



Exceptional Care in the First 1000 Days

Victoria Stirling 2213368

EYEC40050

Word count: 2864

Introduction

The first 1,000 days of life refers to the moment a child is conceived until their second birthday, it is a time of great significance when the foundations of a child's growth, immune system, and brain development for the duration of their life are ingrained. (Unicef 2013)

- Antenatal care of the mother's health, stress levels and nutrition can have an effect on the future of their developing baby.
- The experiences a baby has in their first 24 months can have a lifelong impact on their health and wellbeing.
- In the first 1000 days, poverty, stress, trauma, and violence can have adverse health effects.
- Providing a child with good nutrition, a safe, secure, and loving environment is important in the first 1000 days. (Pregnancy, Birth and Baby 2022)

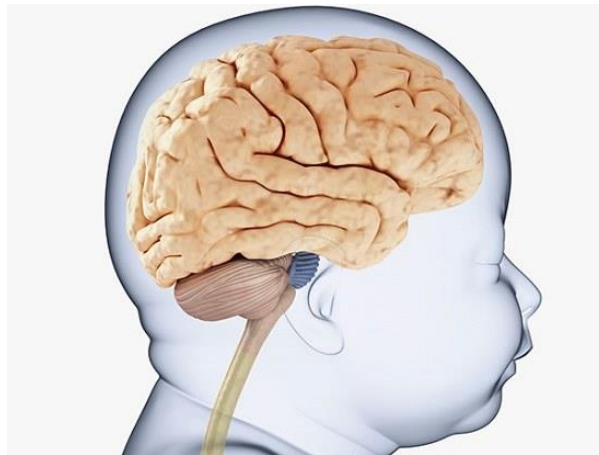
"Robust evidence shows that it is critical to invest in the first 1,000 days, so that every child gets the strongest start to life". (HPA 2018)

According to Save the Children (2016) the science is evident; a mix of genes, environment and experience drives a child's brain to develop and grow at a rapid rate from birth to two years of life. Although throughout their childhood and into adulthood, children continue to develop, science shows that it becomes increasingly difficult to influence the way information is processed by the brain as the child grows in years. It is in these early stages that the brain is particularly sensitive and displays a remarkable capacity to absorb information and adapt to its surroundings.

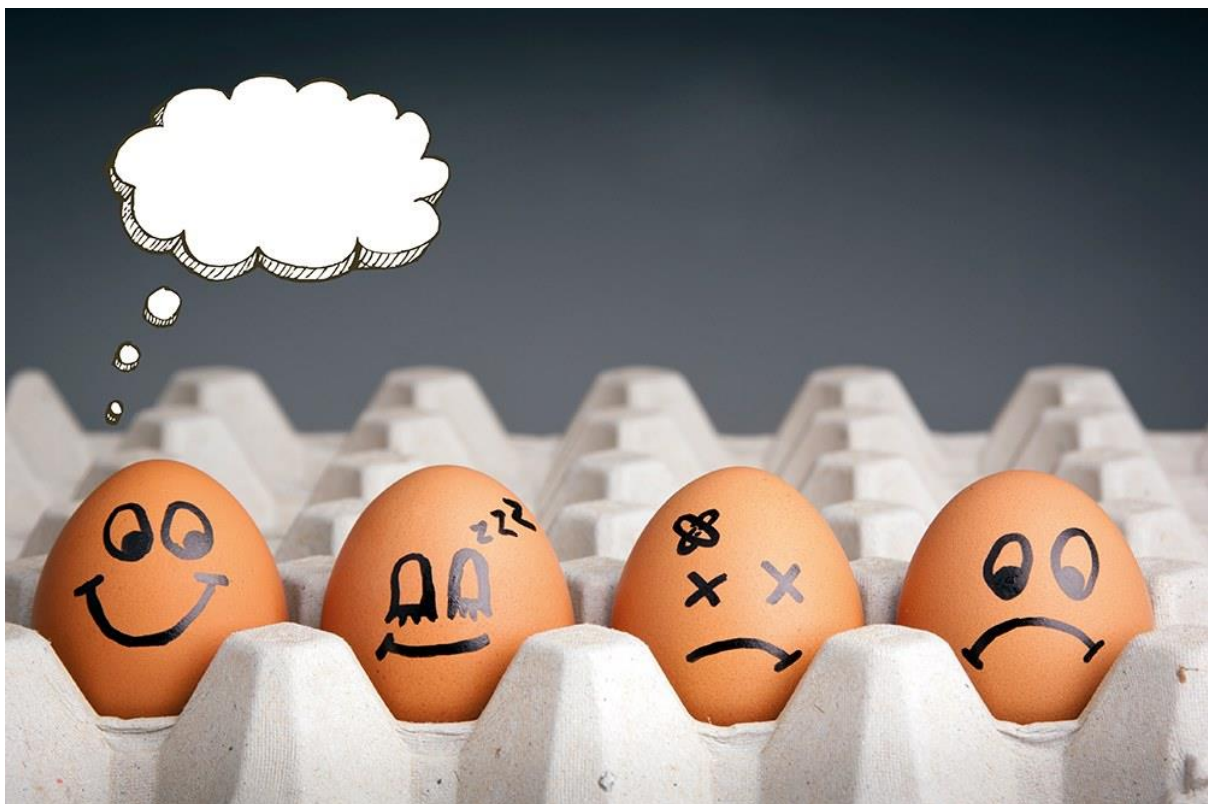
☐ By the age of one year, on average the size of a child's brain is already 72% of adult volume and by the age of two years it has grown to 83% of an adult's volume on average. (Knickmeyer et. al. 2008)

