

What is quality?

Quality provision in the early years plays a vital part in children's development from a young age. (Sylva et al., 2004, Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002, Welsh Government, 2013). This is why it is important to have a clear understanding of quality of care and provision in the early years setting, as this can have a positive long-term impact on the child, and their future. Every child is entitled to the best start in life. The effects of a child's long-term outcomes from having good quality provision are, cognitive, communication and language skills. (Welsh Government, 2014b, Foundation Years, (No. Date). The (2013) Welsh Government document 'Building a Brighter Future' states that children benefit from a high-quality setting, it also states the significance it has on their all-round development, experiences and long-term future. Research shows that attending an early year setting which is of a high-quality standard can improve and benefit children's, social, emotional, cognitive and language development, Munton et al (2001). Additionally, The EPPE project Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (Sylva et al., 2004) which is a long-term study, shows the academic outcomes are linked to the quality of provision, which helps to improve communication skills and self-regulation and reduces hyperactivity. Results from the projects show how the quality of the setting improves children's learning in the following areas, these are, Mathematics, language and literacy and reading. This sets good foundations for the children's future. It also states that awkward and aggressive behaviour is less, (Sylva et al., 2004). For that reason, it is necessary that practitioners understand the importance of high-quality provision, and this needs to be provided to all children for them to have the best start in life, and for them to thrive and reach their goals and targets. There is evidence which supports the above and that is from this the Welsh Government (2015a).

However, according to the article teacherearlyyears.com, it states that it is not always easy to achieve a high quality of provision continuously, because some services may not be available at all times, and not all children learn in the same way, as they are all unique, and have different styles of learning. This is where staff training, experience and teamwork and regular meetings should take place for shared vision and reflection of quality of care. Cottle and Alexandre (2012) also agree with the above article. They state the challenges of attaining a high-quality

standard in the early years, is due to everybody being involved, such as, children, practitioners, parents and stakeholders, because they will all have different views and opinions and can be perceived in different ways. According to Howard et al. (2018) from a parent's point of view the main importance of quality of provision is their child's well-being and happiness. However, policy makers concentrate and focus more on getting parents back into work (West et al. 2010). Due to practitioners experience Cottle and Alexandre (2012) state that the meaning of quality was not accurate and interoperated differently according to each individual setting. Some settings focused more on the individual needs of the children and their development, such as, social and emotional, and other settings focused more on statutory inspection reports as they felt influenced by this, Ishimine (2011). Research from the REPEY (Researching, Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years) report shows that (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) the following qualities such as, the learning environment, policies, weekly planning, ratios, good communication between staff and children, play a vital part in contributing to the structural quality. Cottle and Alexandre (2012) and Ishimine all agree and state, for high quality, care and provision to be provided, that all staff must have the skills and experiences with support from the government.

Evidence from the Education Policy states how attending an Early Years setting can improve a child's outcomes, from, social, emotional, physical and cognitive development and it can also help them to reach their goals, targets and milestones in the long term, by setting them good foundations to build on, epi.org (2018). There have been two reports published by EPI and EIF to help promote the best possible outcomes for children, and these are structural quality and process quality.

Why is quality important?

The quality of a child's early experiences, plays a vital part in their brain development, and their health and well-being. It also provides the foundations for the child's life and their future, whether that will be positive or negative. Children learn to interact with the world they live in by having their individual experiences, whilst growing and developing. Children's brains develop very quickly in the first three years

of life. More than one million neural connections are formed each second. UNICEF (no date). According to UNESCO (2022) the most important time of a child's brain development is from birth to 8 years. With positive experiences between these ages, it can have a positive impact on a child's education, learning, and help them to reach their full potential and help with their all-round development. It is a child's human rights to have the opportunity to have a good education, and have the chance to expand their knowledge through learning. However, poor quality provision from a young age, and in the early setting can have a negative impact on the child's education and outcomes, Quality improvement (no date). Results show percentages from a survey completed in 2021, that only 46% of united nations have adopted free pre-primary education in their laws. UNESCO (2022).

Research by Blanden et al.'s (2017) in regards to inspections in the early years setting by Ofsted, state that there can be poorer outcomes in nursery settings. However, Sammons (2017) argues not all factors and influences play a part in the overall provision and the quality of the setting. Welsh Government (2011).

PACEY (2018) states the aims and importance of high-quality provision in Early Years Settings. He states all children should be given the opportunity to reach their full potential. He also mentions the reports which have been published by the Educational Policy Institute and Early Intervention, and he agrees with what the reports say, with regards to the best possible outcomes for the child.

The importance for children to access good quality provision.

