



The **First 1000 Days**

'Science tells us that a child's experiences from conception through their first five years will go on to shape their next fifty' - Jason Knauf, CEO of the Royal Foundation. December 2020.





1 - The first 1000 days of a child's life are vital for their individual cognitive, emotional, psychological and physical development. it begins right at conception leading up to their second birthday. It is regarded as a key passage of learning and understanding and poses opportunities where adjustments to care and the environments can be made to positively impact their lives.

Babies are particularly vulnerable at such a young age as their language skills haven't fully developed yet therefore parents and carers become advocates on their behalf. Early years practitioners should be aware of each babies needs and how to support their development displaying exceptional care.





2 - When thinking about the early stages of a Childs life it is important to look at the child as a whole, focusing on each aspect of their needs and how environmental influences can affect their brain and holistic development. Beginning with the mother during pregnancy.

According to the GOV.UK a healthy pregnancy sets up the unborn child for a healthy life, The unborn baby becomes susceptible to changes in the environment around their mother. They will hear and feel the influences of their primary care givers and in result form bonds. Early years practitioners have a duty to provide exceptional care and following best practice to support the primary care givers with development as well as ensuring that each and every child achieves their potential and thrives within their environments.

Activities



3 - The first 1000 days of a child's life are regarded as the most influential. For young children sensory activities and opportunities are important for brain development therefore having these new experiences early is paramount. Early years practitioners should strive to develop activities where children are able to gain multi sensory awareness and enhance cognitive skills, these activities can include story times, music and sensory activities.



Early years practitioners should always strive to adapt new experiences with sensory development in mind in order to maintain the stimulation of each and every child. Having a variety of experiences helps keep children engaged and Sensory activities can be particularly important for children with additional needs and can be a key part of their care.



4 - The Montessori method is an approach from physician Maria Montessori with regards to classroom learning that emphasises on independence and choice. This theory of teaching and learning understands that children have innate interest to learn and develop, able to do so in an appropriate environment that promotes a Childs optimal intellectual, physical, emotional and social development. Activities for self directed learning through exploration and play include pouring and scooping materials like sand and gluing and sticking objects, both of which the child chooses the materials they want to use and with assistance can create something unique.





5 - The Curiosity Approach

The Curiosity Approach was founded by Lynsey Hellyn and Stephanie Bennett who's ideas have helped enhance provisions for early years settings, motivating practitioners and professionals to create incredible diverse opportunities for children and young people. Many of their ideas are sensory based and nurseries all over the UK have adapted these ideas.



Messy Play

Messy play is an important aspect of learning. According to Gascoyne (2018) Children learn and develop best when they are free to enjoy plentiful and varied sensory experiences and it is fundamental that adults value the importance of messy play and how it is beneficial. As early years practitioners encouraging messy play in its various forms throughout continuous provision can create positive experiences.



Erikson (1902 - 1994) states the stages each child will go through during their first 1000 days. Building trust in uncertain environments, developing self esteem and promoting initiative are all parts of development that children will go through in their early years. As children grow they will face daunting situations that may challenge their self beliefs. These can become apparent in early years settings where some children may find some forms of messy play and group activities daunting and overwhelmed. It is good practice for early years practitioners to build positive rapports and create positive environments so all children are able develop skills, overcome fears and ultimately avoiding the negative feelings they may face.

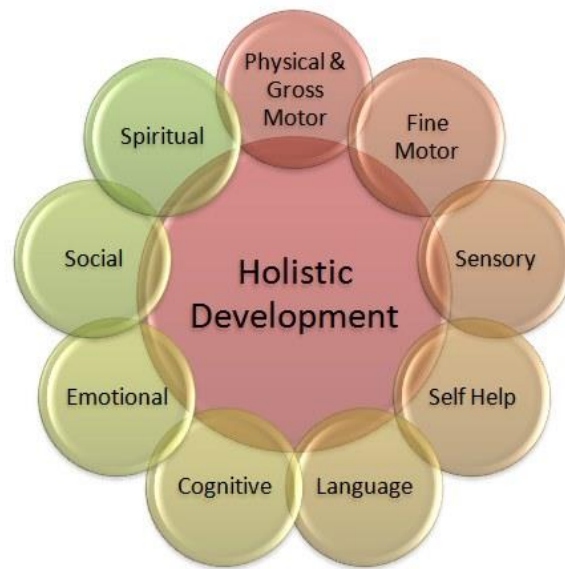
The importance of the Environment



6 - It is important to create stimulating environments that are full of learning and developmental opportunities. Having both indoor and outdoor experiences is also important and as professional practitioners supporting these types of learning outside of the setting is vital too. Assisting families in helping them support their children's learning is key to good holistic development.

