



The First 1,000 Days

ECEY4005/C

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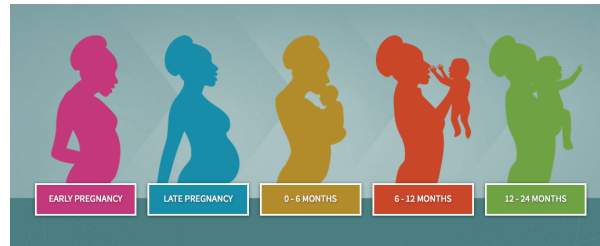
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This digital scrapbook will feature information regarding a child's first 1,000 days focusing on what is needed to ensure the development of the child looking at theories, approaches, and experiences and why they are important for the child in these early days..

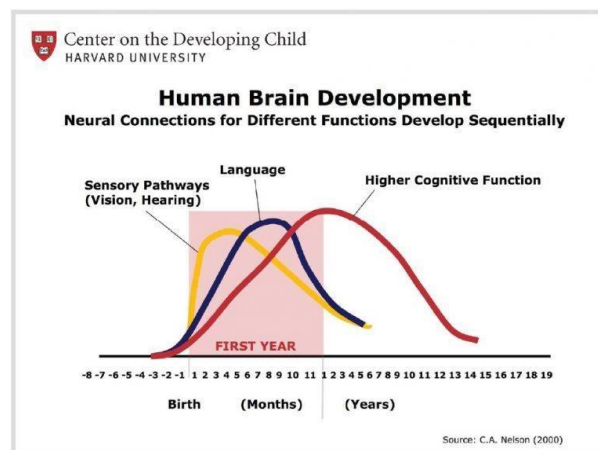
The first 1,000 days refers to a child's life from the moment they are conceived to age 2. During this time, significant growth and development is occurring rapidly especially in the brain (Best start for life, 2021). Therefore, during pregnancy it is important for the mother to look after herself by being healthy, eating well, and keeping stress levels down. The biology of the first 1000 days (2018) explains that maternal nutrition influences outcomes for children and can have long lasting effects. As a result of this, pregnancy becomes a vulnerable time for the baby and needs the health of the mother for its survival. Because of this access to Doctors, Midwives and Health Visitors are important to provide support and information to keep both mum and baby healthy (National Health Service, 2023).



In their first 1000 days, a baby needs:

- *Healthy food*
 - *Loving relationships*
 - *Safety and security*
 - *Time to play*
 - *A healthy environment*
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<https://www.pregnancybirthbaby.org.au/the-first-1000-days>



1 - Best start for life (2021)

This diagram shows the rate of neuron connections being made during the first 1,000 days.

Brain development begins in the womb and more than 1 million neurons build connections and develop in the first year of a baby's life. According to Best start for life (2021) this begins the process of building pathways for basic functions such as vision, hearing, cognitive functions and early language skills. Genes passed on can provide a basic blueprint, but quality experiences can influence how and when the genes are expressed. Similarly, United Nations International Children's Emergency

Fund (2017) states that these connections only come together when the baby receives nutrition, stimulation, and protection. It is a well-known fact that breastfeeding in the early days has many benefits including nutrition and development of the brain (Bust and Pedro, 2020). At the same time, baby will also build communication skills when their mother responds to their cries and facial expressions, making them feel safe and secure.



Good nutrition from the point of conception can shape a child's future with regards to brain development. Poor nutrition can cause irreversible damage to the brain affecting the child's ability to do well at school and progress to earning a good living in the future. This can also lead to other health problems later in life and diseases. 1000 Days (no date) state that investments should be made to support both mother and baby with nutrition and well-being to create prosperous futures.

Additionally, The biology of the first 1000 days (2018) recognises that Women's nutrition before conception can influence outcomes of the infant by affecting the supply of nutrients early in the pregnancy which in turn influences foetal development. This means that for the best start to a baby's life, a woman will need to be physically fit and eating well before and during pregnancy to have long lasting effects on the child's growth and survival.

