



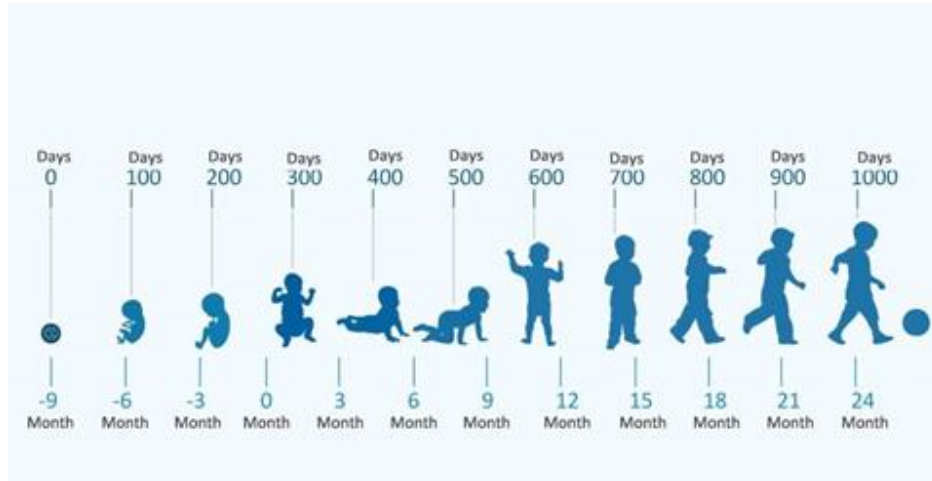
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ECEY 4005

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The First 1,000 Days

What is 'The First 1,000 Days'?



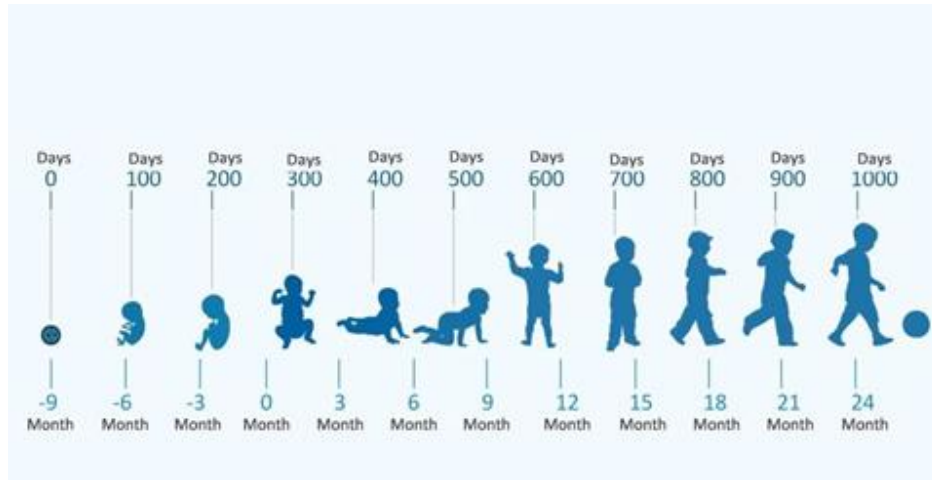
The first 1,000 days refer to a "child's life from conception until they reach 2 years of age". During this time there is rapid development of child's physical, emotional, and cognitive abilities are shaped. (HM Government. 2021, p.13)

The first 1,000 days are split into three areas:



- conception to birth (pregnancy), ideal time to support adults by sharing information on nutrition and provide support during the transition into parenthood.
- birth to 6 months (infancy), babies require positive and meaningful relationships, interactions, communication, nurture and good nutrition.
- 6 months to 2 years (early childhood), babies "brains develop at a rapid pace"(Building Brains, n.d.) during this time weening takes place, builds on their communication skills, Fine and Gross motor skills.

Building Brains,(n.d.); Welsh Government (WG), (n.d.).



1 - Source: Korre, D (n.d) Image showing development from day of conception to the 1000th day (2 years).



2 - Source: *The First 1,000 Days* UNICEF (2013)

Why are the first 1,000 days important?

The importance of the first 1,000 days on brain development, which can impact a child's development, socially, emotionally and their resilience later in life and ensuring the child is ready for school and to learn (HM Government, 2021).

Karakochuk *et al.* (2018) identifies the importance of the first 1,000 days for growth, development and brain neuroplasticity, and add, the importance of the caregiver in providing the child with nutrients, security and safety.

