

Moss, (2016) states that quality is something that everyone wants to have and offer to other individuals. Quality in business and marketing is described as degree of excellence and the level of satisfactory and how well it caters needs targeted to each individual using the service, (Market Business New, n, d). Although, in childcare and early education settings quality may differ and have a different idea of what quality looks like.

Although quality can be measured in how the setting looks, promotes rights, expresses needs for young children and overall assessments. Cottle and Alexander, (2012, p1) explains that quality can have a range of perspectives from different stakeholders surrounding the setting, for example in early education or childcare settings, stakeholders can include, parents, practitioners, managers or many outside agencies will have different opinions and expectations of what is deemed as quality. Mathers, *et al.* (2012), also agrees that stakeholders have an impact of high quality in early education and childcare settings by stating the impact of each stakeholder. For example, parents and carers of the children attending these settings can provide positive feedback and possible improvements to support quality. Parents can also impact on a marketing scale to improve care, environment and how they adapt learning.

Ho, *et al.* (2010) has learnt that from a number of childhood research documents that there are connections comparing how high-quality settings have impact on the nature of development and learning for young children. In this document it also explains the gap in which education and care takes place for young children in both early education and childcare settings. With this statement in mind Huston (2008) also points out that there is no inherent difference between childcare and early education. Both care and education can be a rich experience that contributes and impacts children's development or not, depending on the environment and how it can benefit each individual's child's development. Rounding all these statements up, there is a debate on how high- or low-quality settings impact children. Foundation Years, (n.d.) explains that children who experience high quality provision are set well to achieve higher

outcomes later in life such as school grades. However, children who do not experience high quality provision are more likely face challenges later on in future life as they will not have received the correct support. Sylva, *et al.* (2006) also supports this point by stating 'It is an established view among childcare researchers that higher quality of care relates to better developmental outcomes, and lower quality to lower developmental outcomes.

However, even with a range of research and documents describing the impact that high quality settings can have on children's development and future success. There are many disadvantages to create a high-quality setting. In order for a setting to be labelled as 'high quality' it must meet specific standards, for example having high qualified staff members. The Education Committee (2019) emphasis' the difficulties of staff training, In the publication Sara Bonetti argues the need and goal for early education and childcare setting to have high qualified staff to ensure highest quality provision, although she shares worries about the cost, she states 'yet we know that training for level 3 professionals has become more and more expensive over the years.' Another negative spoken about in the publication is staff leaving childcare settings due to not being offered high qualification opportunities as struggles with budgeting and not being able to offer higher wages to higher qualified current and future staff members.

There are different ways in which to measure quality in early years settings. Two of the types of quality measuring tool are Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-being (SSTEW) and The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), (ERS, n, d).

The Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-being (SSTEW) is a quality measuring tool carried out by observational assessments in early education and childcare settings. The SSTEW scale understands and promotes the importance of high-quality interactions involving children and childcare practitioners within early years settings. The SSTEW scale includes a rating scale using five sub-scales that link and follow aspects of children's development. Within these five sub-scales they include 14 subheadings which outline key focuses within the five sub-scale. For

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example, sub-scale 1 looks into trust, confidence and independence. Within this main focus, item 2 explores how children are encouraged to have choices and independent play (Nursery world, 2015).

Before undertaking a SSTEWS scale at a setting, it is important for the professional carrying out the observations to undertake some factors. Such as; receiving training and gaining a full understanding how to carry out scoring correctly and appropriately. Also, the professional must familiarise themselves with the sub-scale titles, the items and what is expected in each level. This is to ensure fairness in all settings. In contrast to this, Sylva, (2006), explains that the scoring should be carried out by 1 individual. However, by having one professional undertaking these observations it can cause a negative impact on scoring. The reasoning for this is that as the professional may not pick up every interaction that has happened throughout the day and may end up missing high-quality interactions from a different area or group in the setting. The overall scores from the SSTEWS scale must show a clear representation of practitioner's behaviours, in way they respond when having interactions with children and how they enhance and extend the children's learning. The practitioners and staff from these settings can reflect on feedback and results which will lead to future improvements to the setting and staff, (Melhuish, *et al.* 2015).

