The First 1000 Days

Name: Nespu Jahan Module Code: ECEY4005/C Student No: 2216885
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What is first 1000 days?

The first 1000 days is about a child's new life journey starting from the first trimester of the mother's womb until they reach two years of age. This is a crucial time for the child's brain development, physical improvement and boosting their immune system throughout this period. During this period of a child's life, if they experience any kinds of difficulties or health issues that can have an impact on their future life. When a child is born their physical attachment, appropriate nutrition and parental relationships can provide significant impact on their health and physical growth (PregnancyBirthBaby, 2022).

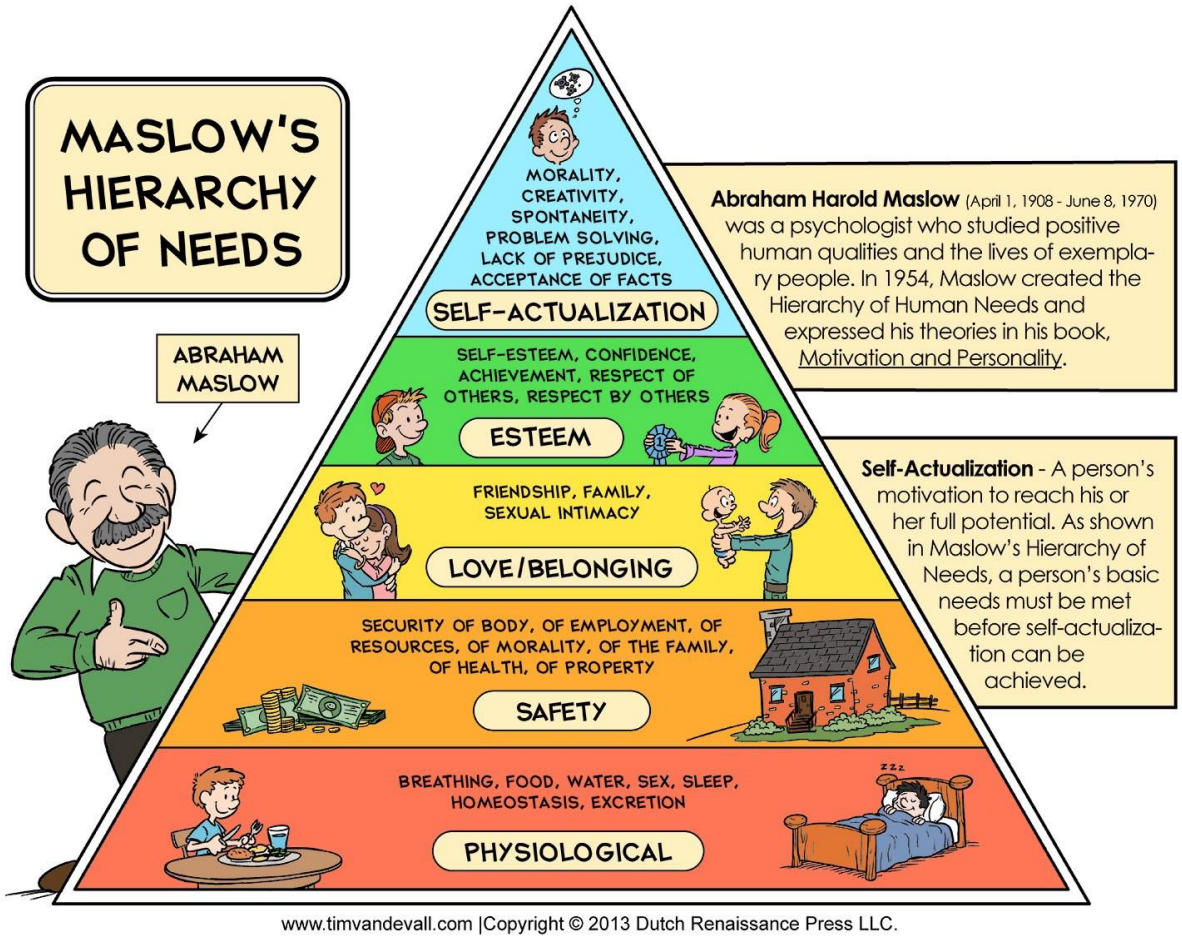
Why are the first 1000 days important?

