



EXCEPTIONAL CARE IN THE FIRST 1000 DAYS

MODULE: The First 1000 days (ECEY4005/C)

STUDENT: James Cunliffe

STUDENT NUMBER: 0600004

EXCEPTIONAL CARE IN THE FIRST 1000 DAYS

Collins Dictionary (2022) suggests the word **exceptional** as being something of quality and done to an unusually high degree.

Collins Dictionary (2022) suggests the word **care** as something that is valued and important.

Exceptional care in the context of the first 1000 days, indicates therefore that the level of care is to a very high standard over and above the norm. This document includes many elements that must be addressed to ensure that exceptional care is delivered. Promoting exceptional care is paramount and will ensure that children are kept safe, happy, and healthy in an environment that will facilitate positive development.







What are the first 1000 days?



The UK Parliament's Health and Social Care Committee (2019) states that the first 1000 days of a child's life refer to the conception date to the age of 2. This period is fundamental in laying the building blocks for a child's development. Where a child experiences both positive body and brain development, their chances of success in life are much improved.

Supporting this is UNICEF (2017), which opines that the first 1000 days of life, span from the woman's period of pregnancy to her child's second birthday. This unique term offers opportunities for building the foundations for prime development and good health throughout their lifetime.

Pregnancy Birth & Baby (NO DATE) state that the first 1000 days is a period when a child's body, brain, and immune system develop substantially. A child will need positive relationships, safety, security, time to play, a nutritious diet, and a healthy and loving environment.

According to the National Health Service (2021), a child spends approximately 280 days (40 weeks) in the womb. It is important to note that this period represents approximately 28% of the first 1,000 days and is therefore a critical period for development. Fatherly (2021) states that many stages occur in utero, including brain cell formation and neuronal movement. Motor, sensory, touch/feel, and response to external movements may be evident, (e.g., kicking). Babies' hearing develops and an awareness of vibrations and sounds begins, (e.g., Mother's heartbeat, music, parents' voices, etc.).

Why is it important?



The UK Parliament's Health and Social Care Committee (2019) explains that when children experience misfortune or stress within this 1000-day period, it may affect a child's progress and development compared to other children of a similar age. Where these children are left without support, adverse childhood experiences such as abuse, upset, trauma, and conflict between family

members, are likely to stay with a child throughout their lifetime, perhaps even resulting in the passing on to future generations.

SSM Health (2019) explains that bonding between parent and child can start before the child is born. Experience has shown that a baby can feel love and affection from a parent even before birth.

Active intervention, particularly within the first 1000 days of life can undoubtedly enhance a child's chances in life and improve their health and development, hopefully resulting in a thriving and fairer society.

CHALLENGES WITHIN AN EARLY YEARS' SETTING



Staff Retention

Following research, the Social Mobility Commission (2020) identifies that the Early workforce suffers from a shortage of staff numbers. They identify that although many of the workforces are enthusiastic and passionate about their role, staff retention is exceptionally poor – more than one in six leaving within 12 months. The causes would appear to be:

Low remuneration and insufficient support / Demanding workloads with high levels of paperwork / 95% female workforce with many taking time off for maternity & career breaks etc./ Insufficient training and opportunities for professional advancement. This often results in management & staff relations breaking down due to unrealistic goals.

Insufficient Funding for SEND children.

Nursery World (2022), states that 75% of early years providers have recorded increases in student intake of SEND-assessed children within the past 2 years. Despite this, 40% of these settings have received no additional funding or support. Settings often find that the cost of application for further funding outweighs the staffing cost.

Day Nurseries (2022), highlight some of the difficulties when applying for funding : Slow, complicated process when applying for SEND funding / Lack of clarity in the funding system leaving applicants unsure of suitable products./ Funding if not often backdated, making it hard to maintain over a lengthy application period.