During pregnancy, Gerhardt (2015) identifies the effect stress can have on the foetus. Little stress can positively support the development of the emotional system. Alternatively, if the mother experiences high levels of stress, it transfers to the foetus and signals the emotional system to respond with cortisol, which can change the development of the brain. Along with stress, the mother's diet can also have an impact on the foetus' development, Hanson (2004) and Roseboom *et al.* (2006) cited Gerhardt (2015).

When a baby is born, stimulation, nutrition and protection is needed by the main caregiver. (UNICEF, n.d.)

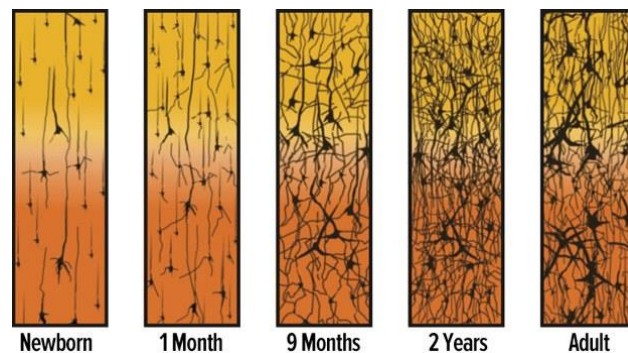
Breastfeeding is identified to be the best for baby not only for the nutrients, increased health protection, but for attachment too (NHS, 2020). By establishing a good attachment, it can create a positive

foundation for the baby's future, meeting the need to feel safe and loved, this enables them to explore the world around them during the 1,000 days (Brodie, 2018).

Brain Development

Herculano-Houzel *et al.* (2008) state fully-grown adult brain has an estimated 86 billion neurons, and they start to develop before they are even born. (cited in Finnegan, 2016)

Finnegan, (2016) describes the brain in its first two years of life, having the exceptional capacity to absorb information, and by the age of two, Stiles and Jernigan, (2010, cited in Finnegan, 2016) highlights that “the connections that are being formed in a child’s brain are happening about twice as fast as in an adult’s brain”.



3 - Neuron Growth & Connections Over Time.

Corel, (n.d.) cited *The Urban Child Institute*, (2009).

"By age one, the size of a child's brain is already 72% of adult volume on average and by age two it has grown to 83% of an adult's volume on average" Knickmeyer et. al. (2008, cited in Finnegan, 2016).



4 - Brain Architecture. Harvard University, (n.d.).

Caregiving

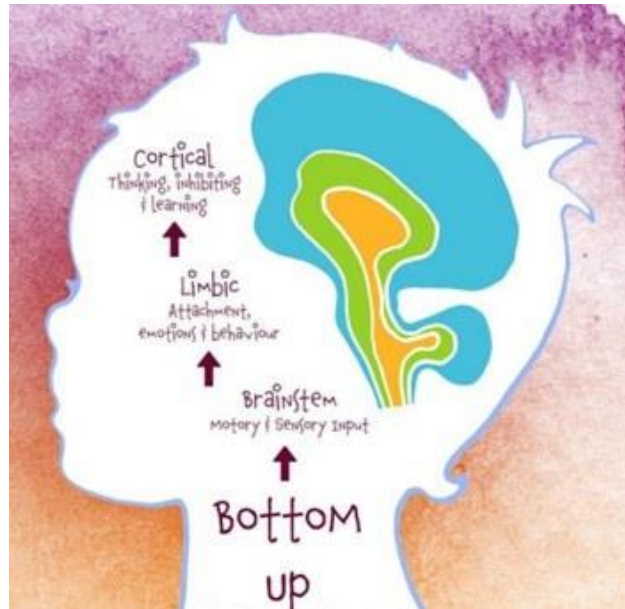


Harvard (2023) state that trusted adults around children have the unique opportunity to positively shape the brain of an infant at the most important phase of development is in the child's early years, where the three parts of the brain develop, connect, and come online: Instinctual, Emotional and Cognitive.

The instinctual brain is found near the brain stem; it controls the body's functions to respond to the world around us and potential dangers.

The limbic system is where emotions and memory sit in the brain and inform behavioural responses. The opportunities to develop this area of the brain are through physical experiences, learning cause and effect from watching caregivers' responses.

(Harvard, 2015).



5 - Ruth Stephens. (2020) Direction of how the brain develops.

Brodie (2018) agrees with Harvard (2023) but also identifies that some children's development within the first 1000 days depending on their unique experiences may not meet child development theories or typical milestones. There are some factors that could have an impact on the child's development, this could be depending on different life experiences even between siblings.

