



Source: Arnerich, 2020

The benefits of using Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing Scale and Baby Effective Early Learning Programme (BEEL) Improving Quality in Early Childhood Settings for Children Birth to Three to ensure quality in early childhood education.

ECEY 2011. Leadership and Management

Diana Cune/ 2007412.

Currently, organisations and systems around the world, whether from the public or private sector, seek the highest quality of services or products, as an outcome of their efforts, pursuing excellence by continuously improving and adapting (The Chartered Quality Institute, no date). In the early years sector, quality of education and provision matters so much more as the services are focused on holistically improving children's lives (Donoghue, 2017).

Within the early years, research shows that the term 'quality' itself shifts its meaning due to its subjective, thus relative nature, where stakeholders hold different views on it and therefore, they measure quality of early educational provision differently (Siraj, 2019; Cottle and Alexander, 2012). Reed (2012) and Weisner (2016) argue that while quality practice can be assessed through evaluating children's long-term learning and developmental progress, the world's complex social and political issues make standards of quality of the early years provision in certain regions of the world seem unattainable in other regions or countries, where even education of the lowest quality can have a powerful and positive impact on children's lives. This it is argued that the programmes and scales for measuring quality of early years education must take into considerations socio- political, economic and historical context of the settings, allowing for local and cultural adaptations (Pascal and Bertram, 2018; Reed, 2012).

One of the most prominent early years research project in the UK - REPEY and more studies since, demonstrated that a qualitative early childhood education positively influences children's developmental outcomes long after childhood (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002; Siraj-Blatchford; 2005, Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2008; Purdon, 2014). A related research study - the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) measured educational provision by considering children's progress and therefore deemed effective pedagogy as an element of quality for early years settings (Sylva, *et al.*, 2004; Cottle and Alexander, 2012). However, using children's outcomes to measure the effectiveness of the pedagogic approach, may not give an accurate rendition of a setting's quality (Taggart, *et al.*, 2015). Both studies mentioned above found out that the highest scoring early years settings also had highly qualified practitioners, revealing the importance of professionalisation of the early years practitioners. Nevertheless, questions still arise. What exactly is quality in

the early years education? What are the conditions for early years provision to be of high quality? How is it measured?

The complexity of quality in early childhood education and care sector stems from the many components it touches, starting at a personal level, where practitioners' personalities, kindness and love help establish warm relationships and safe environments, the professional development they must pursue and values they must adhere to, continuing with structural aspects such as micro policies, leadership, management, teamwork, class ratios and ending with macro policies or current social and political issues (Bonetti and Brown, 2018; Reed, 2012). Welsh Government (2014) highlights the three key elements of a successful high-quality Flying Start setting which comprise the environment, the people and the experiences of the child, all of which have to be of the highest quality. Regarding the three key elements, Siraj *et al.* (2019) groups the first two into structural elements of quality, such as class ratios and size or teacher qualifications, whereas the child's experiences are related to process quality which includes all aspects of social, physical and emotional interactions, opportunities, materials available, and activities. Therefore, rating scales based on structural components of quality have been created assuming that process quality is an implicit consequence of structural quality (Ho, Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2010). However, while the structural quality of early years provision is relatively easy to measure, as it follows the official government policies and its generic minimum standards, the true value of quality appears in the process element of it, where the educator's plays a critical role in the caliber of children's experiences and interactions, and implicitly, in the quality of the early years setting (OECD, 2012).

One such non-statutory process quality measuring tool is the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing (SSTEW) scale, created postliminary to REPEY and EPPE projects mentioned above, which revealed that using sustained shared thinking was a key practice of high quality scoring settings (Siraj *et al.*, 2015). The fundamental concept of this measuring scale is the sustained shared thinking (SST) practice, defined as at least two people cooperating in an intellectual dialogue to find solutions to problems, to clarify ideas or concepts, or to extend a line of thought and so on (Siraj *et al.*, 2015). SST stems from Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD), which states children need to be supported by adults in their process of learning and development, and where language plays a vital role in

promoting thinking skills (Purdon, 2014). The second concept of SSTEWE - emotional wellbeing, is an integral part of SST because a practitioner must be knowledgeable of a child's feelings and behaviour, their development or their cultural background to extend thinking and support their progress (Siraj *et al.*, 2015).

