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“Of all things, love is the most potent” (Montessori, 2007)

Introduction

Why are the first 1000 days so important?

We will firstly look at the first 1000 days of a child from conception through to the age of two, understanding what factors affect the development of the baby and their relationship with the mother. This will include a consideration of the holistic needs of children and their families and how effective partnership with childcare practitioners is essential, referring to relevant theories, policies, and practice throughout. It will include ideas and possibilities to implement theory to practice.

Pregnancy, birth and the first two years can be a difficult and demanding experience for parents and therefore proving to be challenging to provide the care and attention a baby needs. Notably for the foetus, it is a period of distinct opportunity where the basis of neuro development, optimum health and growth make these foundations irreversible (UNICEF, 2013). Of course, the mother’s understanding of a healthy lifestyle during pregnancy will have an impact on the unborn child. During this period, the foetus is affected by lots of factors, for example the mother’s emotions, the environmental factors and what the mother consumes (HM Government, 2021).

According to Piaget's stages of development theory, as children grow their intelligence changes, the child will need to shape a mental model of the world surrounding them and not just rely on a child's cognitive development which attains knowledge (McLeod, 2020). Through interaction of inherent capacities and environmental occasions, cognitive development arises through the series of these stages.

Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development

Stage	Age range	What happens at this stage?
Sensorimotor	0-2 years old	Coordination of senses with motor responses, sensory curiosity about the world. Language used for demands and cataloguing. Object permanence is developed.
Preoperational	2-7 years old	Symbolic thinking, use of proper syntax and grammar to express concepts. Imagination and intuition are strong, but complex abstract thoughts are still difficult. Conservation is developed.
Concrete Operational	7-11 years old	Concepts attached to concrete situations. Time, space, and quantity are understood and can be applied, but not as independent concepts.
Formal Operational	11 years old and older	Theoretical, hypothetical, and counterfactual thinking. Abstract logic and reasoning. Strategy and planning become possible. Concepts learned in one context can be applied to another.

The Psychology Notes Headquarters - <https://www.PsychologyNotesHQ.com>

(Source: The Psychology Notes HQ, 2022)

[The Jean Piaget Stages of Cognitive Development - The Psychology Notes Headquarters \(psychologynotesHQ.com\)](https://www.PsychologyNotesHQ.com)

From this diagram it can be perceived that the sensorimotor stage is an important aspect for early year's practitioners in a nursery setting. To begin with the infant watches, hears, tastes and touches objects around them. They do not appear to be thinking at this stage and predominantly it consists of them learning by sensation grasping, sucking, watching, and manipulating objects that surround them (Salkind, 2004). Therefore practitioners need to provide an environment that can enable this to ensure that the children are receiving inclusive care.

Nutrition

Nutrition during pregnancy, lactation and for an infant is also notably as important for holistic development and wellbeing. According to Karakochuck *et al.* (2018) firstly during pregnancy, the need for nutritional position and reserve is high and may be insufficient for themselves and the growing foetus. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recognises that some women may not be able to meet these requirements due to some factors, such as poverty, lack of knowledge and unavailability of such a nutritional diet, so intervention programmes operate, and (WHO) supports recommendations for national governments.

[Nutrition \(who.int\)](#)

Relationships

According to Clare (2016) The importance of relationships with the infant, parents and multiagency workers will be of great significance for the holistic development of the infant during this stage, developing secure and important attachment. As Bowlby believes (Goldberg, Muir and Kerr, 2000) babies are born predestined to form attachments, therefore, if there are difficulties during this essential settling in period, the infant may develop a delay in all areas of cognitive development resulting in lower levels in their well-being. A respected and close relationship between all parties will enable that all knowledge acquired will form a bond between the home and the nursery (Clare, 2016). Furthermore, the advantage of creating an amalgamated centred approach to achieve constructive and communicative relationships are created by regular interaction, presenting for discussions and issues to be raised. Some parents can feel isolated and having the benefit of a key worker, could open the possibility to seek help and recognise any needs for the infant or themselves (Gasper, 2010).

Why love matters

A baby is born with a brain only quarter the size of an adults and based on this human care in these early days of life, plays a much larger part in forming the brain. Unfortunately, not all babies get their emotional needs met however, there is time for those early developing systems to improve especially if early intervention is obtained. Furthermore, if positive bonding is forthcoming new growth in the frontal cortex takes place due to positive social experiences (Gerhardt, 2014). To put it more simply “If love can be found, it still has the power to shape a new reality” (Gerhardt, 2014).

As can be seen, those first 1000 days are crucial to the holistic needs of the child, therefore what specifically can an early year’s practitioner do to support an infant in a setting?