This can be from life experiences through pregnancy, difficult birth, disabilities, or through Adverse Childhood Experiences. This "may result from exposure to poor parental mental health, abuse, neglect and parental drug misuse amongst other risk factors" (HM Government, 2021. p. 14).



6 - Adverse Childhood Experiences. (IHDCYH Talks. 2018).

More information on [Toxic Stress vs Healthy Development](#)

"The best chance to turn this around is during the 1001 critical days. At least one loving, sensitive and responsive relationship with an adult caregiver teaches the baby to believe that the world is a good place and reduces the risk of them facing disruptive issues in later life" (NSPCC, 2015).



7 - Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs - McLeod, S. (2023)

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) identifies the importance of physiological needs being met in the emotional brain, "food, warmth, sleep, routine and people to feel safe...and secure." (Garvey and Zeedyk. 2017, pg. 37) From birth and during the 1,000 days ensuring the needs of a baby is being met provides the foundation to their futures. Building Brains. (n.d); The First 1,000 Days (2021)

Providing an action, such as the adult responding to the baby's cry by fulfilling their hunger, hygiene or providing comfort, need or repeating their coo's and babbles, enables the baby to have a sense of belonging, from the feeling that they are good at communicating which furthers the attachment and develops the baby's self-esteem. (Harvard, 2015).

Caregivers have a unique opportunity to help shape babies brains by back-and-forth interaction known as '**Serve and Return**'. They interact by babbling and facial expressions and adults respond by matching what baby does (Harvard, 2011).



8 - Serve and Return Interactions Shapes Babies Circuitry (Harvard, 2011).

Respectful Care and Meaningful learning

Early childhood play, learning and care in Wales (WG, 2023, p19) identify the importance of opportunities that adults can provide experiences throughout the day:

- "transition times
- recognising personal care routines as valuable experiences
- snack/mealtimes
- quality interactions
- being outside, noticing seasonal changes"

Pickler identifies the importance of valuable experiences during personal care; the main caregivers need to have trusting relationships and have a great understanding of the child's needs by providing a routine to secure a sense of safety; the caregiver also needs to be responsive and allow freedom of movement and allow appropriate risks. (Hargraves. 2020).

For example, during a baby's nappy change, where it is usually just the caregiver and the baby, Pickler's approach, along with Vygotsky's (1978) theory, emphasises the importance of quality adult interaction whilst children's learning is intertwined with social context when it occurs, to enrich the child's experience (cited in Sagastui, Herran & Anguera, 2021).

During routine interactions with the baby, there are opportunities for 'Serve and return' coos and babbles, by wrapping language around each step during nappy changing by saying what the adult will do next, the adult is interacting with the baby, Pickler's approach (Hargraves. 2020) highlights the importance of freedom of movement, where the child can gain a sense of body awareness, this could be gripping the adult's hand when putting on a baby grow, or holding out the nappy/baby grow for baby to reach for, this develops confidence, awareness, judgment, balance, problem-solving skills.

When the baby is getting more mobile, the adult's role changes slightly by providing an emotionally safe environment and encouraging and supporting the curiosity of the child along with the language. (WG, 2023).

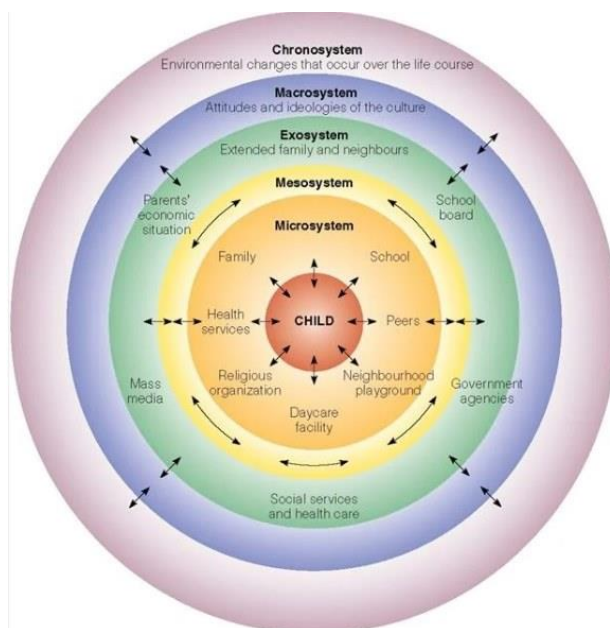


9 - Nappy Changing Source: Dombrowski, (2016).

Professional Partnerships



"It takes a whole village to raise a child". Success 4 All. (2021).



