



The first 1000 days is a time of rapid brain development, between conception and 2 years of age building strong foundations from the beginning is crucial in supporting the physical, social-emotional, spiritual, and cognitive aspect of a child development (Shonkoff, Richter, Gaag and Bhutta, 2012).

The architecture of the brain requires many experiences and opportunities to support holistic development (Unicef, 2013) Moore Suggests, from conception foetus and environment are actively engaged with one another, whilst feeling the effects of its mothers physical and mental state. Signals are sent to the womb, which send predictions directly to a baby to forecast the kind of world, they will be born into (Moore et al., 2017).

A baby's development is vulnerable to the effects of their mother's health, diet, and lifestyle (S.Han, 2021). This is stated within the Wales Maternity and Birth Statistics 2020, where stress, age, poverty, smoking, alcohol, or drug misuse are main factors to fetal growth restriction, premature births, and low birth weights (Welsh Government, 2020). Similarly, there is evidence to suggest childhood obesity is also connected to the factors Wales Maternity and Birth Statistics has highlighted (Baidal et al., 2016).



Respectful and loving care is delivered from the caregiver and conveyed to the baby through words, attitude, hands and looks. Practitioners may not always be in a peaceful state, with frustration due to workload, staff shortages and many babies in need of care, the adult may become eager to stop a baby crying by using a pacifier (Nutbrown, Page, Nutbrown and Clare, 2013).

Gerber, 2012 suggests this form of manipulation and distraction is harmful to the learning and emotional development of children (Petrie and Owen, 2011). Article 10 within the human rights act states, the right to have freedom of expression and not to be dismissed (Human Rights Act, 1998).

Bowlby theory states, babies and infants need interactions which are caring, loving, nurturing and from a peaceful nature (Bowlby, 2008).



Practitioners can show this during times of care such as changing the child's nappy, comforting the child to sleep, feeding, or facilitating at mealtimes (Meggitt, Bruce and Morton, 2016).

Meaningful learning opportunities such as counting fingers and toes or singing rhymes during daily care routines can also support the child to develop maths and encourages use of language (Brodie, 2018).

Gerhardt believes loving experiences are essential for healthy brain development and for building positive attachments. Without love the mind and body reacts, brain starts to function abnormally which has negative impacts to the child health and development (Gerhardt, 2015).

Furthermore, Maslow states it is fundamental to the learning and development of all children to have their basic needs met before any engagement in learning or play can happen (Maslow, 1987).



Practitioners need to be attuned to the children they are caring for, once needs are met and with time the child can see their caregiver is attentive, warm, nurturing, responsive, comfortable, and respectful (Brodie, 2018).

According to Pikler babies and toddlers have a good moral compass, they can deceive right from wrong, this highlights that from an incredibly early age babies are equipped with strong emotions and feelings (Tardos, 2010)

Bloom (2017) agrees children within the first 1000 days can feel compassion and empathy. Practitioners may view this when an infant crawls over to another child that is hurt, the infant will stroke or use patting with intention to soothe and calm the child (Jacobs foundation, 2017).



Enabling Adult

The practitioner plays a vital role in the learning, development of babies and young children. Providing safe spaces where children can regulate their emotions by expressing behaviour and feelings in a positive way. Knowing when to intervene within learning experiences and when not too, through observation the key person can monitor a child trajectory. Collaborating with young children to problem solve and to provide support in a respectful way (Nutbrown, 2008).

It is the role of the adult to be vigilant to signs of abuse or neglect, such as bruises, minor injuries, or weight loss and changes to emotional development. Babies coming into the setting with nappies that are significantly soiled or wet and behavioural distress between the child and parent can be warning signs (Brandon et al., 2010).

Early prevention can support families at risk of problems escalating into abuse and neglect. Making families aware of initiatives such as healthy start scheme can help those who are on a low-income access vouchers for milk, vegetables, and vitamins which can be used during pregnancy and for 2 years after baby is born (Health matters, 2016).

Working with parents can establish any concerns and together work towards better outcomes. Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 states any safeguarding concerns should be reported, through partnership working early intervention can prevent any further impact to the child well-being or development (Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014).



Being a good role model, speaking positively and showing respect encourages young children to model kindness and good behaviour. Having compassion and loving nature supports children to cope better with changes to daily routine or upcoming transitions (Khan, 2019).

