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As expressed by Bland (2023) quality is defined differently throughout the early years by practitioners as training, pedagogy, and opinions can have an impact in the way in which they portray a qualitative ethos and practise. Hussain and Juma (2006) both agree to this as they also state, that quality has a complex of definitions as everyone perceives it differently. They go onto explain that quality is an important concept that needs to be considered in all aspects of education as it highly benefits children's learning and development (Hussain and Juma, 2006) in which should be considered in all areas of an early years setting.

However, research has shown that for children's development to effectively benefit from an early years setting high quality must be available within that environment (Pacey, No Date and Birth to 5 Matters, No Date). As a high-quality environment has substantial influence on a child's early years provision impacting all areas of development (Robb, 2023 and Foundation Years, No Date). As described by Foundation Years (No Date) it is essential for a setting to ensure that all practitioners consider the best way to maintain and improve their quality provision to produce a high-quality environment where children can expand their learning while developing new experiences and opportunities. Foundation Years (No Date) points out that children who are able to experience a high-quality setting are more likely to develop their social, emotional and cognitive skills in order to prepare them for future learning.

Welsh Government (2014) states that, being able to support the child by offering high quality environments and experiences will aid quality assurances. In accordance with Standard 18 of the National Minimum Standards both children and their families will highly benefit from an environment with quality assurance where effective support can be provided and monitored (Welsh Government, 2016, pg. 43) through practise that provides quality which they can benefit from. As indicated by Bland (2023) there is a variety of tools in which settings can use to provide children with a learning environment where their holistic approach is considered within practise. ECERS and SSTEW are two tools which will be investigated in more detail in the paper.

Furthermore, The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project which will be referred to the EPPE project throughout this section was researched by Siraj-Blatchford *et al*. (Institute of Education, 2004) and focuses on the development of children from the ages of three to seven years (Oxfordshire Community Foundation, 2014). The project studied certain features that related to both the parent and child home environment and setting that they attended (Institute of Education, 2004, pg. 1). According to Institute of Education (2004) the EPPE Project found that a setting with high quality provision showed a better development rate for children's intellectual and social behaviours. As stated by Leading Education and Social Research (No Date) the findings also suggested that children having interactive relationships with practitioners is also good quality to maintain effective practise. Institute of Education (2004) agrees with this and implies that having that bond between the practitioner and child is an important pedagogical approach to practise within the setting environment.

Statutory requirements

Seshadri (2015) expresses that a statutory requirement is a law or regulation that is required to be followed by law. These requirements provide professionals with rights and legal responsibilities to fulfil throughout the setting (Seshadri, 2015). As presented by Welsh Government (2019) having statutory requirements provides professionals with the guidance to ensure that their support and guidance follows the correct quality of care referred by Government legislations and guidelines. Having these statutory requirements offers practitioners with the measures that need to be established in the setting creating and embedding an ethos that best ensures high quality provision for all individuals to achieve the best possible results (Welsh Government, 2019). An example of a statutory requirement within an early year's setting is the National Minimum Standards (Welsh Government, 2016).

The National Minimum standards is an important regulation that settings follow to ensure their practise meets the Government guidelines provided (Welsh Government, 2016, pg. 3) and have twenty-four standards in which early years settings must provide and follow to children up to the age of twelve (Berg, 2021). Within these standards quality of care is covered to ensure the best approach and environment for the child

within the setting (Berg, 2021). However, as presented by The Department of Health and Aged Care (2013) the term 'minimum standard' is described as a method to achieve the basic level of performance within practise. Collins (2023) agrees with this and states that this can also be referred to as the level of quality that is thought to be satisfactory.

Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – ECERS

Eceruk (No Date) states that, Environment Rating Scales are being used throughout the UK to support an improvement in the quality provision of early years settings. Clifford *et al*. (2010) describes how ECERS is divided into seven sections where the observer can go round the environment and ensure these areas are significant in comparison to the tool. A couple of examples of these seven areas are both fine and gross motor skills, social development, and opportunities for creative undertakings (Clifford *et al*., 2010, pg. 3). However, a new and more frequent version has been updated and is called ECERS-R (Clifford *et al*., 2010, pg.3). Clifford *et al.* (2010) does state that the seven areas are a little different in comparison to ECERS, a few of examples of these revised areas are parents and staff, interactions, and routines. Mathers et al. (2012) states that the ECERS tool is carried out through observations completed by practitioners throughout the day providing an in-depth assessment of the quality of practise within the settings environment.

