The first 1000 days

"The 1000 days from pregnancy to two offer a crucial window of opportunity to create brighter, healthier futures." says Why 1000 days (no date).

From 0-2 children go through a period of rapid development and during this time babies will often start to meet all their first milestones.

Hyson, and Tomlinson. (2014) state that at 2 months babies will start to smile and hold up their own head. By 9 months they will start to crawl, show fear of unfamiliar people and possibly stand when holding onto something. By the child's 1st birthday, they may begin to say what they hear others saying such as "mama" and "dada" and explore objects in a different way by shaking, banging or throwing. At 18 months babies should be able to walk unassisted and scribble with a crayon. And by the time the child turn's 2 they may be able to say simple sentences with 2-4 words and copy other adults and children.

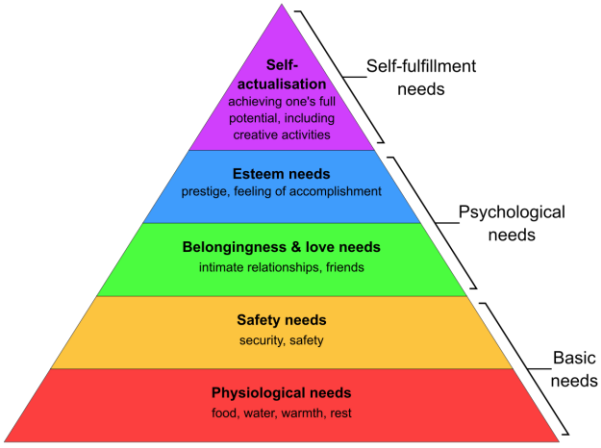
Why 1000 days (no date) state that how well cared for babies are during this time has an impact on how well they will grow and learn. This is the case because the first 1000 days is when the child's brain will develop and will set the foundations for their lifelong health. The harm done to a child's development can be irreparable if they are exposed to poor nutrition and parental neglect. Because of how quickly the brain develops at this stage for children, nourishment is essential for brain growth.

However, why 1000 days (no date) says that too many families in the world do not get the correct healthcare or food they need to have a healthy first 1000 days. Due to this many children do not reach their development capabilities.

Exceptional care

Young children require a variety of things including attachment, food, stimulation, nurturing and experiences. When babies are in practitioners care it is their job to ensure all the child's needs are met, some examples on how practitioners do this include: (All about children, no date).

- **Looking after the children's everyday needs**. For example, ensuring they are fed, changing they're nappy and carrying out first aid. Maslow's hierarchy of needs states that the physiological basic needs need to be met first before any other of the child's needs can be met.
- Practitioners should also create a **stimulating environment** for the children. Children learn through play so a stimulating environment that has sensory activities and where practitioners read stories and sing songs will help a child grow and develop.
- Developing a **close attachment** with the children in the setting will allow the children to feel a sense of belonging and the sense of trust. Maslow's theory states that children need to feel the sense that they belong. NSPCC (2021) says that (Bowlby,1997) believes that during the first 1000 days babies develop an "internal working model", this alters the way they view relationships and can affect the way they trust others.
- **Safeguarding** children from harm is also important for practitioners to do daily to protect and care for the children in the setting.



*1 - **Maslow's hierarchy of needs***

Current challenges

Staff ratio

The National Minimum Standards for regulated childcare (2016) state that children benefit when the number of adults to children meet the correct ratio. The minimum number of children to practitioner ratio in a day care is

- 1 adult to 3 children under 2 years old
- 1 adult to 4 children aged 2

This can be challenging for settings due to staff retentions and shortages. Also, staff are being stretched out more than the ratio states because of this these children will not be getting as good exceptional care and attention they need.

Cost of living

The cost-of-living increase is also a challenge for babies and young children. Barnardo's (2023) states that more than 1 in 4 children are living in poverty in the UK, meaning children do not get their needs met. Children's chances of succeeding in life might be harmed by living in poverty since it restricts their opportunities, holds them back in school, and worsens their physical and mental health says Barnardo's (2023). Maslow's theory supports this as he believes that when a child's basic needs are not satisfied, they will not be able to move up the hierarchy to reach their full potential in life.

