



Exceptional care in the first 1,000 days

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Introduction

The first 1,000 days starts from when a child is conceived to their 2nd birthday. Raghavan and Ruta (2022) looks at how this period forms the future of the child. For the child to have the best start in life, the child must receive nurture which is crucial to provide a child with the greatest start in life. Nurturing a child will include promoting a child's health, wellbeing, care and safeguarding the child. Moreover, supporting them during developing rapidly including their brain development, emotional and physical development, which sets out the foundation for life. According to Raghavan and Ruta (2022) they state how the brain is the main function of the knowledge, actions and the health of the child, which follows on to adulthood and is affected by how we nurture a baby.

Exceptional care involves the quality-of-care individuals receive. When providing exceptional care it can have an effect on the child's development, specifically the social, language, personal, cognitive and physical development of the child.

Challenges when providing care

Routines provide structure to the day and allow children to know in advance what is coming next. Although Kimberley (2015) states the discussion between practitioners where some believe in no routines and others depend on them. Routines can be difficult as all children will have a different routine within the home, meaning children will have to adjust to different routines from day -to-day

and some parents and carers may want to follow that routine to the setting. They can be seen as quite restrictive as children will expect what happens next, and if that activity does not happen next, then it can cause anxiety to the child. Routines are most likely to create confusion for practitioners and can prove to be time consuming. On the other hand, Kimberley (2015) talks how the EYFS suggests routines to support the emotional wellbeing of children. It is important to consider that each routine will vary to each age group, which can again cause confusion to the practitioners that may look after the different ages from day to day.

8:30 - 9:00 Arrival and Centers		11:30 - 12:00 Lunch	
9:00 - 9:30 Outside (or gym)		12:30 - 1:30 Rest Time	
9:30 - 10:00 Small Groups (includes snack)		1:30 - 2:00 Quiet Activities	
10:00 - 11:00 Centers		2:00 - 2:15 Afternoon Snack Time	
11:00 - 11:30 Clean Up, Storytime Large Group		2:15 - 2:30 Pick Up/Dismissal	

Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings for Wales applies to practitioners within early years settings. It focuses on 4 main aims including learners who are ambitious and capable, contributors who are enterprising and creative, informed and ethical citizens, and finally individuals who are confident and healthy. To develop individuals to become this, it talks the importance of having materials and resources that are the finest and a suitable environment. Although, the lack of resources can prove this to be difficult. College Values Online (2022) says a study in America discovered that schools are not receiving the correct amount of funding by \$150 billion yearly. Meaning practitioners are usually forced to buy resources out of their own money they have earned, to ensure that the children within their care have the best experiences and have all the resources needed to develop.



Practitioners have had to face the **impact of Covid-19** on nurseries and the children. Ofsted (2020) carried out an investigation on this matter, claiming that children's holistic development had been deprived, particularly their fundamental skills for future life and their overall learning. Within the findings, parents, carers and practitioners expressed a concern for their children's wellbeing and

future development and most of these parents and carers were parents of pre-school children. From the findings, children returned appearing more worried, uneasy and more independent on the adults around them. Many nurseries have altered curriculum to focus on social, emotional and personal development as children have lost these skills as a result of the pandemic, along with adapting transitions by extending settling in time while also giving the children more one-to-one time to help with this. This demonstrates how practitioners and parents have had to adapt since the pandemic.

Nurseries are seeing less children attending and the demand for spaces have become less. Ofsted (2020) have reason to believe that this is because of most adults are now based in their home for work, rather than an office. From this report, over two thirds of nurseries have less children and a 9% of nurseries have more children. This becomes challenging for nurseries to become or remain financially stable, leading to lack of resources and staff members.



Respectful care and meaningful learning



“Responsive caregiving recognizes that every child has unique needs and preferences and that young children learn best through back-and-forth social interactions with trusted adults”(ChildCare Aware, 2019).

