

Reflective paper.

In this essay I will critically reflect on the benefits of additional methods of promoting and ensuring quality that goes above the statutory requirements.

Quality is defined as a degree of excellence, or something that is often superior to everything else. Quality is when a service, process or product is measured to see how well it can meet or exceed the requirements and expectations of its consumers (Khan, 2023). According to Early Years Wales (N.D) the Quality for All, also referred to as QfA, believes that to achieve high-quality childcare, there are requirements that need to be consistently met. They believe that by offering high-quality care, settings are focused on how successful a service is, this includes the resources, how it is managed, and staffed overall.

Welsh Government (2023, p. 7) believes that by following Quality framework, practitioners are supporting children's holistic development and putting their rights into practice. They suggest that quality in childcare also supports home, setting and school transitions. PACEY (N.D) suggests that there are many aspects to look for when wanting to identify high-quality care in settings. When settings are registered providers, they are inspected regularly, ensuring that the wellbeing of children is being supported to aid their development. Practitioners should regularly update their training, and their environment should be hygienic and safe.

However, Shoesmith *et al.* (2021, p. 6) suggests that a lack of staffing which affects setting ratios, a cut in funding and not having enough time within settings, are all barriers that can contribute to the lack of quality care offered by settings. Moussié (2021) argues that even though there have been cutbacks in funding, learning within the early years is considered to be the most effective time to be investing in the development of children. When children do not receive high-quality childcare there is a significant difference in their learning outcomes and healthcare needs.

The strive for quality should be a continuous process within an early years setting, When children are subjected to high-quality care at the early stages of education it can be beneficial to their development. High-quality settings should consist of well-educated practitioners who are committed to the development of children, those who are open to collaboration with multiagencies, and take part in reflective practices (Birth to 5 matters, N.D).

For settings to achieve and exceed quality provision, there are ways to continuously measure success. These include following guidelines and quality assurance programs to promote and sustain high-quality provision, that can ensure they meet and exceed the statutory requirements. To offer the best of Early Childhood Education and Care to children (ECEC), regulators, and inspectors such as Estyn and CSSIW work together to ensure that settings offer not only high-quality care, but also high-quality education. This allows practitioners to have the strongest form of provision by focusing on more of a holistic view on children's development (Welsh Government, 2014, p. 6-7).

Here are two examples of methods that settings can use.

The Leuven Scale

The Leuven scale was created by Ferre Laevers in the 1980's, this scale provides practitioners with the opportunity to measure children's well-being and involvement in the setting. It is a 5-point scale that ranges from extremely low to extremely high and can help practitioners identify where each child is on the scale and can help them provide support individually. The Leuven scale is also used as a tool for practitioners to use to evaluate quality within their settings (MacRae and Jones, 2023, p. 234; Learning journals, N.D). These observations are meaningful to the learners and put the children at the heart of their own learning (Structural learning, 2021), this supports article 3 of the UNCRC (N.D) the right of the child and links to Piaget's active learning which builds on his constructivist learning theory (The Education Hub, 2021).

Woods (2016, p. 30-31) believes that The Leuven Scale should not be used as a judgmental tool, but rather to measure the degree of success that the setting is providing to children. She suggests that this tool can highlight the significance that reflective practice can offer to all practitioners.

Learning Journals (N.D) however argues that The Leuven Scale is not suitable for children with additional learning needs, as the behaviors that are described on the scales are not always obvious in children who have additional learning needs.

Practitioners are also reminded that a child's learning can be limited unless they are operating at a level four or five on The Leuven Scale, however they are unlikely to be

peaking at these levels all day and, will often or not be fluctuating throughout their time in the setting (Emotionally healthy schools, 2019).

With The Leuven Scale having an emphasis on the state of a child's well-being and involvement this links with Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of needs theory, when the children within a setting feel safe and are at ease within their surroundings (referring to the lower part of Maslow's pyramid), children are more likely to be at the higher end of The Leuven scale with increased emotional well-being and deeper involvement in their own learning (Melia, 2020, p. 28-29).

Laevers and Declaercq (2018) suggests that The Leuven Scale is designed to label children who may not be achieving the '*normal*' levels for their particular age group. However, this does not link to the Curriculum for Wales's vision of focusing more on progression steps where learning is stage related as opposed to age related. They suggest shifts in children's understanding are not likely to happen at the same time for children of the same ages and are also not linked to their ages (Central South Consortium, N.D).

Once practitioners have carried out all the necessary assessments through The Leuven Scale, this can then feed into their reflective practice. After using this tool, practitioners can rearrange the learning environment and set up challenging areas to support children's development, they can identify each individual child's interests and needs which can aid in a holistic approach and can also help with creating positive attachments within settings. This can then help to make the home/ setting transitions easier on the children (Arnerich, 2021).

