

This assignment will critically reflect on the benefits of additional methods of promoting and ensuring quality above statutory requirements. Whilst also critically analysing methods of quality assurance. It will focus on official quality assurance mark and research based professional development tools.

Introduction

Quality assurance analyses the quality of a product with a minimum standard, then sets systems and strategies to divert problems and raise those standards, whilst creating consistency throughout the setting (Bush, 2011). The standards can be set by either the provider or by government (Sallis, 2014). When related to early years this means that the stakeholders (leaders, staff and parents) need to adopt systems to ensure the practice being provided, adheres to policy, that has been written in accordance with Government Legislation (Pre-school Learning Alliance, 2017).

Before 1997 there were no measurable standards, this allowed nurseries and day care centres to be run as the leader wished (Welsh Assembly Government, 2013a). However, in 1998 the UK government decided that there was a need for investment in childcare provisions, to create a high quality of care for all. This led to the Childcare Strategy (1998) which was a plan to improve standards and ensure a higher quality of provision (UK Childcare Policy and Legislation, no date).

The Government had a vision that if a high quality of early years childcare was provided, the development of children in all areas would improve, including those children in deprived areas (WAG, 2013b). Therefore, reducing the amount of children living in poverty (Moyle, 2009). With the introduction of the Green Paper and Every Child Matters in 2003 (DfES, 2003) the Government's vision was to emphasise on 'quality' within the early years provision. This then led to the introduction of Sure Start/Flying Start, which draws together multi-agencies to work together (WAG, 2014). The Early Years Foundation Stage supports this idea and is the basis for quality experiences and is used to provide improvements in outcomes for the child together with reducing social inequalities in deprivation (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2008). As Bronfenbrenner's theory suggests,

different situations lead to the collective experience for the child, therefore it is important that all agencies work together in unison in the interests of the child (Hodgeman, 2011). However, flying start is only available to children in deprived areas (WAG, 2017).

Abbott and Langston and (2005) believe that quality matters for children and families, however, suggests the way that quality is measured is difficult to quantify as perceptions of quality vary, stating that quality measures the environment, history and location. Whereas, Moss and Pence (1994 cited in Abbott and Langston, 2005) disagree and suggest that quality is a concept built on beliefs, interests and family values. Moss and Pence (1994 cited in Abbott and Langston, 2005) suggest this is the reason that quality is measured on the furnishings and space as well as the quality of the teaching and shared experiences in the setting.

The Study of Early Education and Development (SEED) has been conducted to report on the effects of structural quality within a setting and the effects it has on the development of children in the early years it suggests there is a relationship between the quality of the setting and the development of the child however, more research is still being conducted, it is therefore not conclusive (DfES, 2017).

Research has also been conducted into whether children benefit more in a high-quality setting by The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project (Sylva et al., 2010) this was conducted to measure children's attainment and social/behavioural development. This study revealed evidence to suggest a high-quality provision has improved the development and behaviour of children and raised the attainment. The study showed that where the provision had high quality trained staff, there were significant differences in the child's development (Sylva et al., 2010). Similarly, Ferre Laevers' theory suggests that when children are in a state of well-being, learning will occur, if the quality is of a higher level the level of involvement will increase (Jones and Pound, 2008). According to Day et al. (2011) positivity in the environment can also impact on the child's well-being, which builds confidence and self-esteem. To ensure this quality is achieved and sustained it is important to follow the guidelines in the Well-being for Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and keep up to-to-date with policy change (WAG, 2016a).

For quality assurance to be effective, all the stakeholders involved should be accountable in the process (Brundrett, 2013). Firstly, communication is key. This can be achieved through communications, for example in the form of quantitative data collected regarding the voice of the child (UNICEF, no date), parent's wishes and staff appraisals (Dawson, 2009). However, some parents, are not forthcoming with returning questionnaires (Pattern, 2017). Practitioners should create a system that works for all, when obtain this information (Pattern, 2017).

It is equally as important for children to have a voice in the setting, as article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child all states: children have the right to an opinion and should be involved in decisions that involve them (UNICEF, no date).

