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Reflection on quality in the early years.

In the early years quality reflects the setting provision and practices going above and beyond good practices that support and meet the children's developing needs. Sustaining and significantly improving children's learning outcomes, providing children with the right foundation for life. Not only does good quality provision have a positive benefit for children and their development, but it also gives parents and carers the confidence with the setting in providing quality childcare by working in partnership with parent and carers, so the children have the best start in life (Local Government ,2023). In addition, as it is stated in the National Minimum Standards Regulated Childcare for Children up to the age of 12 years(NMS) refers to high quality in an early years setting that goes above and beyond the minimum standards and fundamental expectations and reflects and improves staffing and the provision to provide the best experience and opportunities for everyone involved in the setting. Quality should be in all areas of the early years setting that is reflected on regularly and looks at each of these aspects nurturing wellbeing, healthcare and nutrition (Welsh Government ,2023). However, the National Day Nurseries Association in Wales (NDNA) highlights that quality is a reflection on provision and practice that is always looking for ways to improve and that aims to go above and beyond the National Minimum standard requirement from the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). Where parents can be confident in what the early years setting has to offer their child through play and learning experiences (cwlwm,2016). However, Harvey and Green (1993) cited in Early Childhood Provision, Practice and Quality: *the ambiguity of the meaning of quality* Palaiologou, (2023), concluded that there is no single definition of quality this varies for individuals making it hard to define the meaning of quality (Palaiologou,2023). On the other hand, Pence and Moss (1994;172) stated that 'quality in early years settings is a relative concept' therefore, it is a contracted idea in early years settings that is focused on interest, values and beliefs and is subjective rather than objective. The quality of childcare in the main is the view of the stakeholders involved with the setting cited in Why can't we get beyond quality (Moss,2016). Furthermore, leadership plays a vital part in establishing quality in the early years setting, with self-evaluation of practices, identifying areas for improvement and developing action plans on how to implement the improvement. Improving in quality is a continuous process based on planning, implementation, reviewing and evaluating. It is an ongoing journey involving children, parents and professionals to achieve high quality.

Children who experience high quality in early years care and education have better wellbeing and achieve higher outcomes in their holistic development especially social,

emotional and cognitive skills than early years settings that have poor quality that does not meet the minimum standards, support, and progress and extend children learning (Foundation Years, no date).

Early Years Childhood Environmental rating scales.

The Early years childhood Environmental scales (ECERS) is a tool that measures the early years setting environment, provision and practitioner led interactions that support and develop children's holistic needs (Early year newsletter, no date). There are scales in six areas that are related to the children and the last two scales are related and referred to the parents and the early practitioners in the setting. ECERS can be used by practitioners for self-assessing the quality in the early years setting and to highlight areas that need to be improved on. The areas that the scale looks at are space and furnishing, personal care routines, language –reasoning, learning experience, interaction, program structure, parent and staff (Keystones to opportunity, no date). In addition ECERS has been revised updated and changed to the Early Childhood Environment Rating scale ECER-R has been developed to reflect early years education areas of Development Approach Practice (DAP), which is based on well-balanced research to teach and ways to approach effective learning in early education, looking at all the aspects ECEERS and ECERS-R is used in the classroom of early years settings and is an effective way to measure the setting environment , curriculum, practitioner interaction with children and is also used as a research or self-assessment tool and guide to improve and guide quality education and care (Brunsek et al ,2017). This is measured by a scoring systems 37-7 point looking at 7 aspects of the practice with has been discussed before where the observer responds either yes or no on the scales and following observations practitioners are asked questions about their practice. Research suggests that ECERS-R is a valid and reliable tool to use to evaluate the quality of the early years setting environment however, Burchinal et al 2002 cited in 'A comparative analysis of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale–Revised and Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Third Edition' stated that the links between quality and child outcomes are poorly linked to child development (Neitzel,2019). As it is highlighted in the assessment arrangements for funded non-maintained nursery settings in the Curriculum for Wales that the environment and the children's learning experiences is dependent on the quality interaction between the practitioner and children and supporting progression for child by planning observation and assessment (Education, Wales 2023) Similarly, Gordon et al (2013) stated that a larger number of policymakers and researchers have concern on how limited the rating scale is and how useful it is in practice. Correspondingly this cannot be used to complete the self-assessment of Service Statement (SASS) for CIW because it does not look at all the

areas on the SASS form such as staff qualification, safeguarding procedures and record- keeping. However, to make sure that the early childhood environment is quality the ECERS scale needs to be used alongside other methods and tools such as Early Years Wales Schema Quality for all (QfA) where it looks at the aspects the ECERS scale does not evaluate (Finders ,2023).

Quality Counts National Day Nurseries Association early year improvement scheme

Furthermore, the Quality Counts National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) early years quality improvement scheme is a framework that is set up to help, support, mentor and provide training for nursery providers and practitioners to improve and self-evaluate provision and their practice and work towards a certification. The framework has been developed in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child (UNCRC) and best practice that is based on academic research. Rewarding the setting with a certification that shows that the setting is providing the highest quality opportunities and experiences for children (NDNA, no date) Similarly to the Self-Assessment of Service Statement (SASS) that is a legal requirement for all childcare's, practitioners and childminders to complete for the CIW annually pre inspection and early years settings that are highlighted by this as needing inspection the most are prioritised (Play Wales 2025). As is stated in section 16 of The Child Minding and Day care (Wales) Regulations 2010 the quality of care given to children needs to be reviewed regularly and include the views of children and their parents and the practitioners in the early years setting (Legislation,2011). Practitioner can complete the online audit to reflect and evaluate their practice that includes all the staff feedback in four key areas play and learning, health safety and wellbeing, workforce and leadership and management. This links very closely with the SASS form four rating areas. Once this has been completed online this gives the early years setting access to a system which includes a quality counts statement that gives the practitioner an online review and provides the practitioner with feedback on areas that need to be improved (NDNA, no date). However, NDNA quality schemes have a cost that maybe a disadvantage for early years settings due to the pressure financially with rising running costs, it also relies on funding from the government. Gibson 2024 highlighted that early years have been more dependent on government funding as an income; therefore, the government need to take urgent action to improve the early years crisis by making sure that the early years setting can provide a cost effective service and deliver high quality education and care for all children (Early year alliance ,2024).

In conclusion, quality in the early years is hard to define and that there are no single definitions on what quality means and varies between the government and independent quality assurance schemes.

I feel that practitioners going above and beyond the National Minimum Standards required by CIW is a way of defining quality in the early years as is stated by the NDNA (cwlwm,2016), Leadership plays a vital part in establishing quality in the early years setting, with self-evaluation of practices, identifying areas for improvement and developing action plans on how to implement the improvement. However, the running costs of early years settings and settings being reliant on government funding have impacted early years settings providing quality education and care. Early years practitioners using these methods and schemes such as ECERS-R and NDNA quality schemes are a vital way for the provider to gather as much information that is needed to reflect and evaluate their practice to ensure that the children are given the best possible learning and play opportunity and experience that meets the children's holistic needs and development. Children who experience high quality in early years care and education have better wellbeing and achieve higher outcomes in their holistic development especially social, emotional and cognitive skills than early years settings that have poorer quality and possibly not meeting the minimum standards, or supporting and progressing and extending children's learning (Foundation Years, no date) By participating in Quality assurance schemes this helps early years practitioners complete the SASS form that reflects on regulatory requirements and practice and must be submitted to CIW every year.

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