



Exceptional Care during the First 1000 Days

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What is the First 1000 Days and Why are they important?

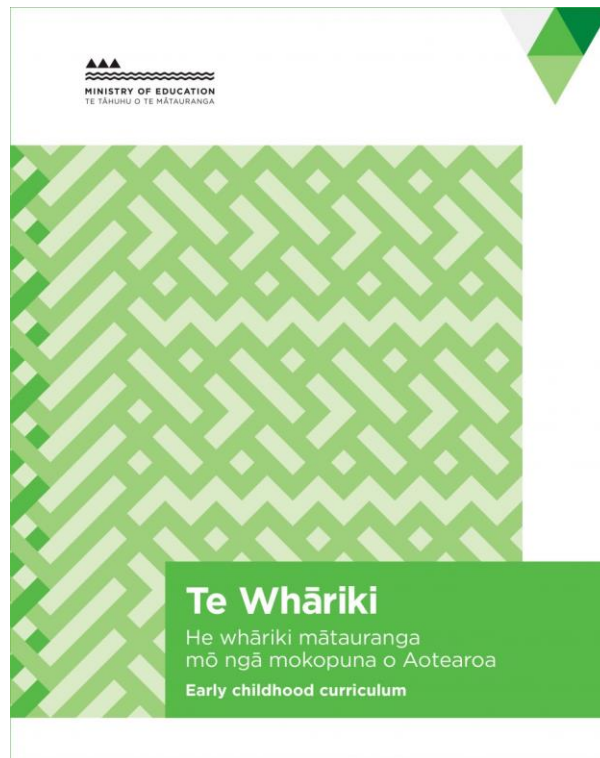
Cusick and Georgieff (2016) state that the first one thousand days typically equate to the period from conception to two years of age. According to Karakochuk *et al.* (2018) the growth and development that takes place during this time is crucial. Children experience quick physiological changes and plasticity, with the potential to have long-term repercussions if they are exposed to stressors. These may be dietary, environmental or hormonal and can result in adverse health outcomes.

Brodie (2018) states that children learn, grow and progress in many ways during the first few years of life. This is an important period and getting it right from the start will establish the groundwork for future growth. Children should be viewed holistically, meaning the whole child is taken into consideration. When viewing child development holistically, every area of growth, development and learning should be interlinked. The Te Whariki New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum reinforces this and it can be depicted as a mat woven with various strands of learning and development. Together these strengthen and reinforce one another, creating a strong and resilient child. Sellers (2013) points out that the Te Whariki approach includes principles of holistic development and these combine complex patterns of meaning and experience. According to Ministry of Education (2017) children learn and grow in holistic ways and the whole learner was taken into consideration when

the curriculum was created. All dimensions are closely entwined including the physical, emotional, social, spiritual and cognitive.

Karakochuk *et al.* (2018) states that the most effective interventions are those made within the first one thousand days of a child's life and impact outcomes positively. Department of Health and Social Care (2021) claims that babies are vulnerable in the first one thousand and one days, they need their parents and carers to advocate for them due to not having the appropriate language and communication skills. Some babies may be diagnosed with a disability, some may experience developmental needs, without the correct provision these can develop into a special educational need when they enter compulsory education.





What is Exceptional Care and Why should it be promoted?

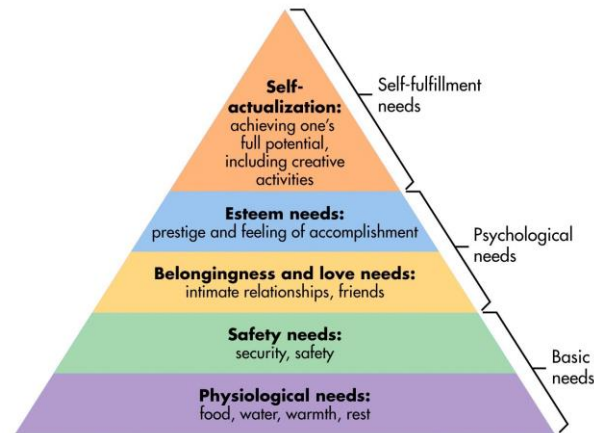
A key aspect to providing exceptional care is to ensure children are being treated as unique individuals. According to Nutbrown (2005) and Hyson and Tomlinson (2014) warm and accepting relationships enable babies to learn and develop by partaking in everyday routines and through play. If practitioners gain a good understanding of each unique child that they care for, the individual child's needs can be satisfied in a special way that promotes their growth and learning. There are similar basic needs that need to be met for all children for example food, warmth, affection and stimulation. However, each baby will have their own preferences with how they like to be fed, comforted and soothed, they will also learn at different paces. Pichere (2015) referring to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, claims that the child's physiological needs must be satisfied before moving up to the next level of the pyramid, security. Each level should be satisfied before aiming to achieve the next one. Practitioners should consider this when caring for children as they will struggle to form attachments if their needs are not being met appropriately.

