

Critiquing Quality Childcare using Methods of Quality Assurance Models

This paper is about the benefits of additional methods of promoting and ensuring quality exceeds the mandatory specifications. It will concentrate, compare, and critically scrutinize the methods of Quality Assurance Schemes, focusing on the Early Years Wales Assurance Scheme and the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-being (SSTEWS) environmental Rating Scale (REF). The paper will research and investigate why it is important for children to receive the best childcare in their settings, and how this is achieved whilst analysing if it is done to the standard that is required by law and if improvements can be made.

In 2016, Welsh Government (2016, p.3) replaced the National Minimum Standards for Regulated Child Care 2012 for an updated version, under the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW). Additionally, these standards are for childcare minders and regulated childcare settings to give assistance to meet the legal requirements (Welsh Government, 2016, p.3). Furthermore, Welsh Government (2016, p.5) says that quality childcare involves a broad range of requirements, which is supported in the United Nations Convention Rights of the Child (hereafter known as UNCRC) (United Nations Children's Emergency Fund, 2019), hereafter known as UNICEF). In article 3, 28 and 29 of the UNCRC (2019) it says that children should have the best start in life and have a right to an education which should support them in their development growth, skills, and abilities.

What is Quality?

To do this, an understanding of what quality is, is needed. Early Year Wales (2020) says that delivering high-quality childcare is providing children with a setting that meets their individual developmental growth needs. Welsh Government (2023) says that to provide children with quality care, practitioners should be enabling and support and promote the holistic development of each child. Furthermore, Welsh Government (2023) says that the practitioners should review and reflect personal and professional needs and qualifications continuously so they can improve their process of educating. Additionally, practitioners should advocate transitions from home to nursery settings to schools efficiently (Welsh Government, 2023). Moreover, Welsh Government (2023b) says that settings should use the support and aid of agencies who can help and provide support to enhance the experiences and environments for the children.

Department of Education (2015) says that for an early year setting to provide childcare of high quality, the way and how the practitioners educate and enable learning to children is critical. Additionally, Murray (2018) says that pedagogy (the way and how a practitioner educates) is acknowledging that each child is an individual and adjusting the education and learning to suit the individual child. Also, the comprehension of quality the practitioner has at present may alter in the future (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016, p.1). However, Moss (2016, p.9) and Cottle and Alexander (2012, p. 635) says that quality is a decision that is an accumulation of values and beliefs of the practitioners, parents, multi agencies and stakeholders and not a mandatory requirement. Additionally, Moss (2016, p.10) believes that this will allow the individuals in the care setting to self- govern to adopt an approach that is decontextualized and false. However, Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016 p.1) says that an efficient practitioner will achieve quality of a high standard, when effective quality practice is achieved as this makes an efficient practitioner. Additionally, Douglass (2019) says that practitioners have an impact on the quality of childcare in a setting especially as they can improve and encourage the overall development in children.

High quality care in early settings is important, as this promotes children's holistic development. To achieve this in The Framework for Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care in Wales (Welsh Government, 2023) says that the Three enablers should be used, which are enabling adults, effective environments, and engaging experiences. When all three enablers are amalgamated the quality of care in the setting will be at a high standard (Welsh Government, 2023, p.7). Welsh Government (2023b) supports this by saying that providing high quality childcare will promote the children to develop their abilities to their potential but also their cognitive development too. Furthermore, Welsh Government (2023b) says that to do this, practitioners should be trained and qualified and be able to comprehend, considerate and emphasize with the children. Ishmine (2011) supports this with a study that showed children who experienced low quality of care had disadvantages later in life. However, Ishmine (2011) says that for high quality to happen practitioners must be a knowledgeable educator and carer and strive to be as dedicated as possible. Zaatari and Maloof (2022) say that theorist Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological system theory supports this when a child feels safe and secure, a sense of belonging is felt by the child, so therefore the development of the child will continue to grow, as a high quality of childcare is in place. Additionally, the parent/carer partnership with the practitioner plays a significant role to achieve a high quality in childcare, according to Cottle and Alexander (2014). However, research showed that whilst practitioners thought that

partnerships are a crucial element in sustaining quality, practitioners could be manipulated in their role due to their own personal desires and preferences of their settings (Cottle and Alexander, 2014).

Additionally, Zahyah (2015) says that a practitioner should be able to constantly inspire children to learn and develop new skills for the child to develop holistically. However, according to Campbell-Barr and Leeson (2016, p.1) quality is a complicated term to understand, although in an early year setting practitioners look at quality to improve opportunities. The setting should provide children with a setting that meets their individual developmental growth needs (Campbell-Barr and Leeson, 2016, p.1).