Questionnaires

To conduct research, collecting data is a must. Data is simply information, and if that information is not gathered then the research that needs to be carried out would be impossible. Questionnaires are a popular type of data collecting procedure and can be utilized qualitatively or quantitatively. Questionnaires can be open-ended or closed questions, or even a mix of both. Open-ended questions allow the respondents to answer in detail if they require, whereas closed offer respondents predetermined answers that they are able to choose from. There are many different ways to offer questionnaires, these can be done on paper, over the phone, or online, meaning that

families who may be harder to reach are also able to take part in the data collecting procedures (Cint, 2022; Mahar *et al*, 2021, p. 6-10; Imperial, N.D).

While there is perception that conducting questionnaires is relatively easy, in order to gain non-bias and significant results, they need rigorous planning, time spent on them and a vast amount of effort.

Ensuring questions are worded correctly to target the desired audience can be crucial to the outcome of the research that is being conducted. For example, if a setting wishes to collect data from children, the questions asked would be age and stage appropriate, whereas questionnaires targeted to adults would look very different (Jones, Baxter, and Khanduja, 2013). There are many advantages to using questionnaires to promote and sustain high-quality within settings. The use of questionnaires offers a systematic way to collect data, they also offer the option to be submitted anonymously, therefor encourages the respondents undertaking the questionnaires to be more truthful. The use of questionnaires can also be economical. When distributing questionnaires this can be done via email which can be the most cost effective (Patten, 2017, p. 1-2).

However, according to Iftikhar (2020), there are often many unanswered questions when wording is not as clear as they should be. This could then also lead to misunderstanding of the questions being asked to the respondents. While Patten (2017, p. 1-2), believes that anonymous questionnaires are advantageous to respondents, Dalati and Gómez (2018, p. 179) argue that this can be a disadvantage to the researcher as they will always be unaware of who completed the questionnaire. Meirte *et al*. (2019) also challenges Patten's (2017, p. 1-2) belief that sending the questionnaires electronically can be advantageous, as they suggest there have been many reports that show there are several technical issues that can occur, which in turn can become a barrier to the completion by the responders.

It is believed that The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education, also known as EPPE, undertook research within early childhood settings. Not only have EPPE findings shaped the way that practitioners work, but it has also helped form policies to maintain high-quality in settings across the country. The findings suggested that early years settings can play a pivotal role to prepare children for their education

journeys. EPPE also showed that children who attend early years settings are less likely to show signs of anxiety and anti-social behaviour (Hall and Eddy, 2024; Karaoglu, 2020, p. 83). The Welsh Governments (2017) Flying Start Childcare: Guidance disagrees and suggest that anti-social behaviour was discovered within the first two years in large group settings at the age of three. They do however suggest that EPPE findings show that increased intellectual attainment is linked to high-quality childcare.

Macdonald (2018, p. 3) argues that the findings of the EPPE have made it increasingly clear that children who are subjected to high-quality care within the early years are more likely to achieve academic success in later life, as there are positive impacts on their holistic development. Majcen and Drvodelic (2022, p. 85) however, suggest that it is children with disadvantaged backgrounds that tend to gain more from being in high-quality early years settings, they believe that although practitioners are unable to remove the children from their often-deprived circumstances, they can minimize this for them while at their settings.

Conclusion.

In order for settings to achieve and exceed high-quality provision they are encouraged to follow guidelines and quality assurance programs. Leuven scales and questionnaires amongst others are a way to ensure they meet and exceed the statutory requirements that are expected of them. The Leuven scale allows practitioners to evaluate quality within their settings by using the 5-point scale to identify where each child is which can then offer individual support where needed (MacRae and Jones, 2023, p. 234; Learning journals, N.D). This method is meaningful to the learners and has the best intentions of the children, which supports article 3 of the rights of the child (Structural learning, 2021; UNCRC, N.D). However, due to the behaviors being described on the scales, The Leuven Scale may not always be suitable for children with additional learning needs (Learning Journals, N.D).

Questionnaires are a systematic way for data collections, they also offer the option to be submitted anonymously, which then encourages the respondents to provide a more honest opinion (Patten, 2017, p. 1-2). Moreover, Iftikhar (2020) believes that there is the possibility to unanswered questions when questions are unclear, which

can also cause respondents to misunderstand what is being asked of them.

Findings from The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) believe that when subjected to high-quality care within the early years, underprivileged children are more likely to achieve academic success in later life, and are less likely to show signs of anxiety and anti-social behavior, which has a positive impact on their holistic development (Macdonald, 2018, p. 3; Hall and Eddy, 2024; Karaoglu, 2020, p. 83).

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