Welsh Government (2016) maintain in the National Minimum Standards that practitioners have a responsibility to make sure that the policies of the setting and the care provided foster warm connections, confidence, independence, security and self-esteem for children in a nurturing and responsive environment.

According to Brodie (2018) the level of care provided should be of a high quality as it impacts every area of development including; physical, cognitive, language, personal, social and emotional. Due to the rate and complexity of development in young children, settings should ensure that their staff have a range of specialist skills, enabling them to satisfy the needs of dependent babies and young children.

Siraj-Blatchford *et al.* (2013) say that one of the findings from the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years study was that adult-child verbal interactions are significant. Cognitive construction

will be accomplished when both the adult and child are motivated and involved, reflexive co-construction should take place which is when learning is achieved. When children are learning, sustained shared thinking is important during interactions with adults as it extends children's thinking. Bruner called this 'joint involvement episodes'. Practitioners should also increase child-initiated interactions as there is evidence that these are beneficial.



Professional Relationships and Effective Communication

Practitioners should communicate effectively with babies and toddlers. Gradovski (2019) claims that newborn babies are highly expressive and communicate in multimodal ways. Infants are raised with many practices of imagination and play. Some examples of this are; tickling, peek-a-boo, songs and narratives.

Brodie (2018) states that professional partnerships with parents are important. It is obligatory for settings to inform the parents of activities the children partake in, provide information on the Early Years Foundation Stage and the settings policies, procedures and staffing. Actively involving parents with their child's learning and care is recommended.

Effective communication will result in positive relationships between staff and children. Degotardi and Pearson (2016, cited in Ebbeck, Warriar and Goh, 2017) point out that the relationships-based curriculum focused on attachments between carers and young children. It was created based on the importance of effective relationships, in addition to responsive care, respect and adherence to the curriculum.

According to Brodie and Lindon (2016) Bronfenbrenner created the ecological approach, emphasising that development does not take place in isolation, also the environment in which they are in impacts it. He placed importance on direct experiences with friends, family, peers and staff in early years settings as this is where socialisation occurs. This highlights the need for positive interactions.

Attachments

According to Pound (2014) some features of Bowlby's attachment theory remain such as; both adults and infants interact with each other, forming attachments. Attachments bring feelings of safety and security to babies, they seek attachments with the aim of being fed and protected. Attachment behaviours increase and decrease depending on how the child is feeling, they may increase when the infant is anxious and decrease if they feel safe. Children's early attachment experiences have an impact on their most intimate connections later in life.

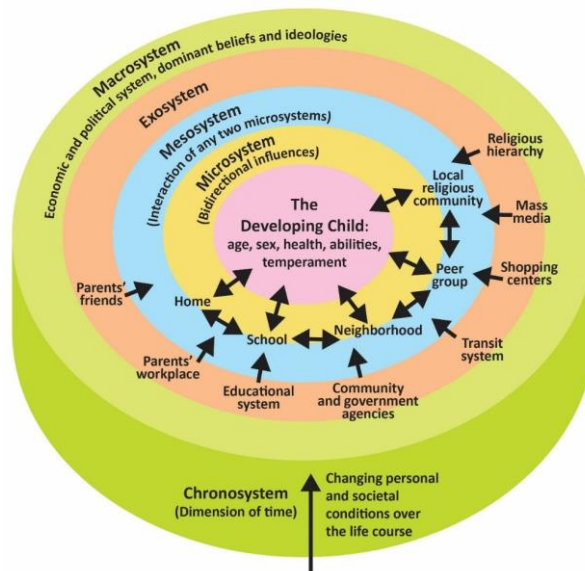
Brodie (2018) maintains that every area of a child's development is affected depending on their attachments including; personal, social and emotional. Children need to feel emotionally secure in their setting and gain trust with their caregivers, so they feel comfortable enough to take risks. Attachment issues can cause children to not develop and progress to the best of their ability. Higher order learning cannot take place until interventions are put in place to sort this out. Page, Clare and Nutbrown (2013, cited in Brodie, 2018) state that relationships develop over time, therefore the key person and key baby should be given time to build on their relationship and attachment. Caregiver relationships should be of a high quality, to promote emotional learning and development in young children.