Education has always been seen as an important part of a child's life and learning. Free education was introduced in the 1990s. However, evidence shows from more recent evidence, that the quality of care and setting, seems to be the main factor in early years settings. The aim is to give all children the best opportunity for educational and learning experiences, and not just seen as a supervised place where children go for their parents to work. This will be the key to a child's positive and successful future and outcomes. Some children who attend early years settings, are from disadvantaged backgrounds, and this can have a negative impact on them and their future, but research shows that by those children attending the early years

setting gives them access to resources and a variety of experiences which they might not be accessing at home. Extra funding has been given to early years settings, to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds to catch up educationally and close the gap. This is why it is important for children from less disadvantaged backgrounds to attend these settings, as it can give them a better start in life and that they will be able to achieve positive long term outcomes and less chance of poorer health and turning to crime. Earlyyearscares (2016).

What is quality assurance?

There are four key areas that need to be taken into account, to ensure high quality of care and education in the early year's settings. These are, the learning environment, practitioners, child experiences and the workforce. These are all positive contributors to a child's learning, and the Welsh Government (2013) has set out a new framework called 'Building a Brighter Future'. Welsh Government (2014b) states the significance and importance of the learning environment should be of high quality, and there needs to be a lot of opportunities with plenty of resources, for the children, so there are no restrictions in their learning.

Early Childhood Environmental Ratings Scales (ECERS) is a formative assessment tool. It is designed for the classroom environment, and is evidence-based quality improvement. It sets out clear steps for assessment and any improvements which are needed. The evaluation has seven indicators on the scale between 1 and 7, with 1 being the lowest and 7 being the highest. The assessment is effective in assessing and monitoring, as it gives a clear reading. It allows plans to be put in place if strengths and weaknesses have been identified, ECERS (2023). The reason for using ECERS in the Early Years is that it is recommended for improving quality of standards for children, schools and families, and these are used to help with baseline and audits, in relation to (EYQISP) National strategies for improving quality, Derby City County (2011). According to (Munton et al, 2001), page 3) the purpose of quality assurance is for practitioners and staff to provide good practice, assess the provision and improve areas they feel that need improvement. There has been research by 'The National Childcare Staffing Study' to look at the quality and the cost of using the ECERS program, another survey by (FACES) 2003, looks at the

importance and rights and experiences in early childhood (Clifford et al., 2010). The ECERS were also developed as part of the EPPE project, as it relates to the curriculum and goes into greater depth compared to ECERS, (Esercuk, no date).

The settings with the better learning outcomes, particularly language development, are those with the higher score on the scale. Practitioners were encouraged to promote and observe communication between the children, which will help with their long-term development, and this is according to Brunsek et al (2017). However, research by Brunsek et al (2017) states that consideration needs to be taken into account with regards ECERS and ECERS-R as they are not considered for broader development, such as social and emotional development, Welsh Government (2015b).

Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional well-being Scale.

Sustained Shared Thinking comes from REPY research in 2002. It was used to measure the quality and effectiveness of pre-school provision Education EPPE research (2004). SST is defined as, two or more individuals working together to solve a problem, but all parties must contribute to the thinking and carry on extending and developing. Sylva also stated sustained shared thinking was beneficial in all early year's settings, (Sylva et al, 2004: 36). There is evidence which shows that SST has a positive impact, and contributes to a high-quality setting in the early years (NCTL, 2013:2). Howard et al. (2018) and Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002) state the importance of Sustained Shared Thinking, as it helps to increase and enhance children's learning, including language and literacy skills. Sustained shared thinking can help children value their thoughts and support their confidence and self-esteem, and can help inspire and support them during most aspects of their life, (EYF5 2015). The SSTEWS scale is also used to support staff by recommending the importance of observation of the child as a practitioner, for example, how the child is interacting, their body language and what the child is doing, (Melhuish, 2015). Siraj et al., (2019) agrees with Melhuish (2015). Also encourage the child to take risks and give them the opportunity to learn through new strategies, (Howard et al., 2018). The practitioner needs to focus on the child and inspire them to expand with their learning, (Siraj-Blatchford, 2002, Melhuish, 2015). Welsh Government (2014a) and CIW Quality of Care Review both state the importance of a child's well-being and the

importance of them bring supported for them to achieve the best possible outcomes,(Lewis 2016).Howard et al.(2018) feels more research needs to be done in regards to the SSTEW scale, even though it is fairly recent. However measuring the standard of quality assurance is something that is suggested to be looked at on a regular basis. Howard et al. (2018).

Conclusion

To summarise high quality in the early year's settings, not all practitioners are fully up to date or understand the SSTEW scale, and some might not be assessing the child in the correct way or not being a critical thinker when it comes to assessment, Melhuish (2015). All staff working in early years settings should have childcare qualifications. up to date training, and continuous professional development and all settings should have a qualified teacher, Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002). Welsh Government (2016) states that staff should have a minimum childcare level 2 qualification if working in early years settings. However, Nutbrown (2012) disagrees and states that staff need to show and set excellent examples, have excellent knowledge and understanding of working in the early years, and have a minimum level 3 qualification.

All children are entitled to a high-quality education, positive learning experience, with qualified staff, which will set good foundations for their future of for them to be given the opportunity to achieve their targets, for the best possible outcomes, and research shows that SSTEW scales and ECERS do have a positive and successful impact on the child.

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