

Leadership and Management for systems of quality ECEY6011

Within this reflective paper, there will be a critical analysis of quality and how it is measured within early years settings. Two scales of measuring quality will be discussed as well as the importance of quality within early years settings.

Quality can appear different to different people and settings. Quality within early childhood services has been discussed for many years (Moss, 1994; Penn, 2000; Tanner et al., 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2007, p.179). This is due to all people who work with children (stakeholders) have a broad perspective on what quality is and the things that quality is made up of (Woodhead, 2000). Quality started being debated in 1997 when the Labour Government used it to reduce poverty. Within this debate, the Labour Government focused on reducing poverty but also increasing partnership, integration, and professionalism within the early years services alongside measures that were supposed to narrow the division that already existed between education and care (Baldock et al., 2009).

Following this debate and the division between education and care, the needs of children and their parents were emphasised throughout the 'Every Child Matters' (DfES (Department for Education and Skills), 2003) which was put in place by the Children Act, 2004. The Ten-Year strategy for childcare also supported this (HM Treasury, 2004). From 1997 funding was given for initiatives like early excellence centres and within this was significant goals being set for 2010 (DfES, 2004, p. 4). These goals included many guidance frameworks which set out expectations for those providing early years care and education in terms of the quality of their provision and practice. These were known as the National standards for under 8s day care and childminding as well as the Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage. (DfES, 2000). The office for standards in education (OFSTED) inspected settings according to the new standards. Sylva et al, 2004; Harms, Clifford, and Cryer, 2005; Pianta, La Paro and Hamre, 2007 also states that quality is measured in several diverse ways and is done in a way that the elements of quality are captured which are predictive of child outcomes.

Regarding quality, it has gained a generic status as is promoted through goals, standards, targets, and other quality assurance procedures according to Tanner et al. (2006, p. 6) refers to quality being an 'objective reality that can be defined, measured, evaluated and assured'. Peisner-Feinberg and Burchinal, 1997; NICHD, 2000; Sylva et al, 2008) states that the quality of education and care matters as it affects children's everyday experiences and the benefits that high quality can provide. High quality provision is important for children that are from disadvantaged backgrounds as it can help to reduce the effects of social disadvantage states Sylva et al, (2004).

Like previously mentioned, stakeholders have distinct roles to play in the promotion of high quality within early years provision. Parents are important for improving quality as they are the primary users of the services, and it means that they need to be informed of what excellent quality is and they should have access to information regarding the quality provided by different settings to help them choose the right one for them and their child. Early years providers need tools which are effective so that they can identify if the setting is suitable for them to progress their career should they wish to.

Quality can be considered as either being qualitative or quantitative. Qualitative is descriptive in nature and assesses data that can be observed but not measured, whereas quantitative involves a numeric value and assesses data that can be measured. Quantitative measures within early

childhood may include data on children's outcomes in national tests whereas qualitative measures might involve descriptive observations of the children's engagement within certain tasks (Mathers, et al., no date).

With regards to quality, there are statutory requirements and obligations which are stated by governing bodies such as CIW (Care Inspectorate Wales), Estyn, Health, and safety as well as Social Care Wales. By law according to O'Sullivan, (2009:163), there are financial and procedural duties in place as well as there being employment contracts and insurance for the setting. There are many legislative frameworks in place to support early years settings one of which is the Children Act 1989 and within this framework, it was stated that there was a need for policies. They also stated that the policies would protect children, parents, and the practitioners to ensure that everyone is clear about how the organisation runs but also gives information about what to always do (Sadek and Sadek, 1998 p.50). Pacey (2021) states the difference between a policy and a procedure and states that a policy is a statement which is written about how you will work in one area of practice whereas a procedure details the action you will take to carry out the policy. Therefore, a policy cannot work without a procedure and a procedure cannot be done without a policy.

All policies must be written carefully by the leader of the setting and should be easily understood by all staff and parents or carers but also the local authority and external bodies if ever necessary. The policies must explain what the individual setting believes in and what actions will be taken. Regarding a policy, it is to be seen as an agreement and therefore everyone is responsible for making it work. When policies are tested this is when people can see if the leadership, management, and teamwork is effective. Within the NMS (National Minimum Standards) there are 24 policies which cover various settings from childminders to after school clubs.