ACTIVITY IDEA 1 - Reading / Singing to your Unborn Baby.(During first 280 days)



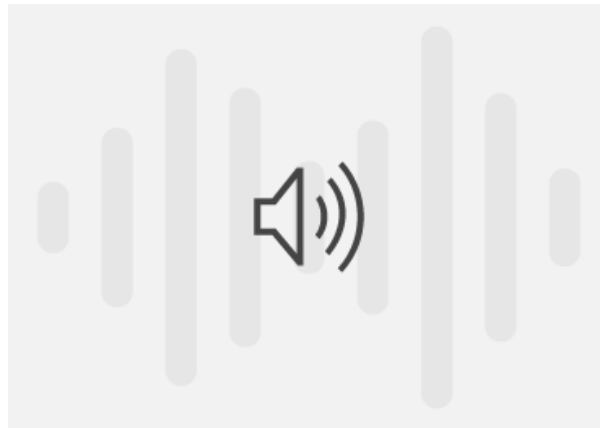
Healthy Children (2021) suggests that exposing your unborn child to music and reading aloud have a positive effect on brain development.

NHS England (2021) advises that a baby begins to hear sounds at around 15 weeks. Sounds from the outside World, the mother's heart, digestive system, and voice may all be present but are unlikely to be clear.

First Cry Parenting (2022) states that as the pregnancy weeks progress, a baby may start to respond to muffled sounds, and this is the prime opportunity to begin communicating with them. Reading a story vocally can aid in the stimulation of a baby's emotions and potentially result in reactions to various stimuli. When a baby hears a voice, a recognition of these sounds, rhythm, and modulation

may be developed. Utilising rhyme, song and repetition also enhances the quality of this experience. Regular communication in this way may strengthen any bond between parent and unborn child, perhaps also providing the familiarity of their carer's voice when a child is born. During this stage neural connections form quickly and hearing external voices and sounds will likely strengthen bonds.

Healthline (2018) states that research has shown that babies are able to learn within the womb. At this stage, 'learning' in this context, is becoming familiar with the tone and audio. It has been recognised that babies who hear repeated sounds whilst within the womb are calmed when they hear this after birth.



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1 - Example: Story for Pre-Birth Child.

ACTIVITY IDEA 2 - Baby's Sense of Touch. (During first 280 days)



BabyCenter (2022) explains that touch is the initial sense to develop, beginning at just 7 weeks. Subsequently, receptors focussed on touch evolve throughout the baby's anatomy. Within eleven weeks of conception, a child will start to make minor movements. This exploration of themselves and their surroundings allows them to experience various feelings and sensations including, warmth, chill, and discomfort. As the sense of touch is the initial way to communicate it is important that the parents utilise the experience to bond with the baby and build upon this sensory interaction.

Pregnancy birth & baby (2021) advises that you should not delay in bonding with your baby. The pregnancy stage provides the ideal opportunity to begin this process. This is essential for post-birth development and advancement.

They suggest that such bonding and interactions can be achieved by the following:

- Touching, massaging and rubbing the belly. Is there a response?
- Reacting to a baby's movement, (e.g. the baby is kicking), by gently applying pressure against the baby bump. Is there a response?

ACTIVITY IDEA 3 - Baby Massage. (From Birth)

PACEY (2017) opines that baby massage creates a calm, holistic and relaxing environment catering to the basic requirements for nurture and love in all humans.



The National Childbirth Trust (2021) discusses the most important sense of a new born child - touch. Using baby massage techniques provides an opportunity to strengthen the bond between a carer and a baby. Baby massage aids tummy issues and trapped wind, whilst also helping infants to relax, perhaps even improving sleep patterns. Prior to a baby being capable of understanding language, regularly, carers attempt to calm and reassure them through touch. Parents may cuddle and hold a baby, so introducing baby massage just becomes part of the natural bonding process.

The International Association of Infant Massage (2023) explains that worldwide, baby massage has played a large part in parenting for many years. This sensory skill offers a meaningful experience and an opportunity for vocal and non-vocal communication.