☐ At the age of two years, the connections that are being formed in a child's brain are happening roughly twice as fast as in an adult's brain. (Stiles & Jernigan 2010)

Knauf (2020) states that science tells us that the kind of children we raise today, will reflect on the kind of world we will live in tomorrow, it tells us that by investing in the first years of life is not indulgent, but economically, socially and psychologically vital to being a prosperous society.



Current Challenges



For professionals in childcare settings, there are many challenges to face and be mindful of when aiming to provide exceptional care and an holistic approach, for example, safeguarding, environment, time constraints, effective communication, understanding of health and well-being, as

well as child development and building good relationships with not only the children themselves, but their parents and any other adults in their life. This can be a multi-agency of professionals or extended family and friends, or both.

As an enabling adult, professionals should support children and help them to master the skills they need to manage changes and transitions in their daily routines with sensitivity. This could be during the settling in period for a child that has just started a setting for the first time and is finding it difficult by showing signs of being upset and disengaged. By keeping to a similar routine of feeding, nappy changing and sleeping patterns that is their routine at home it can ease the settling in more effectively.

It is the role of the adult to encourage children to take risks and challenge themselves, with good support children can develop a sense of independence, gain confidence and be more resilient. These challenges can be met by using well sourced resources and in an environment that are safe and age appropriate, also by maximising learning opportunities within daily routines. (Curriculum for non-maintained settings 2021)

The first 1001 days are a time for critical development, but also one where babies are most vulnerable. (The Best Start in Life 2021)

There are other barriers to consider, that could have an effect on a childcare setting from running at its best and these concern the practitioners: low salaries and poor pay progression that are incompatible with the responsibility and increasing workload that is expected, limited opportunities for professional development and progression, emotional and physical demands, made harder by increasing paperwork and expectations from parents and employers, the view from society on the early years sector as being that of unskilled and suited for, predominantly women, with limited alternatives. (Pacey 2020)

Another challenge that could be noted, is that there is no current curriculum set in place for children under the age of three years for practitioners to follow.

Activity Ideas



Children have a right to play. It is recognised as being so important to a child's development and wellbeing that it is part of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child, Article 31. (Birth to 5 Matters 2021)

The famous Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, said that "play is the work of childhood." Play should not be thought of as just an activity alone, but an attitude or a way of engaging with the world. When children play, they are constantly trying new things, experimenting, testing the boundaries, and taking risks, as a result they are learning in the process. (Resnick 2019)



Stories and Singing Activities

Communication, speech and language are key to learning and should be developed in a holistic way through authentic, real-life experiences. Enabling adults have an important role in providing the building blocks for language. By immersing children in rich language activities and experiences, their communication, listening, and speaking skills will develop. (Curriculum for non-maintained settings 2021)