The most important experiences come from interactions between babies and caregivers and are built by a back-and-forth process called serve and return. It is a focused, two-way interaction between an infant and an adult wanting to communicate, understand each other and show care and interest (The

education hub, 2020). Babies are born wanting to connect and will seek to make contact using eye contact, babbling and physical movements with the adults around them. Hence, the adult responds with sounds and gestures (Best start for life, 2021). Getting responses often enough is essential for all aspects of holistic development and interactions such as this will build foundations for future brain development including emotional, mental, and physical health.

Furthermore, when infants receive enough love and responsive attention during the period of 1,000 days, they will feel safe and soothed which is supported by Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, which is the first step to eventually maintain self-actualisation. According to the work of Maslow (1965, cited in Poston, 2009) basic needs such as food, water and safety needs to be met before higher needs can be fulfilled. Therefore, once the infant feels secure, the brain can then focus on learning, to explore, and play. Consequently, if an infant has not received attention, communication, and love then they will feel unsafe and highly stressed which causes the brain to produce excessive amounts of stress hormones which can wire the brain to react, defend, and survive. In the future this can cause difficulty in keeping friendships, accepting comfort, and regulating emotions (Harvard University, no date).

[Serve and Return Interaction Shapes Brain Circuit.](#)

Caregiving



In the 1930's Pikler used observation of babies in her studies of physical and psychic health and recognised that this was achieved through secure attachment, making links to relationships and respectful care (Teach Early Years, 2015). Pikler focused on two principles based on the importance of respectful relationships with young children and their freedom of movement according to their development stage. A key point to consider when discussing relationships is the adult giving the baby their full attention which the baby will interpret as love. This gives the child a calmness and allows them to be in the moment with their carer (Attachment Parenting, 2020). Similarly, another point which reflects on building relationships is part of intimate care such as nappy changing. This can offer a beneficial opportunity for the baby to build trust and bonds with the carer through

interactions and rich language exchanges. Only About Children (no date) support Piklers' theory for nappy changes to be a quality experience. This suggests that slowing down changes will help baby feel relaxed and comfortable which is an important opportunity for building relationships and learning.



Professional love provides practitioners with appropriate language to describe the close, loving, intimate and affectionate bond, which over time, is developed with children in their care. Professional Association Childcare and Early Years (2016) states that sensitivity towards young children in their care and reading what is needed to make children feel loved at any moment in time. Furthermore, Family (2021) explains that professional love can be seen as practitioners taking on the role of caregiver while children are away from home. They are not replacing parent's love, but making sure children feel safe, offered comfort and have their needs met. However, this can also look different for each child as they are unique, and the amount of professional love will vary from child to child according to their needs. Consequently, some children may not have attachments with their primary caregiver and may require a different approach (EY Matters, 2020).



Inclusion in early years is a vital part of supporting the well-being in children by creating an environment that embraces diversity and ensures all children have the opportunity to take part. Brodie and Savage (2015) explain that a holistic approach is needed to focus on addressing children's individual needs, rather than assuming there are different types of needs to be expressed referring to special needs. Practitioners can plan to support children's holistic needs when observing them at settings and providing activities to compliment this. Curriculum for Wales (2023) supports this through the enabling adult planning engaging experiences based on observations of the child's needs and interests. Inclusion has many benefits to ensure all children have equal opportunities including a positive environment which promotes children's sense of belonging and well-being. It also supports children's individual needs and promotes social awareness including understanding and acceptance of differences (One Education, 2023).

Brodie and Savage (2015) state that if people are to have the choice to be included, then their voice must also be heard and taken into account of in the worlds they wish to be part of. This is supported by United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) referring to article 13 – freedom of expression which allows practitioners to create an environment without discrimination to encourage and support children's different forms of expression.



