

Module: ECEY4005

Name: Rachael Baugh

Component – Sway (The First 1000 Days)

AI Cover Sheet

I have acknowledged the use of Google Scholar to research material for my studies.

The First 1000 Days

The first one thousand days of human development can be defined from conception to a child's second birthday. Public Health Wales (2023) believe the first 1000 days of a child's life is vital for setting strong foundations for successful outcomes for a child's future and recognises the importance of parent's role in providing those early experiences for development. Public Health Wales (2023) acknowledge that is not solely parenting skills alone that shape those early experiences, and other factors also play a role on those early experiences and interactions from social status, accessibility to quality resources such as healthcare and education as well as the financial constraints families face in a cost-of-living crisis. These can all play a role in maintaining generational disadvantages and generate poor outcomes in health and wellbeing for children. Yates (2015) also echoes the idea that for optimal health, wellbeing and success we need a strong start. She also shares the view that there are other factors such as malnutrition, stress and lack of stimulation within the first one thousand days of brain development that will impact children's lifelong outcomes and creates inequalities. It is these inequalities that lead to prolonged poor health, poor education and prevents children from thriving to the best version of themselves. Moore et al (2015) suggests removing barriers in inequalities consists of a multi-sector collaborative approach that is supported by policies and a commitment to invest in a range of support services and interventions in the early years reducing inequalities and gaining better outcomes for disadvantaged families. HM Government, Health and Social Care Committee (2019) review on the best start in life has recognised and highlighted the importance of investing in our early years and children's first one thousand days to protect and promote our future generations. They also emphasize the importance of collaborative, multiagency working and investment to provide a range of resources, services and support for families and children to give them the best start in life. According to Stead (2024) research in neuroscience indicates that human brain development in the first one thousand days is rapid and the connections the brain forms during this time significantly impacts on learning and development. This suggests the connections children make through their early experiences and interactions lead to lasting impacts on lifelong outcomes both positive and negative. It is therefore critical that we invest in developing children holistically and provide quality support for families during the first one thousand days to ensure we close the gap in inequalities and give all children a wealth of opportunities to necessary experiences, interactions and appropriate care to develop cognitively, physically and emotionally. Public Health Wales (n.d) has identified that we need to provide the foundations for a fairer start for children and families they have highlighted actions to help close the gap in disadvantages by strengthening systems, involving parents and families to improve policies and practice, minimise child poverty and its impact giving way for fairer futures.

Exceptional Care.

There are many elements to providing exceptional care for babies and children from meeting basic needs, providing safety and security, establishing good relationships that foster belonging and providing enabling experiences and opportunities to build confidence and self-esteem. Exceptional care in the first one thousand days is essential for supporting cognitive, physical and emotional development that will foster positive outcomes for a child's future and health. The Nurture Framework (2018) captures all these elements of exceptional care within five components that encourages and supports holistic development through good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, security and safety and opportunities for early learning. These components can also be reflected in one of our early theorists Maslow's pyramid of needs. Maslow (1943) emphasizes the importance of meeting various human needs at different levels to be able to reach our full potential. Maslow's first tiers include meeting our physiological needs with food, and water. Maslow then talks about the need for safety and security before we can then explore relationships on our journey to self-actualisation. His pyramid of needs is used widely to inform early years and form the basis of exceptional care. Early years settings should promote all aspects of the hierarchy holistically to encourage children to develop and thrive to the best version of themselves. The Nurture Framework (2018) component on responsive caregiving reinforces the significance of giving responsive care and forming emotional connections in the first one thousand days and reflects Bowlby's theory of attachment. He highlights the critical role of relationships to support emotional and social development fostering good attachment and regulation.

