

The First 1000 Days



(UNICEF, 2017)

Introduction

Karakochuk *et al.*, (2018) suggests that the first 1000 days is from conception to 2 years of age. This part of development is defined as the fastest paced development. The maternal nutrition to the embryo is described as essential to this part of the development. During this time the embryo is exposed to the dietary, hormonal maternal stresses and the environmental influences.

White *et al.*, (2020) details the first 1000 days as becoming. A biological base of the unique first 1000 days of a child's life journey. The beginning where cells develop quickly during pregnancy and later from birth onwards. The child will live in a world that will be influenced by the preference of those around them as the result of certain values, beliefs and professionals.

The first 300 days begin around the time of conception. As a woman pregnancy begins her nutritional status is an importance focus of the fetal growth and development. The next 700 days are from the first day of life, newborn, up to the age of 2 (Karakochuk *et al.*, 2018 p.17).

Karakochuk., *et al* (2018) and White. *et al.* (2020) suggest that it is important in the first 300 days the nutritional needs of a woman are met to support the maximum growth and development of the foetus. The continuous influence through the next 700 days of early childhood with positive nutrition influences can help prevent child mortality and life affecting diseases. This combines with some of the basic needs highlighted from the Maslow Pyramid that a child should have food, drink, warmth, and rest (World of Work Project, 2023).

The Biology

Reynolds (2017) explains in further detail in the video below of the biology importance of good nutrition in the first 1000 days. A woman that is restricted of nutrition, no toilets, clean water, or sufficient healthcare her baby will not develop as they should within the womb and possibly be born underweight and experience complication through their development.

<https://youtu.be/e2DN2iUnvI4?t=68>

Children that do not have the adequate nutritional needs met is called stunting and will affect the child for the rest of their life (Reynolds, 2017). Reynolds (2017) believes that stunting will affect a child's ability to learn and therefore as they are more prone to illness. In addition, they are also likely to miss a lot of education and potentially drop out. The most common part of the world affected by stunted children are in Africa and Asia.

UNICEF (2017) again supports Karacochuk *et al* (2018), White. *et al.*, (2020) and Reynolds (2017) importance of nutrition throughout the first 1000 days. The nutrition a child receives in the first 1000 days does not only determine the development and growth it also has a crucial effect on whether the child survives (UNICEF, 2017).

The Caregiver

When a person is caregiving a child, they are supporting their participation in engaging with occupations such as feeding, toileting and dressing. They are valuable one to one interaction that sustain shared communication and unhurried interactions. The times shared in caregiving opportunities allow intimacy, cooperation and structured routines that allows the child to feel secure with the caregiver. Repetitive purposeful routines are supporting the child in learning the actions and developing the capacity to be independent and self-regulate in occupations (Hardgraves, 2020).

White *et al.*, (2020) explains that right from birth a newborn seek communication from others in their care. Therefore, parents in the early days need to ensure a holistic approach is implemented to support the child's best potential in their human development. A holistic approach means that all parent/guardian and professionals are encouraging positive opportunity for a child's learning, development, and growth together as a whole (Brodie, 2018).

Bronetti (2018) claims that there is enough evidence to show that a child attending early years provision can promote positive outcomes for a child's cognitive behaviour, socially and developmentally. Therefore, it is within the interest of the caregiver to encourage a child to attend and explore alternative environment. The change in environments is beneficial in building the foundation to their future and long-term development milestones.

High quality care can be described as structural and process quality care. The structural care can relate to the child group size to staff ratio and the teacher training and professional development. The process quality captures the day to day of a child experience including the education opportunities, engagement with peers, professionals and parents ensuring their needs are met (Bronetti, 2018).

The Caregiver continued...

This video link below highlights not only the role of a professional caring in the early years but the perception on early years practitioners. Early years practitioners are embedding key manners, experiences that will encourage further development and build relationships with other peers and caregivers. In this video the term used to describe some caregivers is babysitters which is a word used by individuals that do not really understand the educational value of early years practitioners (Only About The Children, 2023).

