

A Digital Scrapbook: The First 1000 Days

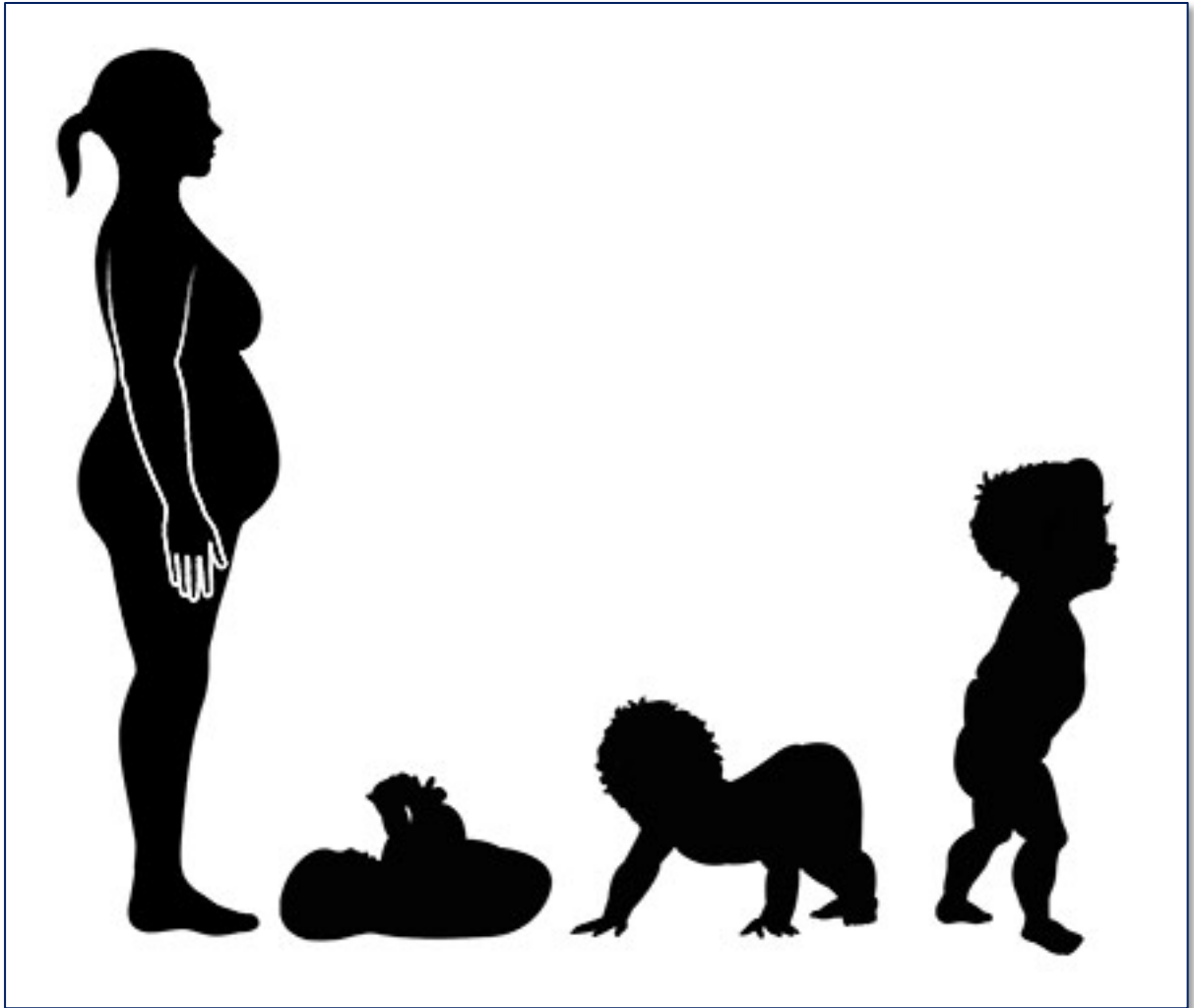


Figure 1: *'First 1000 Days of Life'* (Szalavitz, 2014).