These are all ways of measuring quality within the early years sector. If all legal requirements and frameworks are followed, there usually is not any reason for bad quality of care within a setting. It is important to have good quality within practice as the EPPE (Effective Provision of Pre School-Education) project tells us that high-quality provision is vital to achieve good outcomes for children (Teach early years, no date). Although by following these legal frameworks and laws it ensures quality, however there are many more measures that ensures good quality. Quality should be measured in a variety of ways and times to ensure the setting has a true evaluation of all aspects of practice. By using a range of tools to measure quality, this will ensure that a more holistic approach in all elements of practice. Teach Early years (no date) states a few ways of measuring quality, and this can be measured through peer and room observations as well as regular staff supervisions and appraisals. It may also be beneficial to gain external support visits from sector professionals as well as seeking feedback from specialists such as a speech and language therapist. By gaining views from the children within the settings' provision may also be another effective way of measuring quality as the main focus of the setting should be around the needs and interests of the children as per the new curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2022).

One scale of measuring quality is the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing Scale (SSTEWS). SSTEWS is an environment rating scale that can and is used for research, self-evaluation, and improvement. It is like the Environment Rating Scale (ERS) and involves 5 areas of practice which are linked to aspects of development. Usually, SSTEWS is completed within either a morning or afternoon session which is 3-4 hours long and focuses on one group of children at a time and within these sessions, children should have access to indoor and outdoor areas. Siraj, Kingston and Melhuish (2015) suggest that the STEWS scale is completed with another one of the ERS and ECERS-E

is recommended if working with children aged 3-5 and ITES-R if observing 2-year-olds. More time should be given if completing another ERS. SSTEW recognises how important it is to have practice which is child-centred and developmentally appropriate as it shows progression within learning which enables practitioners to support children in becoming self-regulated and autonomous learners (Howard et al., 2018). SSTEW focuses on pedagogy which is relational and intentional. Higher scores are awarded within the SSTEW scale when staff show that they know individual children well as well as being interested in their interests and including their interests in practice as well as their beliefs, cultures and achievements being included within practice. Higher scores are also provided when educators support children with risk taking as well as support every child according to their needs. These needs should be achieved by implementing different teaching and learning strategies alongside relevant content that can be applied with sensitivity. Finally, SSTEW recognises that the work of educators has a great impact on the children as educators work with parents and carers to support interactions within the home learning environment (Howard et al., 2018).

The EPPE project (Effective Provision of Pre-School Education) investigated the effects of education and care within pre-school on children's development for children aged 3-7 years old. The project shows that pre-school had a strong positive impact on the progress of children with it noting that the quality and quantity of the setting also was influential on the children's progress (Oxfordshire Community Foundation, 2014). Settings vary in effectiveness and suggest that certain forms of provision provide better outcomes. The EPPE project has become well used for contributing to evidence-based policy within early years education and care as well as EPPE using a mixed-method research design which targeted issues that could impact and change the lives of young children and their families (Oxfordshire Community Foundation, 2014). EPPE has also shown that having education in pre-school can help to reduce the effects of social disadvantage and can provide children with a better start in school (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, 2004).

The REPEY Project (Researching Pedagogy in Early Years) has shown that the pre-school settings that are most effective are those that provide a balance between the opportunities given for children to benefit from teacher-initiated group work and free choice play that could potentially come across as instructive play. The project also shows link between the curriculum and sustained shared thinking. The research also discovered that the settings who adopt their policies regarding social and behavioural aspects are the most effective as well as supporting children to talk through their conflicts (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, 2004).

The final scale that will be discussed regarding measuring quality will be the Quality First NDNA (National Day Nurseries Association) scale. NDNA works with the Welsh Government and other agencies across Wales to address any childcare issues in the country. They also develop relationships with nurseries across the country as well as providing information regarding nurseries across Wales (NDNA, no date). Recently, the NDNA has discovered a new form of measuring quality and it is called the Quality Counts: Certification mark which is the highest quality standard a nursery can achieve. The Quality Counts are a framework for continuous improvement with the focus of taking all staff on a learning journey to evaluate their provision for children. Although this may be beneficial to many nurseries across Wales, it is quite pricey costing £1,125 and can be time consuming for some settings. An audit document must be completed reflecting their practice against four key areas, play and learning, health and well-being, workforce and leadership and management. Then there will be an assessment and then an independent assessor will visit the setting and any recommendations made by the assessor will go for verification internally and externally and a decision will be made to

award the setting. Once awarded, the setting will receive the Quality Counts logo to display on the website etc.

The Quality Counts have been developed by following the UNCRC (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) and has been based upon academic research of best practice. The impact of Quality Counts is big, and it will involve all staff to ensure that there is a consistent approach to quality as well as it identifying any gaps in skills as well as supporting the development of individuals and teams (NDNA, no date). Settings that have received the Quality Counts, are able to provide better outcomes for children at inspection.

To conclude, it is clear from the research provided that good quality settings have better outcomes for children from a young age as well as it helping them progress through to their future. Quality can be improved if measured correctly and if all staff are engaged then there should be no reason for poor quality childcare settings.

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