

Research has shown that early year's settings can have a positive effect on children in the short and long term. Benefits to children include their educational, cognitive, behavioural and social outcomes, especially if the setting is of good quality (Melhuish *et al.*, no date and Sylva *et al.*, 2010). Quality supports children to build upon their skills to reach their full potential that gives them the best start in life and beyond (Rashid, 2019). According to Vermeer *et al.* (2016) quality within the early years is operated in various ways but largely represents a wide range of environmental features and interactions that contribute to children's development. The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project highlighted the effects pre-schools can have on children's outcomes. Within the project, a number of key findings were made such as the quality within early years and the positive effects on children's all-round development. They noted how during their longitude study they witnessed good quality across the different settings, however, the quality was greater in integrated care and education and nursery schools. Furthermore, the project stated that children made 'better all-round progress' where settings regarded educational and social development as equal importance, while effective pedagogy and 'sustained shared thinking' contributed to quality (Sylva *et al.*, 2004). However, Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) study was conducted to gain a better understanding of what 'high quality' looks like. The findings suggested that 'high quality' settings had more interactions and encouraged 'sustained shared thinking' among staff and children. Therefore, effective pedagogy consists of adult and child interaction through questioning, modelling and demonstrating where necessary to scaffold children's learning (Siraj-Blachford *et al.*, 2002). One of the main findings in both the EPPE project and the REPEY study was practitioner's qualifications. Where the highest quality was scored was where staff had the highest qualifications (Cottle and Alexander, 2012). Similarly, Nutbrown (2012) and Siraj and Hallet (2014) state the need for the early years workforce to have the vital qualifications, skills and knowledge whilst also improving qualifications making them more thorough with a stronger focus on child development that will provide young children with the best start in life. In addition, professional development is key in ensuring quality as this allows practitioners to progress, reflect and improve on practice and enhancing personal and professional growth. Furthermore, Waters and Payler (2015) State the importance of professional development among early years practitioners needs to be 'systematic, sustainable and transformative' to be effective. NDNA (2016) survey found a downwards trend relating to early years workforce qualifications. In 2015, 63% of practitioners working were qualified at level 3 this declined in 2016 with 55% of practitioners working with a level 3 qualification. In Wales all childcare settings for children aged up to 12 must comply with The National

Minimum Standards (2016). The standards determine if the setting is providing satisfactory care while aiming to improve and promote positive outcomes in children. In addition, ensuring settings have a safe and secure environment for the children in their care. To ensure the standards are met, the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) inspect settings every 2 years (CSSIW, 2022). However, the question of quality has been raised by Moss (2016) he states ‘quality’ is a choice rather than a necessity and quality is taken for granted. He also states that to a degree quality is in the eye of the beholder due to quality being subjective and based on values, beliefs, and interests. This assignment will critically analyse the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing scale and the Leuven scale of wellbeing and involvement two methods used to measure quality. The assignment will look at their strengths, weakness and their role in the early years.

The Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing scale is a tool developed to measure quality within early years settings built on developmental theories that looks at bridging the gaps between research and practice, pedagogy within the setting and in addition, supports the understanding of high-quality interactions (Howard *et al.* 2018). Within the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing scale there are 2 areas of development that are social and emotional development and cognitive development. Within the two areas are 5 subscales with 14 items such as building trust, confidence and independence: social and emotional wellbeing: supporting and extending language and communication: supporting learning and critical thinking and assessing learning and language (Brodie, 2015). The above items are assessed on a seven-point scale ranging from inadequate to excellent. The scores must represent the professional judgement of staff actions, replies and interactions as well as the children’s experiences (Hoare, no date). However, for the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing scale to provide an accurate score Melhuish, Siraj and Kingston, (2015) state the person conducting the observations should have knowledge of child development and appropriate practice. The Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing scale not only considers the environment and resources for children to enhance their problem solving and imaginative skills but also considers the wellbeing and self-regulation of the children through interactions with other children and adults (Siraj *et al.*, 2015). The term sustained shared thinking is defined by Siraj-Blachford *et al.* as:

‘two or more individuals “work together” in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative etc. Both parties must contribute to the thinking and it must develop and extend’ (REPEY, 2002: 8).

