

# A UNIVERSAL AND TRANSFERABLE QUALITY RATING SCALE: IS IT POSSIBLE?

Tanya Richardson  
University of Northampton, England.



# Introduction and context

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- Research question:

What constitutes a quality learning environment with regards to speech and language development for young children and how do factors in the learning environment influence the characteristics of utterances made by young children?

- Study aim:

to ascertain if factors in three different learning environment types for children aged 3-5 years, are associated with characteristics of their utterances and if so, the nature and effects of those factors.

In other words:

Does the quality of the learning environment have an impact on children's speech and language development?

# Previous research findings

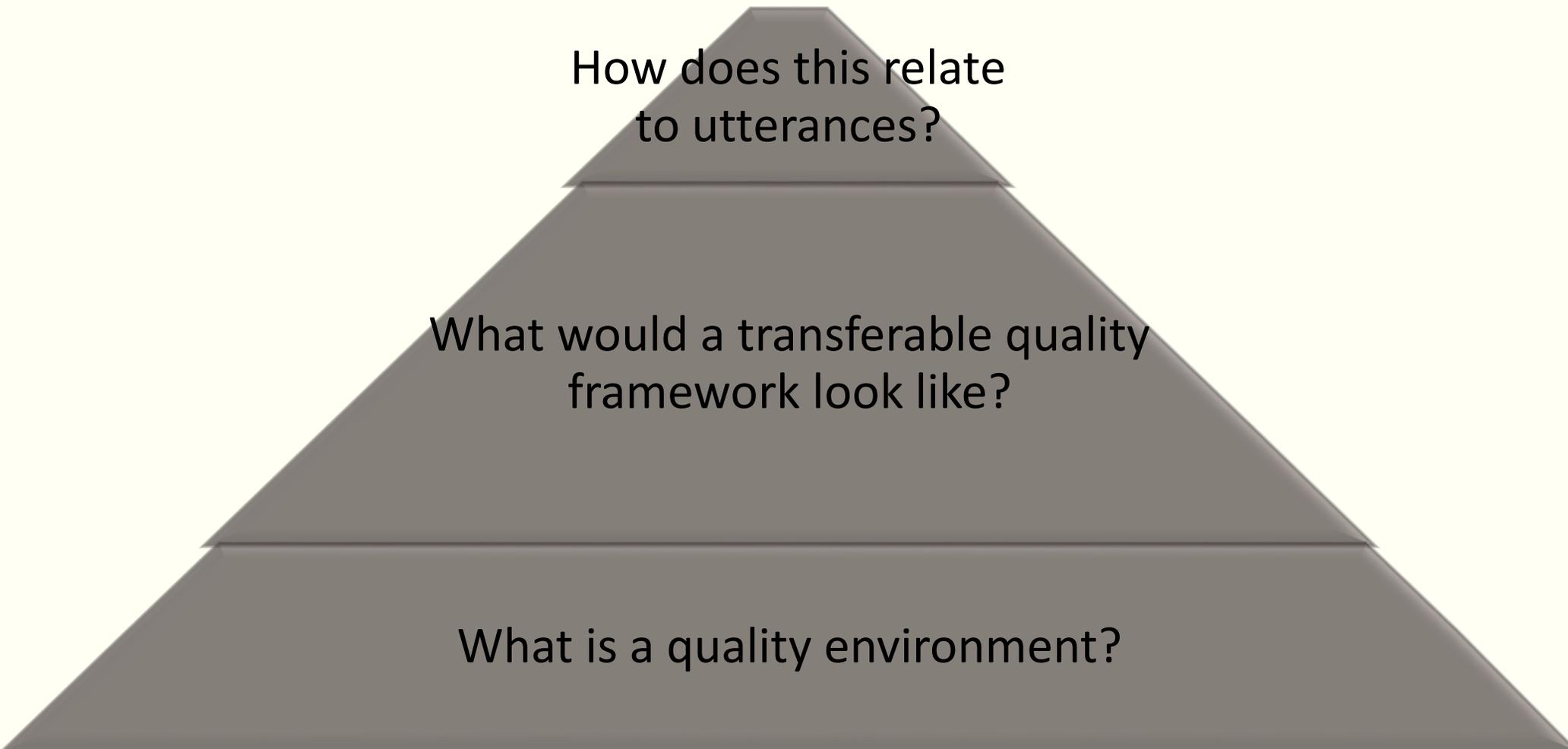
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- Speech and language improved by being in a natural environment (forest school) (Richardson, 2014)
- Children's utterances varied dependant on the environment that they were playing/learning in (Richardson and Murray, 2016)
- Currently available ratings scales were not transferable between indoor/outdoor/natural play and learning environments (Richardson and Murray, 2016)