Welsh Government Consultation documents

Enabling Pathways & A curriculum for funded non maintained nursery settings

The Enabling Pathways Guidance was created to underpin support for practitioners, its objective is to be inclusive for all children. This document is designed for meaningful and holistic learning. The main body of the document is regarding the three ‘enablers;’ adults, experiences and environments, which will be explored further throughout this scrapbook (*Enabling Pathways*, 2021b)



(Source: Early Years, 2020)

The curriculum for funded non maintained nursery settings was assembled to establish children having the best possible outcomes in Wales, whilst attending nursery and school settings. Expertise from the non-maintained sector and professionals in early years have suggested that children who experience a positive outcome from learning will gain the knowledge and skills needed to excel in learning throughout their lifelong journey (A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings 2021a). Additionally planning that is effectual will provide an environment that is utilizing its surroundings and resources and The Curriculum and Assessment Wales Act (2021) emplaces these requirements for schools and non-maintained nursery settings (A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings, 2021a).

The curriculum recognises there are five developmental pathways for the development and learning of young children:

Belonging: For children to feel like they belong they need to reach their full potential and progress, this is highlighted in Maslow's Hierarchy of Need theory (Cherry, 2021). This is in line with Bowlby's own work on his attachment theory and an important factor to consider "If a community values its children, it must cherish their parents" (Shaw, 2018).

Communication: According to Vygotsky, social interaction needs to be spontaneous and not in a certain way for a child to find their own personality, instead of becoming regulated by rules (Veraksa and Sheridan, 2018).

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Exploration: Piaget questioned the approach and traditional ways of learning at the time with his own concept that children are active learners. An energetic learning activity that is ongoing and enables a persistent change and movement in thought. Through the child's environment, they steer their way to interact and learn with their peers and surrounding objects (Halfpenny and Petterson, 2014).

Physical development: Montessori's conception focused on the planes or 'Stages' that children advance through. Amidst this first stage the most imperative developments occur and Montessori pinpointed 11 areas. Recognising that children are advancing towards crawling and walking between birth to 12 months the environment is key in developing these skills, building activities around this stage will enhance those abilities (Gray and Macblain, 2015).

Well-Being: Maslow developed a theory that suggested that to reach self-actualisation other needs must be met; first basic human needs, safety and security, healthy relationships, and achievements. Therefore, once these have all been achieved, children will have the ability to excel, be creative, to dream and find a purpose (Kraussel, 2018).

In addition to understanding and developing these five pathways as practitioners, we will now consider how to meet these needs in a nursery setting exploring in depth the three 'enablers' that have been developed to support practitioners in a curriculum that can be adapted. Firstly, the adult and understanding the importance of professional relationships, respectful care and looking at the importance of observation. Secondly, planning and designing for enabling environments and experiences, ensuring the primary features for successful pedagogy are also met:

(Enabling Pathways, 2021b).

- **Play and playful learning**
- **Being outdoors**
- **Observation**
- **Authentic and purposeful learning**

Enabling Adult

This section will consider the role of the adult as an enabler therefore, the enabling adult would promote professional relationships, consider how adults can connect with families and the wider community, inclusive and respectful care and the importance of this for the child and family.

The importance of professional relationships, connecting with families and the wider community is key to being an enabling adult, as the writers of 'Te Whariki' Maori and Pakeha concluded from developing the document in New Zealand, which was imposed in 1996 (Miller and Pound, 2011). This document was formed from the socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) that overlooks learning as a result of children activities being modelled on social interactions and relationships. It is a bicultural vision, reflecting a holistic view, linked experience and meaning, centred on a cultural and individual purpose. A child develops an understanding of the world surrounding them through their own communication with society, particularly amid a mutual partnership between a child and adult that will build on learning, through understanding and knowledge. Additionally, the teacher with a Vygotskian framework implements socially valued goals and not just their development (Miller and Pound, 2011). However, in New Zealand, children start school at 5 years, and they were the first country to combine all services responsible for the care of young children within their Education Department (Miller and Pound, 2011). In Wales, children begin their education at the age of 3 in a

school setting and the government in Wales also recognise the need to hold in high regard the need for children to be inclusive, identify within society in a multi-cultural country. Encouraging to build on connections between languages with additional methods of communication (*Enabling Pathways*, 2021b).

This is significant for all children and not just for children who have a disability (Collett, 2017).

An equally important aspect to consider as the enabler, is how adults connect with families and the wider community and the impact this has on children and society. The starting point would be to consider, that individuals need to recognise the child's wider connections and if adults realise the importance of understanding themselves then helping families and children accomplish this, would be beneficial to help them comprehend their capabilities (Wharton and Kinney, 2015). Furthermore, the enabling adult needs to consider the importance of their role, not just for children, but on the family and wider community and the impact their support will have in the long term. Being a professional practitioner and understanding how actions and pedagogy will improve the future in Early Years, will be a great accomplishment.

Equally important is inclusive care and the relevance this has on the child and family. One of the most important considerations in inclusive care is, that all children are diverse and that adults need to embrace this and shape their holistic development around it. This is significant for all children and not just for children who have a disability (Collett, 2017).



(Source: Lolita, 2022)

Lastly, respectful care which within the pickler approach is broached with tact and respect, whilst the child and adult are engaging in opportunities of care, interacting with babies or infants such as: eating, changing, and sleeping. Their needs to be trust established at care routines, for it to be a meaningful experience with trust, so the baby will unconsciously perceive this as a calm and peaceful time (Manners, 2019). These experiences that the enabling adult have provided in the setting, will hopefully be carried through to adulthood and are important to the well-being of the child.