The multi sensory activities and opportunities within these environments should be both age appropriate but also challenging. Practitioners should strive to encourage language and communication skills activities to help motivate and encourage learning. As babies develop they will continuously seek opportunities to copy and interact. These experiences

help to shape the brain in many ways and if a lack of these experiences can have a negative affect on the development of a Childs brain.



7 - During the first 1000 days of a Childs life is a key window for holistic development and brain development.

Nutbrown (2005) argues that importance of stimulating experiences for young babies on brain development. Studies that involve the relationship between a new born child and their mother has been regularly used to identify the complex capacity of babies and their cognitive growth. With regards to if a child is born with innate tendencies it is important that adults support and ultimately harness those in order for children to continue in their learning journeys, these core environments and relationships are crucial.

It is argued that ongoing studies regarding the role of the key person and cognitive experiences for babies are key to understand in order to maximise good practice so that provisions and information provided to parents and carers is the kind that will make the most out of each child's potential and meets their every need.



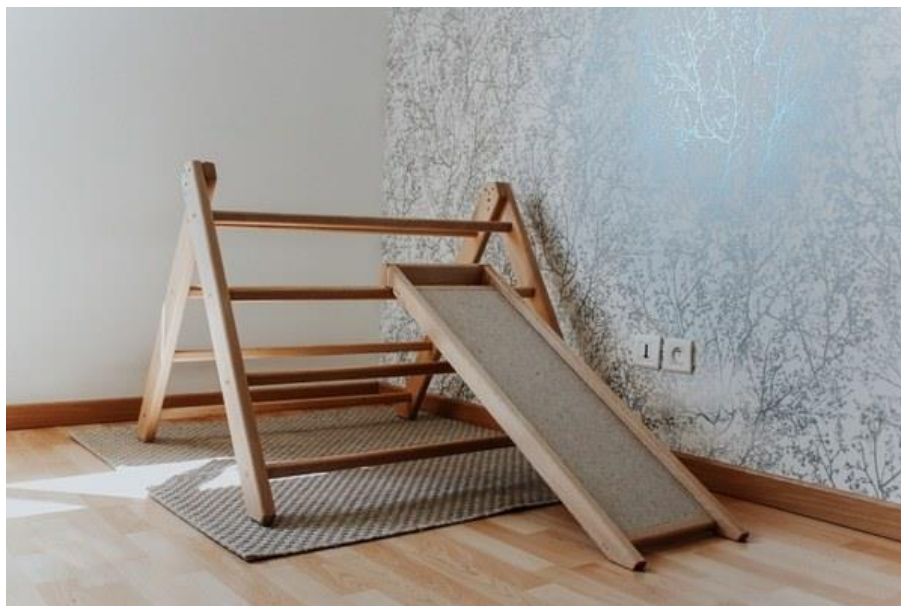
8 - **Environments** surrounding children are key to building curiosity and exploration. The Froebel Trust was created from the ideas of Friedrich Froebel, who believed strongly that learning begins at birth and childhood should not be regarded as just preparation for the next stages in life. His key values included the importance of play and creativity and a stage for adults to influence and promote the positive growth of children within our society.

Professional Practitioners should be skilful, observant and interested and they should be providing opportunities that are rich and purposeful. Striving to help children to take ownership of their own play and provide environments where 'freedom with guidance' can be portrayed. Assisting children in positively exploring themselves and the world around them.



9 - The **Pikler Approach** is a key approach that can be incorporated into modern best practices both within settings and at home. Dr Emmi Pikler paediatrician and scientist developed this exemplary approach to provision for children within the 1000 days. She argued the importance of children forming strong rapports with the adults around them which lead to supportive and attentive based relationships. Alongside the self initiated and natural progression of motor development within children in order for independence to be gained.