Professional Relationships and Partnerships



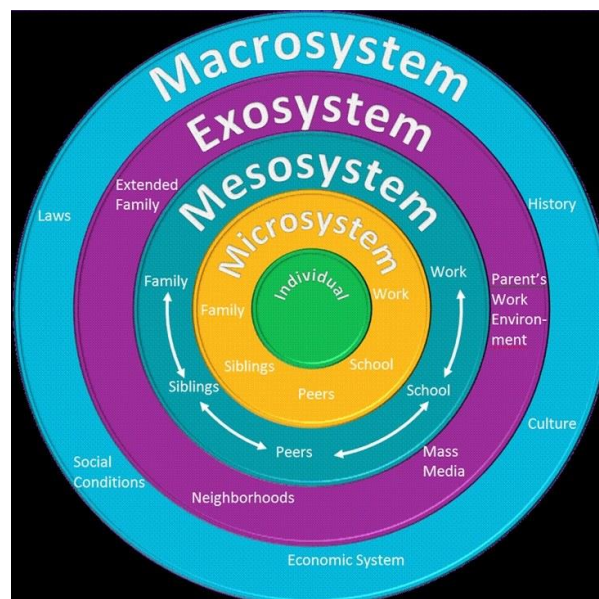
Babies are born vulnerable therefore relying on adults for survival because they have a lack of communication skills (First 1001 days movement, 2021). This means that the role of the adult plays an important part during the first 1,000 days. Throughout the first five years parents, carers and childcare workers provide support to a growing child. During this time, children develop a wide range of skills and abilities and explore the world around them through developing communication skills, behaviours, and emotional attachment (Save the Children, 2016).

By the age of two, children are to meet their developmental milestones, but this can only occur if they are supported and encouraged by an adult to learn the necessary skills such as language and physical development. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978) compliments this idea suggesting that what a child can do with help from an adult. This is known as scaffolding where the adult is aware of the capabilities of the child and are responsive to their needs (Aubrey and Riley, 2019). Adults create environments where children are encouraged to explore when they feel safe to and are provided opportunities to express themselves independently. Practitioners are to encourage children's curiosity by observing their play and using teachable moments to support their learning (Hwb, 2022).



According to Birth to 5 Matters (2021) building relationships will support learning and development and young children will share these experiences with a trusted adult. Their learning can also be enhanced when building positive relationships and gaining trust from families which is important when children start in settings (Wilson, 2016). By demonstrating good communication skills and

sharing knowledge will gain trust and respect from parents (Powell, 2010). Practitioners will need to communicate with parents and find out as much information as possible to meet the needs of the child. This can be achieved by mirroring the child's routine from home to ease transition including feeding and sleep times.



Relationships are an important part of a child's development. To illustrate this point, one might refer to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) where he stated that a child has a microsystem in which there are immediate contacts or environments such as family, nursery and peers that influence the children (Aubery and Riley, 2019). He stated that even before birth babies are affected directly and indirectly by external influences in their family and community. According to MacBlain (2018) Bronfenbrenner suggested that influences can be directional or bi-directional. An example of this could be a baby making a cooing sound to which mum will rush to pick baby up and give lots of attention. In this way, baby is influencing and directing mums' behaviour which suggests bi-directional influence as well as babies being influenced by the behaviours and actions of others in the circle.

This theory is also supported by some parts of Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969, cited in Holmes, 2006) where it is suggested that the relationship between the baby and caregiver is essential to the child's social, emotional, and cognitive development. Babies are born to seek attachment for feelings that safety and security brings, and they have a biological need for a protective, attachment figure. If there is an absence of this, developmental difficulties can occur (Music, 2011).

During intimate care times such as nappy changing, adults build trust by creating a secure attachment (Birth to 5 Matters, no date). Children thrive when they are in loving and secure relationships which can be provided by a key worker in settings to maintain consistency, so children feel safe, supported and comfortable (Early Years Matters, 2023).