ChildCare Aware (2019) expresses the importance of respectful care by stating that when this care is provided it gives children the feeling of respect and importance, while knowing they can count on the adults to meet their needs. Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs focuses on children’s needs being met to be able to fully develop and to continue developing, otherwise a child may not develop to their fullest potential. The hierarchy has five levels, the first level being physiological which are basic needs including shelter, food and warmth. Once these are met, the child can progress to the next levels. These are Safety, Love, affection and belongingness, esteem and self-actualisation.

Tops Day Nurseries (2020) believe there is three main sections to providing respectful care. Firstly, providing care that is primary (a key worker). Within this section, it demonstrates the importance of children becoming independent individuals. For instance, if a child does not want help from a practitioner to wipe their nose, then the practitioner should demonstrate how it is done. The next section is Freedom of Movement. This promotes the wellbeing, emotional and physical development within a young child. Activities that promote movement such as tummy time, lets babies to learn to crawl, walk and build upon muscles that will later assist walking, sitting and coordinate their gross motor skills. Finally, respect for confidence and competence focuses on the communication between practitioner and baby when engaging in activities. An example of this is asking the child permission before changing their nappy. This enables the child to understand permission and talking or singing to a baby when changing their nappy can benefit their speech and language skills. This allows the child to know what is happening next.



Meaningful learning is a learning that is relational. It looks at how we interpret past knowledge and experiences and how we build on those to develop connections within the brain. A theorist called David Ausubel developed a theory on meaningful learning and how this is achieved. He developed the importance of the use of old knowledge and how everyone learns through this. He created a cognitive bridge that allows connections to work with each other, forming a phrase called “Anchoring Ideas” (Matilde, 2022); this is when new knowledge is weighed down by the old. The curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings (2022) states that the environment should support the children holistically and allow children to revisit skills to enhance them further. According to Exploring Your Mind (2018) says that we can achieve this by laying out activities that help stimulate a child’s curiosity.

Meaningful learning provides many benefits, these include the child being actively involved with their learning and is an individual experience for each child as this will enable them to learn at their own pace. It ensures that the old connections connect with the new and this is done by the connection of synapses. According to Halfon, Shulman, and Hochstein (2001), the synapses within a child’s brain in the early years will reach 1,000 trillion to allow for connections to be made through experiences to be able to form the brain. By providing children with meaningful experiences and learning, their brain will be able to make these important connections.



Environments



1 - An in-depth explanation of the curiosity approach.

The curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings (2022) explains how environments need to be child-centred, for instance listening to the child's needs and wants, promoting inclusivity and diversity, and upholding a child's rights, more importantly developing an environment on the children's interests. Environments should focus on "five developmental pathways" which are "belonging, communication, exploration, physical development and wellbeing" for children to be able to develop. The 5 areas were formed to allow children to develop at their own rate.

Hellyn and Bennet (2017) describes how an environment should look from the Curiosity approach perspective. It states that areas of the playroom should be looked after and appreciated, and the room should mainly be neutral colours (walls and furniture) as this creates a calm and welcoming environment for children to develop and feel at ease when in. Resources that are original such as wooden toys, enables a child to play with nature and the world naturally. The Curiosity approach comes from multiple theories and curriculums, this includes New Zealand's curriculum Te Whariki, and theorists Reggio Emilia, Rudolf Steiner and Maria Montessori. Kinacle (no date) has a different opinion on wooden toys. They point out that this can propose a risk to children by the possibility of splinters and can be very costly to provide. Whereas, plastic toys can be eye catching through colouration, more affordable to provide, easier to clean germs and bacteria and last longer as the material can be stronger.