According to Marlen (2017) the Pikler Approach and early years frameworks have many similarities including the importance of the key person and children being able to freely develop physical skills at their own pace with the help of high quality and stimulating learning environments and resources. This approach can be easily adapted into early years settings, It requires practitioners having a commitment to learning how to adapt a child centred modelling. Involving carefully designed environments, positive routines and skilled, affectionate care giving.



The Pikler Triangle was developed by Emma Pikler, It is a wooden triangular shaped physical apparatus designed to assist children in independently developing their gross motor skills, learning how to pull themselves up and down building balance and confidence.



Being Inclusive



According to Nutbrown (2011) the word inclusive can have many different meanings therefore the word can be regarded as situational and setting dependent. Inclusion in early years settings focus on practice and how the environment is set to ensure that every child has a sense of belonging and equal opportunities. Using inclusive practice should be one of the main focuses for early years

professionals especially with its many positive outcomes not just for the child themselves but their families too. When families feel they are able to contribute to their childrens development and within their communities it helps create the feeling of belonging, a place where strong rapports can be built.

The ideas of inclusive practice and equality within the early years is a matter of constant discussion and there are many documents that emphasis on the importance of including everyone. The Index of inclusion is a detailed document that aims to help and support settings to increase the participation of infants in play and learning, it gives early years practitioners a framework to be able to self evaluate and review their provisions to make positive changes to promote inclusivity. As well as supporting positive responses to diversity and equality within communities.



Furthermore it is important to focus on and encourages how practitioners and childcare professionals can work positively with infants, parents and carers to ensure that each and every child has the best start in life regardless of their developmental, personal or physical needs. This is emphasised through the Every Child Matters (2003) documents that inform the rights of children and how practitioners should ensure that children are safe and protected as well as helping them fulfil their potential. Security and opportunity must go hand in hand putting child protection should be at the forefront.



Professional Partnerships

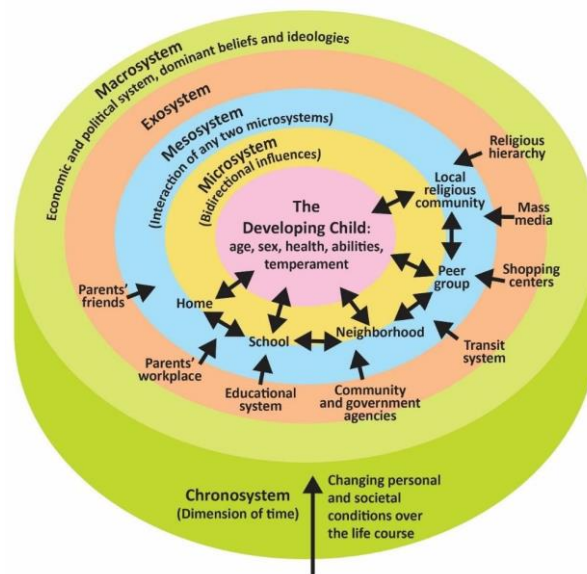


When working within the early years sector many professional partnerships are formed and having the skills to being a professional practitioner is all part of forming the best care for children and their families. According to Gasper (2010) partnership working is a fundamental concept at the heart and soul of social and educational policy, It provides vital opportunities where needs can be met collectively as well as individually. For partnership working to be successful it needs to embody in the notion of children, parents, families and their communities having access to a wide range of support and development services. In order for them to identify needs, access appropriate help, develop skills and increase confidence and self worth.





Professionals should supply the appropriate resources to improve organisations, plan and reflect on work jointly to ensure that children and their families are able to flourish. If partnerships aren't successful it can have negative affects not just on the child but their families too which can include special needs diagnosis's being missed, educational support not being offered and lack of vital help for families struggling especially with regards to post natal depression and mental health.



10 - Bronfenbrenner recognised that there are multiple aspects of a developing Child's life that interacts with and potentially affects the child as a whole. The initial interactions children have within the Microsystem of Bronfenbrenner's theory includes parents, carers and teachers who are important influences on children's brain and psychological development.

Early years professionals should strive to support families as well as other practitioners in creating strong support networks, the best environments for children in order to strengthen brain connections and neurons in these key 1000 days.