By talking, singing, and reading with a baby they are being provided with the stimulation required for the best start in life. Babies love to interact and are naturally sociable, therefore when an adult focuses their attention on them, the baby feels valued and loved. (Hackney Education 2023)

Treasure Baskets

In the 1940's Elinor Goldschmied developed the concept of the treasure basket. It is essentially a basket of household and natural objects that encourage babies and children to use all their five senses as well as develop hand and eye co-ordination when they play. Goldschmied wanted to develop a resource that could be accessible to all children. Over the years treasure baskets have become associated with heuristic play, which is discovery play with lots of objects, but it's origins were linked to sensory play. Several theorists recognised the importance of sensory play, including Jean Piaget, Montessori, Froebel and Pestalozzi. (Gasgoyne 2012)



Water and Sand Play

Water and sand play is one of the most effective methods for early years children to learn and develop their understanding of the seven areas of learning. It encourages children to work together in groups, communicate and share. It plays an important role in imaginative and creative play, early maths and science, and physical development. (Pentagon 2015)



Kinesthesia Activities

The nerves for Kinesthesia are found in the muscles, when they stretch and contract the nerves signal the brain. They not only direct motor responses, but they also activate inhibitory and activation nerves in the brain. Therefore, when a child stretches, they feel energised and more focused. Any activity that needs the body to move activates kinesthesia and the more the muscles are active, the more stimulation happens in the brain.

Activities that wake up the body and mind, and really stretch muscles are:

- Crawling
- Rolling
- Spinning
- Swinging
- Swimming
- Walking and running

(Howlett Mays 2017)





Environment



“Every second of a baby’s life has its importance: the consistency of care, the respect for his own resources, all have to be preserved by the strength of the environment created around it”. (Vamos 2019)

In the early years, exploring the environment is a key element for development and it is through this exploration children gain a sense of belonging and begin to appreciate their surroundings. Therefore, the environment created in settings, should be central to the experiences of the children, both indoors and outside. To be safe and effective this needs to be monitored and reviewed continually and changes made where necessary.

Both the physical and the emotional environment should be considered. Children need to feel comfortable and able to express themselves physically, imaginatively, and creatively. They should be allowed to follow their interests safely, on their own or with others. The setting should offer the children opportunities to be inspired and motivated to learn about the world, problem solve and think critically.

The environment needs to be welcoming, embrace culture, value diversity and be inclusive.

(Curriculum for non-maintained settings 2021)



Loose parts play was coined by Simon Nicholson, an architect, in the 1970’s, as a term for materials used for open ended play. For example, boxes, logs, cardboard, guttering, sand, crates, and containers. It offers a similar creativity potential to heuristic play and treasure baskets, but on a larger scale and can be used limitlessly. (Gasgoyne 2012). According to Whinnett (2022) Froebel’s gifts and blocks also offer open ended play and when used with loose parts the combinations could be almost infinite.

Heuristic Play is adult lead and is an activity where a child can independently explore bagged items, they can freely observe the properties of the items to discover their uses, this could be for themselves, but also to create new uses or apply them differently. This type of play can be linked to Piaget’s sensory theories. (Bilewicz-Kuznia 2017)

Explorative Play is one of the first types of play experienced in life, where children learn about the world and the impact they can have on the environment. From as early as their first few weeks a baby begins to learn and explore the world through play. They will use all their senses to touch, listen, look and move objects to examine them, so to have an opportunity to do this is important. (NHSGGC 2022)

Being Inclusive



The diversity of children and their families must be acknowledged, valued, and promoted through inclusive practise, which also guarantees that they are treated fairly and have access to opportunities, and are respected. All children need to receive the necessary support to engage fully in learning through inclusive practises, which recognise and address the diverse experiences of the children and their families.

Children must be comfortable with who they are during their time in a setting. By incorporating inclusive practises into a pedagogical approach, practitioners can make sure that all children feel loved and represented and have an equal chance to succeed. An awareness that children pick up on everything they see, hear, and do, as well as from the adults around them. By making a setting accessible and inclusive, one that values and celebrates everyone, we have a duty to positively affect children's development.