Grenier states, the key person values and respects children by including their likes, interests, choices when planning for learning opportunities, Taking the time to listen to the voice of children will give them a sense of belonging and strengthens positive relationship (Grenier, 2002). This also links to Article 2, 3, 12 of the United Nations Convention Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989).

Practitioners support inclusiveness by including the unique needs of the children they care for, supporting connections from home to setting and wider community. Providing young children to learn about unfamiliar cultures, religion, language supports children by becoming capable, healthy, enterprising, and ethical citizens which is embedded within the Curriculum for Wales 2022 (Welsh Government, 2021).



Attachment

Implementing a key person approach, provides babies and infants to feel secure, without this approach children may be handled or cared for by many different people, this can lead to insecurity and feeling of being abandoned (Mickelburgh, 2011) Attachment is essential as every child needs a special person who they count on whilst upholding article 3, 29, 37 of the UNCRC (Unicef UK, 1992).

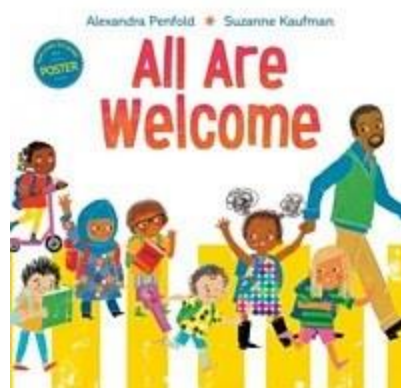
Article 1.10 within the early year's foundation stage (EYFS) states every child must be assigned a key person, that acts as safeguarding and welfare requirement in conjunction with Article 3.27 to ensure every child's care is tailored to meet individual needs. The key worker engages with families to provide access to more specialist support such as speech and language therapy, health visitor or other professionals (Statutory framework for the early years, 2021).

Bowlby theory signifies the importance of attachment, around birth to 12 months is a crucial time for a baby to develop trust, by having their needs met and trust that the caregiver will come back when they are left (Bowlby, 2008).



Practitioners have the responsibility to support families where attachment needs are not being met. When attachment is not formed, it can have a negative impact on the infants cognitive and social-emotional development (Goldberg, 2014).

Furthermore, the key worker can support young children who are at risk of inequality or discrimination (Li, Quinones and Ridgway, 2017). Child-centred approach has the child at the centre of all observations, planning, learning, care, and decision making (Weisner (2002).



Enabling experiences provide babies and young children the opportunity to challenge themselves whilst in an environment which promotes independence. Meaningful learning and play opportunities provide experiences which are used to build emotional resilience, supporting an infant to recognise their feelings, feelings of others and to self-regulate. Through exploration new experiences can be learnt which supports holistic development (Ebbeck, Warrior and Goh, 2018).

Practitioners facilitate young children to make the connection between area of learning and experience. Through observation and once the area of learning has been achieved, a key worker can facilitate the enabling child to move towards next area of learning (Papatheodorou, Luff and Gill, 2011).



With recent research in neuroscience Thomas (2015) suggest through brain imaging, it is visible to see this phase is a critical time where cells and neurons begin to make connections. Synapses are the connections, which send messages across the nerve cells that are formed with every sensation and interaction that a baby experiences (Infancy and Early Childhood the Educated Brain Policy Brief, 2018).

Piaget theory suggests at the preoperational stage, symbolic representation develops, young children can make a word or object mean something else. (Piaget, 1957). Practical experiences within play such as building blocks or loose parts can be used to further explore quantity, number, or pattern to support cognitive development (Educator, 2018).



Pikler believes babies need freedom to move within their environment, movement is one of the first forms of symbolisation. It is visible to see the trace of experiences within the space of play, practitioners should not rush to clear away the space, this provides extended learning experiences to take place (Tardos, 2010).



Enabling environments are relaxed, comfortable, a home from home feeling, this encourages babies and toddlers to participate in play. Eager to explore their surroundings when feeling emotionally safe and secure. Through Repetition, touch, manoeuvre they manipulate objects within their environment to gain a better understanding (Rodgers and Wilmot, 2011).

According to Tierney et al, creating environments that are emotionally enabling with opportunities to regulate emotions, express behaviours in a positive way is important. Supporting children within these areas of learning prepares for any upcoming transitions and changes in routine (Tierney and Nelson, 2009).



