

The first five years of a child's life are crucial to their development as this is the time that their brain develops the quickest. Therefore, it is important that children are provided with high quality learning experiences, helping their brain make the connections needed that will have a lasting impact on their development and the person they will become, (First things first, 2018). This is supported by the (Department of children, schools and families, 2008) who state that children in early year care provision who receive high quality experiences achieve higher outcomes during their time in education and are equipped with social, emotional and cognitive skills needed later in life. However, the term quality is different to different people depending on what the individual perceives quality is. Quality is not just providing high teacher to child ratios and having a well-equipped setting with fully qualified staff. It is more than just meeting the National Minimum Standards. It is focussing on what is the quality of the provision given. Is it meeting the needs of the individuals? Are the children engaged and learning? Do they interact with their peers and adults, if so to what level? (Tonge, Jones, Okely, 2019).

(Mathers, Singler and Karemaker, 2012) agree that quality provision can be varied from setting-to-setting therefore having different impacts on children's developmental achievements. They identify the significance of quality provision and how it is more important for children who come from socially deprived areas as they need the extra support that they may not be able to access at home, which will help them to overcome any disadvantages. (The Department for Education, 2015) support this expressing that children from socially deprived areas, compared to their peers, will have a bigger gap in their educational attainment. As a result, the Pupil Premium was introduced in 2011 to help shorten the gap for the disadvantaged children. However, it does not label all disadvantaged children as having the same barriers or less potential to succeed in their educational performance. (The Sutton Trust, 2011) agree that the quality of teaching can have an impact on children's attainment stating that their research found children from disadvantaged areas who access high quality teaching can achieve up to one and a half years of progress over a year, in comparison with half a year's progress when the experience poor quality teaching.

How is quality defined? (Akareem, Hossain, 2016) discusses quality assurance stating that it is necessary in all areas of education, and it is defined by the structure, activities and processes undertaken by the children and that these are closely and continuously monitored to ensure they are effective and that they are being carried out appropriately. (Slade, NO YEAR) agrees that a quality education is not being solely focused on building the child to become literate and numerate and the content of the curriculum. It is about being able to create an approach that

identifies children's abilities and knowing how to help them progress to the next steps. Previously the education system has been known to be data driven and looking at the children based on their age rather than what stage that the individual is at. (Education International and ASCD, 2015) support this further saying that a quality education is based on the holistic view of the child and providing this quality is based on three things. The quality of the environment- ensuring it is fully accessible, safe and well resourced. The quality of the teachers- as previously mentioned, making sure they are fully qualified, well trained and motivated to support children and finally the tools used to monitor quality- is the curriculum flexible to suit the children's needs and what is used to monitor and assess their progress? (The Department for children, schools and families, 2008) discusses the range of tools that should be used to monitor the quality of teaching. These range from target setting, the use of self-evaluations, observations, professional development discussions and early years settings linking with schools to ensure a consistent approach and smooth transitions for children.

Evaluating practice through reflection helps the practitioner question their actions, what worked well and what can they change for next time. This is important in practice to ensure that they are working to the best of their ability and delivering quality. However, this critical reflection is just taken from their own point of view and can stunt progress if they are unable to identify issues in their own practice (Gudeta, Kyriakides, 2022). (Halim, Wahid, Halim, 2018) agrees stating that teachers can have difficulties and make mistakes in their teaching, but it is a profession that is continually developing, with the teacher learning from their practice and the feedback of others. Only by having this honest feedback from the observation of others they can build on their skills and contribute to their continuous professional development, therefore promoting a higher quality of teaching. However, (Werner, 2018) identifies the barriers and limitations that can arise during the observation of staff. The observer can have a bias point of view and only make partial observations based on their interests. It can be difficult for the observer to focus on everything that is happening in the environment. Some of these limitations can be overcome with the use of an observation tool which is set out for the observer, such as a checklist. This can ensure that the observer has a focus and objective to achieve and helps promote a constant approach to observing and for clear feedback for the practitioner who is observed, (Early Years Careers, 2015).