The sustained shared thinking closely links to Vygotsky's theory that the support of the practitioner when a child is in the 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD) will extend a child's learning beyond what the child could achieve on their own (Children's Services Central, no date, Learning Journals, 2022, Grimmer, 2017). However, Brodie (2016) states how practitioners need the skills to spot an opportunity for sustained shared thinking to happen. Motivation is needed to spend time doing sustained shared thinking as well as understanding its importance, plays a key role as sustained shared thinking is not just 'talking' to children. Practitioners need to actively listen and ask positive questions to allow for deep level thinking to occur. In addition to the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing scale the Leuven scale of wellbeing and involvement is also a tool used to measure the wellbeing and involvement of children within a setting developed by Ferre Laevers (Milton Keynes Gov, 2020). According to Emotionally Healthy Schools (2019) and Lewis (2020) wellbeing refers to the extent a child feels at ease, act spontaneously and shows self-confidence and vitality, factors that are key to securing mental health. While Cheqin, (2019) and St Michaels Pre-school (no date) say involvement refers to the child's engagement, focus and interest in an activity essential for deep level learning and development. Similar to the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing scale, the Leuven scale consists of five scale that enables the practitioner to screen the child's wellbeing and involvement. The scales method measures and ensures inter-rater reliability. A assessment method that involves a practitioner screening a child's wellbeing and involvement through observations over a course of a few weeks. Practitioners observe a child in a group or individually for approximately 2 minutes to be able to give a score on their wellbeing and involvement. The observations will serve as a tool to inform practitioners where the child is at and allow them to place suitable interventions to increase their wellbeing and involvement. In addition, Main (no date) and Evans and Evans (2018) point out how it also provides the practitioner to evaluate the effectiveness of the environment to ensure it is more appealing, challenging, while identifying the child's interests and stimulates their curiosity the same way in which the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing scale works. However, Evans and Evans (2018) go on to criticise the use of the Leuven scale due to many practitioners using it to assess children rather than evaluating the environment in which it is meant for. Furthermore, according to Learning Journals (2022) the Leuven scale does not consider children with additional needs or disabilities due to the behaviours defined within the scale. The behaviours defined are less obvious in children with additional need particularly for those children who are non-verbal. Furthermore NHS Tayside (no date), National Occupational Standards (2014) and Mainstone - Cotton (2019) state

practitioners need to have an understanding of wellbeing in order to provide the best support for children's emotional mental health. Therefore, in order to use the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing scale and the Leuven scale the practitioners should be knowledgeable to be able to accurately use both methods. However, for the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing scale Melhuish, Siraj and Kingston, (2015) state the person conducting the observations should have knowledge of child development and appropriate practice, while the use of the content requires bespoke training from authorised trainers. However, as stated by Croner-i (2020) and Education and Training Foundation (no date) professional development and training opportunities are often costly and as such there is a lack of take up meaning practitioners are not given the chance to upskill. As a result, the methods could be conducted by practitioner with none or basic knowledge of children's development and no knowledge on how to effectively use the methods. Nevertheless, within the tool book for Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing (2015) information regarding child development is provided that will support practitioners who have had limited training in child development. Furthermore, the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing method requires time in order to observe. As stated within the tool book, 3-4 hours is needed to complete the observation with additional time needed after the observation to clarify questions and complete paperwork. Thus, meaning the staff ratio is down and would need to be covered by another member or supply staff. Furthermore, it is also recommended to use another environment rating scale alongside, implications of this, is more paperwork and time. Whereas The Leuven scale requires only 2 minutes of observation per child. This can be done during a quieter part of the day and not impact staff ratio. Bruckauf and Hayes (2017) argue how quality measuring tools should capture children's involvement that holistically monitors early years settings to provide a high-quality provision for young children's development rather than a test tool. As highlighted in the EPPE project and the REPEY study interactions are key in achieving high quality settings. Both the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing scale and the Leuven scale emphasis the importance of adult- child interactions that are stimulating and though provoking which then leads to high levels of wellbeing and deep level learning (Lewis, 2020 and Mackenzie, no date). According to Mackenzie (no date) this should be done by supporting children's thinking through and engaging in metacognition supporting Bloom's Taxonomy hierarchical system. Bloom's Taxonomy helps to structure objective or outcomes for a learning experience. Each level of Bloom's Taxonomy develops from the last one, providing a ladder of potential learning objectives. The system begins with recalling

information to evaluation, where children are able to state opinions on the information (Boulter, 2021 and Deller, 2019).

To conclude although there are some reservations on what quality is, research has shown high quality settings are crucial to children's long-term outcomes allowing the child the best possible start in life. It is important to not only assess the environment but the wellbeing and involvement of the children within the setting. Through the use of quality assurance methods such as the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing scale and the Leuven scale provide practitioners with knowledge on what is working well and what needs to be addressed in terms of the environment to enhance children's emotional wellbeing. The evidence gathered can then inform best practice to increase the quality of the setting. Quality interactions with open ended questions to encourage problem solving and deep level learning are key to ensuring high quality provision for children. However, it is important when undertaking the methods, it is key that the practitioner is knowledgeable in child development to ensure the correct score and where possible training should be provided to understand how to use the methods. Therefore, more professional development is needed within early years for practitioners to progress, reflect and place in practice their acquired skills to ensure high quality is maintained.

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