According to Parents (2018), from early conception stage baby's health started developing in the uterus and after birth their time of development rapidly growing especially in the period of the first 1000 days and throughout their early childhood. During the period from pregnancy to two years of a child's life is remarkable for their mental and physical development. Accomplishing mental and physical well-being during the time is a long-term achievement.

For a human being the most fundamental part of their life is when their body started forming in mother's womb within the nine months period and birth after the period. There are many challenges in

the new world outside of the womb for a new born child, but the child's positive prenatal experiences help the child to build the close bonding by mother's skin-to-skin contact from the moment of the child's birth. It is important to understand that the first 1000 days plays a crucial role for an infant's overall development and for parents physical and mental development. The healthy relationship between the mother and the developing child is more important than any other thing and the opportunity to create this relationship during the first 1000 days period (Sansone, 2021).

Theory of Maslow



Child's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's pyramid of needs focuses that all the basic needs for a human being must be fulfilled to supporting early life before a child is capable to move on to next stage, encouraged and ready to learn. The child's hierarchy of needs' theory is significantly important for the first 1000 days, a period from a conception to two years of age, ensuring that a child is getting the most basic needs from period of womb to early stages of life (Egersdorff and Mundy, 2017).

After a child's born to the new world their responsible adults should ensure that the child get their most basic needs fulfilled, for example, food, safe home, safe sleep, parents' attachment, changing, baby secured environment etc. In the early years of life, all babies must first be met their biological and physiological needs from their close environments before they can meet any other stage of the hierarchy. The first tire of the needs is fundamental for young children, if any of the basic needs are missing so that babies are unable to focus on anything further and also they get distressed for it. For example, when children get hungry or tired then they need to fulfill their immediate needs otherwise it will be more difficult for them to concentrate on play and other activities. Therefore, Maslow's

psychological needs, the first tire of the pyramid, are crucial for a child's primary development and for the growth of different areas of development. The psychological needs are the first requirements to be met for a newly born baby before thinking of other stages of the pyramid. Once these needs are being satisfied then encourage children to play, listening story, engage with active play, which help children to move up to their next stages (Pro Solutions Training, no date).

Nutrition

1 - The first 1000 days brings a unique opportunity to a child's life in order to have a healthier and stronger future. The opportunity gives them the effective support that can protect the child and helping to boost their immune systems. The first 1000 days helps to build the child's foundation level for the future and the right amount of nutrition and protective care during this period supporting them to healthy living as well as making them capable to learn, develop and resilient. As a result, later in life young children can be able to contribute to the society in a healthier way and actively and lead a prosperous life (Unicef, 2017).

In the first 1000 days period, nutrition is an important factor for mother and baby. The average women pregnancy period is 280 days to 300 days, so during the whole pregnancy time women's body need proper nutritional elements for uterus growth. During these special times nutritional influences impacts on pregnancy results, long-term mother's and baby's health and post-pregnancy outcomes. Right amount of nutrition and nourishment protect many pregnancy difficulties as well as birth defects. The most well-known nutritional supplement folic acid is very useful for early pregnancy micro-nutrient deficiencies, and it can help to tackle the early pregnancy diseases by 40%. Studies suggested that lack of right nutrition women's pregnancy can be very risk and micro-nutrients can affect normal pregnancies so that there are many risk of miscarriages. In a pregnancy nutritional influence helping with fatal development so that baby can develop and grow in mother's womb. During this time mother needs huge amount of energy and protein to support baby growing healthily. According to the research, an average pregnant women need 13% energy and 54% protein which are higher than women without pregnancy, Karakochuk et al. *(2018).*

The Challenges for Healthy Living

According to Public Health Scotland (2021), there are some particular reasons that can be challenging for young children's health and well-being and to fulfilling young children's nutrition. The most affected causes that can negatively impact on infants and children's early development, these are lack of money which unable to manage everyday expenses, anxiety in living in poverty, poor lifestyle and lack of knowledge and work facilities. Children living and growing up in poverty faces many difficulties which adversely affecting their cognitive, social and educational development in later life. Children with

poverty experiences are not having opportunities to healthy living, as a result they have poor knowledge and understanding and poor social behaviour, the children may have bullying experience and they are less involve with social activities and feel rejected from their society.

