



The First 1000 days

Introduction



The first 1000 days- a major aspect of a child's development. The first 1000 days is the time scale from when a child is born to their 2nd birthday. 1000 days- astonishing amounts of achievements and milestones as a child's brain develops rapidly. During the first 1000 days of a child's life optimal brain development is dependent on sufficient amounts of fundamental nutrients during specific time

frames states UNICEF (2013). The foundations of optimal health, growth, and neurodevelopment across the lifespan are being laid during this unique window of opportunity. However, malnutrition and poverty too often impair this foundation in developing nations, resulting in earlier mortality and serious morbidities including poor health (Walker, 2007).

Current challenges



In the early years childcare sector there are many current challenges. In the past 3 years covid has had a drastic effect on children all over the world, due to lockdown children missed out on the opportunity to socialise and interact with other children/ adults outside of their own families- causing them to lack social skills. Damour (No date) states by interacting with others that they would not usually choose to be around is part of learning to get along with others and make friends, with settings being closed due to COVID children miss out on this opportunity. Children are going to need more support than ever before, without knowing the appropriate ways to interact with other children this needs to be demonstrated for them to be able to develop and learn. Children gain so much from engaging in new and exciting experiences, spending time with a variety of peers, and enjoying the presence of a diverse range of caring adults, having missed out on the chances to gain these experiences Damour (no date) claims that, "Their lives necessarily became very narrow and close to home. And while that may have kept them safe from COVID-19, it — without question — robbed them of the variety and complexity of life that is a needed and healthy part of development."

Staffing- An increasing rate of teacher burnout is one of the major issues facing early childhood education. Nearly half of all preschool educators acknowledged having high levels of stress and burnout over the previous several years, according to a 2022 survey. The majority of the additional burnout is because to a significant staffing shortage that is affecting settings all around the country.

The teachers who stayed inevitably have to deal with longer hours, bigger classrooms, and occasionally new, mixed-age learning settings states Childcare Education Institute (2022)

Activity ideas



In the first 1000 days, play is a crucial factor of development. Activities in settings are fundamental to allow children to explore, while developing their skills.

Loose Parts



(Source: Laura Lenihan)

What are loose parts?

A 'loose parts' toy is open-ended; The richest source of loose parts being the enjoyment of all senses by nature. Using creativity and imagination children can play and explore in many ways using loose parts by having many ways and opportunities to play with it, states Louv (No date). Simon Nicholson- the architect who originated the concept of loose parts play stated the benefits of a loose parts environment, he quoted "in any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it." (Pacey, 2019). He describes loose parts as "all the things that satisfy one's curiosity and give us the pleasure that results from discovery and invention." Pacey (2019) suggests Loose parts should be at an accessible level where children can choose to freely play.

What are the learning outcomes of loose parts play?

Loose parts play meets all 7 areas of learning.

- Personal, social and emotional development- sharing and playing with others, playing independently by choosing how to and what to play with.
- Physical development- Learning how to use fine motor skills by playing with the parts.
- Communication and language- communicating with other children when playing, developing new vocabulary.
- Mathematics- Concepts such as counting, combining the parts together to explore, sequencing the size of parts.
- Literacy- Mark making, narrating during play to others.

- Understanding the world- Trialling ideas in play.
- Expressive arts and media- Chances to explore materials and media. (Lacey, 2019)



1 - (Western international school of Shanghai 2021)

The Curiosity Approach

What is the Curiosity approach?

According to learning journals (no date) the curiosity approach is based on child-led learning, allowing children to develop skills such as problem solving and critical thinking whilst boosting their confidence while exploring the world using their natural curiosity. Children's engagement to their environment is increased when they are in control of their own interests and development. The curiosity approach stems from theorists such as Montessori, Pikler and Steiner, who instead of aiming to shape children into passive learners, aim to create 'thinkers and doers.'

The curiosity approach within a setting usually appears as a neutral tone space, allowing children's full focus to be on their individual learning and play. Resources such as those mentioned as 'loose parts' are placed at a child's eye level to be easily accessed, when using natural materials in these areas of learning children are able to use full imagination to discover how to play. Instead of a toy which is identified obviously, the children engage with their senses to discover the interaction they can make with it.

Benefits of the curiosity approach:

The main benefit of the curiosity approach is giving children the control of their individual learning, inspiring a child's awe and wonder (Learning journals, no date). The approach encourages children to spend more time outside of the setting to meet opportunities which cannot be fulfilled in the setting, this taking them away from technology which will further lead to improved communication and social skills. This increases the control and independence children have over their learning.

Messy play



ECLKC (2022) states, messy play encourages children to develop the fundamental skills they'll need later in life. One of the most crucial early learning opportunities we can provide for infants and toddlers is this one. Research suggests messy play stimulates children's senses at an appropriate developmental level. As they practise their motor, language, and social skills, children acquire fundamental cognitive principles. One of the best integrated learning opportunities for young children is messy play.

Schoolhouse (2017) suggests the benefits of messy play to allow children to explore with no goal to work towards using their imagination and raw materials. Messy play helps children recognise their senses through play. Since young children can't explain things vocally, messy play allows them to do so in a variety of ways using objects and gestures; yet, in order to do this, they must choose how their actions will best convey their explanation, helping to develop their social skills. You can utilise the messy play activity to promote speech and improve language abilities depending on what you make it. For instance, using letters in the activity aids in the development of a knowledge of written language; explaining feelings and textures to your children can aid in vocabulary development.