SSTEWE scale focuses on two developmental areas: social and emotional development and cognitive development, with five sub-scales which hold fourteen items that indicate and describe practice, with a rating scale from 1, indicating inadequate practice, to 7, pointing out excellent practice (Siraj *et al.*, 2015; Howard *et al.*, 2018). Even though the SSTEWE has rating marks ranging from 1 to 7, there are only four levels of quality judgements: inadequate, minimal, good and excellent.

Howard *et al.* (2018) point out that SSTEWE was created as a support in identifying opportunities for SST in early childhood education and care practice, to increase and improve these episodes and also to reflect and identify which interactions are more effective than others in the context of children's developmental progress. However, Fisher and Wood (2012) highlight that even in the context of self-reflection over the purpose of interaction and to identify the characteristics which prove its effectiveness, the term 'effective' has relative value and a consensus of what it entails must be reached.

Nevertheless, there are challenges to using sustained shared thinking as a practice. Neale and Nino-Pasternak (2017) highlight the challenges of SST, as opportunities are usually omitted, mainly due to practitioners' inability to recognise or to adequately engage children in SST. The authors also point out that the initial definition of SST does not include any form of social interactions, such as encouragement, but only refers to 'cognitive' episodes where active learning takes place through either scaffolding, modelling, discussing or narrating. Purdon (2014) highlights practitioners' obstacles for using SST regularly include lack of sufficient time or staff, long-hours and exhaustion, group ratios, distractions from others, insufficient resources or training and lack of support or understanding of SST from other practitioners.

Howard *et al.* (2018) found out that the SSTEWE scale is capable of identifying environmental elements that could be linked to children's numeracy and literacy outcomes. Kruty *et al.* (2021) examines SSTEWE in the context of Ukraine's early years provision, highlighting that the scale is valuable in assessing the environment and enabling conditions for children's emotional wellbeing. However, they also found

out that Ukrainian educators were unable, due to lack of skills, to use all SSTEWS sub-scales, particularly those related to encouraging critical thinking, SST, or supporting and extending communication, matching other research studies which point out the need for further training (Purdon, 2014; Siraj *et al.*, 2015).

Moss (2016) argues that currently, investments in the quality of ECEC are driven by neo-liberal politics and economic reasons, where children are seen as human capital and their education is reduced to a series of outcomes and achievements. The author argues however, that ECEC quality improvement must reflect and adapt to the political, social, economic and cultural realities of the society, which is what the Baby/ Effective Early Learning (BEEL/ EEL) quality assurance programme adheres to (Evans, 2012). BEEL was designed to help settings working with children under three years to evaluate and improve quality of education and care, and EEL extends the programme to include children aged three to six years (Bertram and Pascal, 2006; Crosse, 2013). Initiated in the UK in 1993, BEEL was developed to improve children's educational experiences by offering training and support for ECEC practitioners, to build upon their expertise and abilities so that the quality of education provided to children is higher than the minimum standards (Pascal *et al.*, 1998; Bertram and Pascal, 2006). The BEEL framework of evaluation and improvement of quality is structured upon three main elements: the context, referring to the physical environment, staffing, pedagogic strategies, curriculum, the process which relates to teacher-child educational interactions and the outcome, where the results of learning are visible, such as well-being, academic achievements or self-respect (Pascal *et al.*, 1998).

