

ECEY6008 Reflective Paper

Quality

Martin, Elg and Gremyr (2020) suggest that the concept of quality relates to the extent a service is meeting stakeholders needs or ideally, surpassing them. Wilshaw (2012) states that in order to judge the quality of services that are provided to children, there should be strict and specific criteria that must be met to evaluate if the setting is providing a good quality service or not. However, Cottle (2013) found flaws with Wilshaw's (2012) restricted method of assessing quality and suggests that a variety of factors should be taken into consideration when determining the quality of provision, a setting is providing, and it should not just come down to whether a setting has ticked a box, or not.

The OECD (2020) explain that in regards to early childhood education, the quality of provision is determined by structural and process factors, with structural quality factors relating to the environment of the setting. This takes into consideration child to staff ratios, children's group sizes, how qualified and trained staff are, staff retention, as well as the programs children are adhering to and the monitoring of children's progression in the setting. The OECD (2020) go on to say that process quality factors comprise of the interaction's children have with their peers, setting staff, the area and objects around them, as well as their families and the community they are part of. The Education Policy Institute (2018) are in agreeance with the OECD (2020) as they also believe that the best way of assessing quality in the early years is to evaluate these structural and process qualities within a setting. Furthermore, Asquith (2021) is also of the position that a child's environment and interactions with others are key drivers when it comes to providing high quality provision. However, Pianta, Downer and Hamre (2016) may argue with the above statements, as their research has found limited proof that structural quality features benefit a child's progression, and instead they state that the process quality feature of interactions is the key driver of high quality which enables positive outcomes for children. She states that if a setting provides a child with an enriching environment as well as facilitating the development of positive relationships, then they are delivering on essential areas to providing high quality care.

Despite the OECD (2020) and the Education Policy Institute (2018) stating that a key element to a setting being able to provide high quality care is the training and

qualifications of staff; Nursery World (2018) argue that a barrier to providing high quality in the early years is the low percentage of highly qualified staff. Elwick *et al* (2018) would agree that under-qualified staff are an issue when it comes to ensuring quality and add that there is confusion in the early years in regards to the qualification pathway that practitioners should take to work in the early years. Additionally, Nutbrown (2012) also agrees that practitioners in the early years are not only under qualified, but also have not received effective training and therefore lack the knowledge required that would enable them to deliver high quality provision. Then again, Blanden *et al.* (2021) may disagree with theories that imply higher qualified staff will provide higher quality provisions, as they state the evidence produced to show this, is weak. However, Callanan *et al.* (2017) highlights that continuing professional development is important and that in their research, they found that settings with highly qualified staff provided high quality education and care, displaying best practice.

Ishimine and Tayler (2013) state that in early childhood education and care, research has proven that there is direct correlation between settings identified as providing high quality provision and improved outcomes for children who attend these settings. Furthermore, Megalonidou (2020) is of similar a similar position and says that children who experience high quality education and care are shown to have healthy growth and development. As well as this, she states that high quality provision during the first 3 years of a child's life is associated with improved cognitive ability, better language acquisition, increased social-emotional development and better stress coping mechanisms. Moreover, Callanan *et al.* (2017) found that in high quality settings, where staff spent one-to-one time with the children, engaging in sustained shared thinking, the children developed a wide vocabulary and well-developed speech. Heckman and Karapakula (2019) discuss the outcomes from a long-term study, in which there were two control groups of disadvantaged children. One study group accessed high quality education and care, whereas the other group did not. The outcome of this was that in adulthood, the group who attended high quality early education and care had less crime convictions and had a higher percentage of participants in employment. Therefore, Heckman and Karapakula (2019) drew the conclusion that high-quality provision in early years, particularly for disadvantaged children has successful outcomes. Furthermore, Sharp *et al.* (2015) explains that whilst all children will benefit from high quality provision, if children from disadvantaged

backgrounds have access to high quality support and education. they will have improved outcomes, like better grades for example.