According to Coventry City Council (2019) ECERS is an inclusive assessment tool that processes the 'environmental provisions and practitioner led interactions' that have an impact in all areas of children's holistic development. As also agreed by Hopkins (2019) ECERS is a tool that allows settings to measure their overall quality practise for children between the ages of two and five years old identifying any changes that need to be made to the provision of the setting (Clifford *et al*.,2010, pg. 2). As expressed by Early *et al.* (2018) ECERS indicates to practitioners a variety of children's developmental needs and the areas in which they may need more support and structure. Nursery World (2012) agrees to this and points out that ECERS can help to understand areas in which may need to be improved so that practise can be extended to best fit the child.

However, due to ECERS being a measuring tool that is carried through observations barriers can arise. As explained by Association Montessori Internationale (2023) finding the time to correctly observe one individual child can be a challenge during the day due to the lack of time that practitioners may have which can impact in the way the observation is carried out as children need to be listened to and attended to their needs throughout it as described by Online Learning College (2021). Online Learning College (2021) describes how it is essential to avoid bias when carrying out an observation as properly recording what the child does and says is essential to finding out the stage in which the child is developing and any individual needs that the child may require support in.

Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-being scale (SSTEW)

The SSTEW scale focuses on the pedagogical approach in which the support and provision of practitioners is presented within the children's learning and holistic environment (Hoare, No Date, pg. 17 and Victoria State Government, 2019). Watch Me Grow (No Date) and Siraj *et al.* (2015) specifically mentions how the SSTEW scale focuses on how practitioners can help and support children's language, social and emotional well-being. Hoare (No Date) goes onto explain that the SSTEW scale focuses on children between the ages of two and five years of age. There are five subscales in which practitioners use to determine staff and children's interactions within the setting while also noting any professional judgement on the behaviours of practitioners towards the children (Hoare, No date, pg.28). These five areas are building trust, confidence and independence, social and emotional well-being, supporting language and communication, supporting learning, and assessing learning and language (Early Years' Service, No Date).

Nursery World (2015) states that, the SSTEW scales can offer practitioners with a clear vision on how the setting can be improved so that they can move to the next level within the scale while ensuring their provision links to the curriculum and assessments (Coventry County Council, No Date). This scale can define the work practitioners do to effectively support children's emotional well-being and their learning (Nursery World, 2015). As described by Nursery World (2015) practitioners have a significant

role in children emotional and intellectual development and using the SSTEW scale can provide practitioners with an idea on the correct approaches that they can use to develop their own practise and knowledge, Coventry City Council (No Date) also agrees to this. Siraj et al. (2015) points out that, SSTEW was designed so that it could be used as research and self-evaluation where efficient improvements can be made in accordance with the findings. Coventry City Council (No Date) also argues that the SSTEW scale can demonstrate how children can independently learn showing clear engagement in what they need to do, by getting used to daily routines and learning opportunities.

However, creating an environment where you can use the SSTEW scale can be a little harder for practitioners. Brodie, 2023, explains that this can be due to not having a calm environment where you can effectively communicate with the child in depth to expand their understanding. For the scale to also effectively support practitioners and children frequent interactions need to occur (Learning Journals, 2023). On the contrary this can be difficult to obtain due to staff shortages. As described by Lawler (2022) this can have an impact on child development due to their being a slower recognition rate of identifying children who may need extra support.

Both these scales can be used for research, inspections, and audits where self-assessment tools can be developed to best improve and support quality provision to best benefit the child as implied by Howard *et al.* (2018). As presented by Siraj *et al.* (2015) using both these scales can provide practitioners with a clear idea of what high quality should consist of within the early years education sector.

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