Enabling environment

This section will explore what rich and stimulating environments should aspire to look like indoors and outdoors. Also, what are the benefits for children from these environments.

Enriching and enabling environments have three aspects which in turn all interact with each other.

- The Child.
- Content- what the child already knows, needs to know, and wants to know.
- Context- people, poverty, access, physical environment, outdoors, indoors, events, principles of diversity and inclusion.

Children spend most of their time indoors where they are often constrained in exploring and moving, spending more time outdoor would increase oxygen to the brain, increased use of gross motor coordination that enhance and support the child's fine motor skills (Bruce, 2011).

How do nurseries ensure that they are providing an environment that is rich and effective to develop learning and one that also provides an infant's holistic development?

Bronfenbrenner suggests that one element of the microsystems is the learning environment which is the key factor in the development of learning. The context is specifically elaborated in the bioecological model, and this is the primary source where learning development takes place and exceptional practice. Some theorists believe that the environment is the third educator in the setting and just as those who adhere to the Reggio Emilia model of early education (Hayes, O'Toole and Halfpenny, 2017).



(Source: Sayer, 2017)

This picture illustrates a rich and effective environment, where children can facilitate their own learning experience making decisions about how, when and with whom they learn.

- **The starting point-** The interests of a child generally form a basis around the local environment, the natural environment and role modelling play.
- **Defined Spaces-** A clearly structured space where children can focus on the area they have chosen with as little distraction as possible.
- **Continuous provision-** Some children depend on particular resources where they develop their skills over time. Furthermore, applying these skills at surface level and this will internalize these skills at a greater level of learning in a meaningful context.

(Sayer, 2017).



(Source: Pinterest, 2022)

This image above is inspired by a Reggio Emilia classroom (Pinterest, 2022).

The outdoor environment is a boundless environment where holistic development can be enhanced.

Froebel recognised the importance of kindergarten provision in Germany in as far back as 1840.

Encouraging the need for outdoor play in supporting holistic development, sections of the environment were provided for growing plants and exploration (Allen, 2020).





(Source: The Keeper of the Cheerios LLC, 2018)

The importance of accessible outdoor environments in early years settings for holistic development is something all settings should try to adhere to. Some factors that would motivate children to the outdoors could be the elements of the open space and freedom. Opportunities for pretend play can be bounded indoors and the outdoor environment can allow new scenarios for play. Additionally, more freedom for physical development to arise and develop and practice skills. As Brunner (1971) suggests, the outdoors provides new possibilities to develop the inactive mode of learning and this mode is defined by doing and actions (Thomas and McInnes, 2017).

Enabling experiences

This concluding section will include ideas for sensory activities and explore the need for such ideas.



(Source: Nurseryworld, 2013)

The treasure basket has become an item that all settings should include in their environment. It is a resource that is natural and simple, essentially it is a basket of household objects. Goldschmied's creation of the treasure basket has these fundamental items within, and babies use their five senses along with hand and eye coordination whilst engaging with the objects (Gascoyne, 2012).



Music is another necessary sensory activity and children learn considerably when the concept of music is key, encouraging the use of motor skills and movement through physical development. Additionally singing and telling stories motivates listening skills, whilst stimulating and enhancing their interest in music (Early Years Resources, 2019).

Maria Montessori believes that focussing on their senses is key for children to learn and is a primary focus in the Montessori today. She also believed that children had 'sensitive periods' and if these periods are recognised by a practitioner, children can be supported through the development period. She recognised the significance of using the appropriate resources and that children's senses come first in their intellect therefore, the arrangement of a stimulating and curious environment is key (Gascoyne, 2011).

Conclusion

In light of this information, it has been demonstrated that the first 1000 days are crucial to the holistic development of the child, without this it is thought that emotional and attachment issues may occur in adulthood. Included in this scrap book, are ideas based on sensory activities, including images showing stimulatory environments which can also contribute to the enhancement of the child's development. The importance of respectful and inclusive care has been viewed, both have demonstrated that they are essential to the child, family and community. Holistic development depends on a number of different factors which are all interrelated. No one factor is more important than another. The examples provided within this scrapbook highlight how parents, early years practitioners, children, outside agencies and Government cooperate in order to promote the three enablers which contribute to the holistic development of every child in Wales. As early years practitioners we need to be mindful of the environment which we create in our settings ensuring that the activities we plan are purposeful and meaningful to each individual child. As professionals we also need to ensure that we build positive relationships with all stakeholders and promote an inclusive ethos. It is vital that positive relationships between the nursery, parents, community and outside agencies are built on mutual respect and trust where all children, regardless of their background or abilities, are provided with an environment in which they are nurtured and given the opportunity to develop in all aspects of their lives and at the pace most appropriate for their needs. Having researched this topic I am able to conclude that the first 1000

days of a child's life are indeed the most important and feel truly privileged to play a part in this stage of their lives.

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