The use of observing teaching standards is only one part of measuring quality. (Welsh Government, 2021) consultation document on a curriculum for non-maintained nursery settings discusses the assessment of children's learning and the importance of knowing where

the child is at developmentally. By assessing the child, the practitioner can support them appropriately as they know what they need now along with the next steps. They can document the child's learning journey at the setting measuring progress from their initial start to the end of their time at the setting. This assessment is not a one off, it is done using a range of assessment tools throughout their time at the setting measuring their attainment and therefore measuring the quality of their provision. (Welsh Government, 2015) Early Years Outcomes Framework gives the practitioner a results-based accountability approach which helps their practice. The framework provides targets, making it clear what is to be achieved. The (CSSIW, NO YEAR) inspection framework for childcare links with this as during their inspection they look at how the children are developing.

A quality assurance scheme known as Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-Being (SSTEWS) scales is a self-evaluation tool used by practitioners to assess the quality of their practice. It looks at how the practitioner supports children's learning and is broken down into five sub scales and each section is scored from one to seven- inadequate to excellent. (Watch me grow, NO YEAR). The SSTEWS is used alongside the ECERS and ITES to assess provision within the setting. The three assessment tools have the same layout and structure which makes them more user friendly for the practitioner, (Early Childhood Matters, 2015). With the ECERS staff interactions with children is a small section of one of the six subscales. The SSTEWS supports this as its five subscales goes deeper into assessing the quality of staff interactions, (Environment Rating Scale, NO YEAR). The SSTEWS scale gives a more holistic insight into the interactions between the practitioner and the learner and doesn't just focus on the traditional structured twenty-minute classroom observation, (Central Collaborative Knowsley, 2019). Research suggests that high quality is achieved when settings recognise the skills of the practitioner and how the positive interactions support their learning, (Melhuish, Siraj and Kingston, 2015). (The Department for Education ,2021) agrees with this stating it is crucial that children are immersed in a language rich environment and have good interactions with enthusiastic adults. However, (Hoare, NO YEAR) states that there can be inconsistencies within the SSTEWS scale assessment if the practitioners observed do not have a consistent approach withing the setting. One practitioner may have an inadequate level of interaction with the children whereas another practitioner may have an excellent, so it makes it harder for the overall judgement to be accurate.

The SSTEWS scale provides clear guidance on what settings need to do to move on to the next level of progression. Previous quality rating scales do not focus on the quality of relationships

and interactions and only mention these briefly, whereas the SSTEW scales look at the impact and role of what adults do to develop children's attitude to learning as well as their emotional wellbeing, (Nursery World, 2015). (Council of Europe, 2022) supports this stating that there is a link between well-being and academic performance. Children that have positive relationships and are emotionally developed have the confidence to look at new ways of thinking and learning which is essential to academic achievement. Having strong communication and a trusted relationship between the practitioner and the child allows the development of knowledge through sustained shared thinking. Working together provides the practitioner a deeper insight into the child's level of understanding and extends their thoughts and ideas. This links with Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development where the practitioner enables the child to extend their learning further than they could achieve on their own, (Children's services central, 2021). (Brodie, 2022) documents the difficulties of using sustained shared thinking within the setting stating that it can often be difficult to provide this to all children due to time constraints. Having a conversation that uses and encourages critical thinking takes time. It is important that the child does not feel rushed, and they can concentrate fully without interruptions. This can prove difficult, especially in a setting with a large group of children however it is vital that the practitioners work together to try and factor in these undisturbed opportunities during the day.

(Macdonald, 2018) talks about the evident divide between early years settings who cater for children 0-3 years old and the formal type of education in school settings when it comes to the curriculum available to practitioners. They highlight the need for more cohesion of the high-quality care in the early years setting to the transition of formal education within schools. Both sectors need to share elements of their practice to ensure the child has high quality start to life. (Welsh Government, 2021) has released a consultation document on a curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings. The draft describes the aims of the quality assured curriculum that has been created with the help of practitioners and teams of experts in child development and early years education. It is sectioned into five developmental pathways, and it will focus on providing a quality education that will help develop the child, taking into consideration their needs and interests.