According to Brundrett (2013) for practitioners to provide a high-quality setting this can be achieved through providing high-quality teaching and learning. Brundrett says that if highly qualified staff are employed, this will provide a better learning experience for the child. Brundrett (2013) also suggests staff should be given training as this builds confidence and increases personal development which increases quality. Busher (2006 cited in Brundrett, 2013) suggests that this experience should involve all staff working together to achieve the same goal. Leithwood et al. (2007 cited in Brundrett, 2013) suggests quality can be improved through leaders motivating staff, this can be done through listening to ideas and developing them, then demonstrating high quality teaching built around those ideas. As the Bandura's (1986 cited in Wise et al. 2013) motivation theory suggests that motivation is increased when staff are comfortable with the task they already know and understand.

However, quality is also about involving parents and creating a better relationship between home and school and teaching parents how to support the child's needs regarding education. Furthermore, for Tayler (2015) policies created by practitioners can be too much what the setting wants, and how things should be done, without being sympathetic to the cultures and identities of parents. If this was to occur, practitioners could be accused of undervaluing of the parent's ways Tayler (2015).

McCarthy (2014) suggests some parents argue against any standards being set, believing that children should be free to learn as they want. However, on a positive note Barron et al. (2010) suggest it is an opportunity to share decisions with parents about the child's needs. Goodall (2013) also says that the engagement of parents in decisions can result in higher academic achievement for the child.

There is also a value to be placed on the importance of relationships that the child encounters with staff in the setting, it should be recognised that children develop in their own way, which links to Vygotsky's proximal development theory that all children learn at different paces and stages, however, learning according to Siraj-Blatchford (2009) should be a shared process. Shared between the child, the practitioner, parents and the environment (Abbott and Langston, 2005). According to Blandford and Knowles (2016) sustained shared thinking is a way of working collaboratively with children, which can develop and enhance learning, leading eventually to independent learning.

With all early year's settings and care providers, barriers occur. One barrier could be, there is poor communication, which can lead to systems failing. According to Sallis (2014) systems can be put into a daily or monthly planner to overcome this breakdown in communication as the plan is set out for all staff to see.

Another barrier suggested by Genishi and Dyson, 2009; Pugh, 2010; Rose and Rogers, 2012; Faulkner and Coates, 2013 says there is too much emphasis on attainments and assessment, which devalues the experience for the child. Similarly, Ang (2014) agrees but suggests that assessment is required to be able to write and change policy to create that quality setting. According to Pavey (2017) it is also necessary to detect interventions required in the early years as this according to Doyle et al. (2007) can be more cost effective. Allen (2011) agrees and suggests public money is being wasted as interventions given later in the child's life do not always work or take longer for the child to grasp. Nutbrown et al. (2013) also agrees and further suggests the need for high quality interventions in the early years for a more effective use of resources that will have a more lasting effect.

Over the years there has been many policy changes including the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, Health and Social Care Act 2008, Care Standards Act 2000 (WAG, 2011) and the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 (WAG, 2013a). These are National Minimum Standards (NMS) and are in place to ensure quality childcare, however, the general expectation is to ensure that the basic standards are exceeded (Gov. UK, 2013). According to Cottle and Alexander (2013) there are arguments to suggest against settings standards, as it is quashing the natural pedagogical and child-initiated learning or sustained shared thinking, instead government is favour quality control to raise the standards. However, Blackmore and Hutchison (2010) suggest this maybe alienating parents, similarly Tayler (2015) suggest that policy is undervaluing the morals of parents. Therefore, this will not in the long run change the attitudes of parents, who influence their children's attitudes, this inhibits the system of change, and the provision of the high-quality for the setting could be lost (Cottle and Alexander, 2013).

Sylva, et al. (2010) however, believe that children deserve a high-quality provision as, research shows that if a child receives a higher quality education then they are more likely to achieve a better standard of life. It is also the child's right under article 27 of the UNCRC that the child should have the right to the best standard of living, to help them fully develop (Jones and Walker, 2011). The Government believed the system was not working and it set legislation to raise the standards by introducing rules on staff qualifications (Gov. UK, 2013). Until recently, it was the responsibility of local education authorities to ensure the quality in settings. However, it is now the responsibility of each care provider to raise the quality of its own setting (Slaughter, 2016).

In April 2016, in Wales, the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 became law. Which means that all providers of care for children are required to register with the Care Inspectorate Wales (2018), this is to ensure quality of standards of care providers are being met by all. Settings are required to complete an annual self-assessment statement and quality of care report (CIW, 2018). The first part, the statement is informing the CIW of the data regarding the setting including staff qualifications, training and children numbers. This is an efficient way

of accumulating quantitative data regarding all the care providers in Wales (CIW, 2018). Part 2 is the quality of care report where the practitioner informs the CIW of the strengths of the setting as well as areas requiring improvement.