The 'Village' relating to Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological system, identifies the importance of the adults who help raise a child. Adults within the 'Microsystem' have the most influence and can help shape a child's development and well-being (Gray & MacBlain, 2015, p.123).

The Best Start for Life' (HM Government, 2021) identifies the current support available to parents and children that is currently available within the first 1,000 days,

- General Practitioners (GP)
- Midwifery service
- Health visitor
- Family Support
- Dietician, team around the family.
- Mental health team
- Social workers
- Parent Partnership Service (PPS) for parents whose children have additional needs.

Other 'villagers' provide support for the family and authentic relationships with the child.

- Early Years Caregiver
- Family

Family support

Currently, in Wales, [Flying Start](#) is open to families in certain postcodes, providing care during pregnancy until the child is three years and 11 months old, through an enhanced support team. Then, from 2 to 3 years old, fully funded part-time childcare is provided. Flying Start, (n.d.).

Whereas in England, they are remodelling their support and developing '[Start for Life](#)' and will have a network of 'Family Hubs' in identified local authorities throughout England.

The Princess of Wales also has a clear passion for early childhood, acknowledging the social challenges. Although her programme '[Building Foundations for Life](#)' is from birth to 5, it is on the same basis as the first 1,000 days. (Royal Foundation, n.d.)

Challenges in Providing High Quality Care



Within the first 1,000 days practitioners have to overcome some challenges when caring for young babies in early years settings.

Some may be the impact of Covid19 where children may need to meet expected developmental milestones.

Some settings are private or charity-run, where the funding comes directly from the parents; this can cause settings not to be at full capacity and, therefore, financially struggling.

Whereas local authority funded settings are financially tied and are possibly oversubscribed, and the demand is increasing.

In both settings, the pay does not represent the hard work and dedication of the staff. Some settings find qualified staff hard to recruit.

The ratio of staff is hard to maintain when settings are financially unstable, but the safety and development of the child are paramount these must be maintained according to the daycare regulations.

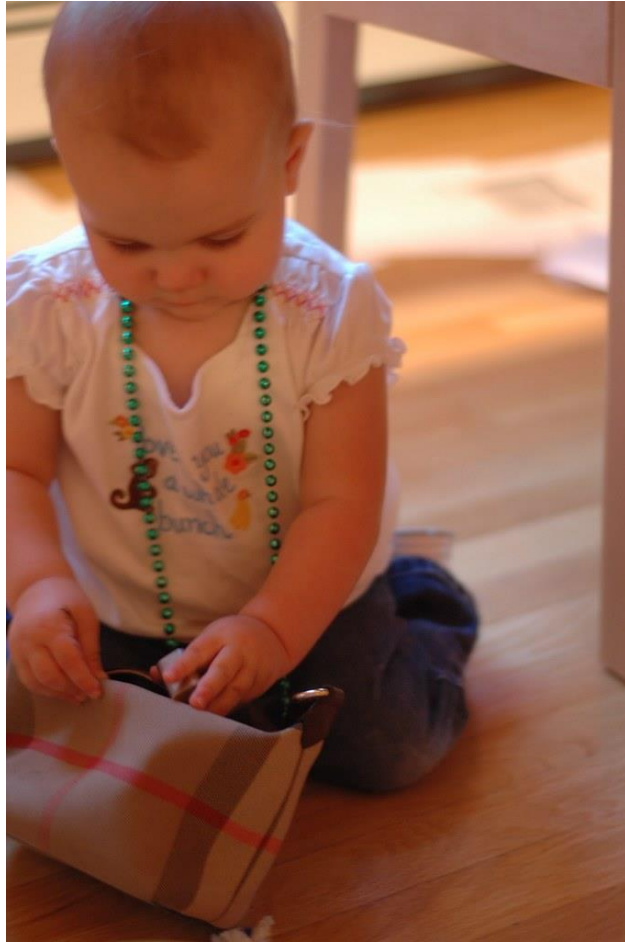
In some cases, there are difficulties communicating with parents, whose own experiences may have been poor, if there are different languages, where staff find it difficult to relay information regarding children or obtaining information can be difficult. Also, parent's working hours can make it harder to have good verbal communication with staff.

Many of the challenges stated above can cause frustration for individuals, which can put a strain on a team.

Activities



The Welsh Government (2020) identify "play as a fundamental right for all children." and states children have a natural urge to play, following the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (2023) stating "Every child has the right to play". During play, Froebel and Montessori encourage using natural and multi-sensory materials to support the development of concepts and the world around them Gascoyne (2019, p. 27). Not only is it great fun, but sensory/messy play offers holistic learning. Duffy (2007) promotes messy play, emphasising on the process the child takes to get there, not the end product. Cited Gascoyne. (2019).



