Leadership and Management for systems of quality

No AI has been used in this assignment.

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1. Reflective Paper

Introduction

Birth To 5 Matters (2025) suggests that quality in early years is not something that is done once but is something that is continuously being developed and improved over time, and it involves practitioners, parents, communities and policy makers working together to create positive learning experiences for children. Some areas of quality, such as policies and standards, can be measured outside of the education setting, whereas other areas, such as relationships and interactions, depend on everyday experiences in the setting and can be influenced by children, parents and practitioners. This links to Welsh Government (2025), which explains that high quality provision focuses on the child and their needs, and includes 'enabling adults, effective environments and engaging experiences.' These three areas help children to explore, become independent and learn through play. This is supported by Foundation Years (no date), which highlights the importance of people working together and building strong relationships to achieve quality in early years settings. It also emphasises the important role leaders play in improving quality, and states that they should have a clear plan for how to check and improve their practice. This includes identifying areas for improvement, planning how to make these changes, and seeing what difference they have made in the setting. Foundation Years (no date) also notes that quality is important for children's education and care, because children in high quality settings are more likely to have better outcomes at school and develop better social, emotional and thinking skills, whereas for children in lower quality settings, it can negatively affect their learning and development over time.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2022), a range of quality assurance methods are used in early years settings to make sure that approaches and everyday experiences are effective and support improvements in practice. These methods help show who is responsible and highlight what is working well in the setting, identify areas for improvements and support staff in deciding what to do next to improve care and learning experiences for the children. They also support reflective practice, which gives practitioners the opportunity to think about their own interactions, teaching, and approaches when supporting children's learning which is strongly supported by the Curriculum for Funded Non-

Maintained Nursery Settings (Welsh Government, 2024). There are formal methods, such as the Quality for All scheme (Early Years Wales, 2020), which involves an assessor coming into the setting to observe practice, give feedback on what they saw and support practitioners in improving and providing the best quality care and learning they can. There are also more informal methods, such as observations, which help practitioners understand what children can do, what they know, and what they may need support with next (Welsh Government, no date).

Quality Assurance Methods

This reflective paper will discuss two chosen quality assurance methods, the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-being scales [hereafter SSTEW] and parents evenings. Both these methods are used in different ways to support improvements in early years provision.

SSTEW

The SSTEW scale is a research-based quality assurance tool is used in early years settings for children aged 2–5. It assesses how well practitioners interact with children during their everyday practice and focuses on the relationships and conversations staff have with children, and how they support children's learning and development. It also includes how practitioners listen, show interest, and support children's thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills (Hoare, no date). The SSTEW scale is made up of five subscales, and each focus on a different area of children's development. Within the subscales, there are 14 items that go into more detail, which help practitioners understand what their everyday practice and interactions should look like (Siraj, Kingston and Melhuish, 2015). The SSTEW scale is mainly used by leaders and managers of early years settings, where they observe practitioners in practice and use the scale to assess the quality of their interactions with children. The observation is then given a score between 1 (inadequate) and 7 (excellent), and this is then used to give feedback to practitioners to help with their practice. It highlights the practitioners' strengths as well as identifying areas for improvement in regards to supporting children's thinking, communication and social and emotional development (Siraj, Kingston and Melhuish, 2015).

SSTEW has many advantages for children and practitioners working in early years settings, one being is that it highlights how vital high-quality interactions are between

adults and children. Mackenzie (2016) states that this is important as high-quality early experiences can a huge positive impact for children's learning and development, helping them to develop important skills they need for life. Positive interactions between practitioners and children are vital in the SSTEW scale, and this is supported by the Department for Education (2025) which highlights that children benefit from being with practitioners who are approachable and show a genuine interest in talking to them. This promotes a 'language-rich' environment, that supports children's communication and thinking skills. When practitioners show interest in what children are doing and saying, they introduce the children to new vocabulary and model good communication through words, body language, facial expressions, songs and actions. This shows what high-quality interactions should look like for practitioners and links to the Curriculum for Funded Non-Maintained Nursery Settings (Welsh Government, 2024), which emphasises the role of enabling adults when supporting children's learning and development. Another advantage of SSTEW is that it encourages practitioners to take part in reflective practice, which is especially beneficial when discussing their practice with experienced colleagues, as this supports collaboration and professional development (Gunning, 2022). This is important because it helps practitioners think about and evaluate their own practice, grow their skills and knowledge, boost their confidence, and make positive changes to the care and learning they provide for children (Birth to 5 Matters, 2021).