Benefits for the self-assessment statement, are that it is a way of practitioners providing professional development for themselves and staff as they can reflect on practice (Borgmeier et al., 2016]. However, self-criticism can be difficult to perform as according to Kulkarni et al. (2015) some practitioners understate their own self-worth. Similarly, according to Hodgman (2011) the self-assessment process can be used to reflect on the setting and evaluate the effect that current systems have on the early years child's learning. Boud (2013) however, believes that self-assessment is more than reflection of the practice, it is also about taking control of situations and re-energising staff and systems. However, Boud (2013) also suggests that self-assessment can have a negative effect on a setting. Suggesting staff may feel judged on the work they are doing, causing staff to become less motivated. Anning and Ball (2008) agrees and suggest with the introduction of monitoring systems (as a result of inspections) this can imply values of mistrust in the ability of staff to conduct jobs properly. Therefore, settings should use assurance systems to promote continuous evaluation and reflection (Mette et al., 2015).

System where a setting may grade itself on performance through using professional assurance providers (Professional Association for Childcare and Early years, 2018). Such quality providers can assess using quality management frameworks. Practitioners could use companies such as the Wales Pre-school Providers Association (WPPA) Quality for All Mark, Environment Ratings Scales, Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing Scale (SSTEWS) and Quality First (NDNA) (DfSE, 2017).

When approaching ways to assess quality within a setting it is necessary to identify the correct framework that work for the type of setting. However, practitioners who have been considering applying a framework within their practice can choose between one or a combination of these frameworks (Inglis, 2015). For instance, if the practitioner was to use the company WPPA. This company works closely with the setting to resolve/implement practice issues throughout the year and assess the

setting on an annual basis, the benefit for this is that the setting will gain a quality assurance stamp annually, instead of every three years with the CIW. This promotes the business to prospective parents (WPPA, 2018). It uses the rational approach this emphasises on the organisational structure of the setting, for example, choice of opportunity based on the perception of the situation, implementing chosen alternatives, plans that suit the needs and wants of the setting. Faulkner and Coates (2013) believe this approach allows practitioners to assess the consequences with alternatives, using support from external assurance. Another benefit of using WPPA is the wealth of experience it has witnessed in the field of childcare providers. The company can offer advice based on prior knowledge and experience (WPPA, 2018). However, Hoyle and Wallace (2005 cited in Bush, 2011) notes that teachers cannot always adhere to the planned rationale as lots of decisions are made on the run, due to the busy nature of the early years setting. Another benefit of using the WPPA is it will keep the setting up-to-date with current legislation such as the implementation of adding the 30 hours allocated to parents, the new successful futures curriculum and the ALN reform bill, that the Welsh Assembly Government are implementing. Furthermore, the evidence that is collected through the systems with WPPA, can be inputted and coincide with the evidence built for the SASS. The WPPA's aims are to ensure the development of the child's personal and social development as well as ensuring families are given the opportunity to experience high quality affordable childcare (WPPA, 2018).

A disadvantage to using a company is that there are costs implicated, However, the costs and benefits to employing the WPPA will be recognised in terms of both staff and financial cost, as long term the implications for staff and management time will be saved when systems in place ensure the quality and smooth running of education and administration systems are working (Salis, 2013). As previously mentioned legislation is constantly changing, when considering matters of changing policy, this can according to Baldwin (1997 cited in EUA, 2012) be an administrative burden, which without sufficient training could cost the setting more to rectify or get right. WPPA work in unison with the government to ensure all policies are up-to-date, this can save money and ensure safeguarding and appropriate procedures are always priority.

Conclusions

Managing quality within the early years setting is critically important. According to Education and Childcare Minister Elizabeth Truss when parent's look for a nursery setting to look after their child they are entrusting that setting with their child's brain. It is therefore critically important to choose the right setting, as setting parents want that achieves high quality status (Gov. UK, 2013).

For high quality to be achieved this should involve everyone's commitment and contribution (Sallis, 2014). However, this will take investment to implement the appropriate quality assurance (Sallis, 2014).

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