Word Count: 2,102

Reflective Paper

When referring to quality in terms of early year provision, the Education Policy Institute (2018) suggests that quality provision is made up of multiple different factors, which need to be continuously monitored in order to maintain the value. Furthermore, Sollars (2020) states that quality in an early years setting is an environment of which a child is able to fulfil their full potential with collaboration from suitable professionals. Supporting these definitions, Pacey (2021) recognise that there are numerous ways to identify a quality setting, such as by looking at their parent-practitioner relationships. However, it has been established that practitioners have different definitions of quality, as Cottle and Alexander (2012) state, further strengthening this viewpoint Moss (2016) acknowledges the complexity of the term. This implies that it may be difficult to achieve quality provision, due to different understandings of the term.

Quality provision within the early years is fundamental for the successful and continuous development of children, as Sylva, *et al* (2004) highlights. Cottle and Alexander (2012) strengthen this viewpoint, as they discuss how the quality of a childcare provision influences children's development, progress and also attainment, as Welsh Government (2013) further support. They acknowledge the importance of quality provision, placing emphasis on the impact it has on the children within the setting. According to the Foundation Years (2017) children who attend a high quality provision often achieve higher outcomes at school, as well as demonstrating higher social, emotional and also cognitive abilities. Concluding these ideologies research suggests that quality provision underpins children's development, outcomes and experiences throughout their educational journey, as Hobbs and Mutebi (2021) emphasise. The Effective Provision of Pre-school Project which is discussed by Taggart, *et al.* (2015) highlights that good quality settings add value to children, whereas poor quality provision adds no value, accentuating the importance of promoting quality provision.

However, research suggests that it is not a quick process and it is a continuous journey, highlighting the requirement for quality enhancement and assurance, Williams (2016) recognises that quality assurance is a process involving shared knowledge and also practice between practitioners within a setting. Butler (2016) acknowledges that gaps and disadvantages within early education can be bridged through quality early year provision. Therefore, reviewing this evidence it is apparent that there is a need for quality enhancement within provision, to ensure the children are receiving the best possible outcome, as Reed and Canning (2011) state. They emphasise that quality enhancement and improvement is a continuous process and is fundamental for benefiting the children, parents and also practitioners, this is further supported by the Department for Education (2021).

Moreover, when referring to quality assurance Mathers, Singler and Karemaker (2012) recognise the importance, they state that the quality of early education affects the experiences the children have. Emalee, *et al.* (2013) highlights the significance children's early childhood experiences have on their future and development, UNICEF (no date) support this. They discuss that early childhood is a crucial time and will shape the child's development and future. The evidence discussed therefore highlights the need for quality assurance within the early years, as it aids provisions in becoming the best for the

children they care for. Consequently creating positive early childhood experiences, as Fleer (2018) states.

Within the early years there are clear statutory requirements, such as the National Minimum Standards, as published by Welsh Government (2018). These are designed to ensure that settings are fit for purpose and meet the requirements of provision, such as staff ratios, as stated by the Department for Education (2013). Furthermore, Welsh Government (2019b) reviewed the National Minimum Standards for childcare. It was reported that generally the statutory standards, the NMS are effective and useful for practitioners as it provides consistency through settings and helps providers understand how to meet these regulations. Moreover, the Department for Education (2017) strengthen this viewpoint, agreeing that statutory requirements help provide consistency between good quality provisions. Hotz and Xiao (2011) conducted a study and discovered that although statutory regulations help provide a minimum quality and consistency throughout provision, this can occasionally become negative. They suggest that provision may aim to work to the regulations rather than aiming to achieve above this, as Oxfordshire Government (2018) agree.

Quality assurance aims to work towards creating best practice and also implement change where necessary, however there are different types and methods, as identified by Care Inspectorate (2022). It is fundamental that these methods are effective, in order to ensure the setting is striving for quality above the minimum standards. This will consequently have a positive impact on the children, as recognised by Siraj-Blatchford and Wong (2006). Further strengthening this, Welsh Government (2019a) acknowledge the significance of settings aiming to deliver high quality provision in order to promote the children's progress and provide the best possible outcome.

One method of quality assurance is the Quality of Care Review, Care Inspectorate Wales (2018) state that it is a self-evaluation which will help the service and also CIW maintain and improve the service and provision. The services Quality of Care Review meets the services duty under regulation 16 of the *Child Minding and Day Care (Wales) Regulations 2010.* The review should contain the views of the service users and also a self-evaluation of the provision, as acknowledged by the Care Inspectorate Wales (2016). This review is fundamental when striving for high quality provision, as it will enable settings to gain a deeper understanding of what works well within their setting and what may require improvement, as Education Scotland (2016) agree.

Moreover, as referred to above, in order to successfully complete a Quality of Care Review, service-user feedback is required, such as parent questionnaires and also the children's views, as Walsall Council (2016) state. Suggesting that the Quality of Care Review can be effective when promoting quality provision within the early years, Nokali, Bachman and Drzal (2010) discovered that when parents are involved it has a positive impact on the children's development and progress within the setting. Wheeler and Connor (2009) develop this viewpoint, as they agree that parent feedback is significant and can help create a richer learning environment, thus will consequently help promote quality within settings as Taguma, Litjens and Makowiecki (2012) emphasises the significant impact the settings environment has on the children's development. Therefore, this emphasises the importance of feedback

from the service users, which is required in the Quality of Care Review, when striving for quality in provision.