Introduction

A child's first 1000 days of life, conception to the age of two, is thought to be a pivotal stage of where their developmental foundations, such as neurodevelopment and physical development are built and strengthened to establish a healthy individual (House of Commons, 2019). A child's learning starts within the mother's womb, this is why even during pregnancy it is important that the mother's diet, well-being and environment is healthy, as this can impact the child's health as adults (Schwarzenberg and Georgieff, 2018). The experiences a baby faces within the first 1000 days may have a permanent impact on their overall welfare. It is important that the prime carer and adults involved with the child are providing them with love, care, a safe and secure environment, opportunities to play and a nutritional diet. If the child is under any sort of stress or experiencing anxiety, neglect or abuse, can cause lifelong health and mental wellbeing effects (Health direct Australia, 2023).

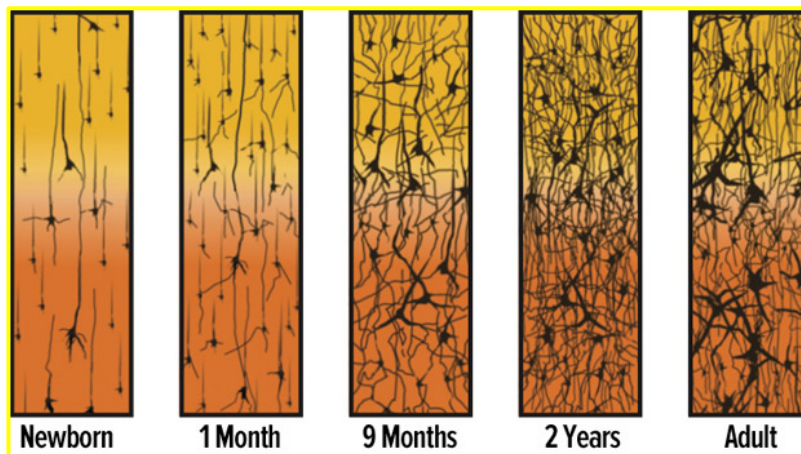


Figure 2: (The Urban Child Insitute, 2009).

The first 1000 days children's brain experience has the most rapid pace of growth, and in fact where it has the most elevated phase of plasticity (UNICEF, no date). Within the first 1000 days, neurons inside a child's brain can form up to 1000 new connections per second, which is a pace the

child will never experience again (Nnubia *et al.*, 2023). The child's significant connections with the adult is a crucial component to develop and structure their brain successfully for their future. The human interaction, relationships, love and care and a safe environment a child receives provides effective connections between their brain, body and environment, providing the child with an overall holistic approach (Winston and Chicot, 2016).

The term serve and return is an important factor to implement when interacting with a child as this is how children form secure brain architecture (Harvard University, 2021). Babies show signs of interacting and serving with their prime care giver by making certain babbling noises and showing facial and emotional expressions, which then us care givers respond and return the serve. It provides structure and supports the neural connections between the numerous areas that the brain has, such as memory, behavioural control and visual, which provides the establishment for a child's cognitive development (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2011). A baby learns and develop mostly through their senses within their first 1000 days of life, such as being able to feel, taste and explore, this is called kinesthesia, a hands-on learning experience where the child is able to grasp and figure out the understanding of a certain item and retain the learning for the next time they experience the same play opportunity (Main, 2023).

Video 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fx1CqQAvR44> (Telethon Kids Institute, 2017).

An example to develop and support a serve and return interaction between an adult and a child is reading a picture book. When the child visually sees the picture, the adult points and correctly states the name. This allows the child to create a connection within their brain of the sound and picture the adult is showing them. Children respond and recognise our voices and comfort we provide them with (Save the Children, 2016).

Figure 3: (Gillet, 2022)



Caregiving

To provide exceptional care the role of an enabling adult is a necessity within early years development, adults must utilise the skills required, to aid children's development.

