

No AI was used within this assignment.

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Part 2: Reflective Paper

The word quality has a variety of definitions and terminologies which are dependent on circumstances and context in which it is used according to Elshaer (2012, p4), Pascal and Bertram (2018) and Martin, Elg and Gremyr (2020, p186). However, it is generally connected to the standard of excellence within specifications, requirements or expectations of an object, establishment or service (Elshaer, 2012, p4 & Martin, Elg and Gremyr, 2020, p186). However, within early childhood and care, Eadie (2024) divides quality into three sections process, structural and system. Process quality being measured by the micro levels of experiences and interactions children have both physically and emotionally. While structural and systems quality is a reflection on the macro level experiences from environments, legislations and regulations (Edwards, 2021, p9 and Eadie, 2024). Edwards (2021, p7) further discusses the importance of quality as a human right alongside providing economic advantages. Edwards (2021, p7) cites how the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter UNCRC) states it is “*fundamental to young personhood*” and children are “*worthy of access to quality Early Childhood Education and Care*” (Hereafter ECEC). In relation to this the UNCRC (no-date) created a legal agreement between 196 countries to ensure all children have rights, this including access to quality healthcare and education. Edwards (2021, p7-8) continues to explain the economic impacts quality has on children’s lives, stating how the cognitive and educational effects support them into adulthood, bridging the gaps from those of disadvantage backgrounds leading to more beneficial social outcomes. Central to this research is the importance of children having access to high quality care within settings. Bendini and Devercelli (2022, p8) and the Welsh Government (2023, p13) both support Edward’s statement on how quality early childhood education (hereafter ECE) has strong links to lifelong economic outcomes, however, explains how this is implemented within settings. Bendini and Devercelli (2022, p8) and the Welsh Government (2023, p13) discuss how high- quality settings unlock every child’s potential, and addresses inequalities which help bridge societal gaps, through providing equal opportunities for all children.

Coinciding with the above information the childcare settings are legally required to undergo inspections to ensure that statutory requirements and regulations are being met (Welsh Government, 2023, p6 and Estyn, no-date). Williams (2016) describes this process as quality assurance, which supports an organisation to maintain, enhance or achieve further, through an accumulation of procedures, policies and systems. However, these inspections also provide setting with support and advice to further improve the quality of care or education (Welsh Government, 2023, p6 and Estyn, no-date). This is known as quality enhancement which refers to raising the current standards further (Williams, 2016). To provide high-quality care settings need to go beyond the basic statutory requirements, through continually improving and evaluating the opportunities available, through using quality assurance tools

(Welsh Government, 2023, p10). Two of these quality assurance tools are Leuven Scales and Sustained shared thinking and Emotional Wellbeing (hereafter SSTEWS).

The Leuven Scale measures a child's emotional well-being and involvement, using a five-point scale system, the scale is measured through observing a child's involvement and emotional state, within the setting and linking it to one of the five points (Learning Journals, 2026). The first stage characterizes as extremely low; this may be observed as a child in distress for emotional well-being or lacking interest or energy during tasks within the involvement scale. While stage five suggests the child is extremely high, demonstrating the child is emotionally confident and content within the well-being scale and highly engaged in the involvement scale (Learning Journals, 2026). However, both scales offer a description to help the observer navigate where a child may be developmentally and emotionally (Learning Journal, 2026). Similarly to the Leuven scale is SSTEWS, SSTEWS also provides a breakdown of sub-scales one to five, each with a brief description of the behaviour or responses that could be observed, unlike the Leuven scale the sub-scales are based on developmental stages and include subheading known as items listed under each one. Scale one focuses on building trust and independence, listing three items related to self-regulation, independent play and small group interaction, while scale five looks at assessing the learning, listing items as supporting and extending learning to language development (Siraj, Kingston and Melhuish, 2015, p8).

Alistair Bryce-Clegg, (2015, p14) discusses how many practitioners are trained to focus on assessing academic attainment, however if children do not feel comfortable within a setting the attainment and engagement will be less visible. However, Bryce-Clegg (2015, p14) and MacRae and Jones (2023, p236) both agree stating how positive and engaged children are more complex thinkers and have better quality outcomes. The Leuven Scale and SSTEWS, both require observing individual children, these observations may be done within small groups, however the recordings will be in response to an individual child's development and not based on a "*one size fits all*" category. Additionally, both tools present high emphasis on children's interaction, involvement and emotional development, measured through relations with practitioners and a standardised format. These are accessible for practitioners and easy to share with carers, whilst also providing opportunities to reflect and monitor the child's progress through regularly repeating assessments (Learning Journals, 2026 and Howard *et al*, 2020). Alongside these advantages, is that both tools provide a child centred approach, allowing practitioners to gain insight into children's interests, and the ability to adapt and respond to needs, areas and resources to meet, challenge and further engage those interests (Learning Journal, 2026: Brodie, 2026 and Howard *et al*, 2020).