Respectful Care and Meaningful Learning

Belasko et al. (2019, cited in Sagastui, Herrán and Anguera, 2022) maintain that when following the Pikler approach there need to be set times for staff to partake in daily care routines with children for example changing nappies, dressing to play outside and mealtimes. During these times there will be direct exchanges between practitioners and children and they must be delivered in a precise, coherent and respectful way.

According to Vamos (2015) there may be conversation between an adult and a baby that results in the child co-operating and forming a relationship. The Pikler Collection (2012) believe that adults creating relationships with children should view them as free and equal. The adult and the child must work in partnership when partaking in activities, doing them 'with' the baby and not 'to' the baby. Children need to move at their own pace and adults should be respectful of this.

Pikler UK Association (No date) state that Pikler understood that by providing polite and very compassionate care routines, newborns and toddlers form safe bonds and grow to have positive self-concepts and an awareness of their abilities. She found this enabled the babies to freely explore their bodily movements and the world, without interference from the adult. Vamos (2015) says that practitioners should never put babies in a position where they are passive, different stages of motor development can be achieved by the baby independently.



Current Challenges

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Welsh Government (2022) believes that some children experience traumatic events in their lives that will have a lifelong effect on their mental and physical health and well-being. Adverse childhood experiences may include; bereavement, abuse, parental separation or imprisonment, neglect or exposure to substance misuse or domestic violence. Each child will react to these situations differently and the children may find the higher levels of stress that they are put under difficult to manage. It may also have a detrimental effect on their learning and development. Unicef (2019, p. 1) quote that "Governments must do all they can to ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and bad treatment by their parents or anyone else who looks after them." Welsh Government (2022) state that practitioners need to keep children safe from harm. Children's skills can develop with the support of staff to build resilience, by maintaining consistent, positive relationships in emotionally secure environments. If a childcare setting is of a good quality, the consequences of adversity may be reduced. According to Siraj and Taggart (2013) some of the

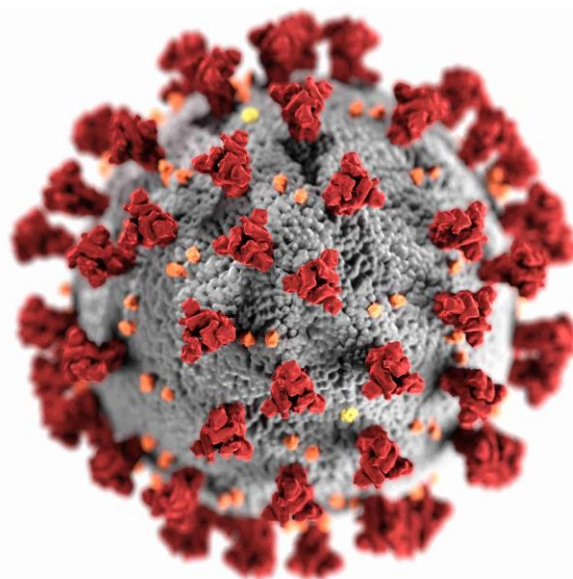
key findings of the Effective Pre-school Primary Education project were that high quality pre-schooling notably benefits disadvantaged children, also better intellectual and social-behavioural development are linked to this.

Covid

Welsh Government (2021) says that COVID-19 has negatively affected children under the age of five, especially their social and emotional development. Also, having an effect on their speech and language, physical, cognitive development and health. There are some strategies that can be implemented by settings to reduce adverse impact on certain areas of development. An example of this focusing on social and emotional development, would be to ensure children are not being put under pressure, avoid pursuing a catch-up schedule and providing children with a feeling of belonging. According to Baum, Grigg and Lang (2020) COVID-19 has highlighted that outcomes need to be improved for vulnerable children, there needs to be an aim to close gaps in outcomes between disadvantaged children and their peers. There is a Pupil and Early Years Premium which provides funding to enable this to take place in settings.

Cost of Living

Hyson and Tomlinson (2014) state that children from low-income families can gain stimulation, support and protection from childcare settings. High quality early childhood programmes are of huge benefit to vulnerable children, and those less likely to develop well. Achievement gaps can be highlighted early in relation to poverty. Comprehensive care and education is important, ensuring the children are cared for in a holistic way to aid all areas of development.



