

Section 2

Quality can be defined as “the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy given needs” (Quality Digest, 2001). However, quality within the early years can look different to everyone, this is dependent on an individual's training and experiences with high quality provision within the early years (Bland, 2023). A study from The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project has proven that high quality provision and settings has drastic impacts on a child's education and development, EPPE suggest that settings who adapt their provision to ensure it is of a high-quality can ensure that it is effective due to the fact that targets are being achieved and the rotation of disadvantaged children is being broken (Sylva, K. *et al*, 2004). Even though EPPE has reported that high quality provision's extremely benefit a child and their learning and development, it is difficult to determine what good and high-quality provision is and what it looks like (Education Policy Insitute, 2018). The (Education Policy Insitute, 2018) suggests that there are two ways in which quality can be used to look at high-quality provisions in settings, these include Structural Quality and Process Quality. Structural quality is based on the parts of the setting that can be observed and regulated such as adult: child ratio's which are also in the National Minimum Standards of Regulated Child Care, structural quality also is based on staff's training and development, ensuring that there is Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for staff within the setting (Education Policy Insitute, 2018). Process quality can be described by (Education Policy Insitute, 2018) as “children's day-to-day experiences and includes the educational activities undertaken, the types of interactions between children, teachers and parents, and the way in which routine care needs are met”.

There are many ways in which schools and settings can measure quality, measuring quality needs to be on going and not just take place over one session, measuring quality frequently and consistently allows all aspects of the setting to have a true reflection of its service. Often a way for settings to measure quality is that they ask stakeholders such as parents, carers, children, and staff to take part in questionnaires and surveys. Questionnaires are beneficial when it comes to ensuring excellent quality within settings as they provide practitioners with opportunities to see areas of improvement, according to (Cleave, 2023) questionnaires “help maximise the success of whatever you are trying to investigate and answer” questionnaires are beneficial as they help give a quick answer to anything you are trying to find out however

analysing the information can be time consuming (Sajah, 2015). According to (Bland, 2023) other ways in which quality can be measured include appraisals, room observations, outside agency feedback, monitoring children's progression and visits from professionals from similar settings (Bland, 2023). Using a variety of methods to measure quality will ensure practitioners are providing the best practise possible.

Ensuring quality across the setting uses statutory requirements such as National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare these are set by Care Inspectorate Wales and provide all nurseries and childcare settings with the minimum standards in which they must have to care for children, within the National Minimum Standards includes ratios, complaints, child protection and quality assurance (Welsh Government, 2016).

There are other methods which are not statutory but are beneficial when it comes to measuring and ensuring quality within nurseries and setting, one of these includes the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA). The National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) is extremely beneficial when supporting nurseries in order to promote and support the idea of high-quality provisions in setting due to the fact that the solid aim of this organisation is to provide settings and nurseries with opportunities to ensure that the children in their settings have access to high quality provision and learning. Another crucial benefit is that the National Day Nursery Association supports over 24,000 nurseries across England, Scotland, and Wales to ensure high quality practise in those settings is taking place, not only do they offer support to nurseries in the United Kingdom but also offer support of high-quality care internationally, this is a benefit as the (Welsh Government, 2015) believes that all children should have access to “ have a flying start in life and the best possible basis for their future growth and development” with nurseries across Wales being a part of the National Day Nurseries Association and being provided with the support to ensure and maintain a setting with high quality care and standards this ensures that children around Wales are being provided with the best opportunities possible.

However, although the organisation works incredibly hard to ensure nurseries are able to provide high quality care for the children within the settings, for a single nursery to afford the use of the National Day Nursery Association's help it is going to cost the £173, with the constant issue with the cost-of-living crisis growing, some nurseries may struggle to afford this, Coram Family and Childcare (CFC) reported that in the last year 72% of local

authorities reported that some of the local nurseries and day cares had to up their price of daily childcare to parents and carers, 48% of local authorities said that some of their local nurseries had to let staff go and reduce their staff numbers in order to afford and keep their setting going, therefore they may struggle to pay for the National Day Nursery Association's support when they are struggling to pay staff and other bills such as electricity and heating (Jarvie, 2023). The CFC reports that if the sector is to face anymore struggles this will put a real damper on all aspects of a setting including setting such as quality, therefore they will not be able to afford the help of an organisation such as the National Day Nursery Association which is supposed to be used in order to enhance the quality within a setting.

