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Leaderhship and Management for Systems of Quality

Part 2 – Reflection Paper

Moss (2016) describes quality as an idea shaped by values, beliefs and the views of different people, rather than a set standard and explains how its meaning depends on the situation. Williams (2016) supports this and describes quality as a combination of procedures, policies, practices and systems that organisations use to create, maintain and improve standards. However, Eadie *et al.* (2022) suggest that quality in early years education and care can be categorised into three domains, which are structural, process and system quality. Edwards (2021) further explains that process quality includes the experiences and interactions children have, which directly affects their learning and development. Moreover, Tayler (2015) refers to this as the human side of quality which focuses on interactions with children, working with families and using knowledge from different areas to support learning.

Furthermore, Slot (2018) notes that laws and regulations influence structural quality which are aspects within a setting which can be measured, such as staff ratios, qualifications and the physical environment. In addition to this, Eadie *et al.* (2022) notes how system quality refers to the broader systems which support early years care and educational settings, including the government who set policies, laws and funding. Therefore, quality cannot be defined with a fixed meaning, as it is influenced by a variety of factors including values, context, policies and individual perspectives. Quality is a flexible concept that varies depending on the setting, purpose and people involved.

Structural quality within an early years setting includes factors such as adult to child ratios, learning environments and group size which are important because they protect children from harm and supports their well-being (Slot, 2018). The Welsh Government's (2016) National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare highlight these factors, setting expectations for how childcare settings should operate to maintain high quality care. By ensuring appropriate adult to child ratios, staffing levels and safe environments, children are kept safe while high standards are maintained and monitored, improving the overall quality of provision (Welsh Government, 2016). In addition to this, Cottle and Alexander (2012) emphasise that structural quality directly affects children's safety by creating a well-regulated

environment in which practitioners can provide attentive and supportive care. This aligns with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (article 19), which states that governments are required to ensure that children are properly cared for and are kept safe (UNICEF, n.d.). Moreover, Maslow's hierarchy of needs highlights that when children feel safe and secure, they are able to interact and engage in learning effectively (Taormina and Gao, 2013). Therefore, high quality care provides a sense of safety and belonging, enabling children to explore, play and achieve their full potential.

However, these structural foundations also influence process quality, as safe, well-staffed and well-organised environments allow practitioners to engage meaningfully with children, facilitating high-quality interactions. This is supported by Zoggeler-Burkhardt, Embacher and Smidt (2023), who state that adult interactions are crucial for children's development and learning. Being responsive to children's needs during play provides support, guidance and emotional security, which is imperative in providing high quality care. In addition to this, the curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings highlights that effective early years practice is influenced by adults creating enabling environments where play and interactions are rich, stimulating and relevant to children's interests (Welsh Government, 2024). Moreover, Salmon and Barrera (2021) states that interactions through adult questioning particularly whilst children play enhance children's thinking, stimulating curiosity and promotes deeper thinking. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development reinforces this, stating that adult support and questioning enable children to achieve beyond their independent capabilities, promoting deeper cognitive development (Frey, 2018). This improves the quality of provision and leads to better cognitive, social and developmental outcomes.

Furthermore, system quality underpins these practices by providing the policies, regulations, funding and professional framework that support consistent high standards (Eadie *et al*, 2022). This ensures that structural and process quality are maintained effectively across early years settings. Cottle and Alexander (2012) identified that the professional development aspect of system quality is essential for maintaining quality as it creates strong system support with competent and confident staff to deliver high standards of care. Rashid, Singh and Singh (2025) support this,

explaining how targeted, well supported professional development strengthens system quality by improving staff confidence and skill level.

Moreover, research conducted by Ofsted (2025) found that this was important because practitioners with higher qualifications and stronger skills demonstrated greater confidence and understanding which resulted in higher levels of adult child engagement. This in turn, supports the delivery of high-quality care and education, while gaps in knowledge and experience were found to limit quality outcomes. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory, which emphasises that wider systems such as policies, regulations and professional support, influence children's development by shaping the quality of care and education they receive (Tong and An, 2024).

Estyn (2025) states that they use questionnaires to gather the views and experiences of providers and their communities to inform and support the inspection process and support the evaluation and improvement of quality. Ghafourifard (2024) expands on this explaining how questionnaires provide important information regarding individuals' feelings, experiences and opinions. This includes parents' perceptions of care and communication, satisfaction levels, strengths and weaknesses and suggestions for improvement. Ofsted (2019) expands on this, explaining how parents' views provide feedback and valuable insight into a setting's quality to support evaluation and improvement. This is supported by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW, n.d) highlighting that the views of individuals who work in a childcare setting along with the people who use the service are important, because they help to build a picture of how a service and its staff promote the wellbeing of children.

Kuphanga (2024) notes how questionnaires can be beneficial in quality assurance by providing timely, direct feedback, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement. Albudaiwi (2017) supports this highlighting how questionnaires enable settings to design specific, targeted questions that focus on key aspects of provision. This means gathering direct, relevant feedback on the areas that matter most and supporting ongoing monitoring, evaluation and reflective practice to improve quality. This is reinforced by CIW (n.d) who ask parents to provide feedback on key aspects,

including the quality of care, children's well-being, staff interactions, the environment and how effectively the setting meets children's needs.

