

What is critical reflection?

2018 NQS Element 1.3.2: Critical reflection: Critical reflection on children’s learning and development, both as individuals and in groups, drives program planning and implementation.

In education and care services, critical reflection means ‘Closely examining all aspects of events and experiences from different perspectives’ (Approved Learning Frameworks – EYLF p.13, FSAC p.12). To be confident in critical reflection it helps to understand how it differs from evaluating, summarising or recording what an educator is seeing or doing. Some examples of the differences are:

Critical reflection is...	Evaluating/recording is...
<p>... looking in detail and creatively:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – thinking about practice and program decisions – exploring multiple perspectives – making the links between theory and practice clear – making purposeful changes to practice to improve children’s outcomes. 	<p>... a diary entry or daily journal describing a child’s or children’s experiences during the day.</p>
<p>... asking key questions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What do we know about this child? – Why did we make the decision/respond the way we did? – Were we guided by our philosophy and theories about how children learn (with a focus on equity, inclusion and diversity)? – How did we feel about the decision? – What went well? – What didn’t go well? – Should we continue, improve or change the decision/practice? 	<p>... a communication book between educators and leadership about what happened the day before and plans for the next day.</p>
<p>... an exploration of ‘feelings’:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What were my feelings when it happened? – Why did I feel that way? – How can I use these feelings to motivate change for myself, the team, and the service? 	<p>... stating an observation about a child’s progress – recording what you saw.</p>
<p>... a tool for professional and personal growth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Can I share my critical reflections at a team meeting? – Can I develop ideas for improvement? – Can I implement a change and what will it look like? 	<p>... planning a new experience based on an observation.</p>
<p>... a process that usually takes place after the decision/practice, etc., has occurred.</p>	<p>... evaluating a situation to find out a child’s interests.</p>
<p>... done individually or in a group, such as with educators, children, families, or other professionals. A group setting gives us other perspectives.</p>	<p>... judging or assessing an experience to see whether or not it was successful. For example: ‘The children enjoyed this experience.’ (This is ‘evaluating’.)</p>
<p>... used to enhance our professional practice, identify improvements, and inform the decisions we make.</p>	
<p>... used to strengthen our program, providing ongoing quality experiences for our children, with a particular focus on equity, inclusion and diversity.</p>	
<p>... a continuous process of engagement.</p>	
<p>... done in daily diaries, reflective journals, meetings and reflection sessions.</p>	

Critical reflection needs to be meaningful and an ongoing process to support the learning of educators and the service’s journey of quality improvement. Some areas of reflection have potential to cause debates within the team and these are best used as opportunities for learning to gain insights into various perspectives. The Approved Learning Frameworks refer to a lively culture of professional enquiry to reflect the ways that your team navigates (for example, listens to and aims to incorporate) educators’ differing views, in a respectful way (EYLF, p. 13, FSAC p.12).