Reggio Emilia's theory focuses on early education and preschools. This pedagogy focuses on the environment, one that allows children to be independent learners and experiment in a environment that builds relationships, in addition to being a 'third teacher' to children. On the other hand, Steiner's theory believed that a child learned better when in a peaceful, relaxed and unrushed surroundings promoting sensory activities and children thrive from playing with resources that are natural and a room which has neutral colours. Finally, Montessori suggests that child-centred is important for children to take control of their own learning and the adults should guide the children and develop an environment that is learning through self-direct. She emphasised how the indoor environment should be extended outside, giving the children time to be physically active and learn independent skills such as sweeping, raking and being exposed to smell such as plants and herbs.



2 - This is a video comparing a Montessori environment and Reggio Emilia environment

Activities



3 - **Loose parts play** is child-led play which allows children to discover different items and pieces freely. Casey and Robertson (2016) believes that this type of play develops surrounding that are rich, does not restrict a child and provides endless possibilities. An example of loose parts play is putting out different natural materials such as wood, fabric, blocks, spoons. The benefits of this play is that it develops a child's creativity and imagination further, allows the children to become more social, naturally develop physically, develops teamwork and children will develop respect for adults and the environments around them.



4 - Duffy (2007) believes **messy play** allows the child to explore different materials freely and become hands on without any limitations. Messy play involves many different materials that are stimulating for a child. An activity for this is mashed potatoes. This allows the child to develop fine motor skills, building the muscles in their hands by manipulating the mashed potatoes. Children's five senses (smell, touch, taste, sound and sight) are supported massively as this play heightens these senses as they are stimulated and have an opportunity to carry out self-expression. For instances, a child will be presented with unfamiliar textures and smells, which also supports knowledge and understanding of the world and giving them the instinct to become familiar with the object. A child's fine and gross motor development is encouraged as the child may crawl within the mess or use objects (scoops) to play. Rock (2020) discusses the principles, firstly that a child's senses are important for the process of learning by allowing a child to learn and understand.



5 - **Reading books** to an infant provides many benefits. Books (2020) believes that to read a child a story it does not mean they have to understand the language, and the sooner you start is better. Reading books helps develop a child's language and communication development as it enables babies to take in the language and develop those talking skills quicker. This is because they are being exposed to the language and words. Theorists, B.F Skinner developed his theory on language acquisition. Johnston and Nahmad-Williams (2009) talks about this theory and that language is a behaviour and that is learnt by children copying adults/children. Skinner believed that when a baby babbles, it is there speech beginning to develop. As well as reading adults can promote this by talking to the baby, object naming and showing positive attitudes to attempts of engagement.



6 - (Source, Ball, 2023)

Treasure baskets originated from Helen Goldschmied's idea each provides babies with assortment of different resources/materials which are easy to reach in a wicker basket. The basket contains natural materials, for instance sponges, brushes, wooden spoons, feathers, mirrors and fabrics. All of these can provide different senses such as touch, smell, sound and sight, creating the senses a benefit to development. This activity supports the "exploration and discovery through multi-sensory opportunities" (Lloyd, 2022) while enabling young children to develop their confidence while making decisions. Featherstone (2013) points out that Frobel, Montessori and Rousseau stressed the importance of children playing with natural objects and materials, also have hands-on experiences through these natural resources.

Professional Partnerships and relationships



Stars (no date) describe partnerships working/professional relationships as one that is formed to support children positively in their development and wellbeing. When it comes to parents, it is important for practitioners to respect them as they know their children best. Brodie (2018) points out that parents are most knowing when providing information on their child, and practitioners should be able to provide effect communication responsibly and meet the holistic needs of every child. The relationship between the practitioner and the adult starts from the child's home by the practitioner participating in visits to the home to develop a relationship with the child and the adult

that communicates two-way, which will develop even further when the child starts attending the setting. Within this partnership, parents will be able to provide details on their child, including the practitioner informing parents on the child's accomplishments and goals so further invention can be carried out at home for the child to reach their developmental stages.