To assess the provision of non-maintained settings the Care Inspectorate Wales and Estyn work together to conduct an inspection on the quality of provision within the setting (Estyn, Care Inspectorate Wales, 2019). However in March 2020 there was a suspension of the joint inspection programme until the spring of 2022 to allow Estyn the opportunity to focus on

supporting the new curriculum for Wales and the Additional learning needs bill which are coming into force (Care Inspectorate Wales, 2021). Within the mainstream settings Estyn's aim is to inspect all schools in Wales during an eight-year cycle. They give prior notice to the inspection and will focus on five key areas during their visit. These include wellbeing and attitudes towards learning, teaching and learning experiences, care, support and guidance and leadership and management. Estyn's vision is to "improve the quality of education and training and outcomes for all learners in Wales through training providers to develop a self-improving and learning culture through our advice, inspection and capacity building." (Estyn, 2022). (Alkutich, Abukari, 2018) supports the importance of school inspections stating they create policies for settings to follow and help practitioners make decisions about their provision based on accurate reports, therefore promoting a drive for higher quality. (Acaster, 2016) supports this further stating that inspections will identify any gaps in areas of development and performance, and they ensure that all settings have the same standards to work towards. The inspection reports will grade the areas which informs the practitioner of the specific area that needs improvement. Alternatively, the report will highlight the excellent areas of practice also which can encourage settings to share by supporting other settings. However, (Evans, 2019) expresses some concerns over the inspection process as members of the National Education Union Cymru had been documented saying they find it stressful with the increased workload during preparation for an inspection. This is then having a negative impact on staff well-being. (Estyn, 2021) states that they give ten days' notice prior to an inspection. Whereas Ofsted can notify a setting as little as fifteen minutes before inspection (Ofsted, 2022). (Sellgren, 2012) suggests that the short notice for an inspection can portray a lack of trust and that inspectors want to catch settings out. This is reflected in a survey by (Perry, 2015) as it expresses the pupil's point of view of the inspection process. Some of the comments made by learners were that during an inspection it was not a true reflection of a usual school day, the lessons had a different structure and teachers had a different approach. (Estyn, 2021b) discusses the importance of listening to learners, it allows the child to have their voice heard and their opinion is taken into consideration during an inspection. The learner shows their level of understanding, which is a result of the settings provision. Do they feel supported? Listened to and valued? The inspector does not have set questions for the learner as the learner will lead the conversation that prompts questions from the inspector. As it is impossible for inspectors to speak to every child individually, they are provided with a survey before an inspection so that each child has the opportunity to express their views. (Children and young people's commissioner Scotland, 2006-2022) supports the importance of listening to learners listing the

UNCRC article 12 that children have the right to have their opinions listened to and taken seriously regardless of their age.

In review of the two quality assessment tools, the SSTEWS scale and Estyn inspections, it is clear there are differences between the two. The SSTEWS scale is a self-evaluation tool used by practitioners to score their provision with a focus on interactions. It needs the support ECERS and ITES to give a bigger picture. However, Estyn inspections have a much broader focus and are conducted from an outside point of view. They gather a range of information from the setting, practitioners, learners and other stakeholders, Estyn provides the setting with follow up activities that are mandatory for completion. These recommendations to raise the quality of provision are not made during the process of a SSTEWS scale, however the SSTEWS scale does list what is needed to be excellent. Another difference noted previously is that the Estyn inspection takes into consideration the views of the learner which the SSTEWS scale does not. The Estyn inspection, although in more depth, is only based on a short number of days of observations, whereas the SSTEWS scale is based on the day to day running of the setting, with practitioners not acting differently due to the pressure of an outside inspection. Both tools give a great insight into the quality of practice and how to improve and they both have the learners best interest at the centre.

At the beginning of this module, I had little to no knowledge on some of the quality assurance tools. I had not previously heard of the SASS report, Quality of Care review, SSTEWS Scale, ECERS or ITES. I have worked in a mainstream primary school for the majority of my career spanning over eighteen years. I have worked through Estyn inspections, and I am familiar with the process and how it requires a level of quality in provision and if these are not met to a particular standard there are actions to take to achieve these. Becoming familiar with the pre mentioned assessment tools, apart from Estyn, through this process has allowed me insight into how non-maintained settings are assessed. I think that the use of a Quality of Care review is an impressive way of conducting self-evaluation of a setting. Identifying what has been achieved every six months, or less, helps the practitioner and setting recap on what they have achieved over that time. I will be looking further into the Quality of Care reviews of feeder settings linked to my school setting to help get a better understanding of children's previous learning experiences. The SSTEWS scale provided me with further knowledge around sustained

shared thinking and has make me think more about it with my own practice, especially when planning, ensuring I'm providing more opportunities for this and to be more aware of it.

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