

## Introduction

Quality assurance according to the European commission (2018) a systematic review of programmes within the education sector as well as processes to maintain and improve the quality, efficiency, and equity of the setting. High quality provisions help to achieve a higher outcome (Department for Children, Schools, and Families, 2008). One issue with quality assurance is that there are different purposes meaning approaches, methods, focuses and objects will vary. Harvey (2004, 2008). One of the overriding challenges facing quality assurance is integrating quality assurance and the enhancement of learning through a holistic approach (Quality Research International, no dated). This paper will critically analyse and reflect on different methods of quality assurance and how they promote quality.

## Main body

Quality delivers a positive outcome for children and young people in the education system by building expertise and supporting teachers. (Scottish government, 2010). To provide the highest quality of education for each and all learners the school systems are committed to reviewing, self-improving and evaluating the setting. (For schools' education services, 2021). (Peisner-Feinberg and Burchinal, 1997; NICHD, 2002; Sylva et al, 2008). Agree with the above statement stating that early education and care naturally affects experiences for children in everyday life and the benefits of having high quality within the provision is only going to improve these experiences. However, Quality assurance according to (The European Education Area no date), suggests that a systematic review of the whole provision will improve or continue the efficiency of the setting. However quality assurance can be very prospective depending on the stakeholders that are involved in the setting. These stakeholders may include practitioners, parents, politicians, managers and of course children themselves (Woodhead, 2000). When looking at quality assurance it is important to remember it needs to be flexible, how it looks depends on each school individually, it also depends on the level of the education authority while building on existing practices (Scottish Government 2010). According to the Education Policy Institute (EPI) (2018) and the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) (2018) because of the insufficiency with how high quality looks within practice, it is important to look at quality as two separate areas: structural quality and process quality. Structural quality according to (NICHD, 2006) structural quality refers to those that are regulated and measurable. Process quality are the adjoining factors regarding the quality of care given to children and the assistance in children's development by staff. (Cryer, Harms, & Riley, 2003). However, it is important to recognise that without structural quality there would be no process quality. And therefore, both work hand in hand to ensure the best

outcomes for the setting and children. (Bogard, Traylor, & Takanishi, 2008; Cryer et al., 2003; Early et al., 2006; Smith, 2005). One issue with quality assurance is investing within early education, experiences for young children results not only in benefits, but also in long-term improved cognitive and social development. There is a high rate of return that outweighs the costs (MacEwan, 2013). However, many schools are struggling with the cost of quality within the setting.

Main body:

One quality assurance method that will be discussed in this paper is effective early learning programme child involvement scale. This scale looks at the quality of human activity. To measure human activity adults, look at persistence or concentration of the child, how motivated or the level of experience both physical and cognitive (Bertram and Pascal, no date). The intensity of the experience and the emotional motivation can be illustrious with the involvement of children; however, it is important to remember that if the task is too easy or demanding then there will not be involvement. Although it is at the edge of the capabilities of the child and in line with Vygotsky theory on the zone of proximal development, where it refers to the difference amongst what learners can do without help and what learners can achieve with guidance and encouragement. The child involvement scale encompasses two sections, first a list of signals and secondly the levels of involvement in a 5-point scale. According to (Bertram and Pascal, no date) the signals list from concentration, energy, complexity, creativity, facial expressions, persistence, precision, reaction time, language, and satisfaction. Quality assurance was brought in to ensure the curriculum and planning use play as a key learning tool for children's learning and that there are plenty of opportunities for children to play, but it has also been brought in for children to take responsibility for their own learning.

One benefit to the effective early learning programme is how it encourages play. Children who develop a holistic approach to learning have a greater learning, child centred experience (Cunha and Heckman, 2009). According to (Shuey and Kankaras, 2018) happy children enjoy a natural process of learning while being curious and active, which helps with all aspects of development within a child. The opportunities play gives to development fulfils a child's inborn need to learn. (National literacy trust, 2017). In line with Froebel's theory gifts and occupations as cited in Bob Bates, (2019) play being the highest declaration of children's development.

One issue with the encouragement to play within settings remains the lack of professional development with the anchor being learning through play (UNICEF, 2018). (Bruce, 2011)

agrees by stating that the shortage of knowledge and understanding by the practitioners about play can have a detrimental effect on how play is perceived within the setting. (UNICEF, 2018) also believe that with development of teachers' workshop, however no guidance on the curriculum or what the expectation are of play then workshops are unlikely to be implemented with settings.

One way to improve the outlook of what play should look like is for practitioners and staff to have opportunities to gain knowledge, expertise and skills from other practitioners (Welsh Government, 2015). By visiting other settings and talking to other practitioners will gain an understanding and different view of play. Where culture peer learning is ingrained, coaching models will be developed by the whole setting and not only when visits happen. (Brinkworth, no date). Another way to improve this is to measure the interaction between adults and children using a scale, this will help with performance management (Crosse, no date) allowing for critical, reflective thinking, allowing staff to build on quality improvements and a child centred approach. Additionally, by giving staff the training and confidence to carry out play activities through building play into the early years' childhood development plan (theirworld, 2023). The greater the results of a holistic child centred approach to learning (Cunha and Heckman, 2009). It aims to strengthen practitioners through the process of improvements by empowering them. (MOSS; DAHLBERG; GRIESHABER, 2016). There are many ways to achieve quality within the setting while making sure it is respectful of culture and diversity. (Bertram and Pascal 2018).