11 - Source: *Playing Merritt*. (2008).

"Every single child, whatever their culture, impairment, gender, language, background, behaviour or need." Play Wales (2020).



12 - Muddy Kitchen

Source: Muddy Kitchen. (Kiker. 2022).



13 - Water Play

Source: Water play (Baker, 2018)



14 - Sharing Stories

Source: Story Time (Chris and Rhiannon. 2009)



15 - Messy Play

Source: Messy Play. (Lifespan Learning. 2020)



16 - Sand

Source: What is Sandboxing? (Stack Overflow. 2010).



Tummy Time

Floor-based play is suggested by Stirrup and Sandford (2019, p.47) as they emphasise the importance of Physical Activity from birth. Spending short burst of time on their tummy allows babies to develop motor skills, strengthening neck muscles, arms and back.

Tummy time is beneficial for babies. Falk (2011) identified the importance of knowing when the baby is physically ready for tummy time and how much time is required when they are. Falk (2011) also identifies that giving too much tummy time prohibits the child from exploring their hands and feet, which supports their development. (Cited Physical Development of Children. 2019, p. 83). Although, when babies are born, they are placed on their mother's chest for skin-to-skin contact, which supports regulation and bonding. UNICEF (2023).



17 - Source: *Treasure Basket* (Ariadna. 2010).

Treasure baskets

Provide babies (when they can sit around 5 to 10 months) sensory exploration through the mouth, which Brodie (2019) identifies babies from birth have the 'instinct is to put things in their mouth'.

This is a great holistic learning opportunity, providing sensory stimulation, concentration skills, and fine motor skills. The treasure basket also offers independent play, which Pickler and Montessori both emphasise. Hughes (2019) and Kayir (2022).

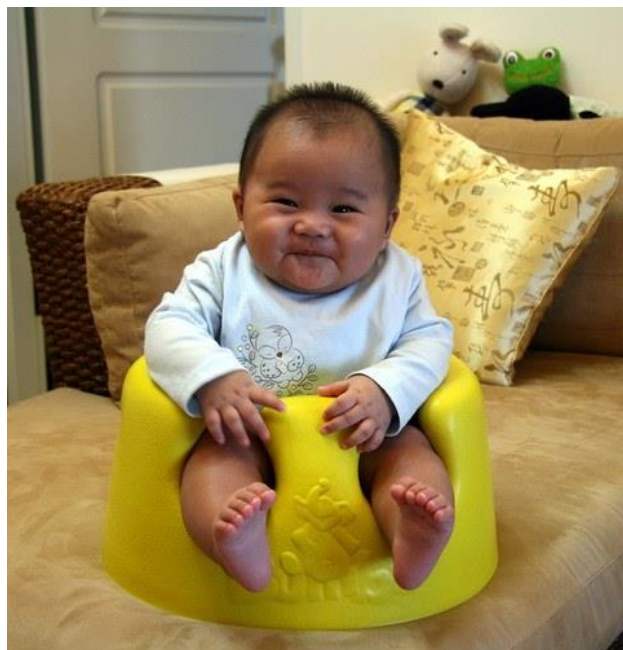
The adult's role is to provide a safe environment for the baby to explore safely, and they should respond with a way of ensuring the baby is safe and interact only if the baby initiates this. Gascoyne (2019).



18 - Source: Under Twos Treasure Basket. (Grandir UK. 2015).

Elinor Goldschmied developed the treasure basket and suggests a collection (80-100) of varied natural and household items, that are placed in a round wicker basket. Gascoyne (2019), Hughes (n.d.).

The importance of ensuring the child can support themselves sitting for this activity helps develop their further physical development. Falk (2011) discourages “assisted” sitting position, especially when it is too early for the baby. Falk says having their legs straight out in front of them can reduce the physical development of crawling. (Cited, Physical Development of Children. 2019, p. 83).



19 - Source: Bumbo (Kuo, B. 2008)

Nursery Rhymes and songs

Nursery rhymes meet the holistic development of a child; they introduce children to new words and experiences. Vygotsky, cited Brodie (2018), advocates that scaffolding language with the support of an adult can help children understand spoken language. (Brodie, 2018)

In addition, action rhymes and songs assist fine and gross motor skills by allowing babies to kick their legs, develop an awareness of fingers, learn basic math concepts, develop emotional awareness, and strengthens attachment.



20 - Source: Nursery rhymes for babies. (BBC. n.d.).