Babies and toddlers need a safe, nurturing, and loving environment to support their holistic development. Ronald signifies, that both nature and nurture contribute to a child's development, that a baby is not born as a blank slate but shaped by the environment and caregivers around them (Ronald, 2018).

Stimulating environment have safe objects where children can explore, through freedom of movement, motor, visual and sensory development can be built upon. During the period when babies have tummy time the adult remains available to provide support to the child, they may feel overstimulated, bored, or tired (Froehle, Patel, Jellinek and Kaplan-Sanoff, 2014).

Indoor and outdoor spaces can include resources such as clay, this can be manipulated through squeezing, squashing, rolling this supports fine motor skills and creativity. Objects placed on a light box can show young children the effects of light and shadow. Resources such as chalks, crayons support mark- making, imaginary and role play such as dressing up or play kitchen supports both fine and motor skills whilst encouraging communication (Elkind, 2016).



Outdoor space should provide authentic experiences, exploration through varied landscapes such as trails, tunnels encourage movement such as crawling, rolling, walking, and running. Planks and tyres

provide opportunities to climb, various heights of rails allow babies to pull themselves up to standing position. Pathways can have different textures such as bark, gravel, or pebbles this supports not only visual interest but can build upon mobility skills for manoeuvring around uneven ground (Enabling environment, 2016).



Playing with sand provides opportunities for exploration, through digging and adding other materials this then can be investigated and manipulated providing open-ended experiences. Water play provides children to see their own reflection, the sound water makes can make this type of play very fun and engaging (Sand Play, 2016).



Both indoor and outdoor spaces can include a cosy corner, fabric attached to a fence with blankets and pillows creates perfect space for the practitioner to initiate opportunities such as storytelling and singing songs. Whilst indoors, a cosy nook can include hanging mirrors, natural items such as acorns or different coloured feathers, this supports multi-sensory experience (Teach Early Years, 2018).



Early sensory experiences are vital to support brain development, within the womb a baby uses their senses to understand the world around them. When born they recognise their mother voice and smell. From the moment a baby is born they are ready to participate in sensory play and explore their 8 senses (Tierney and Nelson, 2009).

Touch is the first sense to be developed, baby and infant massage is a good method to provide multi-sensory engaging experiences. During the massage, good eye contact whilst talking or singing teaches vocabulary and that language has purpose. Toys that light up or make a noise supports the child to understand concepts such as cause and effect, through touching the button, they learn it makes a noise or lights up (Gascoyne, 2016).

Encouraging engagement of a child's sense of hearing can be supported through singing, music, musical instruments and having interactions that expose the infant to many different rhymes. Reading stories, provides the adult to represent and act out different character within the story This supports the child to hear different tones and volumes (Faure and Richardson, 2010).



Books are versatile which can be used indoor or outdoor providing new experiences through sound and environment. Visual props such finger puppets, use of facial cue or setting up tuff tray areas with resources that link to the story promotes engagement and babies to have a multi-sensory experience whilst supporting children to develop fine motor skills, hand - eye coordination and concepts (Wright, 2018).

Treasure baskets and heuristic play can be used for babies and toddlers from 6-10 months up till 18 Months of age. Practitioners ensure the treasure basket is easy to access with low - sides which a have variety of natural everyday items. These items provide a wide sensory experience, this can be

achieved by including many different varieties of texture, colours, shapes, sizes, and smells (Hughes, 2020).



According to the discoverer of treasure baskets Goldschmied suggests, play provides sensory exploration that is achieved through the infant using their hands, fingers, and mouth to explore safe materials. It is a non-social play which gives the infant opportunity to explore independently. The practitioner role is to be responsive, not directive. This supports brain development and meaningful learning experiences by babies concentrating and having pleasure from the activity (Hughes, 2018).



Inclusion

For babies and infants to have the best start in life, the setting should address barriers to inclusion such as stereotyping, conscious and unconscious bias or negativity. With a whole group approach all practitioners can develop positive attitudes whilst implementing clear strategies and nurture collaborative approaches. Going beyond policy and legislation the setting can develop anti-discriminatory attitudes and provide a more positive inclusive practice (Macartney, 2016).

The setting can make adaptations such as a ramp, low-level spaces and facilities that are inclusive of SEND children or families with disabilities. This promotes a setting that is equal and inclusive whilst adhering to the Equality Act (2010).