Covid-19

Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic has influenced young children. Firstly, children and their families were in isolation during this time meaning young children missed out on making connections and building relationships with adults outside their home which would have been key for their brain development. Children would have also missed out on stimulation and development opportunities a childcare setting could have provided. Pregnancy would have been isolating at this time due to the reduced healthcare support available which could have left the mother with poor mental health. Poor mental health poses a risk to bonding with their baby and providing exceptional, responsive care. (BBC, 2020, p.4 p.22)

Enabling environments

The Welsh Government guidance (2021, p.2) says that a fundamental part in helping children grow and develop holistically are the three enablers, Enabling Adults, Enabling Experiences and Enabling Environments.

When their specific needs are met, children develop most effectively. Each child has a unique set of interests, and they all require a variety of opportunities to play and learn to grow holistically Through the use of the outdoor environment children can experience the world, where they can feel the weather changes and hear nature for instance says birth to 5 matters (no date). During the early years of a child's life exploration of environments is key for development states the non-maintained curriculum for Wales (2022). Children will also develop a sense of belonging and begin to appreciate the world around them when they have the freedom to explore. When children are given the opportunity to access first hand experiences, they will independently explore, choosing what items and environment that satisfies their individual needs.

Both Montessori and Froebel believe that children learn best through their first-hand experience with the world. Nursery World (2015) says that as children should have the chance to challenge themselves through risk taking, however, they are sometimes not able to recognise risks.

*2 - **Loose parts and Curiosity Approach***

Curiosity Approach

The child-led curiosity approach plans according to the child's interests, which will in turn stimulate their curiosity and enable them to grow and learn through play. Children should be given the opportunity to experience awe and wonder, which makes them curious about their surroundings and the wider world. Froebel's idea is also that experience with the world helps children develop an awareness and understanding of it (Froebel Trust, no date). For example, putting real fruit in tuff trays rather than plastic to give children the opportunity to smell and touch real items. Kinderly (2020) implies that babies are born enthusiastic learners that are keen to explore the world around them and the curiosity approach promotes this.

Loose Parts

Pacey (2019) says that loose parts allow children to engage in their own learning using everyday items such as**,**springs, buttons, marbles, shells, sticks, laces, feathers, pots, tubes, and conkers. Loose parts should be easily accessible for the children however for babies anything small such as marbles and bolts could cause a choking hazard, so Pacey (2019) suggests keeping these out of the way. All

children will develop holistically through loose parts but specific skills children under 2 will develop include: they will learn to play independently, share resources, develop fine motor skills and new vocabulary through playing with others and learn about size and shape for instance.

3 - The loose parts area in my setting.

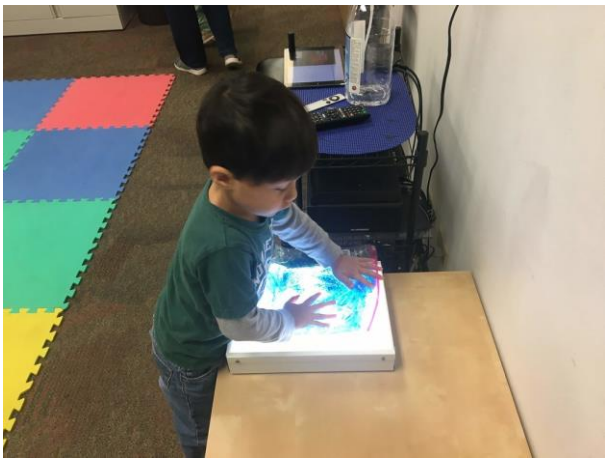
Activity ideas

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child has the right to play and Brodie (2018, p. 99) states that for babies and young children play is holistic. Brodie (2018, p.108) also states that from birth to three years old play is the core focus of life (Piaget and Montessori agree).

