

Reflective Paper

According to Siraj, *et al.* (2019) the definition of quality can be difficult to define because every individual perceives quality in different ways which can depend on opportunities they experience. Welsh Government (2016) quality practice is providing children with their necessities and their rights within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which includes safeguarding, providing food and water, ensuring the environment is safe and providing children with learning and development opportunities (Unicef, 2019). Maslow's motivational theory 'Hierarchy of Needs' supports this as he believed for children to learn at their best capability and achieve self-actualisation they must be provided with their needs by practitioners (Pichère, Cadiat and Probert, 2015). However, Moss (2016, p.1) poses the question "why can't we get beyond quality?" as he believes quality is more than the necessities and it is the responsibility of all practitioners to provide children with equitable learning opportunities by continually developing their practice to include higher quality practice. Additionally, Moss (2016) also believes there is always going to be something a setting needs to improve on; however, this is not a negative as continually improving a setting will enable children to access the best quality of opportunities through the setting.

Continually improving a setting along the National Minimum Standards which are assessed by Care Inspectorate Wales as discussed by Moss (2016) does not ensure there is a high-quality setting as settings are unable to improve more than the expected, however settings can participate in quality scales which can further the quality of settings. Partaking in quality scales enables practitioners to aim further than the basics of quality and achieve high quality practice in providing children with efficient learning opportunities with an inclusive approach (Barton and Smith, 2015). According to Government Social Research (2021) quality scales assist practitioners in within quality assurance as it regulates the effectiveness of opportunities which are provided to children. However, Mathers, Singler and Karemaker (2012) suggests there are many qualities assurance scales which can be utilised which can be both a positive and a negative as multiple quality assurance scales enable settings to choose on one that suits their individual needs as a setting, however too many options can cause confusion on what makes a setting quality effective. The quality scales

which will be discussed are the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing scale, also known as SSTEW (Siraj, *et al.* 2015) and the Leuven scale (MacRae and Jones, 2020).

The SSTEW scale is the adult-involvement scale which measures the quality of adult interaction within the setting to ensure practitioners are providing quality provision to children (Siraj, *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, Howard, *et al.* (2020) states the SSTEW scale enables practitioners to engage in quality effective provision by participating in continual professional development to provide children with inclusive and equitable learning opportunities. This includes providing children with inclusive resources and implementing sustained-shared thinking opportunities where practitioners can extend a child's learning through exploration and discovery (Howard, *et al.* 2020). Mackenzie (2016) states the SSTEW scale promotes individuality, self-expression and choice, therefore, improving confidence, self-esteem. Positive confidence and self-esteem allow for children's learning to be enhanced as it encourages children to engage with practitioners and feel confident enough to express their thoughts, feelings and desires (Mileer and Ginsburg, 2012). Wang, Degol and Henry (2019) state engagement allows for children to become immersed in activities, therefore, providing quality provision as children can learn and develop at an appropriate rate which is supported by practitioners.

However, The Leuven scale is a child-involvement scale and measures the quality of opportunities practitioners provide in enabling an assurance of positive wellbeing and increased child participation (MacRae and Jones, 2020). Moyles (2014) believes child involvement is to be encouraged as child-initiated play enables quality provision in enabling children to engage in their own learning. Through the Reggio Emilia approach understood that enabling children to engage in their own learning increases their confidence because practitioners see every child as strong and capable of leading their own lives and choosing their own paths (Edwards and Gandini, 2018). Donaldson (2015) states within the Successful Futures Framework, children are encouraged to participate in child-initiated play as he believes children must be given the opportunity to control their own play as this promotes independence, confidence and problem-

solving skills. In utilising Froebel's theory, it is understood that children learn more efficiently during play activities when they are provided with the opportunity to lead and control their own play because "in play children construct their understanding of the world through direct experience with it" (Froebel Trust, p.1, 2022). Wien (2015) states this allows for children to feel represented within the setting, therefore, positively impacting children's confidence and self-esteem. Furthermore, Craft, McConnon and Matthews (2012) believe children being in control of their own learning expands their curiosity and possibility thinking as they are constantly posing questions and discovering solutions in an independent way through exploration and discovery. Therefore, allowing for children to develop resilience and problem-solving skills as they are improving their complex thinking skills and expanding their abilities to think of different solutions, enabling the child to overcome challenges they may experience (Ercikan and Pellegrino, 2017).

Similarly, Mackenzie (2016) also states the SSTEW scale enables children to feel represented because it demonstrates the importance of encouraging children to engage in child-initiated play and express themselves through activities they engage in. Children feeling represented through encouragement of self-expression and self-discovery is quality effective as enables children to participate in activities to their full potential as they are completely immersed into the activities due to not being worried or anxious (White, 2013). Donaldson (2015) emphasises the importance of allowing children to feel represented within the setting as this promotes inclusive and non-discriminatory practice, therefore, providing equity within the setting and allowing every child to access the same opportunities. Additionally, Donaldson (2015) also states previously the curriculum in Wales was inconsistent in providing every child with the same opportunities as it included a set of stages which every child should achieve, however, it is understood every child learns at a different rate. Vygotsky agrees with this in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as he believed practitioners must understand the development areas of every child to provide them with inclusive support catered to their individual and unique needs (Holzman, 2016). As stated by SSTEW scale a quality setting enables every child to learn and develop regardless of individual learning needs (Vivanti, *et al.* 2018). This enables the promotion of the *Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018* as practitioners

ensure every child is provided with learning opportunities which are equity ensured, therefore, promoting the quality of the setting as they can adapt activities to suit their unique needs.