For these tools to be effective Bryce-Clegg (2015, p17-25) discusses how it is the practitioner's role to respond to what has been observed and implement opportunities to challenge children's development further. Bryce-Clegg (2015, p17) continues to add how practitioners can develop and enhance learning through

engaging when appropriate, modelling and expanding the children's thinking through questioning. Coinciding with the observations results, practitioners should then adapt the environments to enhance the experiences further, providing open-ended activities which promote SSTEWE (Bryce-Clegg, 2015, p17). Bryce-Clegg (2015, p24) believes environments should be based on assessment results, linking directly with the strengths and developing the weaknesses.

Whilst the Leuven Scale and SSTEWE tool both have beneficial aspects; there are some differences and barriers to consider. Each tool can be time consuming due to the in-depth observations and evaluation of evidence, which when collected can affect time managements within a setting (Brodie, 2026 and Learning journal, 2026). Coinciding with these barriers are that both tools provide a structured description of behaviours or responses within the scales, which is a disadvantage as practitioners may have a different perception or conception of the description, which may affect the child's ratings on the scale (MacRae and Jones, 2020: Howard *et al*, 2020). Lastly both tools require skilled and experienced practitioners, who have had training on how to assess, support and monitor children's development, as each tool can be different and requires a good understanding and knowledge of what to look for (MacRae and Jones, 2020: Siraj, Kingston and Melhuish, 2015, p9).

Although the Leuven Scale and SSTEWE, have many similarities between the methods and barriers, each tool also presents their own barriers. The Leuven Sale mainly focuses on the emotional well-being and involvement within children's development, rather than a holistic approach, although Bryce-Clegg (2015, p16) believes that the academic attainment is interlinked with emotional well-being and involvement, the scales mainly look at those developmental strands (MacRae and Jones, 2020). Additionally, the Leuven Scale can be restricting for children with special educational needs (hereafter SEN) or who are non-verbal as these children may not present these standardised behaviours (Learning Journal, 2026). Meanwhile the SSTEWE scale has a more in-depth documentation system, although having the five scales, there is overall 14 items to consider, which can be time consuming and overwhelming for practitioners, to which may require support according to Brodie (2026). Brodie (2026) continues to discuss how SSTEWE is based on a "*two-way exchange*" within conversations, which requires mutual understanding and learning from both child and the practitioner, which is different to the traditional practitioner role to teaching and imbedding information. This requires practitioner to learn alongside the children, which some practitioners may find difficult to step back from traditional teaching role. Another barrier SSTEWE presents is some may deem it as just chatting with children, and Brodie (2026) emphasis that practitioners, managers and other spectators should not view SSTEWE in this way, however, view it more as a skill.

To successfully implement SSTEWE and the Leuven Scale to improve provision and quality outcomes, the first thing settings need to do is instil an effective environment. Bryce-Clegg (2015, p14), the Learning Journal (2026) and Hoare (no-date) all states

setting which nurture children's wellbeing, build relationships and have quality interactions with the children have better quality outcomes within children's development and the settings, due to children being confident and engaged. Secondly settings ensuring all staff have adequate training, to become familiar and comfortable with the context of both tools to ensure all staff have a mutual understanding, which creates more fair and adequate results for the children's development. Alongside understanding and being comfortable making observations. This is specified by the Learning Journal (2026) and Hoare (no-date, p50) who state having trained and knowledgeable staff who know what to look for, understand when to intervene and can evaluate the evidence collected create better observations. Finally, both tools being child centred, allow for practitioners to observe a child's interests, engagement and interactions, which support and enhance learning and outcomes. Bryce-Clegg (2015, p18) discusses how through this child centred approach practitioners can analyse the observations, what has been recorded and then plan experiences and opportunities which develop the child's learning further. Hoare (no-date) describes how practitioners can provide open- ended resources, provide areas in the setting which are adaptable, quiet and which offers opportunities to encourage curiosity, discussions and questioning.

To conclude, it is evident to see the importance of emotional wellbeing within children's development, Bryce-Clegg (2015, p14), Learning journal (2026) and Howard *et al* (2020, p5) all highlight how building children's confidence and trust, enables them to be effective learners which supports future academic attainment. This is something Mustofa (2022) emphasises when explaining Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of needs theory. Maslow believed for a person or child to learn or reach what Maslow described as self-actualization, which was to fulfil one's potential, their physiological, safety and belonging needs needed to be met first (Mustofa, 2022). Maslow believed children could not focus on learning if their safety or belonging needs were not met, due to seeking that need first (Mustofa, 2022). Bryce-Clegg (2015, pg14) agrees, discussing how if a child is not at ease or comfortable within their environment "*they will not learn effectively*". Through, researching into the Leuven Scale and STTEW, emotional wellbeing is centre to the assessments, along with interactions and engagement which all promote and encourage a sense of belonging and safety. Furthermore Well-being, care and development are two of the key areas Care Inspectorate Wales (hereafter CIW) look at during inspections (CIW, 2025). Within the inspection framework the quality of wellbeing and care is measured by children's having a voice, feeling secure and content, whilst also looking at the level of interactions between staff and fellow peers, alongside their developmental needs (CIW, 2025). Acknowledging the information gathered, the Leuven Scale and SSTEW quality assurance tool, demonstrates a better tool for measuring these areas for CIW inspections and the overall measurement of children emotional wellbeing.

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