# Phased approach

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How does this relate  
to utterances?

What would a transferable quality  
framework look like?

What is a quality environment?

## Philosophical approach

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- Transcendental idealism (Kant, 1781)
- A priori – aspects which can be seen or measured
- A posteriori – intuition, that which is “felt”



## Phase 1: What does the literature say about quality?

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- How is quality defined?

Quality in early childhood services is a constructed concept, subjective in nature and based on values, beliefs and interest, rather than an objective and universal reality. Quality child care is, to a large extent, in the eye of the beholder.

(Pence and Moss, 1994:172)

## And.....

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- Reed (2012) states that quality is defined by individuals' perspectives and beliefs, but also by an individual's positionality.
- Katz (1994:201) asserts that this 'insider' and 'outsider' view is necessary and that children's voices should be sought to define quality.
- Gosling (2016:31) believes that the concept of quality will depend on 'an intricate web of interconnected beliefs and experiences' and is often based on personal views of childhood.
- Brownlee and Berthelsen (2006) state that environment and the quality of such will also reflect practitioners understanding of child development.
- Unesco (2015) advocate the need for a quality environment to 'reflect local values and perspectives on young children's development, as well as scientifically established predictors of their cognitive, language and socio-emotional development'.

## In line with Kant's theory of transcendental idealism.....

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- 'We understand the concept of quality when we experience it, but when asked to describe a quality experience, explanations are very personal and subjective.' (Canning, 2012:78)
- Williams (1995) goes so far as to say that quality is a sensory concept and is something that can be felt, seen or heard.
- Berris and Miller (2011:105) found that parents reported a 'general feeling' about the quality of the physical environment, and reported that it was important to feel a 'connection' to their surroundings.

## If it's so contentious, why bother?

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- Although quality appears to be fluid and open to interpretation, it is recognised that this fluidity cannot be left to its own devices. Moss and Penn (2003:9) argue that it cannot be a case of 'anything goes'.
- High quality childcare can make a difference to children's outcomes – particularly with regards to language and cognitive development (Myers, 2005).
- Children who spend their time in low quality provision are more likely to have difficulties with social and language development (OECD, 2001, 2006)



# Existing rating scales

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## ECERS

Early Childhood Environment  
Rating Scale

(Harms *et al.*, 2005)

Most widely used rating scale  
(Sakai *et al.*, 2003)

Found not to be transferable  
between different environments  
(Richardson and Murray, 2016)

## POEMS

Preschool Outdoor  
Environment Measurement  
Scale

(Hestenes *et al.*, 2004)

Large emphasis on  
interactionism (21 of 56 items  
are based on interaction with  
teacher/caregiver)

Purely for use in the outdoors.

## CLASS

Classroom Assessment Scoring  
System

(Pianta *et al.*, 2008)

Concentrates purely on  
interactions.

Although this element is  
important this research is  
looking at more than just  
interactions

# WHY GO ON THIS WILD GOOSE CHASE?

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Dahlberg *et al.*  
(2013:111) argue  
that attempting to  
define quality, and  
take account of  
multiple  
perspectives is, in  
fact, 'a wild goose  
chase'.