Piaget believed that in the first 1000 days of a child's life they learn best through their five senses and exploring their environment. He believed that children need sensory play with different textures sounds at this age.

Click this link to see the benefits of messy sensory play for a child's development

4 - Sensory play



5 - Sensory play

6 - Reading books and singing with children

7 - Treasure baskets

Reading

All4kids (2017) states that reading to children encourages a holistic development. They state that daily reading to babies helps with language, communication, and literacy skills. This is because reading to children during their first months stimulates an area of the brain that enables them to absorb the meaning of words. All4kids (2017) also states that reading helps create a stronger attachment. In terms of babies, they will not understand what is being said however babies love to hear a familiar voice which gives them reassurance.

Nursery rhymes

Children's development can be aided by singing nursery rhymes together. Early on, young children learn the sequence of numbers through songs like (1,2,3,4,5, once I caught a fish alive and five little sucks went swimming one day.) By "twinkling" their hands while singing Twinkle twinkle little star, children can improve their fine motor skills. Additionally, by acting out the song three little monkeys jumping on the bed promotes their gross motor skills. As these songs are often sung in a setting during circle time, the child will also develop socially. (Brodie, 2018, p.77, p.78).

Treasure basket

Babies learn through treasure baskets by looking, sucking, banging, and shaking says North Yorkshire County council (2017). A treasure basket must always be under adult supervision as some items such as mirrors have sharp corners, and the child could injure themselves. A treasure basket encourages hand eye co-ordination, concentration and stimulates all five senses. A treasure basket also has the opportunity for child to develop schemas which Piaget introduced. For example, filling and emptying containers or develop an interest of lining things up. (North Yorkshire County council, 2017).

Being inclusive

Inclusion is the act of making someone feel part of something.

Practitioners should ensure that every child is included in the setting because each individual child is unique and will grow at their own pace, treating them equally and paying attention to their interests and needs is important.

As Bronfenbrenner's theory suggests children are mainly influenced by their surrounding and the adults in them. Children absorb information from everything they experience, hear, and see. Practitioners have a duty to support children's development by providing a friendly, inclusive environment that values and appreciates everyone in the setting. (Curriculum for non-maintained nursery settings, no date, p.44).

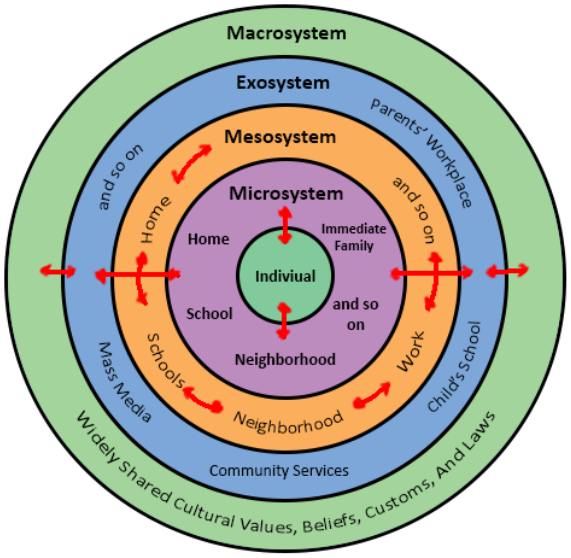
The curriculum for non-maintained nursery settings (no date, p.44) state that it is important that children feel confident in who they are when in the setting. By being inclusive in settings, practitioners can ensure that all children feel loved and represented in the class and have an equal chance to succeed. However, if children experience exclusion, it may lower their self-esteem. According to Maslow, children need to feel like they belong in the world, and an inclusive environment can make sure that need is satisfied.

The curriculum says the environment should be:

1. Accessible to everyone
2. Include a range of resources and images that reflect a varied range of people including, gender, religion, and ability
3. Have few barriers to participation
4. Resources that are open ended that promote diversity and not gender specific.

Professional relationships

Bronfenbrenner's theory suggests that children are influenced most by their environment and the people around them.



