

The aim of this assignment is to critically compare the 'Sustained Shared Thinking for Emotional Well-being (SSTEWE) and 'Safonnu Serennog' (SS) tools as a means of measuring and improving quality with early years settings. According to Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013) quality is a universal formula that highlights the level of standard a provision choose to implement and is therefore a reflection of best practice. Burchinal et al. (2010) furthers Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013) and states quality goes above statutory requirements and the politics of policies and ethics. They believe that quality assurance tools are also an important way of ensuring setting continuously improve inline with current legislation and practice as it encourages practitioners to reflect on practice which in hand allows settings to adapt the way they operate on a day to day basis and improve in order to enhance quality and remain competitive with their local nurseries. (Cottle, 2012). Menter (2010) also agrees and believe that change which occurs as a result of improving quality is important within an early year setting as it allows teachers and practitioners to adapt practice that supports the voice and wellbeing of a child through a child centred approach as encouraged by Reggio Emilia. (Thorton and Brunton 2008, and Arseven, 2014). Hallet (2014) and O'Sullivan (2010) both agree that the pedagogical approach as seen within the SSTEWE tool, instils motivation, creativity and innovation as understanding the voice of the child and upholding the Conventions stated in the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Save the children, 2019) ensures that everything has a purpose as children are valued. Athley (2007) also believes that by meeting the requirements of the SSTEWE and evidence gathered for the SS it will result in better relationships being built between practitioners and children as they feel valued and respected by giving them opportunities and choices within the environment which enables them to follow their interests.

Following quality assurance tools such as the SSTEWE and SS encourages provision to analysing the quality of services provided by early years provision, Reed and Canning (2010) and Stuart et al. (2015) states it effectively allows setting to highlight their strength and weaknesses and in hand allows the provisions the opportunity to challenge their weaknesses by changing practice in order to improve how they operate and provided a high quality of services that benefit the children, the stakeholders and the company. However, Menter (2010) does criticise this and states that measure quality can be difficult and complex as it requires an opinion of an assessor to gain a

level or score which represent standards, he also states that no setting operates the same and therefore believes quality will always look different to each setting.

The Childminding and Day Care (Wales) Regulations (amended 2016) along with the responsible person and person in charge all have responsibilities for ensuring compliance with the National Minimum Standards (2016) and Care Inspectorate Wales (2019) which outlines the minimum standards and requirements needed to maintain a safe and nurturing environment. However, Hodgman (2011) emphasises that quality supported by quality assurance tools, goes beyond this and furthers a setting by providing a unique selling point and attracting parents to the settings. This is extremely valuable as the intake of an early years setting can heavily depend on their reputation and recommendations from other parents. (Waller, Whitmarsh a Clarke, 2011). This is as a result of positive changes seen by parents being made as a result of the SSTEWS and SS tool which in hand builds parents' confidence that their chosen setting is operating at a high quality and therefore benefit the setting through an increase on intake of children as a result of parents promoting the success of the provision quality seen from obtaining the awarded plaque by SS or high score within the SSTEWS. (Ratcliffe, 2018 and Davies, 2006).

Standards encouraged by both the SSTEWS and SS are intended to allow a flexible approach which allows providers to develop quality tailored to the needs of the parents and children which reflects the values of the early years foundation phase (DCEF, 2008) whereby all practitioners have a duty to help each child reach their full potential. Quality assurance tools are extremely beneficial as it allows early years settings to refine practice, consider new initiatives, improve knowledge and adapt in accordance to stakeholders and children needs as well as new legislations and policies. (Davies, 2012 and PACEY, 2019).

According to Purdon (2014) The Sustained Shared Thinking for Emotional Well-being (SSTEWS) (2015) is a pedagogical tool used by practitioners and advisory teams to monitor quality of a provision by observing a session which follows a scoring system. Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2015) emphasise the importance of early years provision promoting sustained shared thinking (SST), which is measured within the tool, she believes SST occurs when communicate and work together to problem solve, clarify

concepts, evaluate an activity and extend on narrative as a method of enhancing their skills and knowledge which also supports (Welsh Government, 2015c).