Quality Assurance Methods

This section will evaluate two different types of quality assurance methods. These being the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing (SSTEWE) Scale and the Environment Rating Scales, focussing on the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS). Tower Hamlets (No Date) explain that the SSTEWE scale is used to assess the quality of pedagogy in a setting and the role of the adult. The SSTEWE scale has been created to assess the provision of 2-5-year olds. Tower Hamlet (No Date) continues to say that the SSTEWE scale is made up of 5 subscales consisting of 14 items. The 5 subscales of the SSTEWE look at how the practitioner enables the children to build trust and independence, supports the children's well-being, encourages communication, supports children's learning and lastly how the practitioner assesses language development. Whilst Tower Hamlets (No Date) state that the SSTEWE scale has similar structure to the ECERS, the Environmental Rating Scale (No Date) explain that the updated ECERS-3 assesses the quality of a classroom and is split into 6 subscales, containing 35 items and has been designed to assess children between 3 and 5 years old, which differs to the SSTEWE scale which has 5 subscales and 14 items (Tower Hamlets, No Date).

Simpson County Regional Training Centre (2018) explain that with each item on the ECERS, the score goes from 1 to 7, with 1 being inadequate and 7 being excellent. Melhuish, Siraj and Kingston (2015) discuss that like the ECERS, the SSTEWE scale is also scored on a scale of 1 to 7. Howard *et al.* (2018) says that using the ECERS, requires a person to have content knowledge and understanding of supporting young children. Similarly, Mackenzie (2016) says that the SSTEWE scale also should be used by someone who is aware of how children develop and what makes best practice. Jarvie (2012) may disagree with the SSTEWE and ECERS scales using only quantitative number scoring scales, as she suggests when quantitative and qualitative data are used together in the early years, it has been found to inform best practice and highlight important elements as to what drives early years quality provision.

As mentioned previously, the OECD (2020) discuss that the quality of provision a setting offers is determined by structural and process quality factors. Howard *et al.* (2018) explain that the SSTEWE scale was created to measure process quality. Similarly, Environmental Rating Scale (No Date) says that the ECERS was also

created to measure process quality. However, Nursery World (2015) explain that the SSTEW scale was created to specifically assess and break down how the adult interacts with the children and how they facilitate and encourage sustained shared thinking and emotional well-being. Furthermore, Mackenzie (2016) would agree with Nursery World (2015) and adds that the SSTEW scale is looking for high quality interactions between adults and children, as well as children with their peers. Whereas, University of Minnesota (2017) state that the ECERS was created to predominantly assess the quality of environment a child is provided and how they interact with the space. Additionally, Hofer (2010) would agree and explains that the ECERS scale was created to assess the materials in the children's environment, with limited attention paid to interactions between the adult and child. This differs to the SSTEW scale, as Nursery World (2015) discuss that the SSTEW scales core purpose is to assess child and adult interactions.

Taggart *et al.* (2015) explains that in the Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education Project (EPPSE) which was a longitudinal study over 17 years, the ECERS scale was used to measure the correlation between quality of environment and better outcomes in terms of academic achievement and social-emotional development. Taggart *et al.* (2015) explain that results obtained from the ECERS were informative and indicated that over time, the children experiencing high quality provision were more likely to achieve better outcomes. However, whilst Siraj, Kingston and Melhuish (2015) acknowledge that the ECERS is a useful and reliable way of assessing quality, they argue that EPPE and EPPSE findings suggest there is a need to take other areas of provision into consideration when looking at the correlation between quality early years education and care and children's outcomes. Siraj, Kingston and Melhuish (2015) explain that Sustained Shared Thinking (SST) is an important aspect of quality provision that is not considered by the ECERS. Siraj- Blatchford *et al.* (2002) states in the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) report that SST occurs when two people, or a small group communicate effectively to problem solve, discuss concepts or extend discussions. The contribution of everyone involved must be equal. The purpose of the REPEY project was to look at what separated good quality provision from high quality provision. Siraj- Blatchford *et al.* (2002) states that a key finding as to what separates good and high quality, is SST. It was found that in settings that were identified as 'high' quality, there was more facilitation of SST compared to that in 'good' quality settings. As mentioned already, Siraj, Kingston and

Melhuish (2015) say the ECERS does not consider the effectiveness of SST on outcomes, but state that the SSTEWS scale has been developed to focus on this area. Therefore, Siraj, Kingston and Melhuish (2015) suggest that by using the ECERS and SSTEWS scale alongside each other, as opposed to choosing one over the other will allow a clearer and more complete understanding on the quality of provision, as although they differ on what they assess, they complement each other effectively. Additionally, Melhuish and Gardiner (2021) agree that the SSTEWS scale and ECERS work in partnership and are conducting the Study of Early Education and Development (SEED) in which both of these methods are being used alongside each other to explore the influence of high-quality education and care on children's outcomes.