[The role of an Early Childhood Educator \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

The first 1000 days affects children in many ways, through biology, experiences, environment, diet and the maternal health during pregnancy. It is important that a child is made to feel protected and safe to form a foundation of attachment with their parents. If this process is not interrupted it can have positive effects on the child's future leaning and growth (First Five Years, 2018).

The above video also explains that early year's practitioners are providing the children with opportunities in a different environment to their homes (Only About The Children, 2023). Bronfenbrenner's child development theory suggests that multiple influence can help how the child develops. The term that it takes a village to raise a child is used to demonstrate that caregivers around the child make a true impact on their decisions (Health Research Funding, 2024).

Professional Partnership

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An early year's practitioners need to aim to build secure attachment with the child as this impacts positive wellbeing and behaviour of the child (Gascoyne, 2018).

In addition, Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) stood by the importance that practitioners need to observe children and other professionals to build a better multi professional approach through different lenses. It is best practise that practitioners offer the child freedom to explore environments. This can promote independent decision making as well as mirroring peers in a variety of enabling environment materials (Early Education, 2021).

Clare (2016) sourced information from practitioner in practise on their professional love to children within the early years care setting and how this is seen to a child in those early years of development. Practitioners act cautiously is showing signs of physical affection such as hugging because of the exposure to possible safeguarding interpretations. Positive professional love benefits the attachment between carer and child when building those early bonds and attachment. In a survey carried out by Clare (2016) she gives examples how practitioners show their professional love through supporting the child with kindness, being available to them, paying attention and caring for the child. Emma Piklar's three of seven approach's support this these are, undivided attention, building trust and respect. These key principles support the way a professional works with and supports children in the early years setting (Hardgrave, 2020).

Gasper (2008) further explains the benefits of partnership working from the professional skill set, experiences and observations from face-to-face care and interventions. A child that may have more than one professional involved in their care in the first 1000 days. At the beginning during pregnancy a midwife and health professionals monitor the maternal needs. Following birth, a mother and child will regularly have home visits from with health visitors to monitor the early development of the baby. In some case on-going medical care is required and follow up midwife appointment in the early days of post-partum. The partnership working here is supportive to the mother and child receiving the care they need following what can sometime be traumatic birthing circumstances. The journey now recording the growth and development of the child by the health visitors and sharing this information with other professions can encourage the support targeted to the needs of the child if required.

Benefits of Partnership Working

Partnership working is also known as Multi – agency working that provides the opportunity for professionals to work together to meet the needs collectively for the child and their family. Partnership working promotes better access to services that can support them to:-

- Identify where the needs of the child and family are:
- Refer and access relevant agencies most appropriate to help them
- Encourage independence on their lives
- Increase their self-worth and confidence
- Further their education and skill set
- Fulfil their lives in wider community and live life to the full

The aim predominately is for the professionals is to ensure they plan, organise and jointly reflect on their work to effectively support the child and their family. It is recognised that professionals value the importance of joint working and sharing of information particularly when child protection cases are the focus of the needs of the child. It is more noticeable now that the wider agencies come together to support the child on a holistic approach. You will find education, social services and health professionals actively working side by side to ensure the best interests of the child are met (Gasper, 2009).

Partnerships in Further Detail

Consistency of those advocating for the child and working with the child as promotes the attachment to at least one person that can help the child feel emotionally supported. This will encourage positive communications, care and documentations of their development and learning (Hardgraves, 2020).

It is suggested that those families within poverty are likely to be involved with multi agency professionals. Therefore, effectively working together can highlight the reasons of poverty and being to reduce the poverty itself and direct the family in the areas of need and address the effect of poverty already impacting the child and family (Gasper, 2009).

Bronfenbrenner Theory is built up on four systems that influence the child's growth and development. These are Microsytems, Mesosystems, Exosystems and Macrosystem. The Exostems principal Bronfenbrenner suggests that a children's relationships outside the close, intimate ones can influence the development of the child. The experiences of other people and environment directly influence the development process (Health Search Funding, 2024).

