



Exceptional Care in the First 1000 Days

Introduction



According to H.M. Government (2021) the first 1000 days is conception to two years. This is a critical time for the baby to develop strong relationships and key stages in their development takes place. Every activity such as eating, sleeping, nappy changes are meaningful learning opportunities. Babies in Lockdown, (2020) states the first 1000 days in a life lay the foundations for their future showing the importance of care in this time. H.M. Government, (2021) reveal that practitioners spend a large amount of time with the babies so it is important they gain a strong bond between the baby and their parents and provide exceptional care. Dewey believed the role of a benenficual adult is to have a good understanding and knowledge of the children through observation and then plan around what the children were interested in. This has to be reviewed and adapted to the needs of the child (Pound, 2005). Brodie, (2018) states that for the holistic development of a child, every staff member at the setting is responsible. It is significant that the child's emotional health, physical well-being, social skills, cognitive and linguistic capacities are developed in the first 1000 days to have a positive effect on their well-being throughout life. They will need at least one stable committed relationship with an adult that makes them feel safe and secure. Pound, (2005) states the Bowlby theory of attachment that children need an adult to meet their needs and create a safe and secure relationship is significant in order for the child to develop. A relationship between a baby and adult can be called 'Serve and Return'. This is when the baby is reaching out for an interaction, babbling or moving and the adult will then respond to return the serve. This repeats in a cycle playing a significant role in developing the wiring of the babies brain, Experiences and interactions between an adult and baby create a flexible brain (H.M. Government, 2021). Gerhardt, (2014) suggests an

insecure attachment will result in a child developing negative well-being and disassociation with reality creating low self esteem. Children need to know how to manage and tolerate their feelings. Conkbayr, (2017) supports this theory. Neglect has a negative effect on the brain because it minimises growth and development leaving bigger gaps in the brain. Infants need limited stress in their lives and they can be affected before they are born. Gerhardt, (2014) says that there is good and bad stress. Janet Di Pietro, (2006) agrees that it builds a more mature nervous system that stimulates motor and cognitive development of the unborn baby up to the age of 2. Exposure to short-lived stress can be beneficial however constant stress becomes toxic on the child and impacts their emotional well-being. Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-being (SSTEW) is used to evaluate settings and develop different emotional expressions and understanding for the children as they grow to improve the quality of their interactions and emotional well-being. H.M. Government, (2021) shows the support for families to minimise stress around the world. 'Sure Start' in New Zealand is a website created for pregnant women or parents with early years children to find support to help ensure their child is receiving exceptional care. This demonstrated high levels of well being in mothers who have used it preventing their stress being passed on to their children. These are important factors to consider when providing exceptional care to babies and children.

Current Challenges



Although there are many positives in such a rewarding job, there are constant challenges that arise such as limited funding to keep up with new ideas and curriculums as well as limited pay for staff. Tyrie, Knight and Borrás, (2021) looked at the covid effects on the lives and development of babies and young children. They looked at children who suffered a bereavement due to COVID-19 and children with additional needs and both of which were found that their speech and language, cognitive, social and emotional development were all impacted. Additionally, they found that children whose parents contracted long COVID-19 suffered socially, emotionally and physically. Each

category they tested affected the child's holistic development. To overcome this, practitioners will need to ensure the infant does not feel pressured and has the opportunity to catch up on the activities they missed such as outdoor activities and social groups. It is hard to see the long lasting effects as it is still early days.



1 - A video discussing the long-term impacts of Covid-19 on children's well being

Activity Ideas

Loose Parts Play



2 - Loose Part Materials

Houser, N. *et al.*, (2019) state the importance of loose parts play for young children. Allowing children to use various materials piques their curiosity and motivates them to explore and experiment with the different items. They will move and manipulate the materials encouraging creative thinking, giving them opportunities to explore new things in the environment. Materials can be simple and natural such as sticks or leaves or synthetic for example rope. They can be set up inside and or outside however outside allows more freedom to explore and experiment. Houser, N. *et al.*, (2019) found that loose part play has massive benefits to young children. It enhances their own creativity, allows collaborative behaviour and cognitive functioning. Loose parts need to be open-ended for unstructured child-led play to see what they decide to do with the different parts. Allowing the children to play with loose parts influence basic aspects associated with physical literacy including movement competence, confidence and motivation becoming daily behaviours.

