



Australian Children's  
Education & Care  
Quality Authority

## QUALITY AREA 1

# DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF LEARNING THROUGH REFLECTIVE PRACTICE



When educators strive to assess and understand the impact of their practice, they are engaging in reflective practice.

Developing a culture of learning through this reflective practice drives continuous improvement and focuses attention on quality outcomes for children and families.

### Things to reflect on:

- How do we observe, listen and critically review what is happening through the day?
- What is the rationale behind our practice?
- Is the practice consistent with our beliefs, values and service philosophy?
- Does our practice foster respect for and inclusion of all children and families?
- How do other services reflect on their practice?
- What is best practice?
- How do we monitor and change our practice?
- What theories inform our thinking?

## LINKS TO THE NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD

The National Quality Standard (NQS) promotes and supports educators to engage in reflective practice through self-assessment.

The importance of individual reflective practice and a collaborative learning culture are identified more directly under Quality Area 1, Quality Area 4 and Quality Area 7 of the NQS, in particular:

**Standard 1.3:** Educators and co-ordinators take a planned and reflective approach to implementing the program for each child.

**Element 1.3.2:** Critical reflection on children's learning and development, both as individuals and in groups, drives program planning and implementation.

**Element 4.2.1:** Management, educators and staff work with mutual respect and collaboratively, and challenge and learn from each other, recognising each other's strengths and skills.

**Element 7.2.1:** There is an effective self-assessment and quality improvement process in place.

## DEFINING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

### Learning from the everyday

Reflective practice is about learning from ordinary and interesting situations and from the issues and problems that are part of educators' daily experiences. It is a critical examination of not only what happened but why. For example, an educator may reflect on the original objectives and expected outcomes of a plan and consider how they evolved.

### Guiding decision making

Critical reflection also allows educators to engage in bigger questions such as 'Who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged when I work this way?' ([Early Years Learning Framework](#), p.14, [Framework for School Age Care](#), p.12).

By deconstructing or 'pulling apart' experiences and critically examining each aspect, educators can gather information to guide their decision making about what should be repeated or extended and what might be changed. Through this process, educators can enrich children's learning, build their own knowledge and skills and affirm and challenge their colleagues.

By deconstructing or ‘pulling apart’ experiences and critically examining each aspect, educators can gather a wealth of information to guide their decisions about what should be repeated or extended and what might be changed.

### Reflection-in-action

Most educators spontaneously engage in reflective practice as they make decisions in response to what happens throughout the day or session. They build on children’s discoveries by adding materials and extend children’s thinking by posing questions or suggesting another way to tackle a problem. This type of reflection-in-action also occurs when new situations present themselves or established strategies do not seem to work, and the educator experiments with alternatives (Schön, as cited in Department of Education and Children’s Services, 2008, p. 141).

### Reflection-on-action

Thinking about experiences after the event, reflection-on-action provides an opportunity for deeper reflection (Schön, 2008). It involves thinking about what happened and questioning how and why a specific practice contributed to, extended or detracted from children’s learning, or the educators’ relationships with families and exploring alternative approaches. This type of reflection might take place at the end of the day or, in more complex situations, over a period of weeks or even months.

### Reflection-for-action

Reflection-for-action is a proactive way of thinking about future action (Schön, 2008). It may be triggered by past experiences, but might also involve thinking about future events and how an educator or service might respond. This might include being responsive to shifts in the community, considering different approaches, and refining inclusive practices and communication strategies to develop and maintain relationships with children and families.

## REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Reflective practice requires a strong commitment to continuous improvement and to lifelong learning.

### Self-assessment and collaboration

The most important component for quality improvement is for services to self-assess and determine what is working and why. By consulting families, children and the community, educators can identify ways to ensure the service is inclusive and responsive to all children and families. The [Guide to the National Quality Framework](#) includes a series of questions to guide reflection.

### Documenting meaningful information

The intent of critical reflection is to question philosophy, ethics and practice. Recording meaningful information to share with families and authorised officers will demonstrate your process of critical reflection and how it will inform your practice. Try to efficiently gather information that will enrich decision-making about children’s learning both as an individual and in groups. This will help all stakeholders to feel included and to understand the thinking behind any changes and improvements.

## MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

Sometimes it is difficult to develop a critical perspective of our own practice. New ideas are often better clarified when there is an opportunity to talk to other people about them. Team discussions and debates provide an opportunity for educators to challenge each other and to use their collective knowledge and perspectives to improve practice.

### A culture of openness

Educators are more likely to engage in reflective practice when there is a culture of openness and trust where everyone has a voice and is listened to, not just the most powerful or vocal members of the group. Individuals need to feel that they can question, offer ideas and raise concerns about their own and the service’s practice. Recognising there is no single or ‘right’ way to approach complex issues is also an important element in supporting reflective practice.

### The big questions

The bigger the question, the wider the reflection may need to be. For example, if an issue is being considered that may result in a change to service policies or procedures, it is important that management, educators, families and, where possible, children are involved in the reflective process.

### Ideas and theories

Looking outside the service and engaging with people, ideas, research, theory and innovations happening in the wider community, can support educators to gain a different perspective and to ask questions such as: How do others see the issue? What are others doing? What does research tell us? Drawing on a range of theories and contemporary research can help challenge traditional ways of teaching and learning ([Early Years Learning Framework](#), p.12, [Framework for School Age Care](#), p.12 - p.13).



## USEFUL STRATEGIES

Providing educators with time and space can support their commitment to reflective practice.

Some useful strategies include:

- **Reviewing staffing arrangements and routines to create an environment that is conducive to reflective practice.** This might include extended periods of uninterrupted time for educators to closely observe a small group of children, foster closer relationships and provide greater insight into children's thinking and learning.
- **Establishing routines that allow reflection to occur regularly.** Each educator might take 10 or 15 minutes during scheduled programming time, or at the end of the day, to record their reflections in a journal or diary. A similar amount of time might be allocated during a regularly scheduled meeting to reflect on practice across the service. These meetings also provide a forum for team members to talk about their personal experiences.
- **Encouraging educators to work closely with more experienced colleagues.** This provides opportunities for both parties to observe, critique and learn from each other; to describe what they noticed about a child's response to an experience and ask questions about why their colleague used a particular strategy.
- **Networking with other services.** Regularly meeting with people in the wider community can provide insights into the way the service is perceived by others. This provides opportunities to explore ways the service can become more responsive to the interests and needs of families and children in the local community.

## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Visit the ACECQA website at [www.cecqa.gov.au](http://www.cecqa.gov.au) to download:

[ACECQA Self-assessment Tool](#)

[Belong, Being & Becoming Early Years Learning Framework](#)

[My Time, Our Place Framework for School Age Care](#)

Find other useful resources:

[Department of Education and Early Childhood Development\(2008\). Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework Evidence Paper Practice Principle 8: Reflective Practice at \[www.education.vic.gov.au\]\(http://www.education.vic.gov.au\)](#)

For another perspective on critical reflection and collaboration, as well as a more detailed approach to Quality Area 4, see our [Belonging, Being and Becoming for Educators information sheet](#) at [www.cecqa.gov.au](http://www.cecqa.gov.au)

More information is available on the ACECQA website [www.cecqa.gov.au](http://www.cecqa.gov.au)

### Acknowledgment

The information in this publication was adapted from a National Childcare Accreditation Council resource.