8 - Bronfenbrenners theory

Babies need to create an attachment with those caring for them to develop to their full potential. As Bowlby's theory suggests children need the sense of attachment as a biological need. He proved that

when children experienced separation anxiety from their parents they suffer from phycological childhood trauma which will affect their development implies Fabian (2009, p.148).

Erik Erikson has a theory that states that from birth to 18 months babies experience trust vs. mistrust. Erikson believes this is the most important stage of a child's life and will influence their personality and view on the world. Erikson implies that trust can affect a child's social and emotional development, as babies are almost fully dependant on their caregivers and children who learn to trust will feel safe and secure in their surroundings. Maslow's second step on the hierarchy of needs shows that children need to feel safe before any other needs can be met.

Practitioners can build trust between themselves and the child by, creating a secure environment where the child feels safe. Although, when a child cries and the practitioner cannot meet their needs is what builds mistrust.

Professionals and parents should be working in partnerships for the need of the child. (Fabian, 2009, p.139). Also, the National minimum standards for regulated childcare in Wales (2016, p.22) says that parents should be kept fully involved about their child's activities, achievements, and progress. Understanding and trust is built through effective communication. When communication is effective it is more likely to promote children's development and well-being. However, a challenge of professional partnerships with parents includes language barriers. In this case the practitioner will have to adapt the way they communicate by maybe using class dojo and the translation tool.

Respectful care and meaningful learning

Children learn best when engaged in experiences that excite their interest, imagination, and curiosity. These experiences should be stimulating children to explore, create, and be active in their learning. The most relevant and meaningful experiences are the ones with real life context says the non-maintained curriculum for Wales (no date, p.17). This will allow children to make links, apply knowledge and strengthen their skills. Real life experiences enable children to ask questions, recognise obstacles and find out answers that will help them understand the world and the purpose of their learning. Meaningful learning for children can also reinforce well-being, self-esteem, and resilience. (Non maintained curriculum for Wales, no date, p.17).

Real-life experiences along with play opportunities can improve a child's language development. For example, during nappy changes practitioners should be talking to the child saying exactly what they are doing. This can improve a child's listening, speaking and communication skills. However, very young children will communicate back through serve and return. (Non-maintained curriculum for Wales, no date, p.20).

International approaches

Reggio Emilia approach

The Reggio Emilia approach puts children in control of their learning. The approach views children as naturally curious and have the capacity to learn from their surroundings and the relationships they

have formed. . Children are influenced by everything in their environment and the environment serves as the “third teacher”. Due to the influence of the child’s surroundings and environment they will learn to explore, discover and problem solve independently. Bronfenbrenner also believes that children are most influenced by their environment and the people closest to them. The role of the adult in a Reggio setting is to work in partnership with the child rather than telling them what to do by listening and observing the children. (Day Nurseries, no date)

Forest Schools

Forest Schools are inspired by Scandinavian countries, and it is when children do a lot of their learning outdoors in woodlands. For the duration of the school day, children would spend time outside of the classroom to gain more understanding of the world around them. Forest school will develop the child’s confidence, imagination, and fine and gross motor skills as they experience the natural world. Similarly, to Reggio Emilia’s approach forest schools are child led and the adult would monitor the children by encouraging exploration and risks. (Day Nurseries, no date)

Te Whariki

Te Wharikii has four curriculum principles and are intertwined with five curriculum strands. New Zealand focuses on the important role of social and cultural learning and child relationships with people, places, and objects from birth up until the child starts school. For example, planting trees strengthens the relationship with the earth in this approach. Te Whariki has the idea that there is opportunity to learn in every environment. (The child, 2022).

9 - Te Whariki's curriculum. (The child,2022)

Both forest schools and Reggio Emilia settings follow the Montessori method. Montessori is child-led teaching method that allows children to freely choose what activity they want to do. Te Whariki’s curriculum for children involves the family and community and does not assess children’s development and learning against milestones. The assessments in Te Wahriki’s only purpose of assessment is to prompt children to reach their full potential.

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Candidate number- 2203999. Module - ECEY4005 2703 words