For the child it may help in the following ways:

- Aids a feeling of secure attachment.
- Enhances a feeling of love, respect, and being appreciated.
- Provides improved relaxation and sleep patterns.
- An improvement of body coordination and self.
- Provides some relief from teething, wind, etc.
- (For Carer) Stronger bond and closeness to the child
- (For Carer) A better interpretation of the child's body language and feedback.
- (For Carer) Enhanced confidence in caring for your new born.

ACTIVITY IDEA 4 - Messy Play. (From Birth)

According to the Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center (2022), Messy play provides the underpinning skills that are paramount for a child's development. Often seen as one of the most important learning activities that carers may offer to young children.

Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center (2022) state that messy play is the discovery of various materials and their properties led by the child's own curiosity. Children are curious by nature, and as such, their own exploration develops their senses at a pace suited to them. Children benefit from language, social, and motor skills whilst creating their own experiments such as moulding clay, arranging stones, making patterns, and pouring different materials. These activities are enjoyable, maintain engagement, and can be set up in early years settings and at home.

Gascoyne, S. (2019, p. 7) describes messy play as a child's requirement for physical contact with various materials and substances. These interactions with the various materials enrich children's lives by offering exploration and investigation.

Twinkl (No date) states that the rewards of messy play strongly outweigh the mess! Messy play is experiential learning that requires the use of all senses for exploration, (i.e., taste, smell, feel, and how they appear and sound when we play with them). Children should be encouraged to play independently however they wish. Interacting with the environment in this way ensures the good development of a child's imagination. Materials having different textures are ideal for encouraging experimentation. These materials are common in most households such as oats, jelly, pasta, and rice, all of which offer differing tastes, smells, textures, and shapes. This sensory experience allows children to develop and express themselves in a creative manner.

ENVIRONMENTS



Hodgman, L (2011, p. 2) explains that the early years environment is an essential part of a child's development and learning.

An Early Years environment should:

- Challenge and stimulate the child.
- Recognise the child's preferences and facilitate exploration and experimentation
- Be adaptable to create an environment for focussed and reflective education.
- Provide areas for reading and more practical activities.
- Assist children with education, developing skills, and introducing new ones.
- Improve communication and language.
- Promote children's creative skills, and imagination and allow risks to be taken and to get things wrong.
- Educate children of other religions and cultures.
- Keep children safe and provide positive emotional support.
- Promote independence and enjoy learning.

What is an Enabling Environment?





Hodgman, L (2011, p. 2) states that an enabling environment within the early years is both an outdoor and indoor setting that provides the following:

Suitable Area for Children.

An array of age-appropriate resources.

Display Boards. An area of stability.

Accessibility.

Hodgman, L (2011, pp. 3-4), asserts that there are many theorists that have different approaches to curricula and how these may apply to a learning environment. Three examples of different approaches are; **Montessori Approach, Steiner Approach, and the Reggio Approach.**

APPROACH 1 - MONTESSORI



*Hodgman, L (2011, pp. 3-4) states that the **Montessori Approach**, (Maria Montessori), focuses on offering children the opportunity to learn in a resourced environment developed to encourage children to lead their own learning.*

The environment is clear of clutter, equipment labelled, and all placed within a child's reach. This approach aims to provide free access between outside and inside spaces encouraging independent activity.







APPROACH 2 - STEINER



*Hodgman, L (2011, pp. 3-4) states that the **Steiner Approach**, (Rudolph Steiner), is founded on providing an appropriate environment utilising various natural resources.*

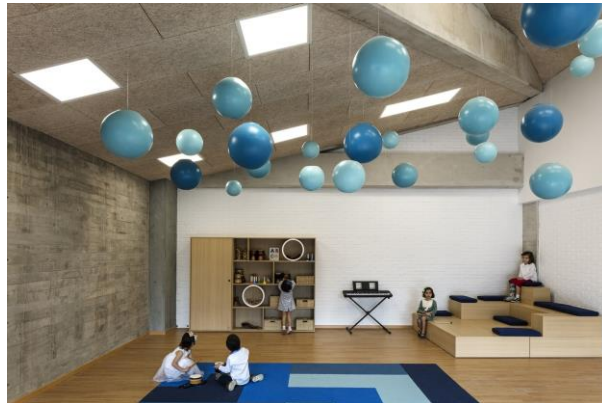
Sharp corners, bright resources, and the use of plastics are all absent.