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) is an evaluation tool used for rating early years and childcare settings. It is important within a childcare or early education setting to have a high-quality physical environment as it can have major impact on a child's personal development (Drake, 2006). The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, (ECERS) evaluate 7 dimensions, with one focusing on the space and furnishings of the setting and the other 6 focusing on child progress. (Lopez-Boo, *et al.* 2016. p.30-31) The Scale consist 35 items all within these 7 subscales, this is a similar approach to the SSTEWS scale in which they recognise key focuses on what to observe and what is expected from high quality settings. The ECERS authors recommend undertaking these observations and to base the ratings on full session, half a day or a full day in each classroom or setting (Sylva, *et al.* 2006). However, (Lopez-Boo, *et al.* 2016. p.30-31) states that these observations take around

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3 hours to complete and take comments and interviews from practitioners in the setting. This differs from the SSTEWS scale where conversation and involvement are kept to a minimum during observations (Sylva, *et al.* 2006. P,9).

As stated in Nursery World (2012), researches from Oxford who have worked on the development of the ECERS have estimated that over 50 local early years settings, that have used the scale for improving quality in settings, they are also supported self-assessment, prioritise training and appropriate support, and also to make correct judgement on spending for resources to improve setting. By using this scale is become a way of 'continuous quality improvement cycle' states Faye Linskey in Nursery world (2012). In addition to this, Thomson (2009) undertook a case study from a local school when using the ECER scale. During feedback from the school, practitioners express personal feelings and thoughts about the scale. At first the staff were shocked and felt threatened with given lower scores but once they received feedback and understood the reasonings behind the scores, they then improved the setting. For example, they did this by providing a wider range of resources for the children from outdoor equipment, more educational and multicultural books and toys. From the school also, there were comments comparing ECER scale results and Ofsted results, commenting that results from the ECER scores were more motivating and emphasised the importance of children's development.

The main difference from both the SSTEWS and ECER scale is the structure. As both scales score by numbers and acknowledging levels of inadequate to excellence during observations. On each sub-scale the setting must show clear examples of what it expected to be scored. For example, sub-scale 1, item 1, 'staff congratulate children when following rules' (Sylva, *et al.* 2006. P,14). This can be scored if the staff members give an instruction such as lining up or tidying toys. To score an excellent on this the staff member must show clear positive communication such as, 'well done boys and girls, you lined up really well!! Let's see if we can do this for the rest of the day.' This shows the professional who is observing the setting a clear experience and confidence of positive interactions. However, the ECER looks on how the environment can have an impact on the children's development. For example, fine motor skills. To reach a level of good or excellent the professional overserving the area will be looking out for

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if the setting has fine motor skills materials available throughout the setting. The SSTEWS scale looks for how adult interactions support the setting whereas the ECER scale looks how the environment can support development of children (Pre-KForAll, n, d).

Another known disadvantage to using both the SSTEWS and ECER scale is that scores can only be given at higher levels when the basis indicators have been met. This means that when the professional starts the observation on the setting, they will start with the lowest level of the item and then progress onto the higher levels when the basis observations have been met. The reasoning behind this is the ECER was designed to ensure that children develop fully and without basic indicators being met they believe that children are unable to fully benefit from the higher levels. This is a disadvantage as early years settings may only focus on the higher levels and lack knowledge on developing basic skills for the children. This encourages settings to look at small details that may impact children greatly, rather than exceeding limits (Pre-K For All, n, d).