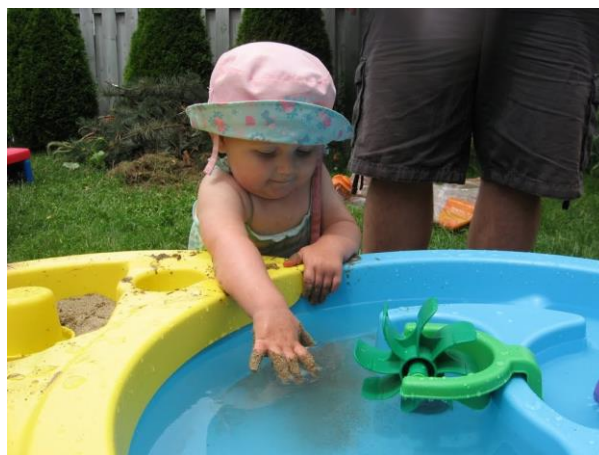
Sensory Play



3 - Sensory Play Idea

Moyles, (2012) demonstrates the benefits of sensory play on young children. They get the opportunity to explore, problem solve and use symbolic play. This allows them to develop their creativity. Sensory play can be as simple and messy as jumping in muddy puddles as they get to experience the mystery, the noise of the splash, their feet becoming cold and water in their wellies. They get to feel 'at one' with nature and discover the 'cause and effect' on their own. Freedom allows new experiences and memories that benefit young children by improving their concentration skills, their determination and their problem solving skills. Sensory play can be simple and slightly prepped, for example shaving foam on a tuff tray. According to Pound, (2017) Komensky theory supports these views as he found sensory experiences enhance learning providing development holistically. Moyles, (2012) continues to say sensory play creates a new 'pathway' in the brain. The more connections that are made and reinforced the thicker the pathway gets with faster signals. This benefits young children intellectually, helping them think and recall events more accurately. Our senses help us learn and understand the world. Knight, (2011) provides an example of sensory play which is Forest Schools offering freedom to discover new things. They are play based, child-led and allow risky play. Children learn how to manage a risk and prevent further risks on their own. The health and developmental benefits from this build character and personality traits. Piaget theory supports this stating 0-2 years old is the target sensorimotor stage where all their knowledge and understanding grows using their 5 senses and physical action.

Water Play



4 - Water Play Activity

Water play is key aspect of developmental experiences. White (2014) describes it as a magical, intriguing and soothing substance that attracts the children. The sensory feel and look of water can be used as a medium for their well being, used indoors and outdoors to allow more freedom to their movement. Different types of resources can be used in the water in different containers to create new experiences. For example mixing and pouring. (White, 2014).

Reading and Singing



5 - Reading and Singing

Shaw, (2021) insists that reading and singing with children, preferably one on one, can further develop the relationship between the adult and the child. This is formed through close attention. The benefits include developing literacy skills, communication, positive effects on well being and encourages the baby or child to respond whether it's a babble or action. Furthermore, face to face contact is very beneficial to a baby, they will watch facial expressions and reactions that the adult is doing and usually copy the adult responding with the same facial expression or emotion. The baby will enjoy the repetition of this experience together and strengthen their attachment.

The Curiosity Approach



6 - The Curiosity Approach

The Curiosity Approach suggests that children are born with a natural curiosity and motivation to explore and experiment. Nature such as flowers and trees arouse the children's curiosity and allow them to observe and think for themselves (Spektor-Lewy, 2013). Malaguzzi combined the theories of Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky and Erickson to create Reggio Emilia. Rinaldi, (2006) describes Reggio Emilia as a child-centred approach that uses self-directed play to allow experimental learning. It is a unique idea to work with children and families allowing the child to be in charge of their own learning. They get the opportunity to make new connections, concepts, relationships and experiences using the curiosity they were born with.

Treasure Box



7 - Treasure Box

These activity ideas allow the children to take control of their own learning and learn through play. They come with holistic developments even with the simplest tasks for example creating a treasure box can take minutes but it develops:

- Hand eye coordination
- Stimulate the all senses
- fine motor skills
- Create vital connections in the brain
- Encourage exploration and discovery
- concentration and focus
- Builds confidence
- Self esteem
- Imagination
- Problem solving
- Creativity
- Speech and language

(Moyles, 2021).

Environment



Steiner believed that children should be raised in a suitable environment with natural, open ended sensory resources. Vygotsky stated that the social and cultural environment in which children are raised plays a significant role in their learning (Hodgeman, 2012). Both of these show the key role an environment plays to a child.

A Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings, (2022) states that settings should centralise the children to create authentic experiences. Settings should be a physical and emotional climate that provide a wide range of varied and open-ended materials to give children new learning experiences that they can experiment on their own. Exploration of the environment is a key driver for development in children and babies and provides them with a sense of belonging and appreciation for the world. It needs to be safe but allow elements of risk play. This allows the children and babies to use their imagination, develop their creativity skills, problem solving skills and motivate them to explore. In addition to this they should celebrate and value diversity in the setting. Welsh should be used in the setting. There needs to have multi-cultured representation throughout and gender neutral activities. Using authentic items allows the children to develop their vocabulary as they will act out role play with all the different resources. The environment also needs to be accessible to everyone. It is important the environment has a quiet space for the children to self-regulate or reflect on their behaviour. This develops the child's well-being and respect for their emotions. (A Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings, 2022) .Hodgman (2012), suggests a challenge could be the children getting bored of an area so it is important that practitioners are monitoring, reviewing and adapting the environment throughout to replace any sections of the environment that children are uninterested in. Montessori theory provides children

with a free environment that is uncluttered allowing the children to explore, with their toys at an accessible height they can reach themselves (Hodgeman, 2012).

[The Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings](#)



8 - Piklers arch

Vamous, (2012) suggests the use of a Pikler's triangle in settings allowing development. Pikler believed children should have freedom in their environment. Pikler's triangle was made from his theory. It allows the babies and children to take learning into their own hands through play and develop their free motor positions, problem solving and make their own decisions. They have elements of risk play gaining confidence through experimenting.

Being Inclusive



It is vital that diversity is valued and promoted in a childcare setting. Equal treatment to all babies, children and their families. Representation throughout the setting will allow the children and families to feel respected and provide them with a sense of belonging. Practitioners are responsible for influencing the other children therefore they should respect everyone, promote and celebrate equality. Hodgman, (2012) states that multicultural resources are not enough. The setting should have different nationality dolls and different language books. Settings usually have an Additional Learning Needs Co-Ordinator (ALNCO) that is an advocate from inclusion. A child with additional needs can be life changing and highly emotional therefore the practitioners need to ensure the families have support (Mathieson, 2015).



9 - Multicultural Dolls

Brodie, (2015) states inclusion recognises individuals are different but still allows equal opportunities. Every child and baby should be valued and have the right to take part. Additionally they should make their own choices and it is significant that their voices are heard. Challenges for inclusion in the setting can be physical access and activities might not be tailored for needs therefore staff need to prepare and plan in advance to ensure everyone can be included in the task. Untrained staff could be a challenge, settings need to ensure staff have the appropriate training and develop their knowledge so they can provide appropriate care and meet the needs of the child. Practitioners need to assess, plan and review throughout to change and develop the individual needs of a child (Matheison, 2015). A possible challenge could be the language barrier therefore practitioners should ensure they still achieve the same treatment and contact that all the other children receive. Cultural differences can be a challenge however, this should be celebrated and is a learning opportunity. Ways to overcome this include trying different culture foods and celebrating different occasions. Children could bring items from home to share their culture. 'Chile Crece Contigo' in Chile promotes the rights of 0-4 year olds and pregnant women to ensure they have equal treatment. This has been beneficial and achieved significant reductions of 2 year olds with developmental delay as families can reach out for help (H.M. Government, 2021). Additionally the Te Whariki Curriculum in New Zealand is a strong curriculum that connects families and the wider community. It focuses on equality and respects the childrens rights. The aim of Te Whariki is to support children that are raised in democracy ages 0-4 years old (Lee, *et al*, 2012). It supports the needs of local tradition and the environment. (Hodgman, 2012)



10 - Te Whariki Curriculum

Professional Partnerships



DfES, (2007) say that parents have a strong influence on the child throughout their entire childhood which has important effects on their education and skill development. The DfE, (2012) see parents' support on a child's development as the main priority. Bronfenbrenner, (2005) ecological system theory states that the child's family have the most contact and influence on a child as well as the wider influences such as nursery settings and in order for a child to develop intellectually, emotionally, socially and morally a child needs the support from these emotional attachments. They will result in the child progressing on a regular basis and highlights the importance for a professional partnership between the practitioner and the parents and families. Wilson, (2016) reveals the benefits of this partnership as it is helpful to get to know the unique child and the development of trusting relationships between the practitioners and parents allow the parents to receive support and information. Parsonage *et al*, (2014) says childhood behaviour difficulties such as persistent disobedience or angry outbursts can be prevented with consistency between the nursery settings and the families at home. If they stick to similar rules, rewards and punishments they will provide a secure, stable and consistent behaviour pattern for the child. Moreover, close contact relationships provide opportunities for the parents to share concerns with the practitioners and reduce anxiety. It is important for both the parents and practitioners to share information regularly and ensure the child is reaching their developmental targets to highlight if the child needs additional help to receive this at an early age. Early years settings can contact support and referrals to help the families (Wilson, 2016).