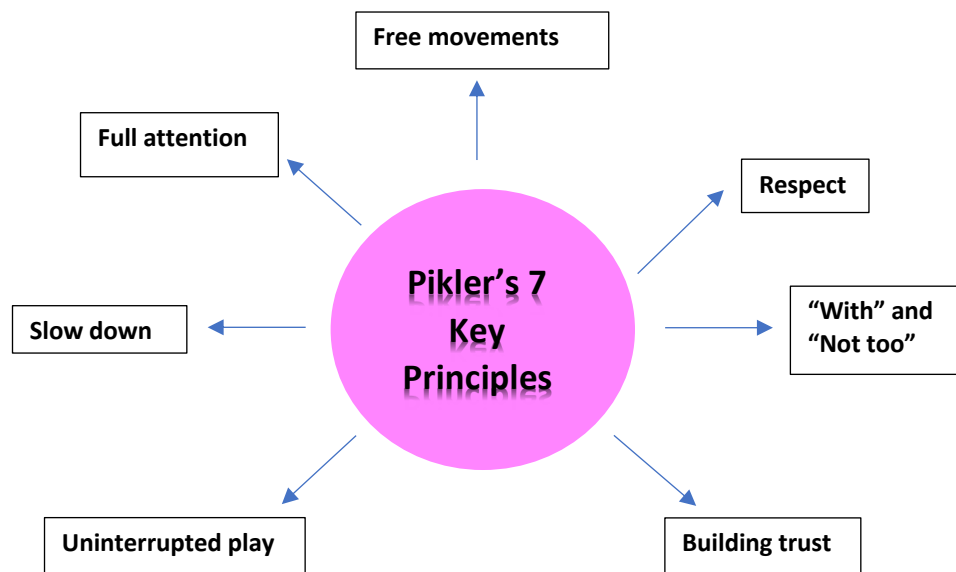


Figure 4 : (Weinstein, 2015)

An enabling adult provides and fulfils the child's rights, United Nations Convention on the rights of the child, ensuring all articles are adhered (UNICEF, 2019) providing and welcoming children into a safe and exciting environment, to enhance their curiosity, become communication rich, a sense of belonging and opportunities to acquire knowledge and participate in play (Scollan and Federico, 2022). Practitioners are able to show children professional love, a concept created by Dr Jools Page who expressed that this type of love could be demonstrated by practitioners to show that children within their care are worthy

to be loved (PACEY, 2016) and cared throughout their time shared, providing a great impact on children's well-being, compassion, kindness and respect for others (Welsh Government, 2022). Exceptional care is understanding the needs of each child and providing meaningful learning experiences, such as supporting and learning a baby to feed themselves.

A theorist who supported the role of an enabling adult was Pikler (1930). Pikler's approach was based on attachment between adult and child, she expressed the importance of having a healthy relationship, so the child is able to sense a loving and secure bond. To secure this relationship Pikler believed that these moments would start once the baby was born, feeding, comforting and completing hygiene, would be the first step to securing these relationships with their prime caregiver. Pikler acknowledged that these basic routines the child experienced would impact on how their physical and emotional development would progress.



Pikler recognised that these 7 key principles allowed the child to develop self-worth of themselves and caregiver, enabling the child to freely explore their environment and body movements that support them in doing so, without guidance or interruption from an adult. The adult provides them with a safe environment to explore, learn and adapt (Nursery World, 2017). To build a trusting relationship with respect for the child, the adult must show liaisons with the child, adults should never make a child do something they are not comfortable with, they need to find a way suitable for both individuals, the child needs to have a sense of independency, as babies are never put into a position they will not get out of, and this will be visual when the child shows emotion and enjoyment in completing tasks alone. The child will build trust and respect for their adult once they learn and recognise their care needs are being met, such as nappy changing and comforted when distressed, the child will successfully feel seen as an individual (Hargraves, 2020).