Enabling Environment

What is enabling environment?

The environment is the key factor in reinforcing babies and young children's development and learning phases. Creating enabling environment inspire infants and toddlers to play freely and comfortably and let them to feel as comfort zone within themselves. Establishing secure environment is important to feel children safe and sound, when young children realize they are in safer environment so they can be able to explore all around confidently and learn about the places that they can see and observe. According to the early years foundation stage there are three categories of environments - the emotional environment, the outdoor environment and indoor environment. The theme of the EYFS is to build up the sustainable environment for learn and play for supporting babies and toddlers (Early Years Matters, 2023).

Importance of enabling environments

Early years practitioners must need to consider making enabling environments within their settings which are not only indoors and outdoors physical environments but also creating emotional environment for babies and young children. So that the enabling environment help to recognize and build up good relationship between parents and practitioners and create home environment for the children as such they feel safe and supportive within the surrounding. Young children learn the best in best caring hand, when they find the environment as their home environment (PACEY, 2023).

The main principle of an enabling environment is to be connected with observation, assessment and planning process to perceiving the growing needs of babies and very young children. Regular observations on children's abilities helps to underpinning their constant review progress. Within the environment it is necessary to review babies and young children's previous learning progress to keep improving and take more challenges for their development. Regular review process helps to enhance the environment and creating new experiment gives young children to have hands-on experience. For example, putting number tiles on the floor to make crawling tunnel so the babies and toddlers have a sense of touch and sensory experience. Make the tidy-up time more fun so that toddlers can focus on helping to tidy toys and enjoy the time (Brodie, 2018).

Enabling Adults

Enabling adults can be able to set up the foundation of young children's cognitive learning and development within the 1,001 days period. In this critical period of life young children's emotional and physical well-being, social behaviour and their cognitive learning abilities increases as well as building their developing foundation in order to succeed in the future. A newborn baby develops and learn in a best possible way when an individual adult create a stronger, stable and well-maintained relationship with the baby. An enabling adult can design enabling environment where an infant can establish a secure attachment with their close connection so that they can feel safe and sound, for example with parents, practitioners, nursery nurse, health visitors, midwifes, childminders. Maintaining these relationships empowering babies and young children's brainpower that can promote and maintain their early development stages (HM Government, 2021).

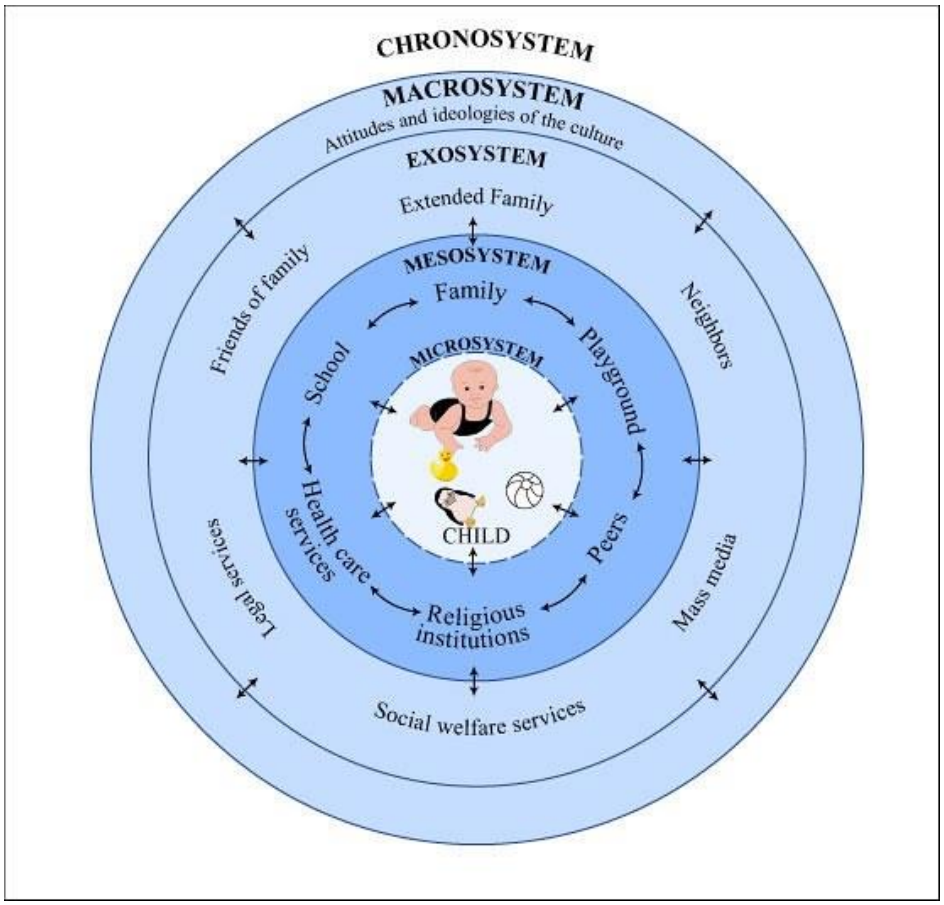
Birth to Three Matter (2003) organised a scheme to arrange support for babies and young children's responsible adults so that they can work efficiently for the children from birth to three years old. They give priority on the main areas of babies and young children's early years development and their enabling adults provides continuous support and assisting them to enhance their early learning experiences in an excellent way. The Birth to Three Matter scheme identified four key factors that all young children need to develop - the strong child, the skilful communicator, the capable learner and the healthy child (Johnston and Nahmad-William, 2009).