Activities

Messy Sensory Play

Babies should be given opportunities to partake in sensory play as it is beneficial and aids development. Forbes (2004) and Gascoyne (2018) point out that babies gain an understanding of the world through their senses and assemble knowledge and concepts by engaging in sensory play. Piaget (1962) defined the sensorimotor stage as the time between birth and eighteen months or two years. This is when babies use both movement and senses to explore and recognise people and objects. According to Athey (1990, cited in Forbes, 2004) play patterns, also known as schemas, are constructed by very young babies. These schemas may be linked to objects, space and time and cause and effect. In children's play, schemas manifest as activities that become more co-ordinated and follow discernible patterns. Forbes (2004) and Gascoyne (2018) maintain that babies have schemas such as reaching, tracking, grasping and sucking. Welsh Government (2022) states that children take play seriously, to engage in play they need to be able to concentrate and pay attention to detail. Children learn through collaboration and perseverance. Play develops self-awareness and children gain social, physical, intellectual and creative skills.





Water Play

Gascoyne (2019) says that when children have the opportunity to play in water it develops both their fine and gross motor skills. It also develops hand-eye co-ordination, balance and control. When provided with equipment such as containers, funnels and guttering, science and problem solving skills are incorporated. Children gain opportunities to master actions and ideas by movements like pouring, controlling the water flow and turning a tap on or off. Bruce (2012) believes that Froebel promoted experiential learning and he emphasised the importance of activity and development. Froebel viewed play, risk taking, being creative and learning outdoors as rich learning experiences.



Loose Parts Play

According to Gibson, Cornell and Gill (2017) the opportunity for child-led play and engagement is enhanced when children experience loose parts play. Moveable materials and equipment can be introduced to the children and brought into the learning environment, children may engage with adult intervention or independently. Brodie and Lindon (2016) believe that the Reggio Emilia approach concentrates on the importance of following the interests of the child, practitioners should co-operate with children and respond to each child's individual needs. Hall *et al.* (2014, cited in Brodie and Lindon, 2016) points out that co-constructed learning is important, going at the child's own pace. Nicholson (1972) created the 'Theory of Loose Parts'. He believed that any environment's level of originality and creativity, as well as its capacity for discovery, are strongly correlated with the variety and number of variables present. The environment in which children learn can be designed to enhance creativity and engagement. Unicef (2019, p. 1) quotes that "Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities."



The Curiosity Approach

Hellyn, L and Bennett, S (No date) state that it is important to promote awe and wonder in children. They emphasise the fact that children learn through curiosity and play. Children explore, learn, and discover things by repeating behaviour patterns, this is called a schema. These encourage practitioners to view each unique child and understand the driving forces behind their engagement, play and learning.



Reading Stories

Page, Clare and Nutbrown (2013) maintain that early engagement with books is a positive experience for babies and toddlers. It is important that practitioners spend time talking and communicating with young children as it is beneficial to their language development. However, Gooch and Powell (2012, cited in Page, Clare and Nutbrown, 2013) state that evidence from a recent study in babyrooms in England, shows that many practitioners were not aware of the importance of intuitively and incidentally talking to babies that they cared for, therefore were not doing so. Welsh Government (2022) point out that to develop children's language and communication skills, practitioners should promote reading stories by reading in small groups and with individual children. There should be a variety of books available in the environment. According to Torr (2019) a study was completed which resulted in infants being more engaged in interactive reading where the practitioners were encouraging turn taking, asking open-ended questions and providing scaffolding, than non-interactive reading which was when the story was read with no interactions. Children that are read to in smaller groups produced more verbal responses than the children in larger groups. Brodie and Lindon (2016) maintain that Chomsky believed that children have an innate linguistic structure that serves as a guidance for children's language learning.



1 - [The Gruffalo](#)

Source: [stephlovegrove](#), 2021

Enabling Environments

Indoors

Brodie (2018) is convinced that to ensure a quality childcare setting the environment should be holistic in nature and meet the needs of each individual child. The baby and toddler rooms need to

be of a high quality and the physical environment should be reflected upon regularly, ensuring that it is engaging, safe and suitable. Welsh Government (2022) believe that children's authentic experiences should be centred on the surroundings practitioners create, both inside and outside. They should continuously assess and examine the effectiveness of the environment and make appropriate adjustments.

According to Archer (2019) when creating enabling environments it is important that there is adequate floor space for babies, as this is where they play naturally and display early movement patterns such as reaching for something, rolling over and crawling. Toddlers also need floor space as they engage in movements such as running and jumping and they play and learn on the floor. Welsh Government (2021) says that the environment should provide opportunities for children to develop both fine and gross motor skills.