[Videos to nursery rhymes](#)

The Enabling Environment



The indoor and outdoor environment should provide children with a sense of belonging and give the child authentic experiences, stimulating curiosity and exploration (WG, 2022). The Reggio Emilia approach identifies the value and importance of the environment as the '3rd teacher', enabling them to explore their environment and express themselves. (Gray & MacBlain, 2015, p.24, 106).

The National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare for Children (WG, 2016) emphasises the need for children to have “first-hand play experiences, activities that aid children’s development and build on their natural curiosity.”



21 - Source: *The Serious Work of Role-Play*. (Marxhausen, 2020).



22 - Source: *Curiosity Approach* (n.d.)

The Curiosity approach draws on the theories of Reggio Emilia, Steiner, Montessori and New Zealand's Te Whariki approach, and combining them in a modern way. Helyn & Bennett (2021)

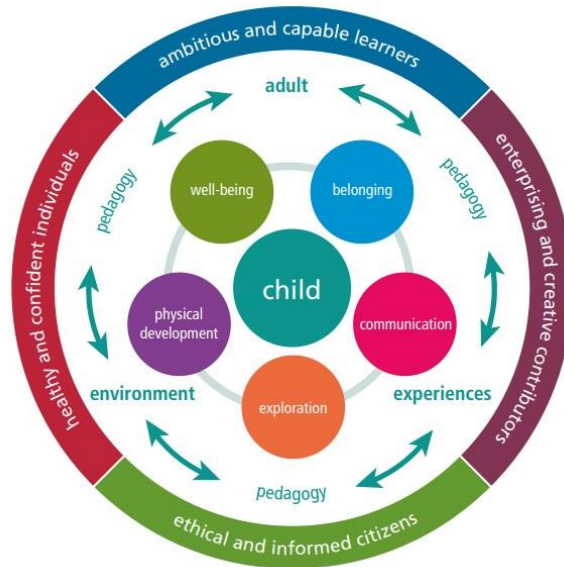
Ensuring there are authentic, real-life resources that can enhance learning opportunities which intrigue play and curiosity.

[To find out more](#)

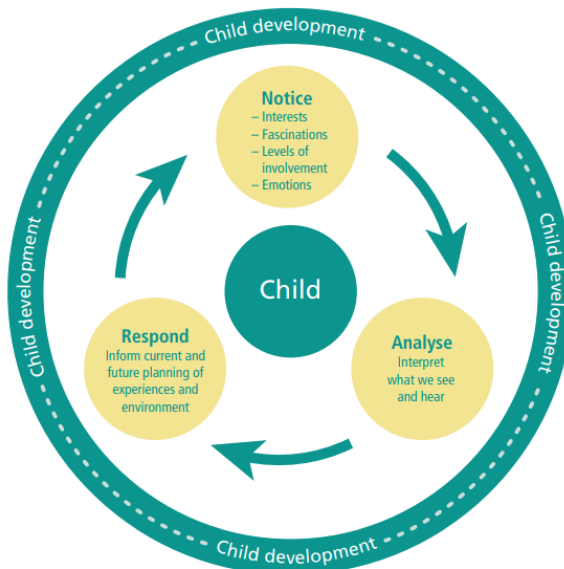
Within a setting

The curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings (WG, 2022, p. 24) emphasises the importance of the adult's role, creating 'The five developmental pathways' to ensure adults can provide space, time and freedom and allow each child's individuality to be celebrated and the holistic development for all.

Similar to the Finnish approach, which is based on Vygotsky's (1987) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, encouraging adults to engage in learning opportunities through play, promoting holistic growth, health, and well-being of each child through their development and age. Saakslähti and Duncombe (2019, p. 64)



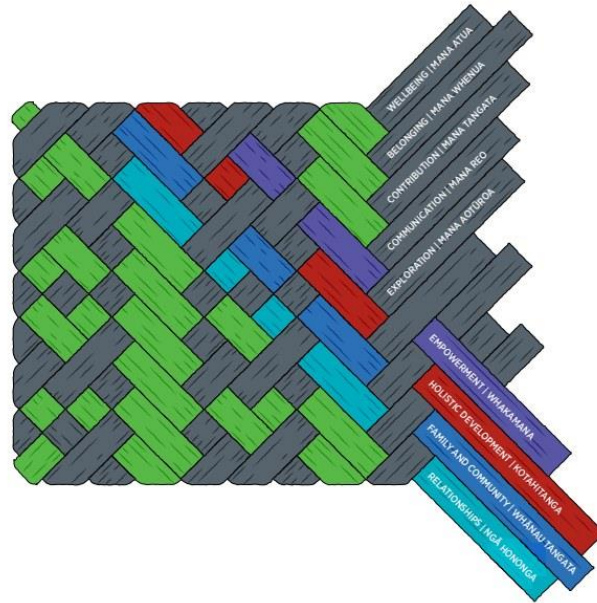
23 - Source: Five Developmental Pathways (WG, 2022, p 24)



24 - Source: Observing Children (WG, 2020, p.37).

