

SIMPLIFYING CRITICAL REFLECTION

A Guide for Empowered Educators

What is it?

Critical reflection means regularly identifying and exploring our own thoughts, feelings, and experiences and then making a decision about how they fit in with the ideas, concepts, and theories that you are aware of, learning more about or others have been discussing and sharing.

You are not only exploring your own thoughts, events and experiences that have occurred but you are also examining them from different perspectives and considering whether this might in fact change your approach or own perspective. It is a way to consistently evaluate your approaches to early learning and an educator role.

It shouldn't be about always looking for something you or others might have *done wrong* though. Think about it as being prepared to identify your current values and biases, and at least consider and explore a colleague's view that might differ to your own. Discuss with others how their view influences their own practice in this area, and perhaps how you could try a different way of doing something to see what happens.

When you are examining and unpacking the viewpoints of others your aim is to engage in constructive debate and discussion that allows everyone to see different perspectives – not to try and change someone's mind by belittling their views, actions or emotions or put your own point across aggressively without being open to the possibility of some change.

Why is it important?

Because it helps you as a professional early years educator to make **changes and improvements** to your practice, knowledge, interactions, actions and learning environments.

SIMPLE STEPS FACTSHEET 1

Critical reflection can highlight for you areas you might like to learn more about, understand better or find different ways to approach that practice. You might use some of the information to add goals and changes that you need to make to your quality improvement plan.

You can also use critical reflection regularly to analyse and identify children's learning and development (as individuals and in groups) to better inform your ongoing planning.

We must always keep in mind that our reflections and discussions should lead to the best possible outcomes for the children in our care.

How is it different to my general daily or weekly reflections?

Think of critical reflection as going one or two steps **further on** from your regular weekly reflective practice.

The aim is to use it as an ongoing tool to build on your current practice and ask important questions not only of your actions, environment and activities – but also of why you choose to do those things that way that you do, how theories and perspectives might have informed your approach, how your actions might have impacted on others and what others viewpoints on this approach or action might be?

How often do we have to do it?

As critical reflection is an ongoing process there are no set rules for how often you should set aside time to document your reflections. To get started you might like to consider 1 or 2 of the questions below and add your answers and thoughts to the end of each week's planning. I've made this easy for you by adding a section to the weekly planners under the general weekly reflections.

It can a little time to learn the skill of critical reflection so by adding a few notes at the end of each weekly program it should help you get in the habit of exploring and learning more about how to use this practice effectively as everyday practice without it becoming time consuming or overwhelming. Some of the questions also help you to involve other people in your reflections and therefore expand and challenge your own thinking.

SIMPLE STEPS FACTSHEET 1

Questions to help me begin ongoing critical reflection

- How did my own experiences and knowledge influence my understanding and actions of a particular activity or interaction this week?
- How did I take into account the needs, perspectives and opinions of parents and their children in this situation?
- Did my personal values and possible biases enter impact on my experiences this week?
- How do my fellow educators, leader or view this situation or action?
- What do I need to find out more about?
- What other theories might provide me with a different viewpoint on this subject?
- In what way are my choices determined by the expectation of my early learning service or leader?
- What does this action/environment/observation tell me about.....?
- How can I acknowledge, respect and value children's diverse identities?
- How could my team members/coordinator/leader/friend help me in this area?
- Were there broader social and/political or emotional issues that influenced my actions?
- Did my assumptions mislead my practice somehow? What assumptions can I challenge next time?
- What knowledge did I use to reflect upon observations this week? Why? How did this apply?
- Why do I think that?
- What did I learn about this? How would I do it differently or better next time?
- How might the outcome of that activity/experience been different if I
- What do you think? Why is that? How does it work for you?
- Why do you think your approach works more effectively than mine?
- What can I do next or differently to further scaffold the children's (or my own!) learning?

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These questions from the Australian Early Years Learning Framework are also very helpful to begin and guide reflection (although obviously more in depth):

- Who is disadvantaged when I work in this way? Who is advantaged?
- What are my understandings of each child?
- What theories, philosophies and understandings shape and assist my work?
- What aspects of my work are not helped by the theories and guidance that I usually draw onto make sense of what I do?
- Are there other theories or knowledge that could help me to understand better what I have observed or experienced? What are they?
- What questions do I have about my work? What am I challenged by? What am I curious about?
- What am I confronted by?
- Are there other theories or knowledge that could help me to understand better what I have observed or experienced? (DEEWR,2009:13)

Think about how your answers to these questions and the discussions surrounding those answers might regularly encourage further learning, help you to gain clarity and inform your future decisions about the children's learning.

You might decide to put more effort into exploring one identified area for now and ask some more specific questions regarding this practice.

SIMPLE STEPS FACTSHEET 1

What might you consider changing?

What are you confident is working well?

What have you identified isn't working well for you?

How could you find out more about something to make it work better?

In what areas would you like to grow more as an educator?

Think about how you might use your answers to begin drawing up an action plan you can revisit and update regularly.

Without critical reflection it can be difficult to grow, to learn new things, to explore different theories and perspectives, to engage in assertive yet constructive discussions with colleagues.

Start small by choosing a question or specific practice each week that you would like to explore further and add your thoughts to the reflection section of your weekly planner. At the end of the month use the critical reflection action plan (*planning & play printables member section*) to put some goals, action steps and timeframes in place.

This not only shows evidence that you are engaging regularly in reflective practice it ideally will help you to increase your knowledge base, skills and above all provide better learning outcomes and experiences for the children's learning journey.