The BEEL process of evaluation uses certain observation techniques, such as the Child Involvement Scale, based on professor's Ferre Laevers' ideas, who noticed that the more children are absorbed in their activities, the more they learn. The Child Involvement Scale rates children's involvement on a scale from one - which refers to an absent or passive attitude, with no interest or curiosity to explore, to five - when a child is immersed into the activity, showing signs of acuity and enjoyment (Evans, 2012; Lopes and Mesquita, 2014). The Child Involvement Scale (also known as the Leuven Involvement Scale) is centred around the Vygotskian concept of social and contextual learning, or ZPD, and extends it with Bruner's scaffolding theory, where the adult supports and extends a child's intellectual ability. Therefore, because of the vital role the adults play in these interactions with children, their level of involvement

is also measured by the BEEL programme, termed Adult Engagement Scale (Pascal and Bertram, 2018). As such, the adult-child interactions within the BEEL framework are seen as a symbiotic relationship, where the level of interest the child shows influences the adult's level of engagement (Pascal and Bertram, 2018). A research study in Portugal point out that EEL/BEEL programme (known in Portugal by DQP - Desenvolvido Qualidade em Parceria) enables the creation of a community of ECEC practitioners which share best practice and collaborate in their action of improving the quality of educational contexts (Lopes and Mesquita, 2014). Moreover, the study recommends that, given the need for professional development of the early years educators, designing an online platform and social network for communication would be beneficial, as it would foster dialogue between practitioners and it would include those who are isolated due to geographical or other reasons.

In regards to the evaluation frameworks presented above, there are certain similarities but also nuances to point out. Firstly, both STEW and EEL/BEEL are evaluation frameworks which require training before using them (Lopes and Mesquita, 2014; Siraj *et al.*, 2015). Secondly, both scales correlate to the ideas formed by the early education academic community in the mid and late twentieth century, such as the Vygotskian ZPD and Bruner's scaffolding theory, as mentioned above. Thirdly, there are some items which overlap in both scales, for instance, STEW's second sub-scale with its only item relating to how to support social and emotional wellbeing, which correlates with EEL/BEEL's first feature of the third section - Outcomes, which details emotional wellbeing. social competence and self-concept. Another example might be STEW's first sub-scale (building trust, confidence and independence) with its three items matching EEL/BEEL's second and third feature of the Outcomes section - related to social competence and self concept.

However, from a technical point, STEW is built on five areas of practice, where the first two areas encompass the social and emotional development, and the remaining three focus on cognitive development, as pointed out above (Siraj *et al.*, 2015). EEL/BEEL is built on three domains: context, process and outcome. The context looks at the environment, with ten indicators such as, learning experiences, aims, professional development, staffing, planning and assessment, parent partnerships and others (Pascal and Bertram, 2018). The process section encompasses observation techniques which measure the pedagogic effectiveness in

children's learning, by using the Child Tracking Observation Schedule and the Child Involvement Scale and also the Adult Engagement Scale (Lopes and Mesquita). And lastly, the outcomes section of EEL/BEEL has three sub-sections, where it looks deeply into the child's emotional wellbeing (connectedness, emotional language, self-esteem a.s.o.), into social competence and concept of self (such as relationships, empathy a.s.o.) and into attitudes and dispositions to learn (searching for creativity, independence, resilience, motivation a.s.o.) (Pascal and Bertram, 2018). Thus, BEEL differs from SSTEWE in structure and by incorporating structural aspects of quality ECEC such as leadership and management, staffing, parent and community partnerships, the physical environment. SSTEWE is designed to include children from birth to five years, however, typically, children between two and five are included in such evaluations, as all children develop differently (Siraj *et al.*, 2015). BEEL however can include children from birth to three years and EEL extends it to children up to seven years (Evans, 2012).

To sum up, both the SSTEWE and EEL/BEEL scale have been proven to be effective instruments of quality evaluation of ECEC environments. Despite structural differences, both scales are taking into consideration contextual variations of settings and personal data of children included, and also recognise the role of the adult and the importance of quality interactions in the early years educational experience.

## Reference list

Arnerich, M. (2020) *Part 2: Ideas to Promote More Sustained Shared Thinking – with Kathy Brodie* [image]. Available at: <https://www.family.co/blog/promote-sustained-shared-thinking-kathy-brodie> (Accessed: 2 April 2023).