Practitioners and parents will sometimes form partnerships with other professionals depending on the adults or the child's needs. For instance, if the child is not meeting the developmental milestone for speech, then a speech and language therapist may become involved to identify a possible additional need, where they may receive support from other services/professionals as well. When working with professionals, this will make sure the needs of the child are being met to the best standard, endless resources and knowledge provided by everyone involved in the partnership. More importantly, every need will be met as the different professionals involved with the child will work together to provide the best outcomes for the child in a timely manner.



International approaches



"Children experience an environment where their play is valued and meaningful learning and the importance of spontaneous play is

recognised" (Te Whariki, no date, cited in Hellyn and Bennet, 2017, p.85)



Within this section I will be introducing many approaches, these include Te Whariki, forests schools and the Reggio Emilia approach.

Te Whariki is the Curriculum for New Zealand, and the name translates to ‘woven mat’. It is referred to this as the curriculum strands and principles are ‘woven’ together to ensure a holistic approach is carried throughout the early years. Firstly, the strands are wellbeing, which focuses on wellbeing of the children and others around them and how we create an environment that provides a sense of safety. Secondly, belonging is similar to wellbeing as it involves creating an environment of belonging and that promotes each culture. Contribution states the importance of children giving back to their communities and helping each other. The fourth strand is communication. This concentrates on the language development of a child and how children can benefit off the adults surrounding them, to assist them with pronunciation, sentence structure and classrooms should be influencing by promoting language (songs and stories). The last strand is exploration, which strongly looks at the impacts of learning through play and the need for children to explore to learn.

The next part of the ‘woven mat’ is the principles. Empowerment is first, stating children need to be provided with experiences that make an impact. Secondly, to be able to develop holistically throughout the guidance of the curriculum. The family and community principle allows for others to understand the importance of children learning from their families and their communities surrounding them. Lastly relationships, is believed to be formed through “cooperative play and collaborative skills” (Drew, 2022).

Forests schools are an increasing well-known approach originating from Sweden and was formed in the 1950s. Early Learning HQ (no date) describes forest schools as supporting, inspiring and capturing young children's interests through outdoor learning and creating positive experiences. The main method of learning that these schools follow is playful learning and encouraging child-led play. When being directly in contact with nature, children can be the leader of their learning and be surrounded with opportunities of risky play, enabling their independence and evaluation of risks to develop. This can demonstrate a positive outcome to their "intellectual, cognitive, physical and emotional development" (Early Learning HQ, no date). Whatever the weather, forests schools carry on as they believe that this is beneficial for the children, and Drew (2023) says this will help children to develop resilience, experience and learn about different weather conditions. Many theorists link to this approach, which Drew (2023) explains. Froebel recognised play at the heart of learning and that children need to be given the independence to explore freely. They describe how Froebel stated that children need to be surrounded in an environment that is stimulating and has the correct resources to learn, which the outdoors can offer as it has unlimited resources that are natural.



The Reggio Emilia Approach was founded after the Second World War (1940s) in a town called Reggio Emilia, Italy. It was formed by parents, which later Loris Malaguzzi (who was a teacher) was intrigued and assisted the parents in forming this curriculum. Schroeder-Yu (2008) explains how the approach refers to the "environment as the third teacher". For example, providing materials and resources for the children to interact with and become creative within their minds, more importantly holistically supporting their development. This type of curriculum is one that the children participate in planning, being done by asking the children their interests and surrounding activities on that subject, meaning this is endlessly expanding and practitioners should take into consideration these interests to plan activities. Vygotsky closely relates to this through his Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Gardner and Jones (2016) lays out how this links to the Reggio Approach by the ZPD looking at what children can do themselves, with assistance and what they cannot do but what a practitioner or teacher might do to help and assist them to achieve. Relating this to the Reggio Emilia Approach by it stating that teachers/practitioners need to develop knowledge on what children require to develop holistically, how to implement interests into practice and allowing children a chance to thrive in activities before providing guidance.

What these approaches have in common is allowing children to explore and learn independently through the use of natural materials and surroundings, and how us practitioners might provide this.



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