Montessori Approach

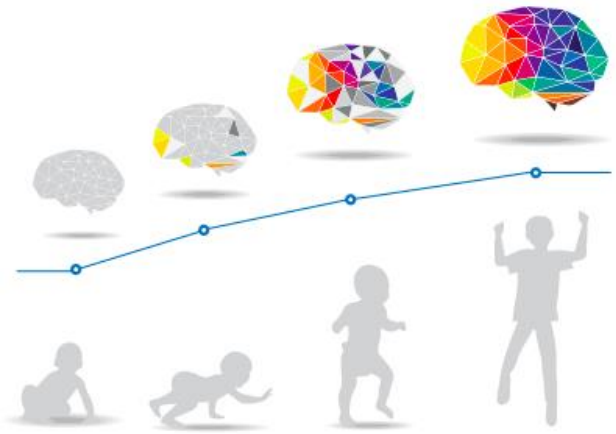
Dr Maria Montessori established a world-wide educational approach, the aim of this method is to nourish children's physical, cognitive, emotional and social development so that young children can explore the world by using their imagination skills. Montessori created a child-led learning approach where early years practitioners committed to prepare a secure and learning enriching environment. The environment is suitable for young children's freedom of choice and learning discipline, helping babies and toddlers to explore every corner of free space as they have free movement opportunity. The babies can choose any toys and enjoy play with it and move into take another one, so they explore and play, and toddlers enjoy playing and learning activities by choosing themselves. The purpose of creating the environment is to help young children to become independent and capable learner and build up self - confidence and self-esteem, which way children assemble their life-long achievements. Montessori approach help the young children to have the sustainable environment facilities and the best learning capacity during the first 1000 days period (Berg, 2021).

As professional practitioners' health visitors playing a significant role for providing support to parents and babies in the first 1000 days. After a child is born the health visitor is responsible to observe the child's health and well-being, keeping them safe and secured, as well as acknowledge their immediate needs. In their regular check-ups they ensure the baby is gaining weight and reaching their growth stages. Most importantly health visitors' home visits are vital for parents and infants if they need any kinds of additional support, for example a disabled child is required a special school service. Therefore, health visitors playing an essential part for families, schools and communities, they are giving support from very early days of a baby's life until they become independent learner. They are signposting the essential information to families and carers, referring to other professional specialists if they have any concerns and identifying any additional needs for example safeguarding issues (HM Government, 2021).

Neurological Development



Neurological development is the most remarkable factor for the period of the first 1000 days, a child's brain started forming from the early life of pregnancy period. From the pregnancy stage to two years of a child's life their brain structure builds up their brain inter-connectivity and they are specialized to do critical and functional activities from the first months after the child's birth. Early brain development is critically important for young children's cognitive learning, understanding science facts and social norms and behaviours. The larger part of the brain growing in the first year of an infant life and the rest of the part developing in the second year. When a child reach at their two years of age, their overall brain development obtained approximately 97% of an adult brain (ScienceDirect, 2016, p.149-154).