Bertram, T. and Pascal, C. (2006) *The Baby Effective Early Learning Programme. Improving Quality in Early Childhood Settings for Children from Birth to Three Years*. Birmingham: Amber Publishing.

Bonetti, S. and Brown, K. (2018) *Structural elements of quality early years provision: A review of the evidence*. Education Policy Institute. Available at: [https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Early-years-structural-quality-review\\_EPI.pdf#page30](https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Early-years-structural-quality-review_EPI.pdf#page30) (Accessed: 26 March 2023).

Crosse, K. (2013) *Supporting practitioners to develop quality provision in the early years*. Available at: <https://app.croneri.co.uk/feature-articles/supporting-practitioners-develop-quality-provision-early-years> (Accessed: 1 April 2023).

Cottle, M. and Alexander, E. (2012) 'Quality in early years settings: government, research and practitioners' perspectives', *British Educational Research Journal*, 38(4), pp. 635-654. Available at: <https://web-p-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=749c80e4-c2c6-41b8-9803-d8b4238f9826%40redis> (Accessed: 20 March 2023).

Donoghue, E. A. (2017) 'Quality Early Education and Child Care from Birth to Kindergarten', *Pediatrics*, 140(2), pp. 1-6. Available at: <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/140/2/e20171488/38652/Quality-Early-Education-and-Child-Care-From-Birth?autologincheck=redirected> (Accessed: 20 March 2023).

Evans, M. (2012) 'Quality Assurance, Part 4: Effective Early Learning', *Nursery World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> April. Available at: <https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/features/article/quality-assurance-part-4-effective-early-learning> (Accessed: 29 March 2023).

Fisher, J. and Wood, E. (2012) 'Changing educational practice in the early years through practitioner-led action research: an Adult-Child Interaction Project', *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 20(2), pp. 114-129. Available at: <https://web-p-ebshost-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=c4e26cd9-6e3a-4763-92e2-325f6820b328%40redis> (Accessed: 30 March 2023).

Ho, D., Campbell-Barr, V. and Leeson (2010) 'Quality Improvement in early years settings in Hong-Kong and England', *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 18(3), pp. 243- 258. Available at: <https://web-p-ebshost-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=52457670-2385-4bed-91ae-f1ed94185760%40redis> (Accessed: 28 March 2023).

Kruty, K. *et al.* (2021) 'Verification of Assessment Scales of the Sensory Enriched Environment ECERS-R and SSTEW or Implementation in Ukraine', (from the Society. Integration. Education - Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference, 28-29<sup>th</sup> May 2021). *Rezeknes Tehnologiju akademijska*, 2, pp. 756-767. Available at: <http://46.63.9.20:88/jspui/bitstream/123456789/544/1/document.pdf> (Accessed: 1 April 2023).

Lopes, R. P. and Mesquita, C. (2014) 'Observational Research Social Network: Interaction and Security', *CSEDU 2014 - Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Computer Supported Education*, 3, pp. 57-64. Barcelona, 1-3rd April. Available at: <https://bibliotecadigital.ipb.pt/bitstream/10198/13885/3/observationalresearch.pdf> (1 April 2023).

Moss, P. (2016) 'Why can't we get beyond quality?', *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 17(1), pp. 8-15. Available at: <https://journals-sagepub-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/doi/full/10.1177/1463949115627895> (Accessed: 29 March 2023).

Neale, D. and Nino-Pasternak, D. (2017) 'A Review of Reminiscing in Early Childhood Settings and Links to Sustained Shared Thinking', *Educational*

*Psychology Review*, 29(1), pp. 641-665. Available at:  
[https://www.researchgate.net/journal/Educational-Psychology-Review-1573-336X/publication/303906895\\_A\\_Review\\_of\\_Remiscing\\_in\\_Early\\_Childhood\\_Settings\\_and\\_Links\\_to\\_Sustained\\_Shared\\_Thinking/links/5f74f64f299bf1b53e02cf8d/A-Review-of-Reminiscing-in-Early-Childhood-Settings-and-Links-to-Sustained-Shared-Thinking.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/journal/Educational-Psychology-Review-1573-336X/publication/303906895_A_Review_of_Remiscing_in_Early_Childhood_Settings_and_Links_to_Sustained_Shared_Thinking/links/5f74f64f299bf1b53e02cf8d/A-Review-of-Reminiscing-in-Early-Childhood-Settings-and-Links-to-Sustained-Shared-Thinking.pdf) (Accessed: 31 March 2023).