# Quality of the environment *does* make a difference

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- High quality childcare can make a difference to children and this is 'particularly true for language and cognitive outcomes' (Myers, 2005:7).
- Equally, poor quality childcare can have negative effects on a child's development. Peisner-Feinberg *et al.* (2001) suggest that this is the case irrespective of the child's background and even children from advantaged backgrounds are seen to benefit from high quality childcare.



## ...and speech and language development is crucial

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- Speech and language development is crucial to a child's outcomes in later life (Bercow, 2008; Field 2010)
- The range of vocabulary that a child possesses at the age of five is 'one of the most significant predictors' of later achievement.
- A national problem exists within this area, despite widespread focus to make improvements (ICan, 2014)



# What has been found out so far?

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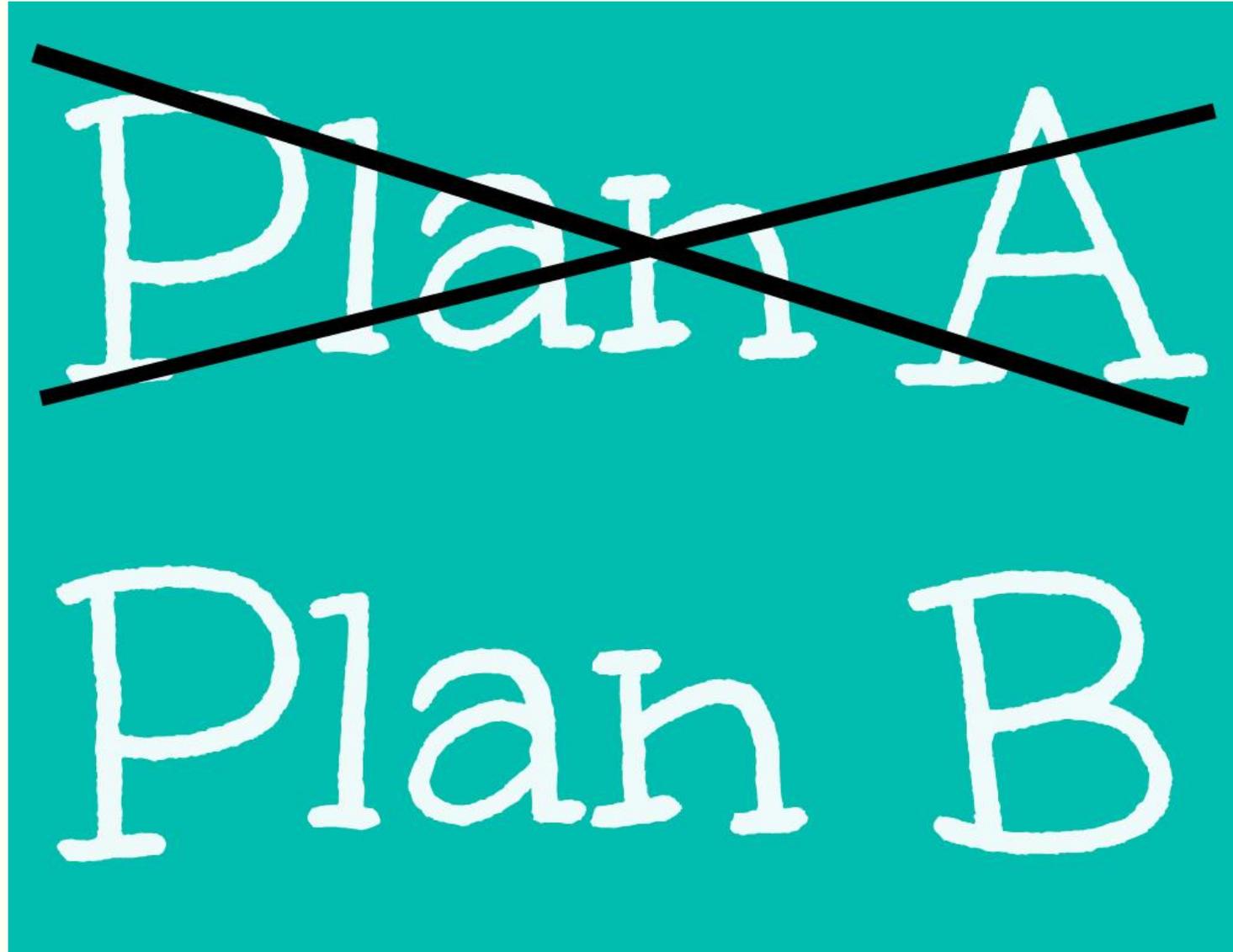


