

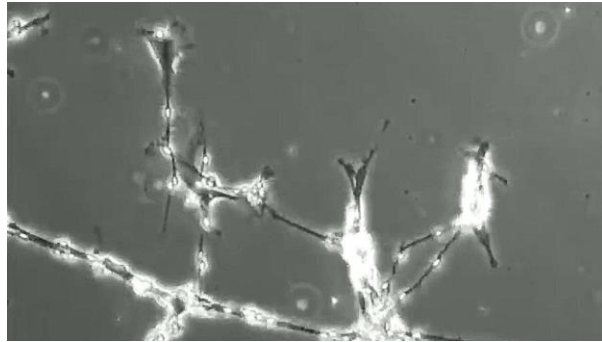


## Exceptional Care in the First 1000 Days

What are the first 1000 days and why are they important?



The time between conception and a child's second birthday is referred to as the first 1000 days. Cusick, Michael and Georgieff (2013) claim that this is a unique time where rapid brain development occurs along with a significant development of the body and immune system. The developmental foundations established during this period, contributes to the lifelong health and wellbeing of the child, which, Pacey (No Date) subsequently suggests, determines the sort of adult that the child will become.



When a baby is born, all the neurons they will ever require through life are already present, however these neurons need to connect to one another for the brain to function. The formation of connections between neurons is facilitated by experiences with the environment and relationships. Between the ages of six months and one year is when the formation of neural connections is at their greatest, which is caused by the intense bond between the infant and their primary caregiver (Nutkins, McDonald and Stephen 2013).



These first 1000 days are important, as the experiences and environment that the baby is exposed to during this time, impacts their health and wellbeing throughout life (Pregnancy Birth and Baby, 2022). Homestart (2020) claim that when the first 1000 days are fraught with difficulties, many areas of development, including physical, mental health, education, and socioeconomic development have a poor outcome. Thus, suggesting that to stand the best chance for a healthy and successful future, babies must be given nurturing care. Bust and Pedro (2022) agrees, stating that along with love and care, play and cognitive stimulation all play an important part in development during the first 1000 days.



## What Should Exceptional Care Look Like?



A setting that provides exceptional care should put the needs of the infant at the forefront, ensuring that the environment that they are in is safe, secure, and stimulating, aiming to develop the child holistically. The physical environment should be well lit with plenty of natural light and have a range of suitable activities that infants have freedom to explore and move between, giving plentiful opportunities to learn, play and develop both indoors and outdoors. The care provided should be nurturing and have a focus on the wellbeing of the infant, ensuring that the rights of the child are respected. It should ensure that they are happy and feel emotionally secure with their care givers and in the setting. The young children should be respected and treated as individuals, with their

personal needs and requirements known and complied with. Areas should be provided to the infants where they can relax, have some quiet time or sleep, without disturbance. Exceptional care also includes the involvement of parents/guardians. Working in partnership with them to keep them informed and up to date with the progress of their children (Welsh Gov, 2016)

## Challenges of Caring for an infant within a Setting

### **Support**

Brodie (2018) claims that practitioners feel that they are not able to dictate the set-up of the physical environment using their professional knowledge of baby's needs, due to lack support. This is an issue as babies only tend to use the baby room for a single year, and during this time their needs change and so it is important for their development that the environment is adapted to suit their changing requirements.

### **Separation Anxiety**

One challenge that caregivers face is the infant's anxiety when separated from their primary caregiver. Clare (2012) describes a situation where babies are cared for by different adults within the setting and subsequently fail to form secure attachments with any one care giver. This can have a detrimental impact on the development of the infant as it can effect their ability to form relationships as adults (Pugh 2005).

When a baby is left at a care setting for the first time, it can be a traumatic experience fuelled by separation anxiety. The infant does not want their primary care giver to leave as it is with that the child feels most safe. Over time the separation becomes less traumatic, as the infant has started to form a secondary attachment to the practitioner, showing an increase in the level of safety and security they feel while at the setting. This demonstrates the value in building strong relationships in the setting, like Bronfenbrenner theorised (Hayes, O'Toole and Halpenny 2017).