However, there are some disadvantages to the SSTEW scale, such as it can be time consuming to complete. Siraj, Kingston and Melhuish (2015) suggest that leaders or managers should observe one small group of children at a time, and that it should take 3 to 4 hours. Extra time is also needed to complete the planning and paperwork side of the SSTEW scale, as well as having the time for meaningful conversations with practitioners afterwards for feedback. Another disadvantage to the SSTEW scale is that it needs to be used along side another scale to give the whole picture of an early years setting, as it focuses mainly just on interactions. Siraj, Kingston and Melhuish (2015) recommend using ECERS-E for 3-5 year olds and ITERS-R for 2 year olds, which again means it requires extra time and planning to assess the settings quality completely. Another disadvantage of SSTEW is that it must be completed by someone with 'knowledge of child development and appropriate practice' (Hoare, no date). This is because individuals without this knowledge may

have less accurate observations and scoring, which could affect how useful the feedback for practitioners would be.

Parents evenings

Parents evenings are very useful in both primary and secondary schools as they give parents the chance to have conversations with their child's teachers. These conversations usually last around 10 minutes and allow both parents and teacher to discuss, ask questions or mention any concerns they have about their child's learning, development and overall progress (Buxton School, 2025). Whilst parents evenings are important, Welsh Government (2023) has brought out legislation that states headteachers need to organise 'termly updates' for parents on how their child is progressing. This means that in Wales teachers must give parents a holistic update on how their child is doing in relation to the four purposes of the curriculum every 12-14 weeks, either during parents evenings or through more informal conversations, such as brief chats during drop off or pick up times. These updates allow parents to understand what their child's strengths are, what areas they can support them in and how their overall wellbeing is (Welsh Government, 2023). Whereas in early years settings, instead of parents evenings, staff maintain regular communication with parents through informal ways, such as daily updates through text or apps, or brief friendly chats, which provides parents with the knowledge to work alongside staff to support their child's needs (National Day Nurseries Association, 2026).

There are many advantages for both parents and practitioners in having parents evenings, such as it can support in building strong partnerships and can improve the connections made between the school setting and the child's home. This collaboration can support children's development, as it can help them feel more confident, can improve attendance and behaviour, and can increase their motivation to learn (Parentkind, no date). Another advantage to parents evenings according to Buxton School (no date), is that parents can benefit from the knowledge and experience that teachers have, meaning they can gain advice and support on how to help their child progress. Teachers can also highlight areas where a child may need extra help, suggest where they can access more support, and reassure parents by reminding them that each child develops at their own pace.

However, there are some disadvantages to parents evenings, for example they can be very demanding for teachers, as they are often held after a full school day. This means teachers could be tired and feel overwhelmed due to having lots of meetings one after the other in such a short space of time. As class sizes have also increased, some teachers may have to do this for 3 to 4 days in order to see every child's parents (Erasmus, 2020). Parentkind (no date) states that this can also be challenging for parents, as they may be unable to attend due to work commitments, they may need to rush from work to make their appointment slot, or they may have to arrange additional childcare, which can make the parents evenings experience stressful for both parents and practitioners. Another disadvantage to parents evenings is that the information given is based on one teacher's views or opinions of a child. Gov.uk (2021) suggest that teachers feedback can be influenced by bias, which means it may not always provide a fully balanced or complete picture of a child's development. This is why it is important for practitioners to collaborative with other professionals that work with the child, to help build a more accurate and holistic picture of their progress and needs (Hewson, 2024).

Conclusion

Even though SSTEW and parents evenings are both valuable quality assurance methods, they differ in what they focus on and how information is gathered. SSTEW is a research-based method that focuses on practitioners' everyday interactions with children, looking at the quality of interactions and how learning is supported (Hoare, no date). Whereas parents evenings focus on communication between practitioners and parents, where feedback is given about a child's progress and development from the school's perspective (Buxton School, 2025). This shows that SSTEW focuses more on evaluating practice, whereas parents evenings focus on building partnerships and sharing information.

However, SSTEW and parents evenings also share some similarities, a main similarity being that neither method provides a full picture of the child. SSTEW is recommended to be used alongside another scale, such as ECERS-E, to get a more complete picture of the setting (Siraj, Kingston and Melhuish, 2015), whilst the feedback given during parents evenings can be biased and may reflect just one teacher's perspective (Gov.uk, 2021). Another similarity is that both methods can be

time consuming, as with SSTEW, one observation should take around 3 to 4 hours to complete, and parents evenings often take place over 3 to 4 days to ensure every parent has been seen (Siraj, Kingston and Melhuish, 2015; and Erasmus, 2020).

When both methods are used together in an early years setting, they can help to build a more holistic picture of the child. SSTEW can highlight what practitioners are doing well and where improvements may be needed (Mackenzie, 2016), whereas parents evenings provide insight into how the child is developing at both school and at home (Welsh Government, 2023). Combining these methods supports practitioners in providing high-quality early years provision, which then enhances children's development and learning and gives them the best possible start in life (Education Development Trust, 2024).

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