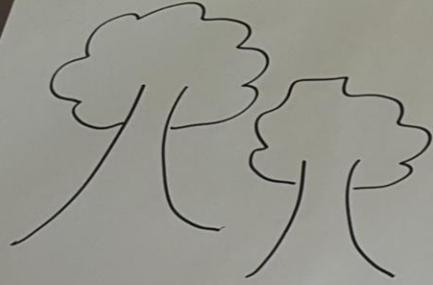
# Pilot findings

	Parents	Practitioners
<b>Indoor environments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Safe</li> <li>Learning</li> <li>Clean</li> <li>Resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Structured</li> <li>Varied resources – free access</li> <li>Free flow</li> <li>Majority of adult led activities</li> </ul>
<b>Outdoor environments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contained</li> <li>Safe</li> <li>Messy</li> <li>Freedom</li> <li>Ride-ons/physical play</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Garden</li> <li>An extension to the indoors</li> <li>Structured play</li> <li>Mud kitchen</li> <li>Prompting independence</li> </ul>
<b>Natural environments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exploration</li> <li>Risky play</li> <li>Getting dirty</li> <li>Learning about nature</li> <li>Natural resources</li> <li>New experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Freedom – less structure</li> <li>More imaginative</li> <li>Just natural!</li> <li>Independence</li> <li>Interactions important</li> <li>Lack of resources means children have to be more imaginative</li> <li>Child led play</li> <li>Changes with the seasons</li> <li>Not planned</li> </ul>

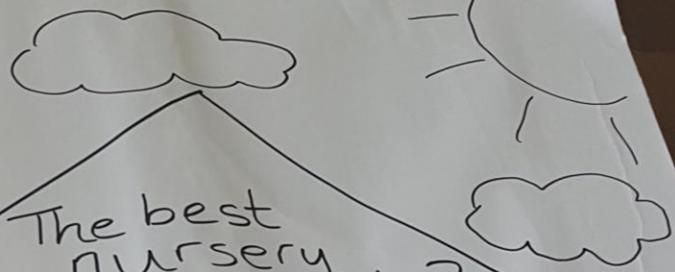
## Pilot with the children

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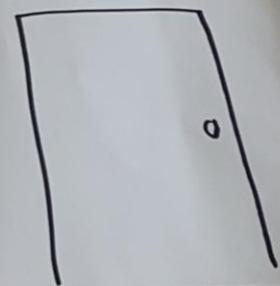
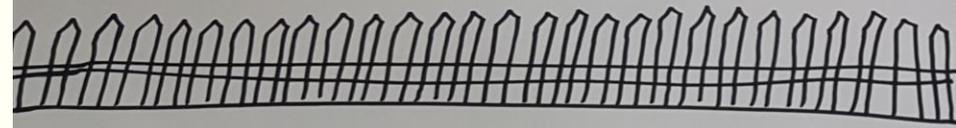




How you feel  
would you could play  
if you could play  
in this  
nursery?



The best  
nursery  
in the world?





## Main discussion point

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It is argued that although it appears to be extremely difficult to reach a general consensus on what constitutes quality, there is a need for a rating scale that is transferable between environments.





**Volunteers  
Needed**

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