## Activities that aid Development

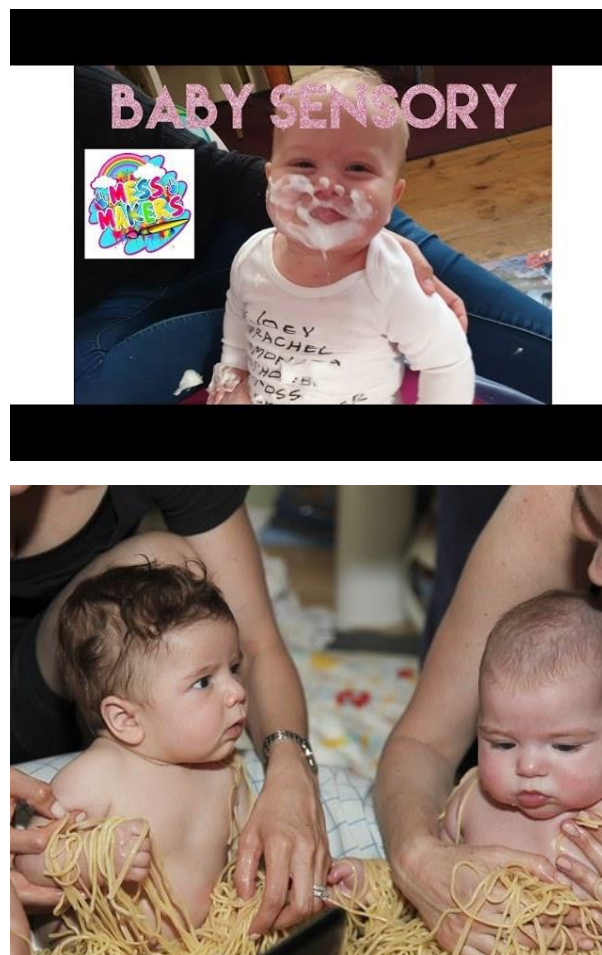


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## Sensory Play

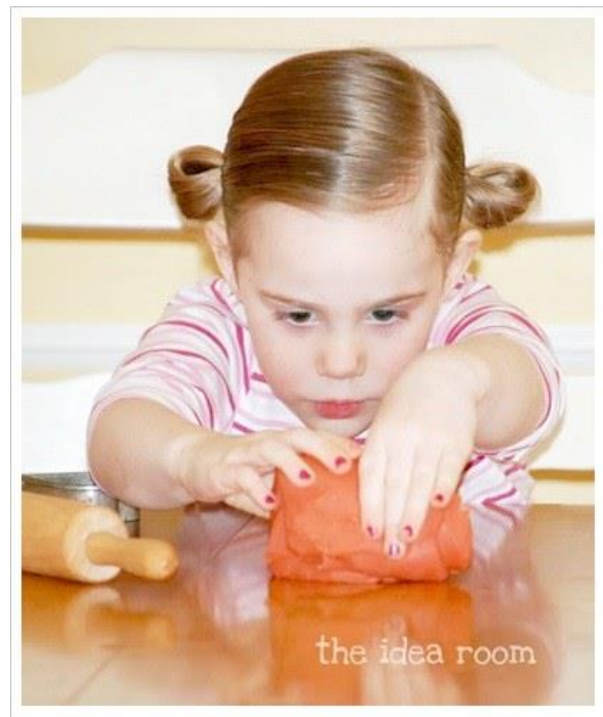


Forbes (2004) describes infants as being highly sensual beings, relying completely on their senses to inform them about the world, stating how Piaget called the time between birth and two years, the sensorimotor stage. Gascoyne (2012) states how research has proven to show the link between memories and the sense of smell, sight, and touch. Sensory play is a hands-on experience with the aim to encourage learning and development. Connections between neurons are formed every time a person encounters a sensory stimulus. Each unique sensory experience an infant has, will either form new connections within the brain or strengthen existing connections. Gascoyne (2012) also states how these encounters are the building blocks for the infants learning, creativity and thought.