Enabling environments supporting brain connections

Children experience better when they are growing up in a suitable environment. Childhood environment and experiences are fundamental for building up young children's brain connections. Create an enabling environment to motivate young children to explore and experiment with suitable play tools. Make a clear space for babies to explore around so they can focuse and choose which way to move and crawl. Keep the floor areas open and clear so that young children encourage to move and develop their physical activities. Establish a free movement environment for babies and toddlers help to refine their physical skills for example, crawling and toddling and improve brain connections. A six-month old baby can be mobile and wanted to have touch and feel when they see a colourful and sensory toy towards them. Modify the environment by creating play activity zones, for example, quite areas and messy areas. Allow toddlers to choose their favourite play activity and observing them and let them to think, explore and play without any barrier. The process helps dynamically to boost their brain connections. Arrange a soft corner within the environment that young children loves to explore, see the pictures and colours

and it is the perfect time to read books together and build up good bonding between the child and the adult (Oxfordshire County Council, 2008).

Sensory Play and Messy Play

Babies and toddlers are naturally adoring the style of messy and sensory play. Creating playful and exploratory indoor and outdoor environments for young children so they can be able to touch and test, explore and learn with their hands in order to get new experience from different textures and tools. Messy play focuses on play-based practical learning and gives young children chance to refine their motor skills and learn them at their own speed. It also helps to gain problem-solving skills, understanding basic math and science, social and psychological skills and other creative skills for instance playing finger painting, dough play, rice play, slimy play, cereal play, sand play and so on. Babies and toddlers sensory play activity comes from messy play tools, young children can participate and get sensory idea so they can be able to lead the sensory activity by their own mind. Parents, carers and practitioners can cooperate with the sensory play idea and enjoy playing with them. There are five tools for messy and sensory play called STEAM - Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Math. Through messy and sensory play young children attentive and learn essential life skills like pouring, measuring, sorting out and experimenting (Messy Play Kits, 2020).

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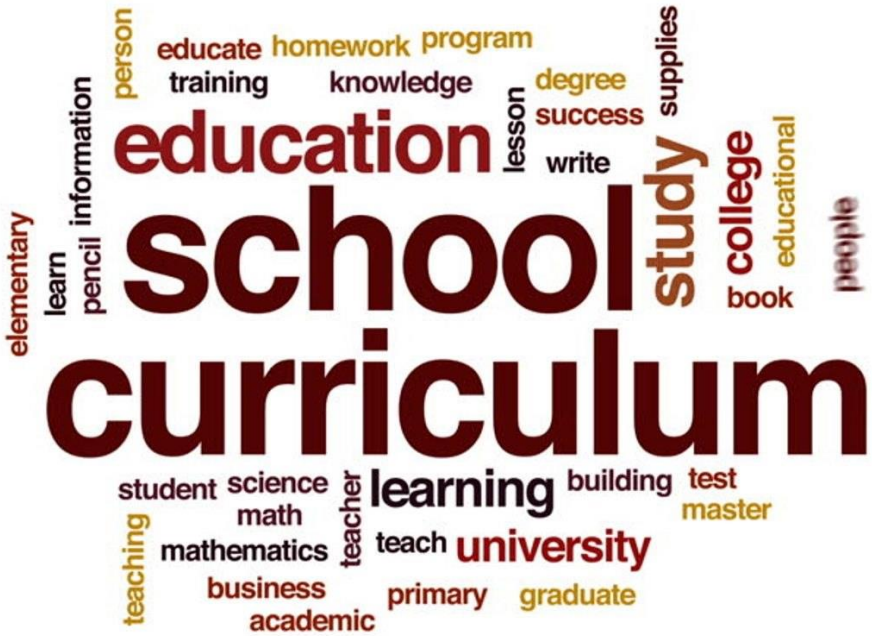
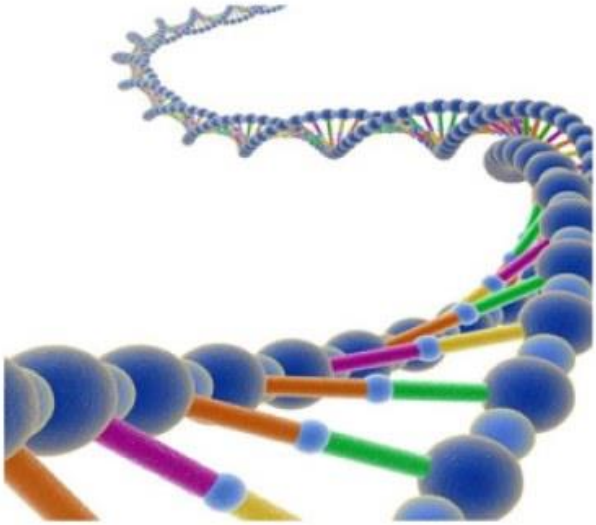
Curriculum