Outdoors

Richardson (2013) states that early years environments should have a well-equipped and safe outdoor area for children to learn and play. They should be easily accessible and both indoor and outdoor environments should be available simultaneously, as they are of equal importance. Being outdoors improves children's well-being and aids all areas of health and development. Welsh Government (2016) point out in the National Minimum Standards that children need to be given time to relax and be active, both indoors and outdoors. Children's growth and their inherent curiosity are cultivated through the utilisation of materials, play opportunities, first-hand experiences and activities. Pound (2014) says that Montessori emphasised the value of real experiences and resources for teaching children about abstract concepts.

Richardson (2013) maintains that young children need a rich outdoor environment full of enticing stimuli, contexts for play, exploration and conversation, as well as authentic experiences and engagement with the community and natural world. This links to Piaget's theory. According to Nutbrown (2014) Piaget believed that for children to learn they need to interact with the environment and experience different stages of cognitive development.

Emotional

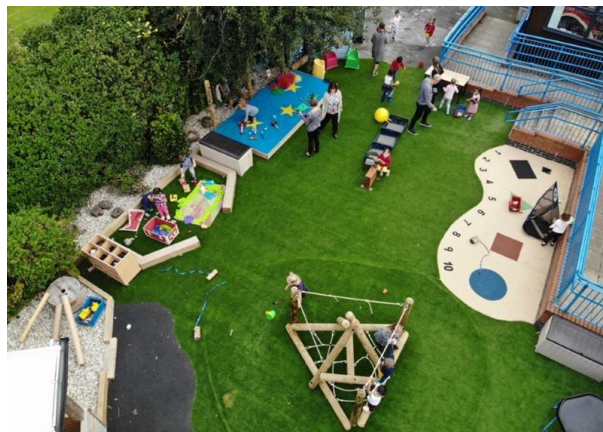
Welsh Government (2021) point out that practitioners need to take in to consideration the emotional environment. Learners should be able to develop by following their interests both independently and with others. When providing an enabling environment there should be opportunities to engage in different experiences which enable learners to express themselves imaginatively, creatively and physically. Environments that promote inclusion should demonstrate and value diversity. They should promote newly acquired communication skills, giving children access to a variety of materials to aid in vocabulary development and concept development.



2 - Source: Pinterest, No date



3 - Source: Launch Good, 2023



4 - Source: Pentagon for Learning and Play, No date



5 - Source: Playdays Nursery Ltd, No date

Forest School



The Forest School Association (No Date) says that Forest School supports holistic growth, the programme encourages children to take risks and facilitates play and exploration. Forest School enables first-hand experiences in a natural setting and develops children's self-esteem and confidence. It originated from Scandinavia. There are six core principles that need to be followed:

[What is Forest School?](#)

Source: Forestschoolassociation8405, 2020

According to Hemery, Hurst and Petrokofsky (2019) outdoor learning improves mental health, encourages holistic development and develops social and practical skills. However, the largest barrier to sustaining Forest Schools is lack of funding for settings.

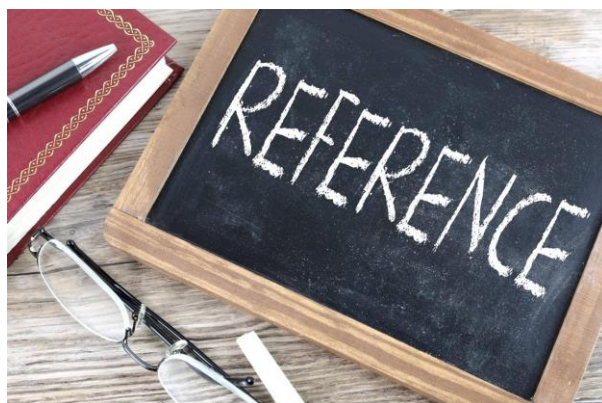


Inclusive Practice

Hyson (2014) maintains that it is important for children with disabilities to learn in environments with typically developing children. Disabled children benefit from least restrictive environments and it is a legal requirement to promote inclusion in practice. Children with disabilities share many of the same needs as other children such as; positive relationships, captivating curriculum and careful observations and assessments. When aiming for inclusive education, the early childhood programme must be tailored by a professional to meet the needs of each individual child. According to Welsh Government (2022) an inclusive environment should be organised and have a variety of resources promoting diversity and authentic representation, referring to topics like; gender, religion and sexual orientation. Also, removing barriers to participation by adapting the environment appropriately.



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