### **Messy Play**

The use of materials such as shaving foam, jelly, sand, playdough, coloured spaghetti, bubbles, paints, rice, pasta, tinned foods, herbs and spices, natural materials such as wood shavings and shredded paper. Overall, these materials are readily available and affordable and can have a profound impact on the development of children. Care should of course be taken with regards to any allergies or sensitivities to materials being used. Messy play can also encourage the imagination when the introduction of other equipment is done, for example adding toy trucks or teacups and cooking equipment (Gascoyne 2018).







Treasure Basket



Elinor Goldschmied created the treasure basket in the 1940's, after reflecting on her own childhood where she was brought up in rural surroundings with natural, everyday objects to play with. She appreciated the simplicity of the objects and how they had the potential to ignite the five senses of the infant, being used as tools to explore and develop imagination. By creating the treasure basket, she could ensure that children in urban areas would be able to access the same resources for sensory open-ended play. The objects within the basket could be a mix of everyday household objects and objects of natural origin. Each object has the potential to be used in a multitude of ways, allowing the development of hand-eye coordination and fine and gross motor skills. Other developments brought about from the sensory rich treasure basket include an increase in concentration, decision making along with emotional and social development. Infants can play independently or collaboratively with peers, supporting their personal development (Gascoyne 2012).



Il gioco euristico del "cesto del tesoro" di Elinor Goldschmied



### Singing Nursery Rhymes

Forbes (2004) claims that singing songs and rhymes that are familiar on a regular basis is critical for infant's language play. Not limiting songs to a particular time of day but including them in everyday activities is an effective way to develop language and communication. This also relate to Malaguzzi's theory and how language and music is important in development. Songs can be sung during nappy time or lullabies sang to help calm and soothe infants. Rhymes can be performed to encourage social interaction between infants and build on the imagination, Clare (2012) states how infant's are more emotionally responsive to infant directed speech and nursery rhymes.



## Effective Environments



An effective environment is not only an environment in the physical sense, but also in the emotional sense too. It is important to consider both aspects as this offers infants the opportunity to explore in a sense of wonder, using their imagination to express themselves and solve problems all while developing their ability to think critically (Welsh gov 2022). Clare (2012) claims that for a child to learn and develop, they need to feel emotionally safe and secure, subsequently, stating that the emotional environment created for infants, is one of the most crucial factors that shapes their learning and development later on. This concept is supported by Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (Aubrey and Riley 2022). For a child to feel a sense of belonging, the environment needs to be inclusive, valuing the diversity of the community whilst promoting a strong Welsh ethos (Welsh Gov).

The physical environment should provide an array of multi-sensory opportunities, with a variety of objects and materials to promote creative development, the ability to think critically and problem solve. The building structure and layout, the equipment and how the space is organised should be looked at (Brodie 2018). Brodie (2018) also claims that high quality is not always evident in the infant rooms at settings, which is problematic. Clare (2012) claims that the wellbeing of the infant as well as their learning and development are influenced by the quality of the environment available to them. Clare (2012) also states the importance of allowing natural light into the setting and avoiding painting artwork on the windows, as this often blocks sunlight unnecessarily. The use of low-level lighting is thought to bring a sense of calm to the environment, improving the behaviour of children. Clare (2012) also recommends have a lighting circuit that allows part of the room to have the lights on whilst others are off, this is beneficial in allowing a space where some children can sleep or relax while others do not. Clare (2012) believes that children are more responsive in environments that offer a calm, natural feel where reflection occur and over stimulation is not brought about using bright colours.



Brodie (2018) defines a quality environment as one which is holistic in meeting all the requirements of the infant and claims that a focus on quality over quantity should be taken when choosing equipment for a setting. Brodie (2018) suggests that value is added to the learning environment when practitioners engage in play with the infants, putting Vygotsky's theory of development being enhanced by interaction with others, into practice (Aubrey and Riley 2022).