Observations

Staff assess and observe children within the setting. The curriculum (WG, 2022) emphasises the importance that staff understand that children all learn differently and learn in different ways. They need to match planning with quality learning for all children and ensure the experiences are genuine and relate to real life (authentic and purposeful). By observing the child, staff will have a greater understanding of their 'fascinations' (schemas), ensuring they can be adapted and altered to accommodate all children and develop the environment to provide curiosity and rich learning opportunities (WG, 2022).



25 - Source: *Te Whariki Approach: A Woven Mat* (Ministry of Education: New Zealand Government, 2017)

Te Whariki

Addresses 'Holistic development' as a whole, where all parts of the child's development weave together. Brodie (2018) refers to the New Zealand Early Childhood Approach Curriculum – Te Whariki.

The Ministry of Education for New Zealand, Te Whairiki (2017, p. 21) states that they strive to create an environment that emphasises the importance of relationships for adults to provide warmth, encouragement, acceptance and respect.

Both the Welsh and New Zealand curriculum share similar values in the importance of supporting children to be:

- Competent and confident learners.
- Responsible citizens
- Effective contributors
- Healthy and confident individuals

'Fascinations' allow adults to use the environment around the child to develop learning and curiosity. Brodie (2018).

Click the headings on the pictures to find out more.



26 - Trajectory

Exploration of movement, climbing up and down, dropping things from up high.



27 - Transporting

Moving objects or themselves from one place to another.



28 - Enclosing

Exploring shape and size by creating or occupying spaces.



29 - Rotating/Rotational

Enjoys spinning themselves or objects around in circles.



30 - *Positioning*

Gathering, ordering, grouping or forming lines of objects.



31 - *'Fascinations'*

From around the age of one, children may show **Schemas** which are repeated behaviours in play, 'fascinations'.

Schemas allow children to explore and make sense of the world around them, they also allow adults to support their learning and understand them emotionally.

Brodie (2018) and PACEY (2016)

Atherton (2013, p.24), defines the importance of adults to have understanding of how children learn, by observing repeated patterns of behaviour through play.

[Further information on Schemas.](#)



32 - Orienteering

Enjoys exploring the world in different angles, upside down / sideways.



33 - Transforming

Exploring the ways materials change and move.



34 - Enveloping

Exploring inside objects, filling objects, covering or wrapping themselves or objects.



35 - Connecting

Children enjoy building and dismantling.

Atherton & Nut-brown (2013, p.3)

PACEY (2016)

Thomas and Boulton (2022)



36 - The outdoors

Source: Show and tell . (Stirling District Kindergarten, 2022)

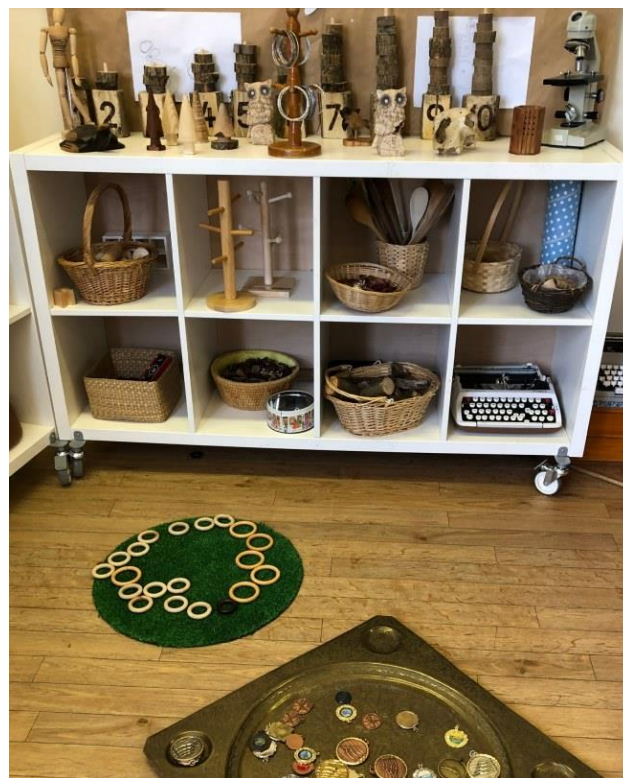
The Outdoors

The use of the natural outdoor environment was recommended by Margaret McMillan (cited Coates. 2019). She highlighted the importance of being outside; getting fresh air and being with nature is good for children's well-being, and active learning through first-hand experiences – mud, water, sticks, trees! McMillan, (cited Coates. 2019). Although there are some challenges to getting outside, e.g. weather, appropriate clothing, staff reluctance, and not wanting to get muddy these should be overcome with the right clothing and footwear.