International Approaches



Finland

The aims of the ECEC in Finland is to promote the holistic growth, health and wellbeing of each child was determined by their age and developmental stage. This is successfully delivered through pedagogical activities based primarily around physical activity, play and cultural heritage. Physical development is a key part of Finland's early years provisions whereas on the contrary the curriculum's within the United Kingdom there is argued to be a lack of focus on holistic outcomes and more focus on ensuring that learning opportunities are planned and assessed regularly ensuring quality and consistency across all early years settings. Although this is also key to early years, the Finnish Curriculum argues the importance of children being able to freely develop and gain skills in more challenging environments building them holistically.



Each country has different ideas on how children in the early years should be educated and cared for, alongside this then forms individual curriculums. According to Saakslahti (2019) Finland's culture is very outdoor based and enabling children to be outdoors is all part of their country's ethos. Many Finnish early years settings have large outdoor areas with access to forest schools and woodlands and when observing these settings they found that children here spend on average 4 hours a day exploring physical activity outdoors. Furthermore Finnish children are renowned for their educational success which could be a lot to do with their varied, educational learning opportunities they are offered daily.

"Competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society"
- Early Years Curriculum, New Zealand Ministry of Education.





11 - New Zealand

Te Whariki is key to New Zealand's early years. From birth up to school age, New Zealand emphasises the critical role of social and cultural learning and the importance of relationships for young children. Children in New Zealand will enter early years settings at a young age solely for developmental purposes whereas children in the United Kingdom may enter early years settings for parents to return to work, this does not seem to be the case in New Zealand.



12 - Their Curriculum is based around a number of important principles which include holistic development, empowerment, community including families and relationships. Some of these principles are similar to the Curriculum in Wales including the importance of community centred care and building and maintaining strong relationships to help children succeed.

Respectful Care & Meaningful Learning



During infancy the connections between neurons become stronger and more extensive these are promoted through the experiences the child has. Young children having access to psychosocial experiences especially within childcare settings is important for the all round holistic development of the child. Using language and communication with babies consistently it can effectively enhance brain activity and skills.



13 - Repeating these good experiences strengthens neurons within the brain and practitioners should always strive to support the idea of building good connections through care. This can be done through day to day activities that involve caring for young children for example meal times, nappy changing and sleep times. For practitioners these child care activities can pose great opportunities for meaningful learning through the theories of serve and return. whilst undergoing activities for example changing a babies nappy it is important to respond to their ever growing communication skills, this can be done by the practitioner singing and responding to their babbling. It gives the every day child care activity another meaning and another opportunity for brain development to progress.

Bowlby (1958) proposed that attachments can be understood within an evolutionary context in that the caregivers provide safety and security for the child. Attachment is adaptive as it enhances the Childs chance of survival, lack of good attachments can lead to children becoming anxious and fearful.



14 - These initial attachments are from primary carers starting with the mother where emotional bond are built. Key bonds can be established within early years settings too with the key person who helps to settle the child and care for their every need. When bonds and relationships are made respectful care can be established. The child will build trust, become more at ease leading to them feeling happier and content. This is important with care giving such as nappy, meal and sleep times which some children may find daunting, the key worker will be able to cater to the needs of the child and make it an enjoyable process.

Potential Challenges



During the first 1000 days many challenges can be met. These challenges can have potential negative effects so being able to acknowledge them and adapt care accordingly is important.



15 - During the **Covid 19** pandemic many isolated and with childcare settings closing, many children lacked in social interactions both with extended families and peers. This had many adverse affects on children, families and their development. According to *Babies in Lockdown* (2020) almost half (47%) of parents reported that their baby had become

more clingy, leading to them struggling in social situations. Developing feelings of nervousness and anxiousness. This meant that making the transitions back into childcare settings difficult and a more sensitive and lengthy process.



*16 - **Covid 19** didn't just impact the child themselves but also their parents and primary carers. With many stating they struggled mentally including many mothers and fathers suffering with post natal depression and lack of help being received to support, this is due to problems accessing appropriate services. Alongside parents being more stressed and emotional attempting to return to work and settle their children back into childcare settings. Childrens development seemed to face many problems not only socially but holistically. Professional practitioners understanding the struggles for both the child and their families is key to making the transitions as smooth as possible.*

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