Natural materials including timber, sheep wool, and crayons produced from beeswax are often used. This approach promotes creativity and exploration of the environment.



APPROACH 3 - REGGIO





Thornton and Brunton, (2007, p. 34) discuss the **Reggio Approach**, (Reggio Emilia), offering a variety of spaces, large rooms, small rooms, and outdoor settings.

The environment is such that it encourages children to explore, communicate, investigate, and express their feelings, giving them time to think and reflect.

A prominent feature is the use of light from both artificial and natural sources. Introducing areas of shadow and reflective surfaces, positioned in prism formation providing alternative viewpoints.

BEING INCLUSIVE

Brodie and

Savage (2015, p. 1) opine that Inclusion within the early years addresses all facets of inclusion covering special education needs, gender, multiculturalism, sexuality, multilingualism, and different communities.



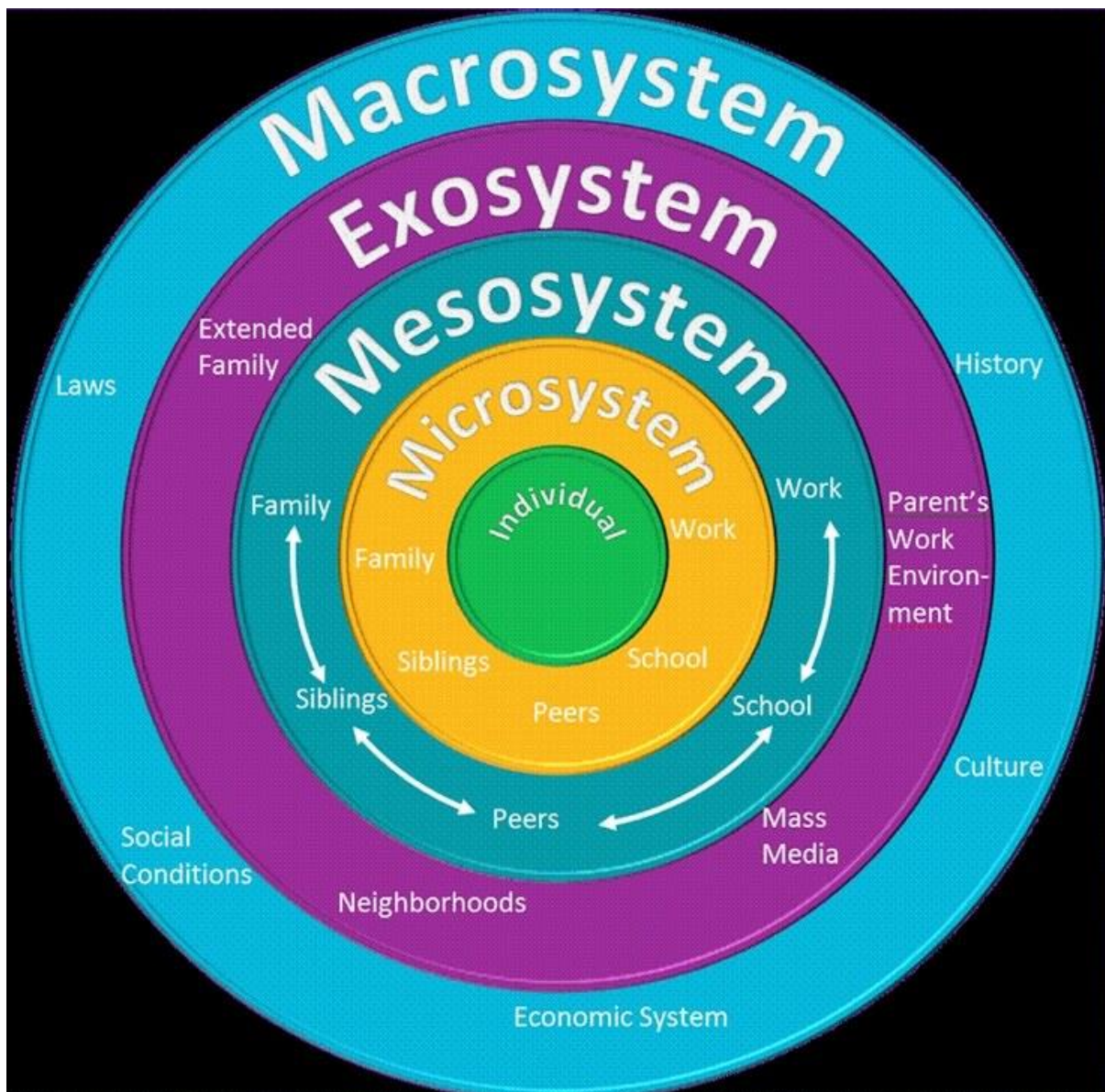
Cologon (2014, p. 12) explains that 'inclusion' suggests to some, a minority group and perhaps individuals with a disability. However, inclusion is about everyone. Cologon, (2014) states that perhaps inclusion is just being a teacher. Get to know each child's level, enhance their talents, and recognise interests to improve progress. Adjust the teaching approach and resources as required.

