Often when discussing the national *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) principle on reflective practice, we overlook the initial words: ‘Ongoing learning and reflective practice’ (DEEWR, 2009, p. 13). This part of the principle is a reminder that engaging in reflective practice is about educators making a commitment to ongoing learning and being a member of a learning community (*National Quality Standard*, Quality Area 7).

What do we mean by reflective practice?

Reflective practice can be undertaken individually or with a group or team and can be practised in the moment or it can happen later by taking the time to think about an event or some aspect of practice. Educators can reflect with colleagues, children, families and other professionals. Reflective practice means:

- thinking deeply about an interest, issue, event or practice from different perspectives
- being honest about all aspects of practice including elements that are positive and those that are of concern
- monitoring pedagogy and curriculum as part of a cycle of continuous improvement
- listening to and learning from others
- engaging in an ongoing process and not a ‘one-off’ activity.
Why is it important to be a reflective educator?

The National Quality Standard (NQS) Quality Areas 1 and 4 and the EYLF recognise that reflective educators are more likely to:

- develop greater self-awareness about the values and beliefs informing their practice and decision making
- understand the ethical nature of their work
- examine the theories underpinning practice
- engage in a continuous cycle of inquiry and improvement
- challenge taken-for-granted practices
- identify and take action about gaps in their professional knowledge.

Research shows that reflective practice makes a positive difference for children, families and communities by improving the overall quality of educators’ work (Marbina, Church & Tayler, 2010).

How can we practise reflection?

One way to support or improve reflective practice is to use an inquiry cycle process:

**Alert and aware:** Being alert or aware of something that seems worthy of thinking about more deeply, either individually or with others, is the first step in reflective practice. Both positive events and things that worry educators can occur every day in an education and care setting, but not everything that happens requires deeper thinking. Support from more experienced educators helps others to recognise when they need to be alert and aware.

**Analysis:** After becoming aware of something that is interesting or concerning, reflective educators analyse the matter by reflecting on it in order to gain a deeper understanding. Gaining others’ perspective, asking ‘why’ questions and undertaking reading related to the issue supports the analysis process.

**Action:** Reflective practice requires some type of response or action. Understanding an issue or something of professional interest more clearly helps educators to take appropriate action either collectively or individually and often in collaboration with children and families or other professionals.

**Assess:** Educators and other stakeholders such as families and children assess the outcomes from the actions taken as a result of the reflection process to ensure the intentional actions are improving practice and outcomes. Informal assessment of the outcomes could include checking with families or children about how they are experiencing the changes and documenting their responses to inform further decision making.

**Example**

A reflective educator would be ‘on alert’ or aware if a toddler in the group who usually separates readily from his mum found it very difficult one morning. While the separation difficulty might be ‘one-off’ behaviour, it is something worth noticing, reflecting on and discussing with others including the child’s mum.

Reflecting with mum on why the child found the separation difficult that particular morning might reveal that they had a very late night because of a family celebration, or that the child’s dad has gone interstate on business. If the child’s separation difficulties were due to the father’s absence, the educator could use a photo of the child’s dad to reassure the toddler that dad is away but will be coming home soon. Providing close physical contact and using comforting, reassuring words each morning would also help to reduce the child’s anxiousness about dad’s absence.

Sometimes parents and educators might be unsure about the reason for a child’s particular behaviour or response. The action in that instance would be to continue to be alert and to reflect on what is happening in order to understand the issue more clearly.

**Reflective practice strategies, tools and resources**

There is a range of strategies, tools and resources to support individual and group reflective practice:

- Early Childhood Australia professional resources such as the ECA Learning Hub modules are an excellent resource for supporting reflecting on practice with others or individually: www.ecalearninghub.org.au
- Keeping a journal or notebook supports documenting the reflective practice process. Journal notes might include what happened, why, who was involved, key points from discussions, actions that were taken and the outcomes.
- Setting aside time at every staff meeting for reflecting on one aspect of practice and planning actions develops a culture of inquiry in a service or setting. The discussion and decisions from these team reflections can be incorporated into the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).
- Reflect with children every day by using questions that respect their ideas and learning: ‘What did you learn today?’ ‘What do you want to learn more about?’ ‘How do you know that?’ ‘What makes you think that?’
- Support educational leaders’ capacity to lead or support reflective practice by providing professional learning opportunities focused on reflective practice and through coaching or mentoring by a more experienced leader.

**Conclusion**

Reflective practice supports ongoing professional learning and development by building on educators’ strengths and skills, and providing deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in their roles and responsibilities. Educators who enact a commitment to reflective practice and taking action make a positive difference to the quality of the education experience and to improving outcomes for children and families.

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**References**


www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au