Partnerships with Parents and Cares

Partnership working is not just with professional practitioners but also with parents or carers of the child you are involved with. Involving the parents in the learning and development of the child in the first 1000 days is the most important factor in encouraging some children reach their potential regardless to their background. Explore possible barriers they may have in working positively in partnership with professionals. Sometimes their personal experience with nurseries, early years settings and the caregiver's personal separation anxiety, language barriers, culture, and values. Sharing information through verbal communication, videos or photos of their child and evidence of materials experienced. Sharing this information can enable the opportunity to explore similar experiences in the home environment further promoting the child learning and development (Government, 2021).

In New Zealand Te Whariki offers key values for childhood education. A principle of this is family and community support the wellbeing, learning and development of the child. A key value to respect and support the child and their families will enhance the relations between teachers and families and their wellbeing (Hardgraves, 2020). One of the seven principle with Emmi Pikler (1902-1984) regarding respect supports the Te Whariki key values in building foundations in relationships between caregiver and child.

Here you will find a short video that further explains the Te Whariki model.

[Te Whariki Curriculum on Vimeo](#)

(First Five Year, 2021)

Impacts of Development in the First 1000 Days

During pregnancy it is advised that a mother takes supplement vitamins to support the growth and development of the foetus. Research highlighted by Karakochuk *et al.*, (2018) that a primary prevention such as folic acid can help in preventing neural tube defects. Neural tube defects are the part of the central nervous system and worldwide is the largest group of anomalies, morbidity in children in the first 1000 days.

The biology of development from conception is widely discussed in many resources. First Five years (2018) explains that during fertilisation it is highly sensitive to signals from the mother. The embryo fluid that passes through to the womb is impacted by the mother's nutritional, metabolic and inflammatory state. At this point of development, the embryo has a high degree of developmental and responds to this environment cues.

According to HM Government (2022), chronic stress in early childhood has a negative impact to the baby's development. Stress can be caused by abuse, maternal depression, and extreme poverty. A child forming positive emotional health, physical wellbeing, social skills in the first 1000 days impacts the individual success in the school and later life. HM Government (2022) and Gascoyne (2018) both say that if these relationships are built sufficiently the child will feel safe and secure supporting early emotional development.

Typical development is a child reaching the milestones expected of them in relation to their age. Some children may not meet those miles stones and are sometime likely to have a neurodiverse condition. In the first 1000 days development caregivers have a key role to encourage skills to their best capability regardless to the level of understanding of the task. In circumstance professionals make decisions to support more safe environments which reduces the risk to the child and their peers. However, this can potentially cause implication to the developing child keen in seeking sensory or high engagement material to self-regulate (Waddington and Tupou, 2022).



What are the challenges in providing high quality care?

Gasper (2009) points out that change can be good for us and encourages exciting opportunities in our future. However, it can also be a threat in the first 1000 days to the children and families the practitioners are working with. There is a lot of time spent between practitioners and child building the foundation of trust, respect and working relationship. If this was then to be disturbed it will unsettle the child and their family.

The challenges facing professionals working with children and families that need multi-agency support are:-

Funding – This is funding that can affect the bill of energy and food cost in early years settings and of those it affects living in poverty.

Staff – The correct staffing levels this could be linked to financial challenges or the government incapability of appointing adequate professionals to support children and their families. The structure of the service and types of qualification that may be needed to support different age ranges with consistency of staff supporting in those important years of development.

Holistic Learning Activities

Children are curious holistic learners, that can thrive withing enabling environments that support their individual interests and high engagements activities (Birth to 5 Matters, 2021). Maria Montessori (1870 – 1952) supported the value of experiential and sensory experiences with children using their mind and movement to explore environment moving freely (Gascoyne, 2018). This is the prime purpose in the new Early year's curriculum in Wales 'Foundation Phase' which encourages high engagement learning through varied enable environments and free play (Foundation Phase Framework, 2015).