Figure 5 (Nursery World, 2016)



Adults must ensure that an enabling environment is accessible for children to enhance development, this allows children to have a safe space where risks can be taken, and their care will be priority (Early Years Alliance, 2016). A theorist who believed that enabling environments strengthened children's cognitive development was John Watson. Watson identified that the environment contributed to children's behaviour, he expressed that the environment the child is situated will affect how they behave, known as behaviorism (Lang, 2020). Piaget also supported the theory, emphasising that children who had access to an enabling environment would develop their cognitive and physical abilities, allowing them to become

independent learners (McLeod, 2023b), which is what the Wales Foundation Phase voices.

Play supports children's learning and development. Play opportunities allows us to see children exposed, have a voice, decision make and overall enjoy learning (UNICEF, 2018). Froebel, a theorist who recognised that play and physical exploration is a factor in development and acquire learning, he believed that through play they would sense understanding of the world and feel free, it is important that we supply children an environment that enhances play as not all children are given the opportunity (Welsh Government, 2020), as life can be very structured for a child, due to caregivers working commitments, not having time to let the child enjoy and experience fun. Play should be accessible indoors and outdoors, it allows them to become spontaneous, imaginative, inventive, inspired and the sense of success and failure (Raje and Ojha, 2022).



Figure 6 (Community Play Things, 2011).

The experiences children access is how their brain develops, it contributes to the child's development (NSPCC, 2021). Children learn from experiences, especially within play, continuous provision is beneficial to children, the children don't only have one opportunity to correctly evaluate on how they can build a den and make it secure, it allows children to trial and error and re-evaluate on how they succeed, which is cognitively developing their abilities, they may want to join in another play area, but also allowing them to re-visit their den and use different materials and try again or allow an adult to help (Cornerstones, 2017).

Video 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IbLqRMuxtUI> (Edx Education, 2020).

Children within an environment they feel comfortable to play and learn, allows them to feel secure and safe. Vygotsky's theory, 'the zone of proximal development' (Kurt, 2020), was constructed to explore the learning and development of a child, allowing them to participate and learn what the child can achieve without the interruption or guidance from adults (Billings and Walqui, 2017). The adult would offer their advice or support with the child's play to further their learning, the child has the option to accept or reject, proceeding their process of learning, which is the start of becoming successful independent learners (Welsh Government, 2020).

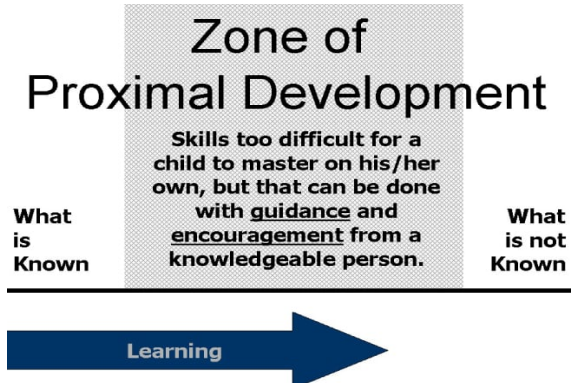


Figure 7 (McLeod, 2023).

Figure 8 (CommunityPlayThings, n.d.)



An effective environment should consist of feeling welcoming to children and families with different cultures, nationalities and ethnicity, which is why it is important to promote and value diversity and inclusion within the setting (Welsh Government, 2022). Children should have the opportunity to experience and value bilingualism, opportunity to discover celebrations that happen all over the world, this would allow children to feel inclusion and respect. It is important to understand and adapt to children, assuring adults are communicating with the language that child is most comfortable with, showing a sense of

belonging, providing a holistic approach to every child, allowing them all to feel happy, healthy and safe (Early Years Alliance, 2014).