The Institute of Early Years Education (2024) states that provision in the early years is key to supporting children to develop and foster positive outcomes. They state an enabling environment supports all children but will target those with disadvantages and additional barriers. The Institute of Early years education (2024) also highlights the importance on fostering inclusive practise and environments to ensure that every child has access to quality experiences and opportunities that support healthy development to reach their full potential. An enabling environment contains two aspects. Firstly, the physical environment provided offering authentic, purposeful and meaningful experiences that gives free access to all resources to foster trust and responsibility. Secondly the emotional environment provided should nurture, foster safety and build trusting relationships. The new Non maintained curriculum for Wales (2022), has been developed by early years practitioners and child development experts to support exceptional care as it encompasses five developmental pathways and focuses on child cantered learning. It places the role of early years practitioners to be that of enabling adults that observe, plan and provide experiences that follow interests that are relevant

to the child, starting with where the child is at and encompasses inclusive environments ensure every child no matter what their need can thrive.

The United Nations Convention on the rights of the child, UNCRC (1989) provides a framework and guidance for promoting exceptional care for children and young people. It consists of fifty-four articles advocating children's rights many of which can also be seen in Maslow's hierarchy of need. The articles stipulate that we must act in the best interests of children, providing them with the care and support, access to quality health and education to thrive physically and cognitively as well as opportunities to relax and play in an environment that is safe and protected from harm. The UNCRC legislation and our knowledge of the importance of the brain development of in the first one thousand days forms the basis of how early years settings provide and build exceptional care for children.

Exceptional care based on theory and supported by policies and legislations in our early years settings will provide effective learning environment and foster holistic development and inclusive practice for all children. It acts as a preventative to inequalities families face by closing the gap and giving all children access to the quality care and education they need to reach their full potential.

Professional Partnerships

Bronfenbrenner theory views child development as a relationship between systems and highlights the role that relationships between these systems plays in children's development. Bronfenbrenner (2005) said "Educators can support children's development by creating environments that promote positive, stable relationships and by working to strengthen connections between a child's microsystems, such as fostering parent involvement in school". Having Professional partnership working together in the early years supports holistic development for children and enriches the network of support and resources they can access with a shared understanding of the needs and abilities. The Children's Workforce Development Council (2008) highlights that integrated working between multi-agency will put children at the centre and improve their lives because the shared and joined up approach means we can effectively meet children needs and improve their chances of a more successful and healthier life.

Early years practitioners therefore play an important role supporting the healthy development of children by acting as the link between all stakeholders and supporting families to build relationships and work collaboratively with other professionals. They can provide information and resources to families about good nutrition, development milestones and offer workshops and strategies that families can utilize in the best interests of their children to promote healthy development. They also act in early identification of delays and concerns and can act fast to providing early interventions

that have positive outcomes for children and ensure inclusive practice and accessible learning at the level of child.

There are many maternal factors that can influence child development during the first one thousand days. According to Likar and Patil (2022) research is showing that several factors such as a mother's wellbeing, diet and stress during pregnancy can negatively impact the development of their unborn child with lifelong poor health implications on their immune system. Likhar and Patil (2022) also express the importance of maternal and child nutrition within the first one thousand days particularly that lack of good nutrition during pregnancy and early life can affect a child's ability to develop learn and thrive. This emphasises the importance of encouraging good nutrition and fostering positive environment for mothers to enhance the development of unborn children giving them a healthier start in life. Capitani et al (2023) also share the idea that external factors in maternal health during the first one thousand days of pregnancy and motherhood will impact on child development and the importance of building strong social care to improving maternal health to foster better outcomes for children.

Challenges

The Early Years faces many challenges that impact being able to provide high quality care for children and families in the first one thousand days. Access to limited funding both in the health care and the early years education sector means the quality of care, education and availability of effective resources and support is limited or stretched. Within the health care sector this impacts those vital first one thousand days of life because new parents and families are not receiving the post-natal care, guidance and support required to lay those strong early experiences and interactions. Our Health visitors are crucial in identifying children and families that are in need and require support services for access to further support services and resources and act as preventatives to generational disadvantages and by implementing early interventions to give children the best start in life.