In order to explore objects, children use all of their senses, think through their discoveries, and try to convey them, messy play requires a high level of focus. Children can focus and concentrate when learning and practising practical skills. As a result of this children will develop fundamental learning skills to use later in life.

Water Play



Water Play:

Water Play is an amazing opportunity for children to explore their senses whilst developing their fine motor skills. Using water, buckets, toys, etc the children can have endless fun. Busy Bees (2020) state the benefits of water play for children in the early years, water play aids to develop children's hand-eye coordination, while engaging with the water and the specific toys, the learn to control the water further improving their sense of accuracy. As well as this water play helps to build social, communication and fine motor skills, the children engage in the play as a group while exploring through sensory experiences. By lifting and pouring with the toys children's motor skills are enhanced. Water play encourages concentration as the children usually spend a long period of time exploring the water, benefiting their attention span.

Environments



2 - (Thatto Heath Community Primary School, 2020)

Early years matters (2017) states Children's progress and learning are supported and expanded in large part by their environment. Babies and young children are encouraged to play in enabling environments because they feel at ease, at home, and comfortable there. Children can explore and learn about their surroundings when they feel emotionally safe and secure while using their senses to discover the environment, they are in.

Hodgman (2011) suggests an enabling environment is designed to advocate children's well-being and mental, physical and emotional health while providing them with stability, accessibility, displays, high quality resources and space. In an enabling environment every child is valued and looked upon as unique. An enabling environment is so important to children as the environment they are in is crucial to their development. This environment will identify a child's interests and give them the freedom to explore and try new things, encourage children to be independent and develop a positive mindset towards learning while guiding their learning across all six aspects developing new skills. While providing children with support emotionally and mentally, as well as keeping them safe.

Learning Journals (No date) discuss the importance of a peaceful environment when adapting to the curiosity approach. When a child is overstimulated their mental health, concentration and well-being are negatively impacted. In some cases, in settings a child's overstimulation begins due to the environment they are in. By creating a setting which is calming, enclosed with neutral tones and soft, natural furnishings, will allow children to feel safe and relaxed. By creating a safety space for children separation anxiety in children will be reduced as the setting will feel familiar, allowing them to reach full potential when engaging fully in their learning.

Enabling environment links to theory-

The Montessori approach:

The Montessori approach is based upon child-led learning, by providing children with the environment, resources and materials they need to freely learn. By creating a space shaped for child led learning children can independently explore and learn, the resources should be at child-level and clearly labelled.

Jean Piaget:

Piaget's theory was when a child was to interact within social and physical environments, the information they gained while doing so was co-ordinated into 'schemes'. During the first 1000 days children use their senses and motor skills to learn about the environment which they are in. The theory of schemas has a massive impact upon teaching when perceiving the children's learning correlated with their environment.

(Hodgman, 2011)

Being Inclusive



Lee (2022) states, "Inclusion and inclusive practice in the early years is about practices which ensure that everyone "belongs": the children and their parents and/or carers, staff and any other people connected with the early years setting in some way."

Inclusion is about delivering the attention to individual needs and backgrounds while treating all children fairly. As all children develop at their own pace they cannot all be treated in the exact same way. To ensure that teaching standards are not compromised, inclusive practise attempts to reduce or remove learning barriers and support to assist the development of all learners.

An inclusive learning environment anticipates the various requirements of learners through inclusive learning and assessment design and delivery, it attempts to guarantee that all learners have equitable access to learning opportunities.

Inclusion in early years is fundamental to a child feeling valued for who they are. All children should feel they are being treated as their peers are as well as feeling they are cared for.

Challenges-

Early years matters (2017) states the challenges involved with inclusive practice. The first challenge being ensuring that every child's needs are fulfilled, even when another child's behaviour needs to be prioritised due to a rise of concern or a new starting child in the setting. Another challenge is maintaining suitable records to be shared within a multi-agency team of colleagues whilst serving as the child's and their family's point of contact. As well as this keeping full focus on the needs of a child while a parent additionally has needs is a challenge.

Professional Partnerships/ relationships



In Early years setting professional partnerships are between the educators and parents/carers.

Early childhood educators must be aware of the various ways that children can display their developmental accomplishments and have a thorough understanding of how sociocultural environments and family situations affect a child's learning states National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009). GOV.UK suggests according to research, the most crucial element in helping some children to succeed regardless of background is having parents and other carers participate in their children's learning. They might come and visit your location to start the

relationship. They can provide you with information regarding the child's likes, dislikes etc. You can then use this information to gently settle the child.

If at all possible, ask parents and carers to accompany you while you settle in their child. Once they see how you tailor their child's learning, they will be able to trust your responses to them. It involves collaborating to share knowledge, identify children's interests, and determine the most effective ways to promote their learning.

By communicating with parents and carers about observations made of their child in the setting enables them to possibly further their child's development in their home environment by involving similar enjoyments of learning.

Parent/Carer partnerships with teachers in settings links to Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory. The ecological systems theory developed by Bronfenbrenner is one of the most widely recognised theories explaining how social settings affect human development. According to this theory, your upbringing has an impact on every aspect of your life. Your thoughts, feelings, and preferences are influenced by your social environment states office for multicultural learning (2023). By working closely with parents and carers and identifying a child's background/ home-life environment the effect on their development can be determined.

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