

ECEY6011/C

Leadership and Management for Systems of Quality

Part 2

Defining quality within the early years sector can be deemed as challenging however determine what quality is through research, curriculum, statutory documents and importantly staff knowledge and their experiences is a sure-fire way to help shape its meaning and how our settings can provide quality provisions. Hussain and Juma (2016) state despite the arguments on the definition of quality, it is clear that quality is an essential concept to the early years and It is argued that high quality early years settings have a significant positive impact on future life experiences. Building a Brighter Future (Welsh Government, 2013). As well as according to PACEY better qualified practitioners in these settings who form strong bonds both with children and their parents or carers will arguably deliver better quality care as a result.

Providing quality provision within early years is considered vital for the effective development of young children. (Sylva et al 2004, Siraj Blatchford et al 2002, Welsh Government 2013). Early years practitioners understanding the concept of quality provision and adapting environments to achieve this is all part of giving children the best start in life. Quality practice should be inclusive placing each child's individual needs at the heart. Bland (no date). Hussain and Juma (2006) state that from research that the early years are crucial in terms of developing a child's intelligence, personality, and social behaviour. If children are not provided with opportunities and suitable environments where they can communicate, learn and develop they will not attain the optimal level of development. It is therefore imperative that practitioners understand multifaceted aspects of children's development for in which they learn and grow.

There are many aspects to consider when delivering quality within settings and a report by Bonetti (2018) argues there is good evidence that shows that attending early years provisions can ultimately improve a range of child outcomes, from ensuring children's overall holistic development as well as laying the foundations for future long term developmental milestones. However there still remains a lack of clarity to what this high quality provision looks like in practice. Building a Brighter Future (Welsh Government, 2013) recognises that in order for quality to be delivered within a setting and for care to be improved there are four key areas that need to be addressed these being leadership, the learning environment, child experiences and the workforce as a whole.

Quality Assurance schemes aim to boost standards by helping early years setting to help themselves with self-evaluation being a key part of Quality Assurance (QA). Mercer (2000).

The use of Quality Frameworks can ensure that settings offer well evidenced, well informed and successful approaches to early childhood play, learning and care as well as actively supporting practitioners to reflect and continuously improve practice. Welsh Gov (2023). The Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care Quality Framework for Wales clearly draws together the requirements for delivering high standards in Wales and is aligned with the National Minimum Standards for Regulated childcare in Wales and the Curriculum for Wales. Welsh Gov (2023).

The Baby Effective Early Learning Programme sets out to help early years practitioners become practitioner researchers to drive quality improvement through reflective practice in setting for children from birth to three years. CREC (no date). The programmes help to move settings beyond the baseline of national standards with developmental strategies alongside well tested systems for ongoing quality improvement.

Stated by Crosse (2013) the BEEL programme supports early years practitioners to support deep level learning whilst also providing opportunities for professional development. Integrating relevant training where practitioners are able to carry out observations that then feed into small scale action research activities. The methods of observation used in BEEL are based upon approaches by Professor Ferre Leavers. Who argues that observation methods help practitioners to see how deeply children are fully involved in learning experiences which are both child and adult led. When a child is fully engaged it is likely that from this experience, they will learn at a deeper level which results in high quality sustainable learning. This is measured through the Leuven Scale, the scale is between one to five. Number One being the child is absent or has a passive attitude towards the activity with no signs of exploration or interest upto Number Five where the child is continuously absorbed by the activity, showing high levels of motivation and enjoyment. Famly (no date).

The positives of the BEEL programmes are that with the use of observing children and evaluating adult and child led interactions can lead to evaluating staff performance and supports critical and reflective thinking enabling practitioners to work to bring quality improvement which in result promotes quality of opportunities and cultural diversity. A report by the House of Commons (2019) states that to tackle the disadvantages in early years the quality of teaching needs to be regarded as just as important to outcomes as it is to other stages of education, quality is the key to pre-school whom have the biggest impacts on children's life chances. The use of the Leuven scales in the BEEL programmes enables practitioners to evaluate their own practice in order to reach quality, taking a focus on staff performance where relevant information can therefore be fed into organisations development plans. Crosse (2013) argues that inspectors such as Ofsted will focus on practitioner engagement as the involvement of children's is key to evaluating whether learning is effectively taking place.