Furthermore, educators can be the bridge between families and other professionals. Working in partnership with the health visitor, translator or a speech and language therapist can support in ensuring all needs are being met (Dombro, Jablon and Stetson, 2011).



Early intervention in the first 1000 days provides the best opportunity for babies, parents, and wider family to achieve better outcomes. Preventing any future issues or concerns to arise supports parents to adhere to section 7 of the education Act 1996 (Education Act 1996).

The current challenges

Early years alliance Covid 19 report highlights, regression in children's development is at an all-time high with infants losing the ability to play independently, expecting to be carried all the time when they had already learnt to walk. Other areas of concern are personal, social -emotional development and the ability for children to communicate and language was recorded with the highest area of concern (Gaunt, 2021).

Bowlby theory emphasise the importance of attachments (Bowlby, 2008) Covid restrictions of 2m apart made it exceedingly difficult for practitioners to provide nurturing and loving care. Bronfenbrenner theory signifies how the environment influences development of a child and how the interactions between environmental factors affect a child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 2007).



Wolf states, the use of masks stopped a baby or infant from reading the practitioners facial cues. Staff shortages and altered ratios impacted the holistic development of children due to the lack of learning experiences being provided. More efforts and time being used to control the infection with vigorous cleaning impacted the overall quality of care children received (Wolf, 2020).

Furthermore, Delphi study from the Welsh Government illustrates the impact of Covid 19, children with additional learning need (ALN) had the most negative impact on their social - emotional and cognitive development. Speech - language and physical development was impacted from families on

a low income, living with poverty, single parents, and those families suffering from long Covid or bereavement (Delphi study, Covid 19, 2021).



Professional Relationships

Practitioner's support professional relationships by creating a safe, nurturing environment which welcomes the whole family. Being non-judgmental and putting aside own value and beliefs is important in providing a fully inclusive setting with a high standard of care that supports the holistic development of all children (Nutbrown, 2008).

Families who are expecting a new baby or after baby is born can experience a mixture of emotions, Cymru Well Wales highlights parent's feelings include a sense of not coping, self-doubt and concerns of their baby's health, spending time alone or feeling isolated (Parental Insights, 2017).



Having an open-door policy, inviting parents to stay and play or coffee morning provides, families to see that their child is happy, safe, and cared for. This promotes positive relationship between families and setting to form (Elfer, Goldschmied and Selleck, 2011). Bronfenbrenner theory suggest, establishing positive relationship with families from the start and being available to listen to families strengthens relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 2007).



International Approaches

New Zealand early childhood education curriculum known as the Te Whāriki approach is, child-centred with a play-based curriculum. It emphasises the importance of meaningful connections within the community, these are formed with a deep understanding of every child and their family's culture (McLaughlin, Aspden and McLachlan, 2015)

Furthermore, mutual responsive relationships with families from day one provides, continuity between home and setting whilst developing a deeper understanding of the whole needs of the child. Partnership working with local authority, community, family, and setting provides a multi-cultural learning experience which is based on care, trust, and respect. This supports development, empathy among peers, a sense of belonging and acceptance (Lee, Carr, Soutar, and Mitchell, 2013).



Similarly, to foundation phase Wales, Te Whāriki approach is based on building strong relationships from the start. It is connecting to the child, those who are linked to the child, the environment of

home and learning whilst connecting to the wider community. Both want to build a foundation for all children to become competent, confident learners and communicators. Who are healthy in mind, body, spirit and achieve a sense of belonging (Welsh Assembly, 2014).

Holistic Approach

Enabling Pathway Wales highlights how practitioners should include young learners interests, motivations and aspirations whilst including the voice of the child during planning. Having a child-centred approach, collaborating and including families in their child progress supports holistic development (Enabling Pathway, 2021).

The National Minimum Standard (NMS) support settings to meet regulations linked to childcare provision. Care inspectorate Wales (CIW) regulates, inspects all childcare provision to ensure high-quality care and education are being adhered too (National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare, 2019).

Furthermore, building strong foundations from the beginning, ensuring all children and families receive the support they need is crucial for everyone to have the best start in life. Practitioners collaborate through partnership working with other professionals ensures during the first 1000 days the holistic needs of children and families are being met whilst practitioners provide, high-quality early childhood education and care (Enabling Pathway, 2021).





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