Stacey (2009) stated that emergent curriculum is child -centered curriculum and their initiatives begins with children-based. The main purpose of the curriculum is to observing children at their play time, what kinds of play they are involving with and how they are playing. Understanding the meaning of the play, what are the intentions and explorations of the play. Play is the thing that matters in the first 1000 days period. Children's facilitator monitoring their play activity and offer more exploring to engaging further and to obtain deeper knowledge.

According to Marjory, Sheela and Mandy (2018), a curriculum is based on a complete observation of a child's whole day at their settings, and it established to work with children from birth to three years of age. The curriculum system addresses all young children's regular interactions, routines and experiences as part of its daily monitoring for each child's day. It is a relationship-based curriculum and give importance to build on the babies and toddlers attachment. The aim of the curriculum is assisted to create good bonding between babies, toddlers and three years old children with their practitioners. Building the relationship helping to find out the young children's well-beings, learning development, self-determination, independence and individual capabilities. The principle of the curriculum is to enhance the young children's capabilities to prepare to contribute to the faster changing world.

A Holistic Approach



A holistic approach is the key and core part of the first 1000 days, young children's holistic development is significantly important to mastering in their first years of childhood. Holistic development take place when a child gradually develops socially, emotionally, physically, intellectually and spiritually to become a healthy child. A child's development progress begins from the mother's womb and after the child's born their overall development influenced by home and their immediate environments. Parents and other caregivers are responsible to ensure and give attention on the young children's all aspects of development. The responsible adults are able to assist and support to have wide range of fine motor skills, build up social interactions, healthy emotional behaviour, cognitive learning skills and good morality (Mcilroy, 2023).

A child to see and explore the world in a different way when they are expert with various physical development. Babies' gross motor skills and fine motor skills help with their large movement and create the bigger muscles in their body, the limb movements support the young children to walk, run, skip and hop. A six-month old baby who developed with gross motor skills can roll over and reach out to the toys that they wanted to explore and look for even more to explore than a child less developed with the skills, so they sit in one place. Physical movement allows for young children enjoy wide range of opportunities and connections, early development helping them to be independent learners which allow them to have their early social and intellectual development (Cooper, 2009).

The Pandemic (Covid-19)

A child's earliest years of life is crucial, and their healthy growing experience can shape the child's individual achievements into their adulthood. Early years' experiences enormously influence all areas of children's development stages. The Covid-19 brought a unique adverse experience to very young children, especially to the first 1000 days period. According to Delphi Study evidence there was tremendous impact of the Covid-19 to all children under five years. The pandemic isolated the young children from broad range of opportunities and affected babies and toddlers physical and emotional development, cognitive development and speech and language development as many health professionals' services (doctors and health visitors) were very limited, some were completely closed during the time. It was tremendously affected the young children's social interactions, emotional health and intellectual development in the lock down. In pandemic period, the overall impact on the cognitive development which strongly affected by 19.61% and negatively affected by 72.55% whereas the social and emotional development adversely affected by 100% within all age groups (Welsh Government, 2021).

Effective Communication

Good communication is the key to young children's cognitive and brain development and through effective communication it helping to build up a strong parent-child relationship. A responsive mother does not need to have educational knowledge to nurturing her baby, the mother can gain implicit knowledge from early pregnancy period which determined a good way of nurturing the baby from early

life and maintain good bonding within themselves. The responsible adults' non-verbal communication supporting babies to feel calm, attentive and valued and helping to improve their mental growth (Sansone, 2021).

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