As a result of this, Schon 1983 believes that SSTEWS allows practitioners to think on their feet, as children lead the learning and ask questions, which he argues is important of early years practice and supports the Early Years Foundation Phase Framework (2008) and the Successful Futures (2015) that supports critical and creative thinking as a way of enhances the children's development. Piaget theory also agrees, as he believes children will benefit from high quality experiences encouraged within the SSTEWS (2015) as they will enhance their knowledge through first hand experiences and as a result will build on their schemas by making connections to the world and enhance their cognitive development. Research by Burchinal et al. (2009) also emphasise the importance of practitioners implementing the SSTEWS and SS as a means of means of promotion quality experiences to children, as they state, children who experience high quality play are more likely to lead to better learning outcomes and provide them with a flying start and ready for school. As a result of high-quality experiences and routines implemented in early years settings, it will increase parent's confidence and make the transition from nursery to school smoother. (Burrell and Riley, 2007). As both the SSTEWS and SS look at planning, Wright (2009) furthers that by practitioners planning in advance and incorporating children's ideas through providing positive child led experiences the children will benefit from a natural continuous development.

As research suggests by Mudiad Meithrin (MM) (2019) the SS quality tool has replaced the 'Cylch Rhagorol' status in order to reflect changes in practice uphold quality superior quality standards shared with the likes of Flying Start (Welsh Government, 2014) and Estyn (2019). Unlike the SSTEWS, the SS has three levels of quality; the bronze, silver and gold. However, the bronze plaque is automatically gained upon joining Mudiad Meithrin at no cost which be an incentive to settings. Saracho (2015) and Michel and Canning (2011) states this can be misleading to parents as a reflection of quality as Although signifies that the provision simply follows the welsh language policy and is compliant with CIW (2019) and is therefore not a true reflection of the standards seen daily within the setting.

However, the silver award of the SS tool does assess the provisions level of quality above bronze standard through a portfolio format full of evidence and paper work that highlights practice that support quality within 7 areas; Well-being of the child, experiences and learning, care and development, leadership and management, the welsh development, the environment and assessment which is also monitored within an inspection and SASS report. The portfolio is evaluated by an external quality assurance panel in order to ensure consistency. (Davies, 2012).

O'Malley and Pierce, 1996 cited in Beck et al. believes portfolios are beneficial for measuring and showcasing quality as it allows leaders and employees to document growth over time, reflect on their practice and highlight beneficial redirections. (Monkhatria 2015) states that portfolios as a means of assessing quality develop continuous development which is very beneficial for settings as the MM link officer will continue to monitor the quality of the provision throughout the application process as well as after the plaque is awarded and therefore reassure parents that the setting is operating to a high standard. (Davies, 2006 and Ratcliffe, 2018). Despite, Rosenstock (2002) criticising that portfolios can be time consuming and complex, The SS award also benefits employees as well as leaders as the link officer will work in partnership with the setting to observe and highlight good practice seen within the sessions that can be used to evidence high quality practice needed to meet the criteria of the silver award. The quality assurance panel can ask for additional evidence if they feel an area within the portfolio does not have enough evidence.

Unlike the SS, whereby evidence to showcase quality is gathered over a minimum of 6 months period and it supported by MM support officer, The SSTEW assessment is carried out over a short period of time, often only two and a half hours which Smidt (2015) and Podmore and Luff (2012) believes is not enough time for an assessor to have a true reflection of the settings service as a whole as they only score each setting on what they see within their time at the setting. (Drummond and Pollard, 1993). For example, depending on the timing of the SSTEW assessment, some settings may score higher for an activity that promotes culture and diversity which might not be celebrated daily. However, Saracho (2015) and Nutbrown (2014 and 1994) argues that observations as a means of measuring quality is very effective; as assessors have clear guidelines to follow when being a gold rated assessor and are able to ask leaders questions on the day if they notice a setting has not quite met the criteria within an

area of assessment and are able to show case what they do through photographic evidence. Palaiologou (2012) believes observations are also an effective way of evidencing results which will reflect the practice seen on the day and therefore emphasises on the need for the scoring to be detailed and subjective in order to minimise bias. As a means of ensuring quality, the SSTEWS also requires the people carrying out the assessment to have inclusive training and carry out observations together in order to determine a similar scoring system through common expectations. i.e each member recognises what good practice looks and vice versa in order to ensure consistency of scoring. (Wright, 2009).