(Curriculum for non-maintained settings 2021)

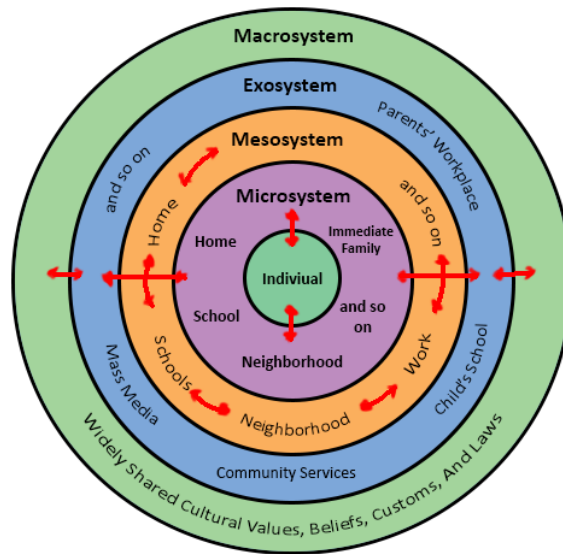
Professional Partnerships/Relationships



Practitioners rely on parents to provide information on their babies, including care routines, dietary preferences, and calming methods. As parents are the ones who know their children the best, practitioners need to interact with parents successfully and sensitively as well as be able to address the requirements of their children in terms of care and education. Depending on the setting and the type of care offered this will look differently, for instance, many childminders develop a close bond with a small number of parents over time, whereas professionals working in a busy baby room in a large setting may get to know many families for less than a year. Having a productive, meaningful, and sincere relationship with parents and people with parental responsibility is a vital element of the practitioner and key person position, regardless of how long you have known the parents. It is essential for the effective exchange of information, which may occasionally contain private details about the child in care of the setting or perhaps any worries they might have. They must take into account the parents' expectations for the care and education of their child, their culture, and at-home learning in order to be able to accomplish this. There are also a number of suggestions for best practises, such as keeping parents informed of their child's development and progress. A trustworthy, and respectful partnership with parents and carers entails that parents participate actively in their children's education and care in the setting. Since parents are the only people who can provide information regarding the home learning environment and the wellbeing of the children, it is even more crucial when working with babies and young children. As a result, it makes sense to collaborate with parents to provide the best possible home learning environment.

Some parents experience extreme stress and even guilt when they leave their child with someone else. Parents make decisions in a complex and specific manner based on their particular circumstances. It is important to address any legitimate worries the parents may have about the infant transferring their affection to the practitioner.

A reciprocal relationship with parents is necessary for an effective partnership. Babies and young children do best in their home learning environments, which can be supported and assisted by practitioners through parent partnerships. In a similar vein, strong collaboration with other experts is beneficial for advancing holistic teaching and care. (Brodie 2018)



Respectful Care and Meaningful Learning



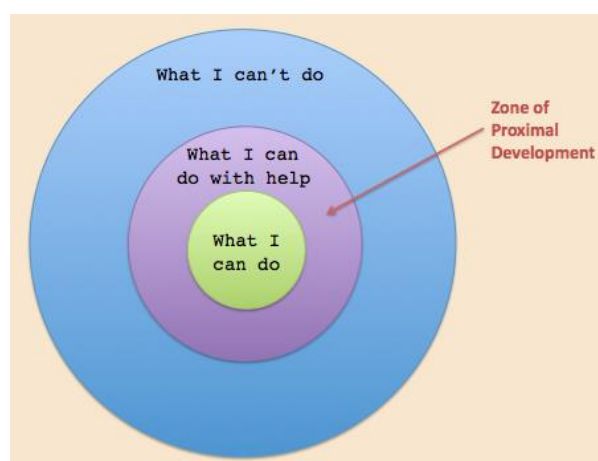
Healthy attachments are crucial for a child's general wellbeing as well as their physical and emotional (psychological) development, according to Emmi Pikler. She discovered that the crucial possibilities for the baby and carer to establish safe, reliable relationships were present throughout the key caregiving activities of feeding, changing, and washing.

