

This paper is going to look at and critically reflect upon and analyse methods of promoting and ensuring quality assurance. Cambridge dictionary (2023) defines quality as something of a high standard or how good or bad something may be. Moss (2016, p.8) describes quality as something that everyone wants and wants to offer. He goes on to explain the problem of quality stating, if quality was subjective and valued based on having multiple perspectives and understanding quality could have many meanings however these meanings could become effectively meaningless in conversation or as a tool of evaluation. In relation to an early years and a settings perspective if everyone has a different understanding and it is not made clear to staff what is meant and expected a quality this could impact how the setting operates.

According to Pacey (2023) a good quality provision involves qualified practitioners to provide better quality care who also have strong and secure bonds with the children. Teager and Bonetti (2018) view quality in two important ways. The first being structural quality. Structural quality relates to inputs that can be easily measured, observed and regulated. Inputs such as practitioners training and their continual professional development, group sizes and staffing ratios and also staff retention. The other quality view Teager and Bonetti (2018) mention is process quality. Process quality involves capturing children's day to day experiences including the activities they participate in, the type of interactions between children and practitioners and also the practitioners with parents. Process quality is also the way children's routine care needs are met. The Department for Education (2018) carried out a study where quality and structural characteristics were measured. The study found that a number of structural characteristics were linked to process quality. The results from the study showed key characteristics that were associated with quality included a higher level of staff qualification, a budget or a staff training plan, a higher overall staff to child ratio and a lower number of staff turnover.

According to Study Smarter (no date) quality assurance for business can be defined as the set of activities designed to ensure that products or services meet the quality standards and requirements. They go on to mention this involves the use of standards and procedures that have been established, monitoring and implementing any corrective actions when necessary. In education quality assurance involves a systematic review of the setting, to maintain and improve its equity, quality and efficiency. The settings systematic review encompasses a self-evaluation, an external evaluation which includes an inspection and also an evaluation from the staff, senior leadership team and pupil assessment (European Commission, no date). Quality Assessment Framework (2020) states quality assurance is a setting's aim to improve and achieve better outcomes for the children and their families. They mention if a settings managers are unaware of what their practitioners are doing then they would not know if it is of a good enough quality.

Healthy child Wales quality assurance framework (2014) was created by the Welsh government. The framework ensures the healthy child Wales program is delivering a progressive and universal services which focuses on prevention and early intervention. The framework states effective interventions and preventions in children's critical early years are vital. This is to ensure children are having the best start in life and to reduce any long term health and social issues (Welsh Government, 2022). This suggests the government has put in place many services to provide children and families with support with early interventions and tools to ensure children are being protected from anything that could impact their growth and development. This framework is inline with the United Nations conventions on the rights of the child (UNCRC). Article 6 of the UNCRC states children have the right to life and ensure to the maximum extent possible for survival and development. Article 18 recognises parents or legal guardians have primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of their child. Article 18 also states parties shall provide the appropriate assistance to parents or guardians in their performance of their child-rearing responsibilities (Unicef, no date). These two articles are both relevant to this framework as they support the growth and development of children especially in the critical early years by ensuring parents and legal guardians of children are receiving support they need.

The Healthy child Wales Framework (2014) links to quality in settings as to have a high quality setting as mentioned by Teager and Bonetti (2018) the interactions between parents is a part of process quality. Therefore in order for this framework to be a success in supporting parents there needs to be those relationships built between practitioners and parents, this supported by Cottle and Alexander (2013, p.654). Cottle and Alexander (2013,p.654) did a study on parent partnerships, the study concluded they viewed parent partnerships as being a fundamental part of quality when it comes to their work with children and their families. It was noted that many practitioners from this study felt that to have a quality provision positive relationships that are founded on mutual trust from all parties, with shared values, a common purpose and goals was needed. However they also pointed out some challenges due to the complex nature of the relationships with parents and the developing shared understandings within frameworks.