National Day Nurseries Association (2024) (hereafter known as NDNA) say that to achieve high quality in childcare the experiences that the child is involved in should be authentic and embrace the overall sense of belonging in the setting. The environment should promote development both physical and cognitive by creating opportunities that challenge whilst the children can gain skills (NDNA, 2024). Pascal and Bertram (2018) support this as they believe that children's experiences should cover holistic needs such as emotional, personal, social, and cognitive development such as problem solving, communication, knowledge and understanding to physical development such as fine and gross motor skills and balance. In addition to this, Theorist Froebel believed that for children to fully develop their social and emotional skills, play is a vital role, so for this to happen the children should have engaging experiences (Tovey, nd).

To do achieve quality in early years education, settings use tools such Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales (ECERS) and Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing Scales. These methods help the settings to assure that the key opponents that are important for the holistic development of children are in place such as enabling adults, effective environments, learning and development, wellbeing of children and staff (Welsh Government, 2017).

Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales (ECERS)

According to Clifford *et al.*, (2021) the first version of ECERS was published in 1980 but since then has been updated in 2015, it has been translated in more than 20 languages and is used worldwide. The ECERS is based on the children's environment which include the four components which are cognitive, physical, social-emotional and health and safety (Clifford., *et al*, 2021). The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale is a resource that early years settings

use indicators to assess the quality of the environment in the early year's settings (A+ Educational Ltd, nd). These indicators then will show the pluses and minuses that need to have improvement, this is done over a period of time (A+ Educational Ltd, nd). The ECERS was used in the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project (EPPE) where it supported the research regarding the quality of education and recourses that promoted children's development (A+ Educational Ltd, nd,b). Gordon *et al.*, (2015) adds to this by saying that the ECERS also is arranged around the practitioners and organisation of the setting, therefore applying the ECERS this way it allows the practitioners to effortlessly monitor and collect information from the children (Gordon *et al.*, 2015). Naesby (2021) supports that ECERS is a method which can identify high quality care, as reports on a study that took place to explore if high quality benefits at risk children. Findings on the report showed that when children in these high-quality settings promoted the learning and development, emotional support, communication and language support, and education of the child (Naesby 2021). Jeon *et al.*, (2014) agrees, children in a lower-level environment have a greater result with support from practitioners who provide a high quality of care. However, Ishmine and Taylor (2013) say that not enough information is given to the practitioners to help them with their way of educating individually as they get assessed as a group. Additionally, Martin (2016) says that research was taken from a study from nursery settings and preschools on using quality assurance scales and the results showed that practitioners, teachers, and managers do not have sufficient knowledge to suitably support the holistic development need in children.

Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing Scale (SSTEW)

The Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing Scale (SSTEW) is a method which is a quality assurance scale, it measures the quality of children in 5 developmental areas (VIC.GOV.AU, 2024). These are wellbeing, confidence, communication, learning and analysing and language of the child (VIC.GOV.AU, 2024). Additionally, Siraj *et al.*, (2015) says the SSTEW scale is where the practitioner can observe children through their play and how they interact with others by using eye contact and body language (Siraj *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, the SSTEW scale is used to observe the practitioners in the setting by asking non leading questions (Siraj *et al.*, 2015). Welsh Government (2021) says that SSTEW scales forecast the outcomes of the individual child's cognitive and self- regulative development. Furthermore, Watch Me Grow (nd)

also says that SSTEW scales focuses on the interaction between the practitioners and the children and how the practitioners help and supports the children by encouraging their social and wellbeing. It highlights that children that are in the early years of education, that this is a crucial time for them as this is the foundation of their holistic development ((Watch Me Grow, nd). However, there is advisement that practitioners should attend training for SSTEW even if the practitioner has already undergone extensive training for other environmental scales (Siraj *et al*, 2015).

Conclusion

Whilst these quality assurances in early years settings are extremely helpful in providing the practitioners with information on the children so they can focus on the children's area of need in their development journey. Also, a lot of time is taken up on observations alone, more interaction between practitioners and children would give a more authentic result. However, in conclusion quality assurance scales such as ECERS and SSTEW are general worldwide tool that is used by a vast number of educators and practitioners and is also a successful method to assess the quality of early year setting (Krutty et al., 2021). To conclude, Welsh Government (2023b) believes that to maintain high quality childcare, there should be an amalgamation of safety, efficiency, and continuous learning for both the children and practitioners, Also, as said in the UNCRC (UNICEF, 2019) article 6, children have the right to reach their full individual capabilities. Additionally, article 5, which say that governing bodies, parents, and cares are responsible to provide their children with the amenities to support their holistic developmental growing journey (UNICEF, 2019).

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