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2012) *Starting Strong III: A Quality Toolbox for Early Childhood Education and Care*. OECD Publishing.  
Available at:  
[https://www.dji.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/icec/Starting%20Strong%20III\\_englisch.pdf](https://www.dji.de/fileadmin/user_upload/icec/Starting%20Strong%20III_englisch.pdf)  
(Accessed: 26 March 2023).

Sylva, K. et al. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from Pre-School to end of Key Stage 1*. Nottingham: DfES Publications. Available at: <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/8543/7/SSU-SF-2004-01.pdf>  
(Accessed: 25 March 2023).

Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2005) 'Quality Interactions in the Early Years', *TACTYC Annual Conference Birth to Eight Matters! Seeking Seamlessness – Continuity? Integration? Creativity?*. Cardiff, 5<sup>th</sup> November. Available at:  
[https://tactyc.org.uk/pdfs/2005conf\\_siraj.pdf](https://tactyc.org.uk/pdfs/2005conf_siraj.pdf) (Accessed: 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020).

Siraj-Blatchford, I. et al. (2002) *Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years*. London: Department of Educational Studies University of Oxford. Available at:  
<https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/4650/1/RR356.pdf> (Accessed: 20 March 2023).

Siraj-Blatchford, I. et al. (2008) 'Towards the transformation of practice in early childhood education: the effective provision of pre-school education (EPPE) project', *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 38(1), pp. 23-36. Available at: <https://web-p-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=1a050800-a27a-44b3-aa1c-29946ff9324d%40redis> (Accessed: 24 March 2023).

Siraj, I. et al. (2015) *Assessing Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing (SSTEWE) Scale for 2-5-year-olds Provision*. London: Institute of Education Press.

Pascal, C. et al. (1998) 'Exploring the relationship between process and outcome in young children's learning: stage one of a longitudinal study', *International Journal of Educational Research*, 29(1), pp. 51-67. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/science/article/pii/S0278434398000135> (Accessed: 30 March 2023).

Pascal, C. and Bertram, T. (2018) 'Effective Early Learning: A Praxeological And Participatory Approach To Evaluating And Improving Quality In Early Childhood Education', *Revista da FAEEBA*, 27(51), pp. 105-120. Available at: <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2186779670/fulltextPDF/713EBDEF32C4205PQ/1?accountid=130472> (Accessed: 25 March 2023).

Purdon, A. (2014) 'Sustained shared thinking in an early childhood setting: an exploration of practitioners perspectives', *Education 3-13*, 44(3), pp. 269-282. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/doi/full/10.1080/03004279.2014.907819> (Accessed: 24 March 2023).

Reed, M. (2012) 'What do we mean by quality improvement?', in Reed, M. and Canning, N. (Eds.) *Implementing Quality Improvement and Change in the Early Years*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Taggart, B. et al. (2015) *Effective pre-school, primary and secondary education project (EPPSE 3-16+)*. London: Department for Education. Available at: Effective pre-school, primary and secondary education project (EPPSE 3-16+) (Accessed: 25 March 2023).

The Chartered Quality Institute (No date) *What is quality?*. Available at: <https://www.quality.org/what-quality> (Accessed: 20 March 2023).

Weisner, T. (2016) *What is the most important influence on child development* [video], TEDxUCLA. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glZ8PkLMMUo&themeRefresh=1> (31 March 2023).

Welsh Government (2014) *Flying Start - Annex. Quality Childcare Guidance*. Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-07/flying-start-childcare-guidance.pdf> (Accessed: 20 March 2023).