Building brighter futures Wales (2013) recognises high quality early education and childcare has an important role and plan to improve the quality of early education and childcare by focusing on four key areas these areas include, the experiences children have, the environment, leadership and the workforce. The welsh inspectorate frameworks for non-maintained settings and schools was built on the assumption that young children attending school were not receiving the care they required and children in daycare were not having educational learning opportunities. Welsh Government (2014) stated the split system was unlikely to support the outcomes to give children the best start in life and was overly complicated for parents and provides to reliably understand. Welsh Government (2014) gp

on to state it was recommended to join both CIW and ESTYN inspectorate frameworks together. A benefit of blending these two frameworks together into a single quality framework is it combines the expertise of both CSSIW and ESTYN. From January 2019 setting we're started to be jointly inspected, one of the areas they inspect is the environment (care inspectorate Wales, 2023).

Tool kits to help settings evaluate their environment are the ITERS and ECERS scales. The ITERS scale assesses the environmental provisions, health and safety and the risk in the provision. It also assesses the interaction between children and practitioners, their language, social and emotional development and the children's physical development. This scale measures the quality for children from birth to the age of three. The ECERS scale measures the range of needs of children aged three to five. Similarly to the ITERS scale the ECERS scales also assesses the environmental provision and the health and safety. Where this assessment tool differs to ITERS is it also assesses children's social and emotional development, any teacher led activities and additional items such as literacy and maths activities (Early years newsletter, no date).

The ITERS and ECERS assessment tool can be very beneficial for practitioners to use as a reflection tool. To see what their strengths are as practitioners and to see if there are any areas for improvement (FindChildCareStanislaus, 2018). According to Setodji, Schaack and Vi-Nhuan Le (2018, p.159) there are critics who believe that ECERS-R was not focused enough on the teaching processes that support and promote children's conceptual development across learning domains. They also believed there was not enough focus on practitioners' behaviours to promote secure, strong and trusting relationships with the children to support and engage the children's learning. Instead Setodji, Schaack and Vi-Nhuan Le (2018, p.159) state the critics believed there was too much focus and emphasis on environment quality. While still important to have a high quality environment for the children, settings and practitioners can raise the level of quality and ECERS score by building those relationships with children, engaging with them and supporting them in all areas of learning as mentioned previously by Teager and bonetti (2018).

Another issue found with the ECERS scale is even though it is being used world wide due to cultural differences the scale is more successful in some countries than others (Garvis *et al*, 2017, p.4. and Kaarby and Tandberg, 2023). Garvis *et al* (2017, p.4) and Kaarby and Tandberg (2023) both discuss cultural differences that impact the scale's outcomes for health and safety of equipment. For example Garvis *et al* (2017, p4) mentions the difference in the settings, furnishings and environment in different countries, the room layouts and equipment. Kaarby and Tandberg (2023) talks about the outdoor environment and how some countries' scale results would differ in the sense of what is deemed safe and dangerous play. For example, in the Scandinavian region, mainly composed of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, encourage their children to develop their gross motor skills by running or

walking on uneven grounds with roots and stones. Despite this being encouraged in the Scandinavian Culture, other cultures view it as hazardous. Therefore, when looking at the ECERS scale for quality it has an advantage of being reflective to practitioners in the early years however, what one setting might seem as a high quality provision may not be scored that on the ECERS scale due to cultural differences.

To conclude this paper quality can mean how good something can be, in early years quality relates to the service practitioners and settings provide in their provision. The quality in service when working with parents and families, meaning the relationship they build up, having a good relationship where parents and legal guardians feel supported, practitioners can offer support and intervene with early intervention if needed. Quality in early years can relate to the settings environment. Meaning the space they have, indoors and outdoor, with a range of equipment and activities set up whether they be adult-led or child-led but activities that will engage children and support them in their learning and development. A quality environment is not just about the space and equipment but also their well-being, meaning positive relationships with the practitioners. When children are happy and comfortable in an environment they are ready to learn. This then links to quality assurance and quality assurance schemes that support settings in ensuring they are of a high quality for the children and their families. The healthy child wales quality assurance framework which ensure children are having the best start in life by providing children and their families progressive services that help reduce any long term health and social issues and ECERS, a tool kit that supports practitioners to be reflective in practice and make any changes to improve for next time and ensure they are providing a quality service.

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