These caregiving moments take up a significant portion of the daily routine and are how the baby learns about himself, how the carer sees him as an individual, and about relationships. Therefore, it is important that the baby feels comfortable, acknowledged as a unique person, and cherished as a partner in the relationship during these times. Throughout their early development, an infant's physical and mental well-being will be influenced by how he experiences these caregiving moments. (Pikler UK 2022)

Interaction between children and important people in their life that involves "serve and return" is one of the most crucial experiences in forming the architecture of the growing brain. Adults respond to the babbling, facial expressions, and gesturing that young babies use to organically engage them in conversation by doing the same. The wiring of the brain is fundamentally based on this back-and-forth process, especially in the early years. (Harvard University 2023)



The zone of proximal development was developed by psychologist and social constructivist, Lev Vygotsky and describes the gap between what a learner can accomplish on their own and what they can accomplish with support and encouragement from a knowledgeable partner. Since the student is "near" to acquiring certain talents, the term "proximal" refers to them. As the work is just beyond the individual's capabilities, ZPD is the zone where training is most advantageous. We need to be given tasks that are slightly beyond our capabilities in order to learn. The best cognitive development results from challenging tasks. (Simply Psychology 2019)



International Approaches



It is recognised around the world by many other countries, that the first 1,001 days are important, and are continually striving to better support families with babies. (The Best Start in Life 2021)

Forest School

The idea of institutionalised outdoor teaching is relatively new, despite how straightforward it is. Although learning has always taken place in nature, the idea of the forest school did not come into being until the middle of the 20th century.

In 1952, Ella Flautau founded the first forest school in history in Denmark. The concept was born when Flautau and her neighbours' children started gathering every day in a nearby forest as an informal kind of day care that piqued the curiosity of many other local parents. Out of the Waldorf-Steiner educational philosophy, which emphasises child-led, play-based learning and uses adults as facilitators rather than teachers, the parents organised a group to build "walking kindergartens." At the time, Denmark was faced with a lack of indoor space for early childhood education centres, which led to the emergence of forest schools, or Naturbornehavens, all over the country. Today, there are forest schools in dozens of countries around the world, each with an own curriculum and educational philosophy. (Growing Wild Forest School 2020)



Te Whariki

In New Zealand, Te Whariki gives a broad interpretation of the term curriculum, considering it to comprise all experiences, actions, and events that take place in an Early Childhood Education environment, both directly and indirectly. It offers a framework of values, strands, objectives, and learning outcomes that emphasises the value of respectful, reciprocal interactions and the mana of the child. This framework gives each setting a foundation upon which to build a local curriculum that represents its unique character and values. The Whariki or woven mat is a metaphor for the

curriculum, in which four principles and five strands are interwoven, together they give expression to what is at the heart of Te Whariki, the child.

One element of the curriculum that stands out is that children are supported to take healthy risks in play, with heights, tests of strength and speed, and the use of real tools. These activities not only help to develop their gross and fine motor skills, but the belief that although the environment may have challenges, it is not a hazard. (Ministry of Education 2017)

Reference List

Bilewicz-Kuznia, B. (2017) *The Experimental Approaches and Creative Mindsets of Children in Heuristic Play*. Available at: www.agathos-international-review.com/issue8_2/24.BARBARA%20BILEWICZ-KU%C5%B9NIA.pdf (Accessed: 15th Jan 2023)

Birth to 5 Matters (2021) *Non-statutory guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage*. Available at: www.birhtto5matters.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Birhtto5Matters-download.pdf (Accessed: 14th Jan 2023)

Brodie, K. (2018) *The Holistic Care and Development of Children from Birth to Three: An Essential Guide for Students and Practitioners*. London: Routledge.

Gasgoyne S. (2012) *Treasure Baskets and Beyond*. London: McGraw-Hill Education.

Growing Wild Forest School (2020) *A brief history of Forest Schools Around the World*. Available at: <https://www.growingwildforestschool.org/post/the-brief-history-heritage-of-forest-schools-around-the-world#:~:text=The%20world's%20first%20known%20forest,other%20parents%20in%20the%20community> (Accessed: 22nd Jan 2023)

Hackney Education (2023) *Your Child's journey from Birth to Five*. Available at: <https://education.hackney.gov.uk/content/talking-singing-and-reading-builds-your-babys-brain?guidebook=1250#:~:text=Talking%20is%20one%20of%20the,the%20best%20start%20in%20life> (Accessed: 15th Jan 2023)

Harvard University (2023) *Serve & return Interaction Shapes Brain Circuitry*. Available at: developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/serve-return-interaction-shapes-brain-circuitry/ (Accessed: 21st Jan 2023)