Professtional Partnerships

The role of a practitioner does not only have the role of supporting and caring for the child, but also their families, as they supply a part in the child's development. The children's prime caregiver is the adult who knows them best, and as practitioners who also will support and develop the child, we need to ensure that we create a good relationship with the caregiver to retrieve the relevant information in support of the child (Longford, 2017). Bronfenbrenner is a theorist who created the ecological system, which voiced the child at the centre, who was surrounded by their family, nurseries/schools, and other environments that contributed to their care, it is the relationships they made within these environments, moulded the child's way of learning and the success of their development, meaning that the partnership we create and the more support the caregivers receive, would enhance the child's abilities and development (Santa Clara University, 2022).

URIE BRONFENBRENNER'S ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY MODEL



Figure 9 (Hahn, 2022).

An adult can be seen as a role model for a child. Albert Bandura, a theorist who believed that children do not only learn cognitively, but through observing and modelling others through social interactions (Horsburgh and Ippolito, 2018). Children do not develop their abilities from only experiencing intellectual learning, but from observing and following behaviours by adults who surround and care for them (Cherry, 2022). Children need to be surrounded by role models, as they will attain and copy our gestures and behaviours, which will allow them to become socially and emotionally developed (World's Alive, 2018).

Maria Montessori's theory supported the importance of adults as role models and nurture towards children. Montessori's expressed that children not only listen and hear everything, but also mirror what they see (Sophia and Zhang, 2019), adult's interaction with children had importance, allowing them to engage in their learning, viewing behaviours and ques that were key to effective development (Daily Montessori, 2021). The true potential of a child's development will be seen when they feel a sense of belonging in an environment they can interact and be present with adults. Adults are able to adapt and develop children's skills, showing respect for others, experiencing emotions, curiosity towards learning through play (Wales Government, 2022).

Children need to form attachments with adults so their able to express their wants and needs, adults showing children respect, which theorist Winnicott supported, stating that a child develops a sense of belonging and

self-worth when adults show they respect them as an individual, adhering and being consistent with their emotional and physical needs, by accepting and following through with their decisions and choices will allow them to enhance their learning (Bainbridge, 2015).

The Reggio Emilia approach is a great theory to include within the setting, as children are the centre and they have a voice, some unable to verbally communicate, but allowing children to convey themselves in a way they were comfortable, to develop their own identity. Reggio Emilia expressed that children and all adults involved in their development needed to have a sense of happiness. Reggio Emilia believed children communicated through emotions, cues and facial expressions and the belief that children communicate through any way possible (Berg, 2020). It allowed children to feel assured and accepted.

According to Pacey (2015) partnership working is beneficial to a child's well-being and development. Partnerships are successful between adults involved, if they show respect and appreciate other thoughts and beliefs. To support the child, adults will need to build trust, which theorist Erikson expressed. Erikson had beliefs in that children can create and obtain bonds with adults other than their primary caregiver, allowing the child to create a healthy relationship with other adults, evolving their independence. Communication will be a fundamental to enhance the child's abilities, allowing parents to become comfortable with the child's second caregivers (Kelly, 2015). The relationship formed between the adult and child, other than the primary carer can have a great advantage and develop each individual emotionally and socially.

Activities

All sectors of a child's development can be obtained and evolve through play. Play allows children to experience sensory, structured, non-structured, indoor and outdoor (Raising Children, 2019). The first 1000 days of a child is where play is most important, this is the time period where they learn and become self-aware of the environment around them and where the adults get to observe the capabilities of the child (Welsh Government, 2022).

Figure 10 (Thomson, 2016).



Loose Parts/Risky Play: Montessori was a theorist who would support the Wales Foundation Phase in the children to experience risk, independence, loose parts and real-life tools to understand the requirement of them. Montessori believed in children and allowing them to use real life tools, as it would enhance their skills and show them that we support and trust them to successfully use a small hammer to put a nail into wood, Montessori believed this is how the child learnt best, from real life experiences, patience and guidance from the adult (Parenting Practical Life, 2018). Loose parts allow children to use their imagination,

thinking and problem solve on what these items are used for, what can they do with them? It awakens their minds and brings a sense of investigation and excitement (Better Kid Care, 2019).