One way that early childhood settings measure quality is by doing observations while children play, (UNESCO, 2004). Observations is one of the most important tools to gather information on the specific needs of the child (West Sussex County Council 2015). Pacey (2016) agrees by stating that with every child being unique it is important to understand the needs of everyone. By observing children in play activities, it allows them to understand where everyone is in their learning and development combined with the planning for further development. According to West Sussex County Council, 2015 without the understanding of each individual child planning and activities would be based on what the practitioner feels is important, interesting, or fun and not what the pupil believes. Through observation, staff can build an understanding of each pupil individually which in turn allows tailoring planning with the children's interests at centre of all by gathering knowledge of child development and understanding play, along with the knowledge of the curriculum framework (rainbow nursery no date).

One downside to observation is that the time in which it takes as it is not something you can do in two minutes however observations take time as while observing you can only observe one child at a time (Klauber, 2022). Harcombe, no date agrees by stating that observations are not only planned however, but spontaneous while being also brief or extended. It is important when observing that all children need to be covered and not just one individual while the majority of observations are done through child-initiated learning (Pacey, 2016) This can be a challenge to make sure the practitioners have the time to observe all the children for the same period and not some for longer than others, while also making sure that all other jobs within the setting get done.

One way in which observations can be improved is by allowing practitioners time, by allowing practitioners time it will ensure that all evidence is properly documented (Connect Childcare, 2022). A wonderful way to document the finding is through a digital voice recorder. Digital voice recorder factors in the ability to balance quality time with the pupils and quality observation by speaking the notes made and then writing them when there is more time (Education Scotland, 2022).

With all the information on Effective early learning above there is evidence to suggest that this is an effective tool for measuring quality and allowing more opportunities for play with play incorporated into the planning and curriculum (Bertram, Pascal and Ransden, 2006). However as above there are also plenty of improvements that need to be made to have the best outcome.

The second quality measure that is being looked at in this paper is Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing Scale (SSTEWS). SSTEWS is used to look at how adults within the setting support the language for thinking about the social and emotional well-being of children. (Chilvers, no date). SSTEWS scale developed to assess quality within early years education and care, including dimensions the process of quality looks like based on developmental theories and practice within an effective setting. Howard, Siraj et al (2018). Siraj, Kingston, and Melhuish, (2015) agree by stating that the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-being (SSTEWS) Scale was designed to contemplate the strategies in line with pedagogical strategies that are associated with child's outcomes. SSTEWS uses a scale to self-evaluate the practitioners looking at building trust, social and emotional wellbeing, confidence, supporting and extending language and communication. (Chilvers, no date). This form of scale needs to be used alongside other environment scales to give whole understanding of high-quality within the early years. The SSTEWS scales was brought in according to Siraj et al, (2015) to support, improve and increase the practical identification of

sustained shared thinking within the early years' education. SSTEW scale was brought in with the importance of self-regulated autonomous individuals, supporting and developing appropriate practices for all pupils both in school, and home settings. (Howard, Siraj et al, 2018). and (Kingston & Siraj, 2017).

One benefit is to child-centred learning where practitioners believe that students must be encouraged to learn in their own time. The child's education must be in accordance with the child's needs, understanding and enjoyment. (Smile foundation, 2023). Child centred lead was developed by theorist John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Maria Montessori by stating that children should be at the centre of the learning process and directed by the teachers. SSTEW focuses on bridging the gap between research and practice while supporting integrity, sustainability in high quality interaction and understanding for all practitioners (Sylva et al, 2004). Another benefit to the SSTREW scale is that it has a specific focus on the quality of interaction between staff and children with the scale going between cognitive and social-emotional side of development. (Sammons et al., 2002, 2003)

One downside to the SSTREW scale is that educators themselves use the tool to self-evaluate the quality improvement process, the downside to this is that some may score on what is believed they think they should be given and not an accurate scoring (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Downer et al., 2012; Mashburn et al., 2008). Another issue with SSTEW is that it works alongside another scale called environment rating scale (ERS), meaning that staff not only have to understand SSTEW practitioners also must understand and carry out ERS (Katz, 2008).

To improve SSTEW there needs to be clear guidance for marking the scale to ensure there is consistency throughout the whole sector, there also needs to be understanding of the different grade scales and the expectations in which staff need to assess the practitioner's performance (Howes et al., 2008; Slot et al, 2015). Another improvement to STTEW would be the integration of ERS so that practitioners are learning and understanding one as a whole and not individually allowing practitioners to understand how they both work alongside each other and why both together form a stronger more accurate response. (Fukkink and Lont, 2007).

## Conclusion

This paper critically analyses and reflects on different methods of quality assurance and how they promote quality. Quality is a standard in which we measure performance. Quality

delivers a positive outcome for children and young people in the education system by building expertise and supporting teachers. (Scottish Government, 2010). The two types of methods used to assess quality were effective early learning programme child involvement scale. With all the information on Effective early learning above there is evidence to suggest that this is an effective tool for measuring quality provides opportunities for play and ensuring the planning and curriculum incorporate play as the key aspect to learning (Bertram, Pascal and Ransden, 2006). However as above there are also plenty of improvements that need to be made to have the best outcome. The second is Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing Scale (SSTEWS). SSTEWS is an extremely useful tool to measure how practitioners and school setting staff support children in their language in social and emotional wellbeing as well as the thinking process. (Chilvers, no date). And all the evidence from above points to a successful outcome with insignificant changes in how SSTEWS is carried out the Successfulness of the Scale can be seen throughout all Early year's provisions.

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