Howard *et al.* (2018) highlights that ECERS was developed before the SSTEWS scale, and has therefore been used in more studies and could be classed as more valid and reliable according to Whitebread, Kvalja and O'Connor (2019). However, Howard *et al.* (2018) conducted research and found the SSTEWS scale to have concurrent validity with ECERS findings, despite its recent development. For example, in their study, both the SSTEWS and ECERS scales predicted similar numeracy outcomes in a setting. However, Howard *et al.* (2018) does note that the scales results differed slightly, as the SSTEWS scale predicted that both numeracy outcomes would be obtained, whereas ECERS scale predicted that only one numeracy outcome would be obtained. This led Howard *et al.* (2018) to suggest that even though the SSTEWS scale is more recent than ECERS, it has shown that the success of children's numeracy outcomes relates to SSTEWS score more than ECERS score, which indicates that high quality SST is linked to better outcomes in comparison to classroom environments.

Setodji, Schaack and Le (2017) conducted an evaluation of the ECERS scale and found that in settings that used the scale, once an overall composite score of 3.4 had been met. There was a plateau and no further improvements to the children's development could be observed. However, when analysing the ECERS subscales, it was seen that the children continued to improve in the interaction subscales, but not in the physical environment subscales. This led Setodji, Schaack and Le (2017) to believe that the ECERS focusses too specifically on the quality of the environment and disregards the positive impact child and adult interactions can have on successful outcomes. Furthermore, Iles (2019) is in agreement that the ECERS pays too much

attention to the environmental aspect of quality provision, which means other areas like quality of interactions are being overlooked. She also notes that the thoughts and feelings of the children are not taking into consideration when carrying out the ECERS assessment. UNICEF (2019) may argue that this is a further flaw of the ECERS scale because article 12 of the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that children should feel listened to and give their input on anything that involves them. Moreover, Siraj, Kingston and Melhuish (2015) are of similar position to Setodji, Schaack and Le (2017) and also found ECERS to focus too much on one aspect, which they explain is the reason the STEW scale was created. The STEW scale fills the gap of adult: child interactions that ECERS overlooks.

Reflection

Prior to this module, I had very limited knowledge as to what quality meant in early years provision. Whilst I understood that providing children with high quality education and care could only be a good thing, I lacked awareness of the benefits and long – lasting effects high quality provision can have on children's lives. Additionally, working in a school, I had not encountered a SASS form before, so it was interesting to learn about this and gain insight as to how a childminder self-evaluates the quality of service they are providing their stakeholders. Furthermore, before this module, even though I had heard of quality assurance tools, I had never experienced using them.

As mentioned above, before this module I had little knowledge of the meaning of quality in early years. However, this module has been very useful and I now have a much wider and deeper understanding of quality provision. During this module, I have learnt that quality is assessed against two main pillars, these being structural quality which relates to ratios and staff training etc, and process quality which focusses on the quality of interactions children have with their environment and the people around them. Furthermore, when conducting research for this module, I have found many studies that evidence the link between quality provision and better outcomes. This research has equipped me with sound understanding that children who are provided with high quality education and care are more likely to have higher attainment academically, particularly in numeracy. Moreover, another aspect I found especially interesting during this module was learning of studies that prove children from disadvantaged backgrounds can have improved outcomes if they have access to high quality provision in the early years of their life. Moving on, this module has also taught me how quality assurance tools would be used in practice and also gave me an

opportunity to use the SSTEW scale to assess the quality of provision being provided in a video during lecture, which was beneficial.

Going forward, the completion of this module has enabled me to make improvements to my practice and the provisions I offer the children in my setting. For example, after extensive evaluation of the SSTEW and ECERS scales, I am now much more conscious of what it means to be providing children with high quality provision and what that looks like. Since starting this module, I have realised that facilitating and participating in Sustained Shared Thinking with children is a key driver to providing high quality education and care and noticed that by extending discussions and encouraging problem solving has improved the quality of activities we provide. A further benefit of completing this module, is that I can now share my knowledge with co-workers that like me before I started this module, do not understand the long-lasting impact of providing high quality in the early years.

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