Although, both scales share the importance and need for high quality interactions between practitioners and children as they believe children learn best this way. In relation to this Theorist Lev Vygotsky was the first theorist to understanding and state that children learn best through interactions and the way we communicate (Neff, n, d). In relation to this, both the SSTEWS scale and ECER scale recognises how Sustained Shared Thinking (SST) impacts early years settings. Sustained Shared Thinking (SST) is defined when two or more individuals, in early years settings this would mainly be between adult and children, working together and communicating to problem solve, to understand concepts or evaluate activities. For SST to be effective all individuals involved ideally need to contribute to the thinking and understanding when in conversation or carrying out an activity. Both the SSTEWS scale and ECER scale acknowledge the importance that SST can have on children's learning and continuous development (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2004).

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The last section of the assignment is about self-reflection. I have been asked to reflect on how I have felt that this module and topic has impacted me personally and professionally. For this I have decided to use aspects of the Gibbs Reflection Cycle as I feel it works well for self-reflection and it explains in which ways you have acknowledged and demonstrated new outlooks and methods that have been learnt. The University of Edinburgh (2020) describes the Gibbs Reflection Cycle as giving structure to learning from active experiences and allows you to learn and plan from situations that went well or didn't go well. This Reflection includes 6 stages to reflect on, these being; description of the experience, feelings and thought about the experience, the evaluation, how did it go? Analysis, making sense of the situation, a conclusion on what was learnt and ways of improvement if needed and then an action plan on how you would improve and deal with future situations or overall changes made in your personal and professional life.

One of the main points I have taken from researching quality assurance tools and how quality is measured, specifically in early education and childcare settings, has been the importance of adult and child interactions. It has been interesting to learn how these types of interactions contribute to individual development and how it can support and enhance children's learning. As I work in a day nursery with toddlers aged 2-4, I always understood the impact of good interactions. Although since looking into the SSTEWS scale and how quality is measured through this scale it has made me aware of how I can maintain and improve quality in my setting.

I will be discussing an example of how I have used elements of the Gibbs Reflective Cycle to support my self-reflection during this module. Firstly, I was researching into the SSTEWS scale and came across 'sub-scale 4 – Supporting curiosity and critical thinking' This section, item 9 – supporting curiosity and problem-solving explored ways in which the environment impacted children's learning. As early education and childcare settings are inspected through observations during the scale report, I focused on the higher levels that are expected in these settings. I personally feel that the higher levels as seen as 'excellent' are a good way to focus and plan to enhance children's learning. On the other hand, I also believe that there could be a number of

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factors stopping settings from reaching this level and may have disadvantages due to lack of resources, staff members or time within the day. I definitely feel that having these levels can give positive encouragements for settings but also dishearten those settings that may have barriers.

The last stage of Gibbs reflection Cycle is an action plan, which I have mainly focused on when going through this module. During lectures and independent learning time I always re-tell what I have found and learnt into my professional workplace. The action plan gave me the push to acknowledge in my setting how to enhance learning, how to forward plan and take more pride in my overall interactions with the children in my setting. Since starting this module, I have had one-to-one meetings with my manager discussing the SSTEW scale and together we have looked at what is 'expected' at excellent level and worked together to improve nursery learning.

Another part of the SSTEW scale that I have enjoyed looking into is from 'sub-scale 1, item 3 – planning for small group and individual interactions/adult deployment. As I stated earlier on, I have always been aware of the impact of interactions and how they can have a positive impact on young children. In my setting I have a key-worker group, in this group I am responsible for 12 three-year olds. In my setting we have recognised the importance of smaller group and one-to-one interactions. From recognising this we have started to set time aside within the day for keyworkers to have 30/45 minutes with own personal key groups. By doing this it has built stronger relationships between key children and key staff. As keyworkers we have also been able to identify each child's individual development, strengths and weaknesses which may have been ignored or mis-read in whole room activities.

In conclusion, this assignment has outlined the importance that high quality early years settings can have on children's development. It has been interesting to see how the use of quality measuring tools can have impact too. By using a mixture of the SSTEW scale and ECERS scale it can support settings in providing high quality provision both by providing stimulating environments and high-quality interactions. From my personal

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self-reflection I have used both these tools to impact and improve my personal professional life and how I provide care in my setting.

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