Archer (2019) claims physical development is often overlooked in practice and suggests that both indoor and outdoor spaces should be used for physical activity.

A young baby develops skills required for reading and writing through exploration of their environment and the development of tracking skills. Providing the baby with adequate floor space to be able to move freely is of importance, as this is the infants natural play area. They can lay down, roll over, stretch for toys, crawl, and pull themselves up to stand and cruise (Archer 2019). Allowing these areas for the infant to crawl, aids the development of the palmar grasp, along with developing strength in the hands, shoulders, and upper arms. Archer (2019) claims that this contributes later to the ability to hold a pencil as well as other fine motor skills. This stresses the importance of a developmentally appropriate, safe, suitable indoor space in allowing physical development to occur during infancy. The development of back muscles and the evolving sense of balance all occur when the baby starts crawling, sitting, and standing. This is essential later in life for a stable posture and to be able to sit and write when older. Emmi Pikler designed a piece of equipment known as the Pikler Arch, which is a tool to aid babies as they grow through the physical development stages. Emmi Pikler's approach to child development was to let the child be free to move without the intervention of adults, and so for this reason the physical environment is important as the enabler for the child to reach the different stages of motor development, giving the child a sense of self and security (Vamos 2015).



Also important is the outdoor environment. The curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings states the need for an outdoor environment as well as indoor at settings (Welsh Gov 2022). Natural outdoor spaces, full of trees, grass, vegetation, stones, sticks and other natural materials are areas where quality creative play can happen (Wilson 2012). This type of space is supported by the Froebelian approach, where the Froebelian garden is seen as a learning environment that rich and full of unique learning experience that fail to be met indoors (Tovey 2013). This type of play encourages a deeper appreciation of nature which can lead to the child developing care for the world they live in. Wilson (2012) states that nature play can make infants healthier by encouraging more physical activity. It is also thought to boost brain development and strengthen social bonds and wellbeing. Frederick Froebel was an advocate for the learning through nature, where children can be at one with the outdoor environment. The opportunity to move the whole body freely Tovey (2013) claims to be essential for brain and body development. Adventurous play can take place outdoors, building the infants confidence and capabilities, becoming self aware. Tovey (2013) believes that children need to be exposed to a certain degree of risk to be able to develop their own sense of safety. The latter is a stipulation from of the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings, where it states that the environment should challenges and risks aimed at developing the child's sense of independence, resilience and confidence (Welsh Gov 2022).



Welsh Gov (2022) states the need for the environment to be communication rich, with an emphasis on developing communication skills further. Reggio Emilia classifies the environment as the third teacher, which subsequently means that the physical environment can shape how children learn. Creating an environment that offers the opportunity for practitioners to use language in a playful way, gives rise to the development of strong language skills which are important to educational success further on in life. (Uk Gov No date)

## Enabling Adult



During this uniquely significant period of development, the adult should understand the importance their role has, in the progression of the children within their setting (welsh Gov 2022). By forming a secure attachment to an infant, the adult can provide a secure base and safe haven, where the child feels emotionally and physically secure (Rose and Rogers 2012). The curriculum for funded non maintained nursery setting states that the adult should be involved in promoting the curiosity of the child, facilitating their learning through observation and engagement in their play. The adult should act as a role model, encouraging a good relationship with learning and ways to express feelings in a positive way (welsh gov 2022).

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of development places the child at the centre, where they are exposed to factors that can affect their development. Bronfenbrenner claims that the relationships or interactions between two microsystems, such as family and childcare setting, play a role in the child's development (Aubrey and Riley 2022). Therefore, communication between the infant's home and the setting is of importance, developing the child's sense of belonging (welsh Gov 2022).