Effective partnership working in early years is important for the development of young children. This involves communication and collaboration between practitioners, parents, healthcare professionals and the community (Gasper, 2009). There are many professionals involved in the care and development of a child's first 1,000 days including maternal support in pregnancy from midwives and antenatal care, health visitors for regular check-ups, doctors providing healthcare including vaccinations and community support such as baby and toddler groups. These professionals work with parents to meet the needs of their family, enabling them to access the most appropriate help and support allowing parents take greater control of their lives.

Practitioners work closely with each other and parents to share information and identify any concerns with a child's development leading to early interventions to support the child's needs. At the age of 2 parents, practitioners and professionals complete a Progress Check. This can celebrate progress made, identify any additional needs and use support of other professionals to support the well-being and development of the child. This is important to share with parents to maintain positive relationships (Department of Education, 2022). Hwb (2022) suggest that strong connections between home and community can strengthen a child's sense of belonging. In settings children can benefit from having a key worker. Practitioners having this role can provide emotional support to the child and observe their behaviours and act on any changes. They can be a point of contact with parents which builds trust. A key worker will also know the child well and be able to identify progress or delays in learning and development and put interventions in place (PACEY, 2016).

Professional partnership aims to improve organisation, planning and reflecting as a team. Working together provides everyone with better understanding of each other's professional knowledge and to learn from each other's experiences as a unified whole. Flying Start (2017) provides a service of childcare, access to parenting support and speech and language. Working together with various agencies involves effective and collaborative partnership for all involved to achieve the aims set out.

Environments and Experiences



During a child's early years exploration is important for development. According to Hwb (2023) authentic experiences both indoors and outside can lead children to develop a sense of belonging and appreciation of the world around them. Children have the opportunity to explore and express

themselves physically, creatively and imaginatively while the environment promotes curiosity leading them to develop skills such as problem solving and critical thinking (Clare, 2012).

Children's learning should be hands on, meaningful and encourage children's independency. Curriculum for Wales (2023) suggest activities should include real life opportunities such as cooking, gardening and cleaning. Practitioners should provide opportunities to experiment in mark making with not just crayons but shaving foam and wet paintbrushes for example and Sensory play using materials to stimulate children's senses help them to make sense of the world that surrounds them developing fine motor skills, language development and problem solving. (Action for Children, 2022).

Other theories share these principles such as Reggio Emilia whose holistic approach saw children as human beings who are born with an innate capacity to develop as individuals and build their own knowledge of the world around them. They need to socially interact with those around them, but they also have the right to. Children possess a hundred languages which refers to their potential to build knowledge and how they express their thinking (MacBlain, 2018). The environment is considered important to children's learning as classrooms are decorated neutral and filled with natural light with spaces arranged to encourage exploration. Natural resources are used to provide a sensory rich environment with links to nature (Kinney and Wharton, 2008).



Additionally, The Montessori Approach placed a strong emphasis on the environment being the third teacher. Aubrey and Riley (2019) suggest that Montessori noted that the child developed a familiarity with the environment during the unconscious mind stage. At this stage children needed to feel secure in their environment and in order for this to happen, the child needed structure. Montessori environments were designed to meet their needs and allow children freedom of choice giving them confidence to explore (Pound, 2008). Therefore, environments are bright neutral spaces

full of natural resources made from, wood and stone to promote a sensory rich environment. Areas are at the children's level making resources accessible encouraging independent learning. Practitioner also encourage responsibility for the environment by getting out and putting their resources away at the correctly labelled areas. (Isaacs, 2012)

[The Montessori Prepared Environment](#)