In contrast, whilst the SSTEW scale believes in scaffolding children through sustained-shared thinking opportunities, the Leuven scale emphasises the importance of ensuring children's play is uninterrupted because whilst a child is participating in play which is child-led, they are completely immersed in the activity (Lingan, Li and Vermeeren, 2021). Immersion takes place because children engage in the play cycle which is when the child can express themselves completely through play unconsciously (King and Newstead, 2019). However, as Jones and Reynolds (2015) state if a practitioner becomes involved without being invited, the play cycle can become broken causing the children to participate in conscious play and become less likely to engage completely in the activities in displaying their true holistic development. King and Newstead (2019a) also state that during the play cycle practitioners must only interrupt during opportunities where they are either invited by the child and they believe they can extend the child's learning through open-ended questions and sustained-shared thinking opportunities. Tayler (2015) believes an engagement in sustained-shared thinking strives for quality as it demonstrates an aim to achieve for a high-quality practice, because it allows for children, parents and practitioners to feel valued, respected and represented.

Montessori and George (1964) believe "play is the work of the child" and every child should be given the opportunity to develop at their own pace through play. Brooker, *et al.* (2014) agrees as they believe when children are provided with the opportunity to learn at their own pace, they are more likely to engage in risk and challenge activities which extend their learning. Additionally, Alcock and Ritchie (2018) state risk and challenge enables children to engage in sustained-shared thinking opportunities which is discussed within the SSTEW scale and the Leuven scale. Forest schools continually strive towards ensuring children are provided with risk and challenge opportunities as it expands children's knowledge and understanding through experimentation, exploration and discovery (Knight, 2013). Forest schools fulfil children's curiosity by

enabling a child to participate is discovering the answers to questions they may have, through hands-on learning which as Piaget's theory suggests enables quality effective practice (Goldin-Meadow, 2017). The SSEW the practitioners are working in partnership to discover the solutions and in the Leuven scale practitioners are encouraging children to discover the solutions independently (Siraj, 2015; MacRae and Jones, 2020). Care Inspectorate (2015) discusses that a positive approach to risk and challenge enables practitioners to ensure quality as it promotes a holistic development approach. Additionally, Care Inspectorate (2015) also state promoting risk allows for children to develop skills such as resilience, problem-solving and independence as they can participate in self-discovery.

Both scales agree in practitioners participating in continuous professional development (CPD) because the knowledge on how children develop is continually evolving on how we can provide a high-quality setting and what it means to have a high-quality setting (Ferdman, 2014). Ferdman, *et al.* (2013) states practitioners engaging in continuous professional development allows for practitioners to continually improve their practice by including more efficient approaches to pedagogy. As discussed by Ferdman (2014) for practitioners to engage in continuous professional development, they must be open-minded and have a growth mindset as these positive approaches allow practitioners to understand the importance of changing their practice to impact children positively. Social Care Wales (2016) state that engagement in CPD allows for practitioner to gain "new knowledge that may help you to deal with new or complex situations", providing practitioners with the skills they need to improve and adapt their current practice. Williams-Sieghfredsen (2017) states that continuous professional development increases practitioners' confidence and motivation towards supporting children through provision of high-quality learning opportunities. Additionally, Williams-Sieghfredsen (2017) believes CPD allows for practitioners to have a wider understanding of the varied support strategies they can provide children with. According to Topçiu (2015) the Vygotskian theory discusses having a wide understanding of the varied support strategies allows for practitioners to provide support to children which is catered to their individual needs, therefore, providing high quality practice as every child is provided with learning opportunities.

To conclude, the STEW scale and Leuven scale aim to provide children with the most effective strategies to supporting them, however both scales provide an understanding of the importance in understanding children's individual needs to understand the most effective support strategies (Welsh Government, 2021). Welsh Government (2021) demonstrate that the most effective way to improve the quality of a setting is to include at least one quality assurance scale. With the further understanding of how different quality assurance scales can be as demonstrated within this portfolio, Welsh Government (2020) states it would be more quality effective to utilise multiple quality assurance scales as this allows practitioners to understand the holistic measures, they must implement to ensure the practice is quality effective towards supporting children. Additionally, the utilising of multiple quality scales allows settings to choose specific quality assurance scales which support and assist the setting in achieving their morals and values (Roalf, *et al.* 2015).

Self-Reflection

During this model 'management for systems of quality' I have learnt that the definition of quality can change depending on who is the one defining it. During previous modules it was discussed on the difference between Macro and Micro policies which are implemented. During defining quality through a Macro policy, such as the National Minimum Standards or the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) it can demonstrate a basic understanding of what is expected from practitioners during quality assurance (Unicef, 2019; Rodrigo, 2020). However, each setting will have Micro policies to show what is expected and what the morals are for the specific setting to promote and implement quality assurance. Whilst the National Minimum Standards enable settings to be quality effective, it does not enable high quality practice as it is the baseline for provision. However, practitioners can enable high quality practice by implementing quality assurance measures, such as the sustained-shared thinking and emotional wellbeing scale (STEW) or the Leuven scale as these can allow for practitioners to understand how they can provide a higher quality of practice.

Additionally, during this module I have learnt that by measuring quality, children will be provided with a wide amount of learning opportunities as there is an additional structure of what settings should aim towards achieving. Therefore, allowing practitioners to understand the expectations the setting has for them within the specific morals and values the setting has. Settings sometimes struggle with understanding how to achieve higher quality practice as there is not a set of stages, however the quality assurance scales will allow for them to understand the in-depth quality needs which are needed for children in implementing continuous high quality learning opportunities.

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