Lack of funding within our early years sector can lead to poor educational outcomes for our children due to lack of purposeful and authentic resources, often poor wages and difficult working environment over longer hours make it hard to retain staff and advocate for their wellbeing. Currently there is a gap in early year practitioners that have the qualifications and skills needed to provide quality education and the rise in additional learning needs (ALN) put more pressure on practitioners leading to further difficulties in retaining staff.

Early Years Workforce Strategy (2017) recognises the challenges and barriers early years sector face in providing and maintaining high quality care for children due to high turnover of staff, a under skilled workforce and the need for more support for additional learning needs. While government and public bodies have committed to initiatives and

strategies to support and invest in our early years to improve exceptional care provided for young children within the early years sector. Early years settings can mitigate some of challenges themselves by adopting valuable ethos and commitment to improving the wellbeing of staff through reflective practice, sharing best practice, and providing continuous professional development and progression opportunities. The wider community organisations can be valuable resources to early years setting by enhancing the resources, skills and equipment to enrich the learning environment for children, community skills can act as professional learning for staff and provide diverse learning opportunities to explore culture and diverse groups. They offer opportunities to develop relationships and foster belonging and respect.

Activities

As the enabling adults we need to offer children a variety of activities that create meaningful learning and are purposeful to children's interests that foster development in all areas. Piaget believed children experienced and built knowledge of the world through their basic senses and physical actions and saw learning as a process of discovery. This suggests we need to give children opportunities to explore and find out about their environments through curiosity and discovery. Vygotsky believed in a zone of proximal development which was the gap in what children can achieve independently and what they can achieve with support and guidance from an enabling adult. These ideas can be used when planning activities and ensuring the environment includes opportunities for independent exploration and opportunities to build on knowledge and learn new skills.

Treasure Baskets were developed by Einor Goldschmid and offer children a wide range of benefits, they encourage independent exploration, opportunities to enhance cognitive skills through problem solving, imaginative play and sensory experiences. Treasure baskets support Froebelian ideas by providing hands on learning, freedom with guidance and starting where child is at. They offer real life resources that are natural and can be independently explored.

Singing and Songs –

Singing and songs have huge benefits for babies and children and fosters development of many skills. Singing and songs will encourage language development, and due to the patterns and sequences support cognitive development as well as help children to recognise letters and sounds. Singing is usually done as a group making it excellent for social interactions and development. Incorporating songs with movements or actions promotes fine and gross motor skills. Songs can be used in early years for transition and children then start to recognise daily routines and shared enjoyment to boost wellbeing.

These can also be linked to Froebelian ideas and his belief in mother songs and their role developing relationships and interactions and building of belonging.

International Approaches

While the United Kingdom is taking vital and key steps to investing in our early years we could learn a great deal from our international partners. UNICEF (2019) report that the United Kingdom has ranked with some of the unhappiest, poorest and least educated children. Therefore, it can be useful to look at other international approaches and how these are impacting the early years

Te Whariki approach in New Zealand recognises the importance of child centred learning that encompassing the role of families and the wider community in child development. Its meaning is “woven map”, and it does not have any formal assessment process and relies solely on adults supporting children to be motivated to reach their full potential. The principles and strands are all interwoven to develop the curriculum and enhance well-being. The United Kingdom could learn about promoting the wellbeing of our children through more wider community work and hands on learning and strengthen family involvement within early years settings. The non maintained curriculum for Wales encourages early years sectors to come away from recording and gathering information on progress and attainment and now has a focus on observing, analysing and responding to children developing a more authentic learning experience that is centred on where each child is at and follows a child’s interests

Reggio Emilia approach is an Italian curriculum and has many similar ideas to Te Whariki in that it also recognises the importance of child centred learning and development and the role of the wider community and environment in education. It encompasses a flexible approach to learning and focus on what the child has an interest in and is motivated by. It has a hands on project based ethos fostering strong competence and communication skills.