CRPD Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2017) identifies, within Article 24, the rights of students with disabilities to education.

UNICEF (2017) states that all children, including those with disabilities, have the right to be educated. Educational settings should be inclusive and able to accommodate children of all abilities and at all stages, including preschool. Inclusion can be explained as an environment that has adapted the layout and structure, pedagogy methods, and curricula. These then become available to all children with disabilities. Accommodating a student with a disability into classes without the appropriate changes and adaptations is not inclusion!

According to Cologon, K (2014), early years practitioners are more adaptable, competent, and skilled when they are inclusive. Inclusion can be a detailed and continuous process and therefore, takes time to gain a full understanding and to implement it fully into practice.

PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS / RELATIONSHIPS



HM Government, (2022) explain that there is much benefit to forming good relationships with both carers and parents in that this may enable some children to thrive irrespective of their personal history.

Working with families and carers is paramount in the early years. Creating good relationships allows all parties to get an understanding of family, culture, and previous history.

Conkbayir and Pascal (2018, p. 119) explain that it is strongly advised that partnerships are nurtured with all parents and/or carers. This ensures that the setting is better placed to offer help to the carer when needed and to aid the development of their child. Conkbayir and Pascal (2018 p. 109), discussed the Bronfenbrenner ecological model. This model highlights that child development is influenced by many relationships over a period and not by a sole factor.

Lindon and Brodie (2016, p. 47) opine that Bronfenbrenner's ecological model highlights that children will not develop if they are isolated. The importance of positive partnerships and relationships within the early years environments should not, therefore, be underestimated.

RESPECTFUL CARE

UNICEF (1989), Article 12 of the UNCRC states that children have the right to communicate their own views and any item that may affect them and be taken seriously.



Christie, Tony (2012) suggests the following strategies to achieve respectful care for infants:

- Children need to have a mutual relationship with their carer.
- Inviting children to engage and the carer wait for a sign of approval before interaction.
- Interpret children's wishes by quietly monitoring them and their gestures and signals. Even a very young child can demonstrate their wishes and accordingly have acknowledged their own human rights, UNCRC.
- Being there for the child without intervening unnecessarily during their activities.
- Giving children choices of situations that may involve them and await an indication of their wishes.

Early Years Matters, (2020) believe that children require and deserve to have their emotions met. Every practitioner should nurture, encourage, and appreciate a child as an individual. It is important therefore that we provide an element of professional love to children, and so doing promote the following: -

- Emotional Development.
- Resilience.
- Have a feeling of self.
- Have a feeling of security and safety, happy and relaxed.

