

What is Quality?

Quality from an early year's standpoint can be multifaceted and defined from a range of perspectives and should concern stakeholders such as Children, parents, practitioners and policy makers, with Children being central to practice (Care Inspectorate Wales' Quality of Care Review, 2018, Ruzek et al, 2014 and Sollars, 2020). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Welsh Government's National Minimum Standards (2023) provide a legal baseline of children's rights to life and education. Moss (2016) argues that although quality is not essential practice, however action should always be taken to drive the quality of children's early years attendance above the child's rights and minimum standards to enrich their lives to achieve their highest potential. The Regulation of Child Minding and Day Care (Wales) Order 2016 state that undertaking regular self-assessments of provisions in a setting is what ensures high quality. The National Association for the Education of young Children (2019) recommend that practitioners attitudes towards high quality care should include responsive care and acknowledging children's voices, scaffolding of Children's learning, celebrate children's cultural and linguistic diversity, utilise the curriculum when planning, monitor children's progress and tailor different methods of communication to meet the needs of individuals and to establish strong relationships with families.

Why is Quality Important?

The social and economic requirements for parents to go to work has resulted in an increase of Children requiring early years education (Ang, Brooker and Stephens, 2017, Brunsek et al, 2017, Pascal and Bertram, 2018, Ruzek et al, 2014). The first stages of life represent a time of remarkable growth and high-quality care and education determine human potential and opportunity (Eadie et al, 2022). The Effective Provision for Preschool Education (EPPE) project (2004), Hong et al (2015) and Hooper and Hallam (2017) explored the effects of high-quality experiences that Children receive in their early years attendance and how it enhances preparedness for school education and potential to succeed in life (Gordon et al, 2015, Setodji, Shaack and Le, 2018). Brunsek et al (2017), Gordon et al (2015) and Hong et al

(2015) and Iruka and Morgan (2014) believe high quality education lays a solid foundation for modelling skills of academia, enhanced cognitive functioning, social and emotional development in individuals. High quality observes Children who are more affluent in language and comprehensive abilities (EPPE Project, 2004). Ang, Brooker and Stephens (2017) and Grammatikopoulos et al (2017) and Iruka and Morgan (2015) state that high quality early years education can have a profound impact on Children who are living in social disadvantage, through supporting vulnerable Children and their families, due to the improvements in behaviour regulation skills and well-being. Hong et al (2015) agrees, that enhanced family outcomes are supported through improving parents' knowledge of caregiving and referral to local programs. The EPPE Project (2004) discovered improvements in literacy and numeracy skills in Children from parents who had low qualifications. Pascal and Bertram (2018) and Ruzek et al (2014) endorse the participation of children from low-income families in high-quality care to ensure inclusivity in achievements for all. According to Hooper and Hallam (2017), Children's cognitive growth depends on stimulating and nurturing environments which are aspects of high-quality provision. If Children do not receive these opportunities in early life, they may not experience the same academic progressions as others and are not likely to overcome the social disadvantage and the setback consistently remains (Grammatikopoulos et al, 2017).

Analysis of the Early Childhood Environment Ratings Scales (ECERS-R) and The Infant Toddler Environment Ratings Scales (ITERS-R).

According to the ERS Institute (no date) and Environment Ratings Scales (2019) and Hooper and Hallam (2017) Environmental scales like the Early Childhood Environment Ratings Scales and the Infant Toddler Environment Ratings Scales are self-assessment tools that can be constructed to observe, evaluate, and monitor process and structural quality in early years settings (Bull et al, 2017). A high-quality service is achieved when three fundamental requirements are met and nurtured for Children to thrive, such as must consider the three fundamental requirements of all Children to thrive in their early life, which are to safeguard their health, well-being and security, establishing strong relationships with others and stimulation of the

environment and experience-based learning. Brunsek et al (2017), Gordon et al (2015), Grammatikopoulos et al (2017) and Hooper and Hallam (2017) all agree that these environment ratings scales are a popular tool for measuring quality in early years provision globally to support children's preparation for school life. These methods of measuring quality assess the factors that contribute to children's cognitive development and their social-emotional well-being (Sabol and and Pianta, 2014, Setodji, Shaack and Le, 2018). The model of these environmental ratings scales determine that the three components mentioned are as significant as each other and all contribute to process quality care provision. These elements materialise in the environment, interactions, the curriculum, routines, and supervision. The Environment Rating Scales (2019) highlight the reliability and validity of the methods and believe they are effective in evaluating and enhancing the quality of early years settings.