Health Promotion Agency (2018) *First 1,000 days*. Available at: www.hpa.org.nz/programme/first-1-000-days (Accessed: 14th Jan 2023)

Howlett Mays, J. (2017) *'Kinesthesia', The Motor Story*. Available at: <https://themotorstory.org/sensory-processing/kinesthesia/> (Accessed: 15th Jan 2023)

Knauf, J. (2020) *State of the Nation: Understanding Public Attitudes to the Early Years*. Available at: www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2020-11/ipsos_mori_son_report_final.pdf (Accessed: 14th Jan 2023)

Knickmeyer, C., R., Gouttard, S., Kang, C., Evans, D., Wilber, K., Smith, K., J., Hamer, M., R., Lin, W., Gerig, G. & Gilmore, H., J. (2008) *'A structural MRI study of human brain development from birth to 2 years'*. *The Journal of Neuroscience*, 28 (47)

Ministry of Education (2017) *Te Whariki: Early Childhood Curriculum*. Available at: www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Early-Childhood/ELS-Te-Whariki-Early-Childhood-Curriculum-ENG-Web.pdf (Accessed: 22nd Jan 2023)

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (2022) *Explorative Play*. Available at: www.nhsggc.org.uk/kids/life-skills/play-leisure/explorative-play/#:~:text=Exploratory%20play%20involves%20the%20child,sand%2C%20water%20and%20messy%20play (Accessed: 15th Jan 2023)

PACEY (2020) *News and views*. Available at: <https://www.pacey.org.uk/news-and-views/news/archive/2020-news/february-2020/news-research-from-natcen-on-the-early-years-work> (Accessed: 14th Jan 2023)

Pentagon (2015) *Outdoor Learning and Play*. Available at: <https://www.pentagonplay.co.uk/news-and-info/the-benefits-of-sand-and-water-play> (Accessed: 15th Jan 2023)

Pikler UK Association (2022) *The Pikler approach*. Available at: www.pikler.co.uk/about (Accessed: 21st Jan 2023)

Pregnancy, Birth and Baby (2022) *The first 1000 days*. Available at: www.pregnancybirthbaby.org.au/the-first-1000-days (Accessed: 14th Jan 2023)

Resnick, M. (2019) *Projects, passion, peers and play*. Available at: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://web.media.mit.edu/~mres/papers/Creating-Creators-final.pdf (Accessed: 15th Jan 2023)

Save the Children (2016) *Lighting up young brains: How parents, carers and nurseries support children's brain development in the first five years*. Available at: www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/education-and-child-protection/lighting-up-young-brains.pdf (Accessed: 14th Jan 2023)

Simply psychology (2019) *The zone of Proximal Development and Scaffolding*. Available at: www.simplypsychology.org/Zone-of-Proximal-Development.html (Accessed: 21st Jan 2023)

Stiles, J. and Jernigan, L., T. (2010) *'The Basics of Brain Development'*. *Neuropsychology Review*, (20). Boston. Springer US.

Unicef (2013) *The first 1000 days of life: The brain's window of opportunity*. Available at: www.unicef-irc.org/article/958-the-first-1000-days-of-life-the-brains-window-of-opportunity.html (Accessed: 14th Jan 2023)

Vamos, J. (2019) *A Primal Environment for a 21st Century's 'Naissance'. Thoughts on the Language of Tenderness in Ferenczi's Footsteps*. *The American journal of psychoanalysis* 79(4), pp. 594–600.

Welsh Government (2021) *A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings*. Available at: hwb.gov.wales/api/storage/b1801d78-38c3-4320-9818-d9996c21aef8/220914-a-curriculum-for-funded-non-maintained-nursery-settings.pdf (Accessed on: 14th Jan 2023)

Welsh Government (2021) *The Best Start for Life*. Available at: assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/973112/The_best_start_for_life_a_vision_for_the_1_001_critical_days.pdf (Accessed: 14th Jan 2023)

Whinnett, J. (2022) *A Froebelian Approach: Froebel's gifts and block play today*. Available at: www.froebel.org.uk/uploads/documents/Froebels-gifts-and-block-play-today.pdf (Accessed: 20th Jan 2023)