Tummy time and exploring a treasure basket and many other activities can be taken outside, on the grass, blanket etc.

Crawling on grass, watching leaves fall, listening to the birds.

The outdoors naturally provides risky play for children.



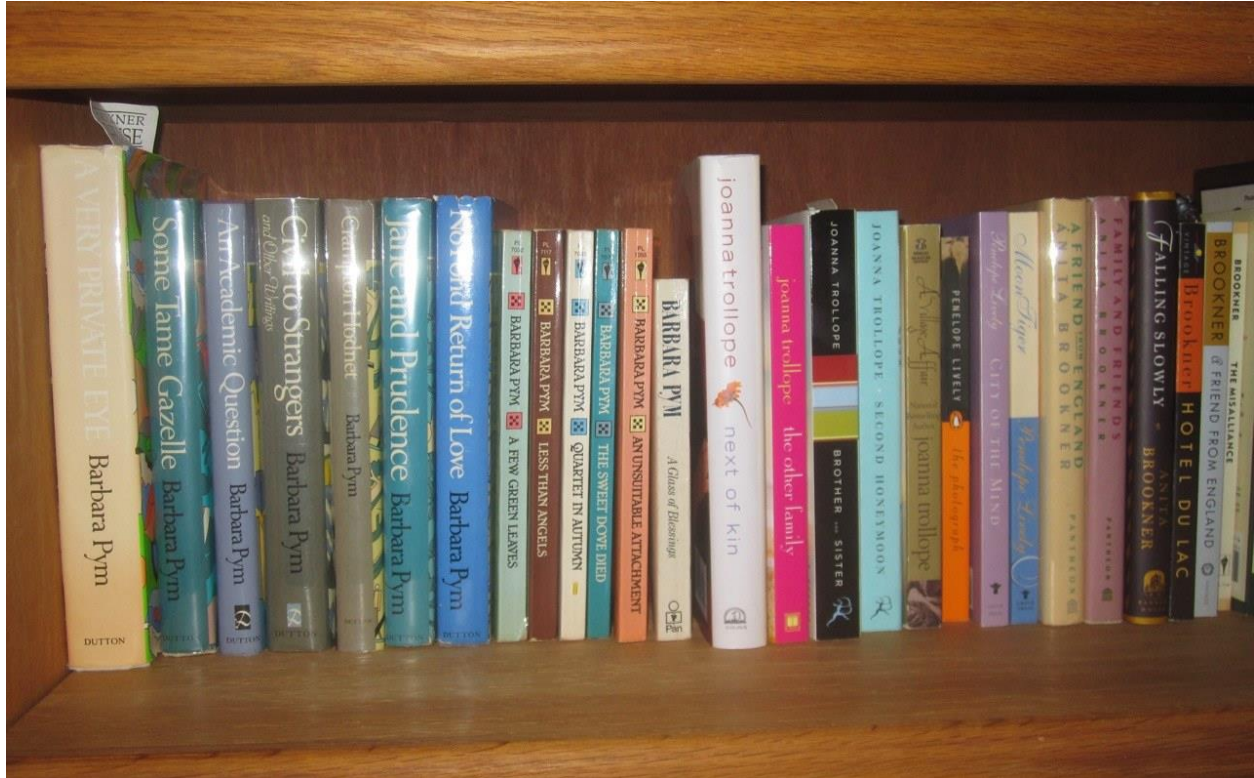
37 - Source: *Loose Parts* (WG, 2022, p. 27).

Loose Parts

OxonPlay describes Loose parts as providing "high level of creativity and choice, as there are endless possibilities for how they can be played with." Loose parts are "items and materials that children... can move, adapt, control, change and manipulate within their play." Daly and Beloglovsky (2014, p.10) describes loose parts as moveable objects that can provide children with the "What if" and encourages thinking, which provides curiosity, creativity which leads to imagination and excitement.

[Examples of loose parts](#)

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