When regarding these scales, structural quality entail adult-child ratios, curriculum, qualifications, and training, where process quality involves the physical environment, experiences offered, and the richness of interactions encountered (Brunsek et al, 2017). Ang, Brooker and Stephens (2017) share a challenge that have been highlighted in studies that suggest the wide perception of quality has been acknowledging the structural form of quality rather than the process.

Grammatikopoulos (2017) and Vermeer et al (2016) state that the ITERS-R and ECERS-R measure heavily on process quality and believe that quality should be related more to the process quality and the physical environment as they offer more of a reflection on a child's fast paced development during this period (Boo, Dormal and Webber, 2019). Bjornestad and Os (2018), the EPPE Project (2004) and Hooper and Hallam (2017) disagree with this concept, where true quality is established when the structural forms of quality are determinants of the process quality. Meaningful Interactions cannot be fulfilled without the appropriate adult-child ratios and training to master these skills of encouraging communication.

Brinkman (2017), Iruka and Morgan (2014) and Wolf (2018) highlight practitioners' further education and training development opportunities contributed to high quality provision. Manning et al (2017) Believe teachers with a higher education contributed to significant enhancing of process and structural quality within early years settings. Lin and Magnuson (2018) are undecided, after investigating the effect of teachers'

level of education and professional training with assessment of classroom quality. There is a varying ideology whether teachers' qualifications, such as degrees had a particularly profound impact on quality, however professional training and development supports their knowledge of how to enhance quality through interactions, planning the environment and materials offered.

When analysing the ITERS-R and ECERS-R measures, along with Welsh Government Curriculum for non-maintained Nursery settings (2022), one can establish the heavy influence of quality and characteristics from theorists, such as Vygotsky, Piaget and Montessori (Stevens, 2020). These theorists developed approaches that raise the standards of process quality in a setting. Daly and Beloglovsky (2020), Fisher (2016), Macia-Gual and Domingo Penafiel (2021), Rentzou and Slutsky (2020) and Ruzek et al (2014) state that the complexity of interactions between practitioners and Children needs to be scaffolded to tailor the Child's level of understanding to foster engagement to learning. Each theorist endorses responsive adults who respect children's abilities and are attuned to what children can accomplish independently and when to scaffold learning to enhance development and well-being in the setting (Evans and Saracho, 2022, Fleeer and Van Oeurs, 2018, and Vygotsky, 2021). Ang, Brookers, and Stephens (2017) and Boo, Dormal and Webber (2019) and Burchinal (2017) state quality can be measured by practitioners' attitudes and interactions with Children to establish positive relationships. Gordon et al (2015) advise that the ECERS-R and ITERS-R are based on a checklist of areas for enhancing the quality of environments in early childhood settings. Ang, Brooker and Stephens (2017), Bjornstead and Os (2018) believe that quality of childcare and the environment play a role in child development and outcomes and determines experiences and practice (Maree, 2022). Aubrey and Riley (2022), Bradbury and Swailes (2022), Conkbayir and Pascal (2014) and Waters-Davies (2022) believe Children require access to materials that encourage hands-on, child-directed play, exploration, investigation and discovery and where previous knowledge can be applied to support critical thinking and cognitive functioning (Cohen and Waite-Stupiansky, 2017, Murphy et al, 2016, Saracho, 2021, Veraksa and Pramling-Samuelsson, 2022). Language rich environments should be assessed to determine opportunities for creative and imaginary play which is a drive for language competency (Bodrova and Leong, 2015, and Bull et al, 2017). Hong et

al (2015) and Macia-Gual and Domingo-Penafiel (2021) believe this fosters exceptional learning experiences that cater to children's individual needs and support the 3 dimensions which influence the other subscales and is a core aim for the revised ITERS and ECERS (Environment Rating Scales, 2019, Gordon et al, 2015, and Ruzek et al, 2014).