Although there are many benefits of having a professional partnership, there can be challenges. Wilson, (2016) reveals the barriers such as poverty resulting in the child being unable to attend consistently or a language barrier which limits the effective and sensitive communication. There is limited time for the practitioners to speak to the parents on a busy day or various barriers preventing communication. If professionals maintain positive and open-minded most barriers will be easy to overcome. For example, technology apps such as Seesaw to contact parents virtually throughout the day and send photos of their child. This helps parents stay up-to-date, have peace of mind and allows the parent to contact them if necessary (Wilson, 2016).

Respectful Care and Meaningful Learning

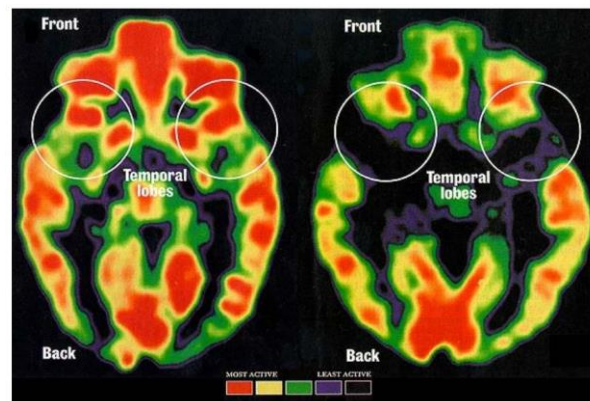


Sirens Film, (2010) shows us the benefits of constantly talking to the baby about everything that is happening. The adult needs to observe what the baby is interested in, whether they are reaching out or staring at something. Babies are usually interested in nature, for example grass. They can put the baby down to experiment with the grass allowing them to use their senses. The adult can describe this to the baby and as the baby gets older they are likely to respond in their own way such as babbling. Letting the baby create their own experiences with anything that intrigues them allows physical development while they use movement to get around. Allowing the baby to lie on the grass on their back and tummy helps develop their strength. This will have developments on their emotional well-being as a sense of empowerment choosing what they get to learn and social developments whilst they are communicating with the adult. (Sirens Film, 2010) Similarly Mathers *et al*, (2014) believes the importance of child led play based activities from birth to three is vital to develop communication and language and argues there are five key conditions for respectful quality of care:

1. Practitioner being knowledgeable and capable
2. Having stable staff team
3. Ensuring staff are effective
4. A secure but stimulation environment
5. Engaged in their development including the family in the process.

Pramling Samuelsson and Fler, (2009) claim that childcare settings expand relationships and allow holistic development if they provide this meaningful learning. Experiences such as a nappy change allow one on one time with the child. Ephgrave, (2018) proposed the idea of 'Planning in the

Moment'. This is child led play that emphasises meaningful learning in a setting. This starts from birth as babies are born with a desire to learn. Practitioners observe and listen to the child in order to assess and 'plan' a response. This provides uniquely suited play to each unique child. The powerful role of practitioners achieves outstanding progress. Ephgrave, (2018) states the effects of meaningful learning on the child's brain. When children have autonomy they are engaged in learning therefore their brains are developing and creating new synapses. The lack of engagement can hinder a child's brain and prevent them from forming empathy or new relationships in the future. That is why it is essential that the children are interested in their learning. If a child is forced to do something they do not want to do they will become anxious, changing the chemical makeup of the brain preventing new synapses from forming.



11 - Healthy brain next to a neglected brain.

Respectful care and meaningful learning comes with challenges. With little funding it is difficult to ensure the child has the best opportunities, however with this idea of planning in the moment and allowing children to be curious it can be done with free open-ended resources such as sticks (Ephgrave, 2018). One challenge is ratios in a child-care setting. For two year olds ratios are 1:4 therefore there is limited time to get one-on-one contact in the setting. To ensure respectful care and meaningful learning is taking place the practitioners need to prioritise the well-being of the child allowing uninterrupted play (Ephgrave, 2018).

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