Moreover, Ofsted (2013) draw attention to the importance of self-evaluation, which is required in the first part of the Quality of Care Review. This is a fundamental tool in helping provisions create, maintain and also improve their setting to ensure it is meeting the highest standards of quality, as Siraj-Blatchford and Sum (2013) agree. They suggest that self-assessment, such as the Quality of Care Review can help encourage better leadership which will consequently demonstrate a stronger, more unified team, as Stamopoulos (2012) and Ang (2012) convey. The evidence reviews suggests that the Quality of Care Review is an appropriate and effective approach to quality assurance, as it enables services to acknowledge their strengthens and aspects which may require improvement.

Further, the Quality of Care Review is a self-assessment tool, evidence suggests that this is an effective way to promote quality within early years provision, as Scobie and Scott (2017) express. They imply that this can be an effective tool as it allows the service management to highlight the quality of the provision. However they also propose the argument that this form of quality measurement and assurance, focusses very specifically on self-evaluation, which therefore limits results and will consequently hinder the development of quality within the provision, as Lancaster and Garvey (2010) propose. It is suggested that a more child-centred approach is the way forward when striving to improve quality in the setting, as the child should be at the centre of all decisions, as Melhuish (2016) agrees. Therefore, this suggests that the Quality of Care Review may not be effective when promoting quality within provisions.

Although it is recognised that the Quality of Care Review is a form of self-assessment which allows leaders to review their setting and care provision, as stated by the Care Inspectorate Wales (2019), it can be argued that this may not help achieve quality and promote change within settings. Kasanen and Raty (2002) highlight that self-assessment tools rely on honesty and the ability to promote change through improvements. This is a complex skill and therefore some individuals may find difficult, as Kjellstrom, Stalne, Tornblom (2020) acknowledge. Consequently, this suggests that some Quality of Care Reviews may be biased and therefore inaccurate, implying this may not be an effective form of quality assurance for every provision.

Another method which is used for quality assurance is the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-being scale, also referred to as the SSTEW scale, as identified by Hoare (2017). Foreman and Hall (2015) recognise that a knowledgeable, engaging and understanding practitioner is required to observe children, implying this is therefore necessary in regards to the SSTEW scale. Mackenzie (2016) refers to the term sustained shared thinking, stating that it is when two or a group of individuals work with one another to resolve an issue or clarify an idea, for example, as stated by Siraj-Blatchford, *et al.* (2002). The scale was developed to assess the quality of adult support within provisions whilst encouraging sustained shared thinking and aiding emotional wellbeing, as Howard, *et al.* (2018) and Melhuish, Siraj and Kingston (2015) acknowledges. This method is seen as an effective form of quality

assurance, as evidence by the Welsh Government (2008) suggests that observing and listening to children helps promote quality in provision as they should be at the centre of a quality settings decisions.

Siraj-Blatchford (2009) discusses the importance of sustained shared thinking and agrees that it enhances children's development and experiences, whilst also aiding practitioners continuous professional development. Further supporting this, Early Education (2022) highlight that sustained shared thinking can also aid the development of bonds between the children and practitioner, which is fundamental for the children's development and experience. Hayes, O'Toole and Marie (2017) agree, they state that the interactions between children and practitioners help shape the child's future, development and also will create positive experiences, which is also expressed by the Government (2019). However, Purdon (2013) discovered that although the importance of sustained shared thinking is recognised, in practice it is not appearing often enough, highlighting the necessity for the SSTEW scale.

The SSTEW scale focusses on observation and requires an adult to recognise cues from the child, suggesting that the practitioner will need to be knowledgeable and also act encouraging towards the child, as Howard, *et al.* (2020) states. According to Siraj, Kingston and Melhuish (2015) the SSTEW scale is assessed using a seven point scale, ranging from one which is inadequate and seven, which is excellent, this is in comparison to a more qualitative approach like the Quality of Care Review, which has been discussed above. Within the SSTEW scale there are five further sub-scales, such as language and communication as stated by Siraj, Kingston and Melhuish (2015). These sub-scales can be connected to areas of the Foundation Phase, as outlined by Welsh Government (2015), making it relevant whilst encouraging consistency. This suggests that the scale may be an effective method of quality assurance as it is able to work in correspondence with the curricular targets and will therefore ensure quality provision relating to academic outcomes.

Moreover, it may be argued that the SSTEW scale obtains more accurate results than the Quality of Care Review in terms of quality assurance, for example, as the scores reflects observed practice, as Lee (2019) conveys. She states that the STTEW scale is a strong quality assurance method which should be used to evaluate early years settings, implying that they are effective when put into practice. Also, the STTEW scale recognises the importance of play in promoting curiosity, Samuelson and Carlsson (2008) emphasise the importance of play on children's learning and development, agreeing that it is a fundamental aspect of the early years, as Fleer (2017) also agrees. However, as this approach is quite new, Howard, et al. (2018) agrees that further research surrounding the scale is necessary.

To conclude, quality is fundamental for early years settings, as it is recognised that high quality provision promotes children's development and skills. To ensure quality within settings, there are numerous quality assurance methods which can be applied to provision, such as the STTEW scale. Although challenges have been identified of particular approaches, evidence highlights that these methods play a significant role in enhancing the quality of provision.

Word Count: 2,102

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