Moreover, Estyn (2025) states how questionnaires provide valuable feedback and quality can be monitored and improved through distribution to a range of individuals including learners, parents and staff members. In addition to this Sharma and Ruikar (2025) notes how questionnaires provide efficient, standardised data collection which can increase engagement, capture complex information and support analysis for evidence-based decision making. Therefore, questionnaires can be designed to include specific, targeted questions related to quality and distributed to a wide range of individuals. This enables settings to gather direct, relevant feedback that provides a more holistic understanding of current practice and informs improvements in quality.

However, Kuphanga (2024) explains that questionnaires have limitations and may provide answers with limited depth, as responses can lack detail and do not always capture the full complexity of children's experiences or interactions. In addition to this similarly Sharma and Ruikar (2025) state that they need to be carefully designed to engage respondents and gather accurate, in-depth information. Poorly crafted questionnaires can produce superficial responses, limiting their ability to provide a full picture of the quality of provision. In addition to this, Ghafourifard (2024) suggests how responses can also lack depth due to survey fatigue, where participants become tired or disengaged, providing less thoughtful, incomplete or rushed answers. This can result in superficial data that does not fully reflect the quality of provision.

The Curriculum for Wales states how parental communication through parents' evenings is a vital aspect of quality assurance, ensuring early childhood education effectively supports children's holistic development (Welsh Government, 2019). Adams (2015) describes how semi structured interviews include combining specific questions with open dialogue, reflecting the format of a parents evening, which helps to gather parental feedback to assess quality within settings. Similarly to questionnaires, they provide feedback on individuals' feelings, opinions and experiences. Ayres (2008) supports this, explaining how parents' evenings are

conversational methods of collecting feedback using open ended questions, while also following key topics related to quality.

Due to the flexibility of parents' evenings, recording the relevant information can be more challenging than with questionnaires, which provide timely, direct feedback. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) note that this method can be less direct than questionnaires because the conversational format may lead off topic discussion, resulting in difficulty recording notes and reduced efficiency if too much flexibility is used. Furthermore, similarly to questionnaires, parent's evenings can provide opportunities to discuss and collect information on the quality of care, children's well-being, staff interactions, the environment and how effectively the setting meets children's needs (CIW, n.d).

However, in contrast to questionnaires, Van Zant (2014) highlights how face to face interactions can promote more honest and open feedback from parents, providing better insights that help improve the quality of provision. Zhaksylyk *et al.* (2023) note how honesty is essential when gathering information, as it ensures reliable feedback that supports improvements in the quality of provision.

Moreover, in comparison to questionnaires, parents' evenings are specific to measuring the quality feedback from parents/guardians alone (Welsh Government, 2019). This does not give a broader, more holistic representation of quality from different perspectives. Estyn (2025) reinforces this, stating how gathering information from a range of perspectives including practitioners is essential for monitoring, evaluating and improving quality as it provides a more comprehensive understanding of provision. Therefore, while parents' evenings allow for qualitative discussion surrounding quality of provision and child development, the conversational flexibility can make information less direct, limit perspectives and make recording more difficult, compared to a questionnaire method.

On the other hand, in contrast to questionnaires, parents' evenings can potentially provide richer, more in depth responses due to its flexibility and semi structured style format. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019) suggest how during parents' evenings practitioners can sensitively ask more probing questions, allowing parents to expand on their thoughts and experiences in detail. This helps to gain better insights into

individuals' feelings, beliefs and topics to give a better overview of current and past quality performance to improve current practice. Mashuri *et al*. (2022) supports this explaining how this method of collecting feedback allows participants to express their views freely and enables deeper exploration beyond fixed questions.

In addition to this, in depth responses can enhance reflection and provide more meaningful insights into quality and improvements. Harvey *et al.* (2025) states how reflection engages emotional, cognitive and physical awareness to thoughtfully consider past, present or planned actions which can improve the future quality within practice and provision. Mann (2016) supports this emphasising that when reflection is guided by detailed, specific feedback, individuals can identify strengths and areas for development. This insight deepens learning and enhances self-awareness and supports more effective improvements in future performance.

However as stated by Harris and Brown (2010), combining these methods of collecting data reveals both agreement and disagreement in responses, capturing details that a single method may overlook. The mixed approach provides a more complete and accurate understanding of participants' views. This is supported by Wasti *et al*. (2022), stating that mixed methods of data collection, through using questionnaires and parents' evenings, provide both breadth and depth, highlighting patterns while also exploring unanticipated insights. This approach enhances understanding and strengthens evidence for improving quality within practice. However, for effective quality assurance, Dutta *et al.* (2021) state that the analysis of data collection for improvements needs to be communicated to all members of staff. This is important as effective communication in the workplace increases productivity, collaboration and the overall structural, process and system quality within a setting.

In conclusion, overall quality in early years settings is a complex concept influenced by structures, interactions and systems. Both questionnaires and parents' evenings contribute to improving quality by gathering valuable feedback. However, they offer different strengths and weaknesses, and both have limitations. Questionnaires provide broad, efficient and comparable data with a direct format from multiple perspectives. In contrast, parents' evenings allow for more in depth, detailed insights through open dialogue, enabling a deeper understanding of parents and childrens

experiences. When both methods are used together, they create a better and more holistic view of the quality of provision. This combined approach enables effective reflection, informs decision making and provides recommendations for improvement in quality within early years settings.

I have not used AI.

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