Emmi Pikler (1902-1984) was a paediatrician and created a seven-principal theory that she believed would support and direct children and those around them to direct their development. One of her principles around complete freedom of movement support what is outlines in the Foundation Phase Framework (2015) (Hardgraves, 2020).



(Birth to 5 Matters, 2021)



(Gascoyne, 2018)

Treasure Baskets

Resources such as wood, stone, shells, and twigs made available to explore in a sensory rich environment so the child can explore them in their own curiosity. Fredrick Frobel (1782 – 1852) whom was a drive of children's education, expressed the importance of open ended, child initiative play (Gascoyne, 2018). This can be supported by Fridrich Froebel (1782-1852) as he developed a set of gifts which included sticks, shells, stones, sand and clay encouraging self-initiated play (Early Education, 2021).

Messy play

An activity made up of common materials such as sand, water, paint, slime, playdough, shredding paper, foam, or mud. However, many other materials have the potential to fall within messy play activities whether it be fabric, treasures, and food (Gascoyne, 2018).

Gascoyne (2018) support's research from Duffy (2007) that messy play allows children to use their senses in exploring messy play. Messy play allows children to have the opportunity to explore through the sense of touch to manipulate materials freely. Messy play can be fun and exciting and provide endless possibilities, however can cause distress for children who have sensory difficulties.

Messy play described as fun with food by many children's researchers and pediatricians support imaginative sensory play. The sensory play game helps a child become familiar with different food and non-food substances that can make develop food acceptance in the future. Fun with food also gives the opportunity to explore other senses such a taste and smell when a child is ready to explore these senses (ARFID Awareness UK, 2020).

Messy play myths:-

- Need to planned and purposeful
- Messy play is just for younger children

Theorist Bronfenbrenner believes that child led choices benefits the child development and therefore a range of interests will allow the child to make the choice in their learning environment (Brooker, 2008). Friedrich Frobel (1782-1852) also believes that children construct their understanding through play experience (Early Education, 2021).

We know that children learn from communication from practitioners and parents therefore joining in with the children sends a message that it is not just child play it is time to engage and explore together. This shows good communication through building trust and modelling and also allows us to experience what they are experiencing visually and sensory ([Gascoyne](#), 2018).





Outside Play

Outdoor play has somewhat become something of the present and supported within the Foundation phase curriculum (Foundation Phase Framework, 2015). The Froebel approach of learning is linked with encouraging outdoors learning. Froebel highlighted that children should experience all aspects of nature, from plant and animals to the wider universe, gravity, and forces. The connection children make from planting a small seed and seeing it grow will help their development in understanding through their lives (Tovey, 2020).

In Scandinavia children attend school from the age 6. Before this the child will attend nursery and pre-school however, the parents will opt to outdoor provision for this. This link below will support a little in-sight to what the children endure during these outdoor opportunities. The skills they learn, the risk taking and nature awareness (France 24, 2023).

[\(860\) Scandinavia: 'Forest Kindergartens', a wild education • FRANCE 24 English – YouTube](#)

In the United Kingdom Forest School has been implemented to primary schools which was inspired by the Swedish Forest Kindergarten. The aim of forest school is to promote children's resilience, build their confidence and connect with nature. The outdoors will motivate the child's own learning and curiosity (Bullard, 2022).

Conclusion

A child life begins at conception and the first 1000 days begins. The fast development of cells creating life through the nutrients through the mother blood stream. The environment in which a child develops and becomes stronger through the nutrients and experiences of the maternal mother (Karakochuk *et al.*, 2018).

There is evidence supported by theorist Bronfenbrenner, Fredrick Froebel and Emma Piklar that partnership, respect, child led play can encourage learning development (Hardgraves, 2020).

Research into other countries education principals such as New Zealand's Te Whariki and Scandinavia's forest kindergarten show that the Wales foundation phase (2015) curriculum has adopted some key aims.

The first 1000 days is consisted of the conception development and the maternal influence (Reynolds, 2017) the partnership in caregivers, parents, and child (Gasper, 2009) and supporting the best possible potential of development through holistic play and enabling environments (Foundation Phase Framework, 2015).

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