babies, (2015)

The video above exemplifies the importance of reading to a baby every day to give them the best possible start and an advantage when they start school. J. Grabmeier (2019) has explained that if you read 5 books a day to a baby from the day they are born until they start school they will start school having heard 1.4 million words. He then goes on to say that even children who read 1 book a day will hear 290,000 more words than a child who isn't read to. That is a massive difference in a child's vocabulary and really highlights the importance of reading to a child in the first 1000 days.

Singing and rhymes also have been proven to have the same language development benefits of reading but is also a brilliant activity to help babies and toddlers to deal with emotions. A. Collins (2014) believes that music improves cognitive skills, helps moderate emotions and helps the brain to be healthier in later life and children get the most benefits out of music before the age of 7.

Babies and toddlers learn via play, allowing them to play is critical during the first 1000 days. Practitioners should make sure that the environment encourages children to play and that they have the freedom to do so. Children's play can be enhanced by inviting them to play with things such as loose parts, which can be natural or artificial. Because they're open-ended, children can use their imaginations to play with them. Leaves, shells, and sticks from the natural world can be used in play to teach children about the world around them. Finally, practitioners should provide role-playing materials and costumes so that children can develop their imagination and creativity while also acting out real-life scenarios.

Children learn best when they are engaged in their environment and are using all their senses. An enabling experience that allows children to play and use all their senses is messy play. Messy play allows children to explore and learn with their hands using different objects, materials and textures. Messy play allows children to learn life skills like pouring, mixing and scooping which they later use for practical life skills like assisting in making their own breakfast or helping to bake a cake.



8 - [copy + paste image] motherandbaby.co.uk, (2021).

Practitioners may invest in an equipment called a pickler triangle which may assist a baby or toddler in having an enabling experience as it encourages movement and physical development. The Pickler triangle was designed by Dr. Emmi Pickler to help babies and toddlers gain gross motor skills like pulling themselves up, crawling, standing and climbing. Babies who are learning to crawl and be encouraged to crawl through the arch of the triangle. Practitioners can encourage this by making the triangle look appealing to babies, the practitioner could put one of the baby's favourite toys in the middle of the arch or tie play silks on the triangle to see if the baby will try and reach out to grab them and eventually crawl towards them. Toddlers who have mastered the arts of crawling and walking may find the edge to climb the pickler. In time they will gain confidence, stability and strength in climbing and will be able to use their new found skills to climb outside of their environment possible in a public playground or in a tree.



9 - [copy + paste image] www.montessoriinreallife.com, 2020.

A treasure basket allows babies and toddlers an enabling experience it encourages babies and toddlers to use their senses to learn about their surroundings. A sensory basket is usually filled with household objects that babies and toddlers would have seen adults using and possibly been curious about. Babies and toddlers not only get a rich sensory experience from treasure baskets but it can

also help develop concentration skills as they explore every day objects as suggested by A.M Hughes (2018).

Conclusion

In conclusion a practitioner plays a significant role in the first 1000 days of a child's life, and by working together with the parents of the child; and being aware of the importance of an enabling environment, an enabling adults and enabling experiences the child has a promising opportunity of a good head start in life.

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