Critique.

Environment Ratings Scales (2019) raise the challenge of quality assurance is varied perceptions of what high quality means among diverse cultures. A benefit of the Environmental ratings scales, however, is researched and accessed globally, so that they support the social outcomes required for all children, allowing inclusivity, supporting additional learning needs and involvement of families which is assessed at inspection. (Quality of Care Report, 2018, and Brunsek et al, 2017). However, Improvements and revisions have consistently been made which is significant for quality assurance (EPPE Project, 2004, Kulikovskaya et al, 2021, and Setodji, Schaack and Le, 2018).

Upon utilising the ECERS-R and ITERS-R to evaluate quality, many studies have discovered advantages, such as they are the more cost-effective instruments of assessing quality (Boo, Dormal and Webber, 2019).

Bull et al (2017) and Gordon et al (2015) indicate the ECERS-R and ITERS-R possess indicators that assessors of quality in settings can complete the scoring when they meet a response category where indicators are no longer being observed. This offers a clear, time effective method, and allows leaders to implement the indicators that have not been reached into setting targets post assessment to drive exceptional quality (Quality of Care Report, 2018).

Boo, Dormal and Webber (2019) and Gordon et al (2015) supports these scales by stating they offer a true reflection of early years provision in supporting Child development, through process quality. Brunsek et al (2017) and Grammatikopoulos et al (2017) agree that the revision of the scales and the commitment of practitioners to drive quality contributes to overall positive outcomes in language, numeracy, and social-emotional outcomes. La Paro, Williamson and Hatfield (2014) found the ITERS-R subscales of Interaction and Listening and Talking were an advantage to encouraging behaviour regulation in individuals. Hadeed (2013) endorses the scales

as reliable and valid by measuring the quality of interactions which proved to be high in settings that use them, due to the encouragement of higher staff qualification levels in the scales. Hooper and Hallam (2017) believe strengths of these tools for assessment are the considerations of many aspects of quality using one scale or the other and the awareness of children's engagement towards enriching environments from global perspectives. Barros and Leal (2014) suggest that the attitudes of practitioner's use of the ITERS-R tool for assessing quality to prove extremely efficient. Zeng (2017) states that the ECERS-R has contributed to accurately determine strong outcomes in literacy and numeracy.

EPPE Project (2004) and Hooper and Hallam (2017) discovered that settings that observed quality using the ITERS-R scores demonstrated lower total scores than classrooms that measured quality using the ECERS-R. Analysis may need to be made to improve the quality of educations in settings that use the ITERS-R scale. The perspective of Betancur et al (2021), Burchinal (2017) and Grammatikopoulos et al (2017) was that there are inconsistencies with ECERS-R in its evaluation of structural and process quality and with its predictions of Children's outcomes. Sabol and Pianta (2014) and Setodji, Schaack and Le (2018) found that its consistency in measuring and driving quality that the tools aim to fulfill have not been apparent in practice, where scores of qualities were found to maintain at an average but not improve with assessments.

Hong et al (2015) indicate a barrier in the literacy aspects of the scales. Boo, Dormal and Webber (2019) and Hooper and Hallam (2017) agree that in the listening and talking subscale of the ITERS-R, the observer is required to assess indicators that are more speculative and therefore is more challenging to notice and record, due to the limited dimensions of interactions that are experienced by infants and toddlers. Lokken et al (2018) and Early et al (2018) discovered that the ITERS-R scale does not predict strong outcomes in interaction quality and social-emotional capacities in Children. Fujisawa et al (2023)'s research concluded that the ECERS-R was strong in determining the quality of interactions and personal care routines, but the learning activities assessment was limited.

To conclude, there are advantages and disadvantages to utilising the ITERS-R and ECERS-R as tools of measurement to assess quality. This paper's findings

recommend that more research and efforts need to be made to ensure its accuracy in observing aspects of process quality in the environment and how they reflect children's holistic outcomes.

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