Another disadvantage of the National Day Nursery Association is the fact that it does not offer in setting support, it does not seem to be reported that they offer human interaction support. All the interaction and support offered is online, although this was good when the UK were faced with COVID-19 and no inspections by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) or Estyn took place, now more than ever in person support from an organisation such as the National Day Nursery Association would be crucial in order for setting to thrive and ensure they are providing the best high-quality practise. Partnership working with different organisation is extremely important within nurseries and settings as it helps enhance a child's learning and development therefore enhancing the quality of a setting (The Hub, 2020).

As well as the use of the National Day Nursery Association and statutory requirements to measure and ensure quality there are other ways in which high quality practise can be ensured across a setting, such as the use of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS). Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) is a method used to measure quality in settings by measuring "the quality of group programs for infants and toddlers (birth to age 3) by collecting data through classroom observations and a staff interview" (The Pennsylvania Keys, no date). According to, (Gordon et al, 2013) Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) have also played a significant role in measuring the positive associations between childcare quality and child development.

Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale is not a reflection of a practitioner's work or environment, but it is a reflection of the quality of the environment the children learn and develop in. There are 43 factors which influence the score of the level of quality taking place in the environment and each factor being scored from 1-7, 1 being inadequate and not

meeting the care needs and 7 being perfect in high quality care (The Pennsylvania Keys, no date). According to (Clifford and Reszka, 2010), environments that provide children with high quality care and learning, need to ensure that children are provided with 3 essential needs, these include “protection of their health and safety, the facilitation of building positive relationships, and opportunities for stimulation and learning from experience” (Clifford and Reszka, 2010). The use of Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) allows management to ensure the quality of all environments both indoors and outdoors. Monitoring the quality of outdoor environments is extremely important and that is where children do the most of their risky play, “outdoor spaces offer children varied opportunities to use and develop risk management skills; as well as improve their confidence and self – esteem” (North Yorkshire County Council, 2017), Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, allows practitioners that the environments are safe and of high quality in order for the children to safely risk take and play which extremely beneficial to their learning and development. Not only that but learning and developing within the outdoor environment plays a vital role in the Welsh curriculum.

However, factors come into play that can make carrying out ECERS difficult, they can often be time consuming when you are looking at the whole 43 factors and having to score them accurately. Also, another disadvantage of Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) is the fact that the scoring method can lack specificity (Pro Profs Survey Maker, 2022), due to the fact the answer is only a number it does not leave room or clarification on how a specific area of the 43 factors can be improved. Other factors that can go against this method of measuring quality, this can include that fact that “training is required to use the ECERS tool” staff members will have to take part in having adequate and accurate training in order to carry out this tool, there for prolonging the time it takes in order to get the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale done.

In conclusion, ensuring practitioners are providing their settings with high quality care and provisions this allows the children within the setting to be able to learn and develop accurately, not only that but management must ensuring that all members of staff are on the same wave length when carrying out high quality practice as everyone has different opinions on what it actually means (Pacey, 2023) . In order to provide high quality practice practitioners must follow National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare and other

statutory organisations such as Care Inspectorate Wales this ensures that there is an elevated level of quality within a setting, however using external non statutory methods ensures that practitioners are doing whatever is possible to ensure their practise is of an even better-quality standard. There are many methods used in order to measure quality across settings, that are not essential and statutory but are extremely crucial in measuring level of quality that takes place within a nursery or other regulated childcare setting, however there factors that come in to play that can make carrying out measures and methods difficult, they can be costly and often time consuming.

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