Outdoors: Adults notice that children have a sense of freedom and excitement when being outdoors. There are so many opportunities for children to learn, imagine and critically think for themselves while playing outdoors, they get to hear certain noises of vehicles, they can visually see what is in the sky, to capture and develop their imagination and curiosity to advance their play and learning by the natural resources that the outdoors provides us with. The outdoor environment allows children to explore their sensory needs also, splashing and jumping in muddy puddles, different textures of leaves and grass, exploring the mud. The outdoors provides children with a number of different play opportunities and it allows the adult to observe, communicate and play with them, progressing their ideas on their play, the outdoors is special as it allows the children to play and learn with nature (Ouvry and Furtado, 2019, p. 79-82).



Figure 11 (FD, 2019).



Figure 12 (Litte Learning Club, 2019).

Sensory: Children are able to explore and stimulate all of their senses when engaged with this particular play, such as touch, taste, sight, smell and hearing, children find it fun and supports their ability to be creative, independent and support their memory development of retaining information. Sensory play is important in a child's first 1000 days, they discover and use fine motor skills, developing thinking capabilities from a young age to enhance when becoming toddlers, independent and learning through concept (Kable, 2020).

International Approaches

The Wales Foundation Phase has similar values and approaches to educators in New Zealand, the 'Te Whariki' model. This is a great facilitator within early learning, known as "Woven mat", it focuses on learning through the child's eyes and providing a holistic approach, allowing children to express and develop their needs, sense the feeling of inclusion and empowering children throughout the start of their lives (Reedy *et al.*, 2017). The two models value play as an importance factor, they recognise that children develop through exploring the environments themselves, understanding and making sense of the world around them (Parent's Education, 2020).

Forrest school is an approach that allows children to continuously learn and develop through nature. It allows children to explore all their senses and increase their motivation to learn, enhances children to think differently, risk take and promotes physical ability (Forest School, 2019). It motivates children to communicate

and play with others, creating team building opportunities and social skills (O'Brien, 2018). There are weather conditions that may effect on how a child reacts and enjoys the experience, which counter argues if it is effective, if a child is not had the opportunities to play in the rain or snow, then this may become a problem in them enjoying and having a positive learning outcome. The children in Sweden have adapted to an issue we may occur, they have the 'Friluftsliv' known as 'open air' to us, approach where they learn and gain knowledge from the encounters they face in nature. They allow their children to take naps outdoors, all year round, allowing them to adapt and be able to sleep in any weather, they embrace that the outdoors doesn't require money, and just have the sense of enjoyment (Jones-Rusell, 2020).

Video 3: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_4kyrFGH9Q (InTheKnow, 2017).

Challenges

There are a number of challenges that can affect providing high quality care to children. The fundamental challenge I have witnessed within settings, is working closely with children with additional learning needs. Practitioners will need to identify the child's needs and support them throughout their first 1000 days, as adults need to be inclusive to all children, as every child should be given equal opportunities to thrive (Welsh Governemnt, 2022).

Example- *If a child is showing signs of additional learning needs, they will require different forms of intervention. Practitioners must provide play opportunities, exploring sensory equipment, creating a calm space for the child to escape if becoming distressed or over stimulated, understanding their form of communication, such as gestures and ques.*

Additional learning needs is a factor that could challenge practitioners providing quality care. Insufficiency with accessibility, not having enough space or funding to provide a space that is suitable for the child to access, explore, learn and feel comfortable, not having the resources needed to expand their development (KVTC, n.d). Poverty within communities can affect settings not receiving funding to enhance their provision, equipment needs to be purchased so the child is able to involve with play opportunities, this does not only affect the child but also the adults involved, neither individuals have an environment where they are able to feel free, watch their child be provided with the care and play other children are offered, it prevents developing their social skills and connections, which can psychologically affect the child (Heller, 2016)

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