In contrast to the SS, the SSTEWS is an effective way of provisions measuring and improving adult interaction with children, as supported by Elklan (2019), By settings taking part in the SSTEWS, Brodie (2014) states that children will benefit from the use of the tool as it encourages Vygotsky (Cited in Bodrova and Leong, 2007) theory and Siraj-Blatchford (2009), that children learn effectively through collaborating as they will learn off the more knowledgeable other and become independent thinkers as they question why things happen. Bilton (2010) also agree and believes children learn effectively using this method as it not only encourages children language and literacy skills, it helps children develop across the curriculum. (Gibbons, 2015).

The SSTEWS and SS also places a great emphasis on the environment and opportunities for children that go above and beyond the National Minimum Standards (2016) and requirements of CIW (2019), therefore by settings focusing and planning for a range of activities that meet the needs of each child it will in hand provided the staff in the setting a common vision that the children will benefit from as the whole setting is adopting a pedagogical approach and ensuring the wellbeing and development of the children is the provisions focus. (Nicholson, 2017 and, Halfpenny and Pettersen, 2014). However, Thornton and Burton (2008) do state that the space and location of the setting can affect the results of the SSTEWS as it is encouraged that best practice allows children free access to all resources across the curriculum as well as the outdoor environment in order to develop children skills and development further.

Furthering research also suggests that following the SSTEWS assessment the assessors that highlight the areas of strengths and weaknesses to the setting leader and provide recommendations on areas that can be enhanced in order to score high

marks in the SSTEW and increase quality the setting will benefit as the assessors will be able to offer bespoke training to improve quality. Despite this, only one member of staff, often the leader will be allowed the training, any further training will come at a cost. Canning et al (2010) believes this is beneficial to staff and the setting as it will allow the setting the understand why they have score low in an area of the SSTEW and make necessary changes in order to reflect and improve quality. Palaiologou (2012) and Pugh and Duffy (2014) Siraj- Blathchfor (2015) and the REPEY Project highlights that high qualifications attained by a work force promotes confidence which is beneficial for children as they are more likely to be engaged in an activity whereby the staff know what they are doing and are enthusiastic. High qualifications also lead to high level of knowledge which Bandura believes is effective as children learn through modelling behaviour as it provides demonstrates to them the correct way of using resources through play and as a result consolidate their learning. (Cable, Drury and Miller, 2012).

To conclude, 'Managing quality means constantly pursuing excellence: making sure that what your organisation does is fit for purpose, and not only stays that way, but keeps improving.' (IRCA, 2019:1). As stated throughout the assignment, good practice that includes high quality experiences for children will increase their wellbeing and emotional stability which will help children to develop the life skills needed to make independent choices in the future. (Williams, 2003). The SS is extremely effective for a setting as all the research gathered for the portfolio from silver award above can also provide evidence to show CIW inspectors on their good practice and opportunities children have at the setting. The support of a MM officer will also ensure continuous development, which is beneficial as often new members of staff will take on in order to ensure compliance with ratios. The three levels also provide a natural progress of development for their settings and award plaques showcase their quality to parents which will lead to better relationships and confidence being built along with a good reputation that will encourage more children to the setting. However, the main downfall of the SS is the bronze level award, as it does not carry much perspective of the level of quality as it naturally awarded upon registration. As stated by Stuart et al. (2015) The main advantage of the SSTEW is that it will highlight the strength and weaknesses of a setting. This is very beneficial as a way it allows leaders to address these

weaknesses through training and therefore improve practice. (Siraj-Blatchford, 2011 and Taguchi, 2009).

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