The child's wellbeing can be impacted by how the adult treats them. Consistently providing kind and compassionate care and treating the infant with respect whilst understanding the importance of their opinion and choices, will positively impact their wellbeing (Welsh Gov 2022). Emmi Pikler is a theorist who promotes the respectful caring of babies. The gestures of the hands can impact the relationships between the adult and the infant. Kind, gentle gestures give the infant a positive outlook on the world. (Chahin 2021). This connects to Bowlby's attachment theory and feeds Maslow's hierarchy of needs when trust and love is felt by the infant, based on the action shown by the adult (Aubrey and Riley). Respectful care can be given during feeding time and nappy changes. Engaging with the infant, singing, giving eye contact, ensuring that the baby can see the face whilst talking to them, all builds the child's language and communication skills (Siraj-Blatchford 2005).

Bruner developed the term 'scaffolding', where the adult facilitates the child's learning. Language development occurs when the adult actively encourages babbling, in ways of copying sounds the baby makes and showing the mouth while saying words. By the caregiver being in tune with the baby, two-way communication can happen, further encouraging speech and language development (Barron and Homes 2005).

Welsh Gov (2022) state how observation is important in understanding the child's interests and being able to plan for their learning and that consistent patterns of behaviour should be recognised. Piagets' schema theory recognises that infants need to repeatedly perform tasks or behaviours to reinforce the connections being made between brain cells, otherwise they are at risk of being lost (Rose and Rogers 2012).

## Engaging Experiences



Welsh Gov (2022) state that the experiences offered in a setting should be purposeful, meaningful and hands-on for the child. They should be authentic in origin offering opportunities for role play with practical experiences encouraging cognitive development, which is supported by the Montessori approach. Authentic experiences allow the child to discover their environment, developing respect and care for it. Both Piaget and Vygotsky encourage hands on learning. This can take place in the form of gardening and cooking, where multiple senses are stimulated, encouraging brain development (Aubrey and Riley 2022)

Experiences should be communication rich, with the availability of symbols and signs, which along with adult input can support the children in noticing and developing symbolic representation. The use of different languages should be offered to widen the infants understanding of the diversity in Wales.

Giving infants the opportunity to engage in sensitive, responsive interactions with caregivers will help to build confidence, resulting in an independent child with a strong self-esteem (David, Gooch and Powell 2005).

## How to be Inclusive and the importance of professional relationships.



It is important for the children to feel a sense of belonging in the setting, and for the parents to also feel the same, as when these relationships are strong, Bronfenbrenner theorises that developmental stages can be met (Hayes, O'toole, and Halpenny 2017). For inclusivity to be felt, a non-judgemental, unprejudiced environment should be at the forefront, where everyone is recognised and valued as individuals as this is where young people thrive (Buckinghamshire council 2012).

Professionals need to understand the importance of professional love and where to draw boundaries.

## Comparisons of international approaches

In New Zealand, the pre-school curriculum is given the name, Te Whariki. It has a great emphasis on family and community with the name meaning 'woven mat'. The metaphor depicts the many strands, principle and goals that contribute to the bicultural curriculum. The curriculum is based around four key principles, which are, empowerment, holistic development, family and community and relationships. Unlike the curriculum in the United Kingdom, which is academically driven, Te Whariki focuses on the nurturing disposition, acknowledging that each child is unique in their development (Nutkins, McDonald and Stephen 2013).

In France, children do not start formal schooling until the age of six, prior to this they can attend a preschool setting from the age of three. However, for children under the age of the three there is no curriculum for day-care centres. In 2009 only 10% of children under the age of three attended day care centres in France. (Miller and Cameron 2014).

In Sweden, compulsory education starts from age seven, with an Early Childhood Education service starting from the age of one up to six. Preschools in Sweden often take on a homely environment as opposed to a classroom approach. The curriculum for this type of setting is holistic in nature, focussing on socialisation and learning together (Miller and Cameron 2014).

In Norway, all children between the ages of one and six have the right to a place at kindergarten. The Norwegian curriculum is influenced by the work of John Dewey, bring their educational experiences into the real world. The curriculum stipulates the requirement for outdoor education, but not just for physical development but to gain a greater understanding and appreciation for nature (Miller and Cameron 2014).

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