MEANINGFUL LEARNING





Woods and Boyle (1999) explain that learning is thought to be achieved better through the child's active participation as opposed to passive. This supports meaningful learning in that the child is actively involved in the process.

Twinkl (2022), discuss the process of active learning, where children join in activities in lieu of just listening.

Love Every (2022), assert that meaningful learning occurs when a child participates or is exposed to everyday objects and activities. (e.g. feeding time, nappy changing, bath time, bedtime). These routines are ideal opportunities to interact with babies as part of a daily routine. Each of these repetitive routines should be an enjoyable 'experience' for both the child and the carer.

Ability Path (2021) supports this by suggesting that a child learns best through hands-on meaningful activities – doing, moving, and using touch.

INTERNATIONAL APPROACH 1 (Scandinavia)

Maynard and Water (2014) state that these three Scandinavian countries focus their early year's education on outdoor play and

exploration. Although it is not statutory for young children to attend these settings before they are of school age, most of them do!



Scandinavia (Sweden, Norway, Denmark)

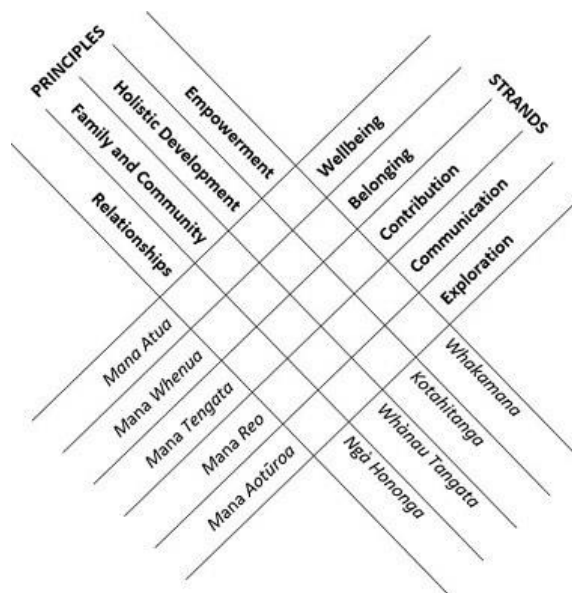
An example of an outdoor learning setting would be the Forest School concept. According to the Forest School Association, (2021), a forest school is a child-focused inspiring process, offering holistic exploration opportunities. The process encourages exploration, and play and involves an element of supportive risk-taking which enhances a child's confidence and feeling of self. This is achieved by learner-led, practical experiences in the natural world. Forest Schools are thought to have originated in Scandinavia and are now seen all over the world.

Maynard and Water (2014) describe a forest school as follows:

- A longer-term option to be regularly repeated. Preparing, adapting, observing, and reflecting are all prime elements.
- The school activities are located within natural environments such as woodlands. This enhances the relationship between the child and the natural environment
- A holistic approach is encouraged. Determination, self-esteem, creativity, and confidence building.
- Children can undertake supported risks within their setting.
- A centre for learning and child development.
- Operated by forest school practitioners who are qualified and appropriately trained.



INTERNATIONAL APPROACH 2 (New Zealand)



New Zealand

New Zealand Ministry of Education (2017) explains their early childhood education is not compulsory but despite this, 95% of children make some use of this education. The country uses Ta Whariki to lead its curriculum.

New Zealand Immigration (2022) explains that Ta Whariki is an experiential learning route, that includes all the events and activities that would occur during the early learning stages. There is no

formal assessment at these early stages and alternatively, the progression of each child is logged within a child's own profile booklet. Te Whāriki's key to delivery is to make every child the priority and reinforce the importance of respect, and responsive relationships.

New Zealand Ministry of Education (2017) suggests that children will develop the following skills:

- Capable and skilled learners.
- Good communicators.
- Healthy in spirit, body, and mind.
- Secure in their sense of self.
- Feel a valued part of society.



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