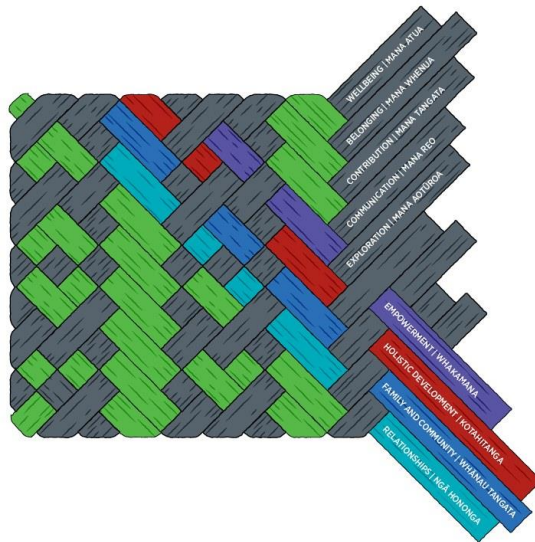


Te Whariki is the New Zealand early years curriculum. Children are seen as competent and confident learners and communicators who embark on the curriculum following a journey. They will encounter events, experiences and activities and these are underpinned by the framework to assess the child with focus on the importance of respectful, reciprocal and responsive relationships. (Pound, 2008)

MacBlain (2018) explains the principles of the curriculum are interwoven with five strands. These are:

- Well-being - The focus is children's health where they feel safe and secure.
- Belonging - Children and families have a strong sense of belonging and have links to the wider community and the wider world.
- Contribution - Children are seen as equal individuals and their contributions are valued.
- Communication - Children are encouraged to use their own languages including stories of culture.
- Exploration - Children are encouraged to learn through exploring their environment and play is valued to develop confidence in learning.

Children will attend a Te Whariki setting within the first year of their life and their curriculum is very similar to Wales. Ministry of Education (2017) states in their document that their curriculum provides opportunities for children to explore, be creative, and engage with peers in experiences that extends their learning. Practitioners support children's interests and strengths and provide clear boundaries to acknowledge and respect children's rights to have increasing agency.



2 - <https://www.championsproject.nz/ideas-in-action/te-whariki>



Loose parts have many exciting areas of development for children. Daly (2015) suggested that it promotes curiosity, critical thinking and creativity to name a few bringing a sense of excitement and adventure to children's play. Loose parts are objects that can be moved around the environment, manipulated and controlled while playing. Piaget (1952) first explained that children can actively manipulate the environment when engaging with people and objects.

Practitioners are to source loose parts with to awaken the senses with bright colours, textures and to invite conversations to encourage collaboration. Resources should be captivating, open-ended and mobile for children.



Goldschmied (1994) believes that treasure baskets are essential for a baby around six to nine months. At this age they can be supported to sit or can sit independently on the floor with a basket in front of them at a reachable distance to develop their core muscles. It is recommended that the basket be made of natural material and filled with real and natural objects of different textures for babies to explore (Forbes, 2004). This promotes concentration and hand-eye co-ordination. Practitioners are encouraged to select objects suitable for children's physical needs and development. Treasure baskets use all of children's senses to explore and play with the objects where they can select objects and play in their own time and at their own pace (Early Years Matters, 2023). Practitioners sit close by to support babies choosing objects and offer emotional support if needed. They can then observe babies interacting with the basket and note any interactions or schemas such as filling and emptying containers (Atherton and Nutbrown, 2013).





Current Challenges



There are many challenges during a child's first 1,000 days particularly recently with the effect of COVID lock down, the cost-of-living crisis and challenges of children attending a setting. According to Havard (2022) the lockdown was responsible for fewer social opportunities between families and friends which has seen developmental effects on children for example speech and language difficulties and milestones not being met. Education Endowment Foundation (2022) claims that there is evidence to suggest that pandemic has had negative effects on children' well-being.

While this may be true, it needs to be considered that every child develops at their pace and there may be some additional learning needs that has not been recognised yet. The pandemic has also affected parents in accessing support from the community as restrictions were tightened (Children and Covid 19 in the UK, 2021).

Early Years settings faces its own challenges with a high staff turnover leaving children not being able to form attachments with regular staff. As staff are poorly paid it can be a challenge to keep them. According to Early Years Careers (2016) it is suggested that high turnover of staff can be distressing for the children leading to broken early attachments. Futhermore, with the structure of the day, shift patterns and ratios can present challenges to both the staff and the children.

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