CREC (no date) argues that the BEEL programme places key workers interactions at the centre of high-quality learning and development with a key focus on observing the child's abilities to try new things, interact with other children and adults and developing their sense of the world. All these vital learning experiences and use of observation tools enables children to be spontaneous in their learning and experience different ways of learning to enable them to develop holistically, forming relationships, working independently and being proactive with their problem-solving skills. The holistic observational tools used by BEEL links closely with the new Welsh Curriculum guidelines with Welsh Government (no date) recognising that cross disciplinary planning, learning and teaching alongside collaboration enables children to build connections across their learning and combine different experiences with newly learnt knowledge and skills. Focusing on each child's progression, defined by

their personal development. Using these tools of assessing within early years helps to track where each child is with their development individually and supports the ideas of learning through play, children being able to make choices regarding their own learning experiences and supports practitioners in adapting environments accordingly to ensure children reach their potential.

The Early Years Wales Quality for All (QFA) is designed to support early years settings to achieve outstanding quality within their care. It assists providers in achieving and maintaining high standards, providing opportunities to gain recognition for investment and contribution their staff make as well as providing a consistent approach to demonstrating high quality across all types of early years settings. Early Years Wales (no date). The Quality For All (QFA) process is an ongoing cycle of key reflections, assessments and accreditation. For high quality childcare to be provided there needs to be a focus on how well managed, staffed as well as resourced the setting is, for this to happen early years settings and their practitioners need to reflect and adapt to excel standards. With raising concerns on funding and staffing levels poses a barrier to effective quality care and education, some tools require funding which for some settings may not be at the forefront of spending as well as not being able to send practitioners onto appropriate training can result in struggles in providing thriving quality settings.

On the contrary the benefits of the QFA tool in Wales is that it is a sure-fire way for settings to reflect, plan and change to help raise standards for inspections and assessments with the development of robust legal and management structures. it also enables settings to highlight their uniqueness and have their strengths recognised. Early Years Wales (no date) believe that consistently meeting all regulatory requirements to the up most highest standards and being proactive in reflecting and evaluating practice is fundamental to delivering high quality childcare. So that every child will receive the best possible learning and development experiences in a safe and secure environment where they can flourish.

The use of the QFA tool in settings supports setting leads and their practitioners in building their knowledge, skills by using reflective tools help highlight areas for future development and improvements. Early Years Wales (no date). Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002) suggest that staff working in the early years sector should have recognised qualifications and training should be readily available for all practitioners in these settings, arguing that practitioners should have opportunities within the workplace to develop. The QFA tool together with BEEL programmes focus on the use of observations and reflective practice in improving the quality of the workforce within early years settings, where professional development can be attained and practitioners are able to take responsibility of their own practice and seek to develop quality. It is clear that all early year's settings have a clear expectation in meeting all the relevant regulations including meeting the National Minimum Standards for regulated childcare up to the age of 12 years (NMS).(2023).

With Early Years Wales stating that appropriate guidance materials such as the QFA should be followed or given due regard wherever possible, this applies to all aspects of early years childhood development, care, learning and education. Arguing the point that the use of such tools will in fact promote quality assurance as well as

giving practitioners opportunities to enhance their individual practice and promoting good practitioner in settings as a whole. Enabling the National Minimum Standards to be met accordingly and preparing settings for quality inspections.

Early years Wales (no date) explain that the QFA tool is divided into three sections which all look at different aspects of quality, from leadership and management to children's health and wellbeing and the overall learning environment and operational practice. With the use of effective reflection within practice it helps to improve learning environments putting children at the centre, as well as assisting practitioners in developing a critical understanding of their own practice. Birth to 5 Matters (no date). Reflective practice is a critical component of developing quality practice. Bland (no date). With concerns for quality in the early years has been ongoingly debated however aiming for high quality should be a priority for all early years settings through quality improvement where settings should consider how best to create, maintain and improve provision in order to offer high quality learning experiences. Foundation Years (no date).

To conclude it is clear that children who experience high quality provisions are well placed to achieve higher outcomes and develop better social, emotional and cognitive abilities. With quality improvement being a continuous cycle based on good planning, implementing, reviewing, and analysing. Regarded as a on-going journey involving practitioners, children and their families working together to strive to achieve.

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