Reflective Practice
REFLECTIONS ON BEING REFLECTIVE

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) identifies reflective practice as one of the principles that supports and enhances teaching and learning. This fact sheet is designed to explore what is meant by the term “reflective practice”, to outline some of the benefits of reflecting on practice, and to consider ways to incorporate reflective practice into the everyday. Reflective questions are included to promote reflection and discussion.

Defining reflective practice

O’Connor and Diggins (2002) define reflective practice as thinking about what educators do in order to reconsider their actions and refine their practices according to these thoughts. Reflective practice is a cycle of ongoing learning that occurs when we take the time to “stop, think and change” (O’Connor & Diggins, 2002, p. 9).

Exploring the benefits

By engaging in reflective practice, educators are more likely to see evidence of an increase in knowledge and skill development, be more open to different ways to think about and understand things, and be more flexible and adaptable in their approaches. When everyone is involved in the process of reflection, it is more likely to result in an exchange of ideas, shared decision-making and positive partnerships. It also means educators are more likely to learn, develop and strengthen their capacity as a team. This in turn leads to better outcomes for children, families and community.
Getting started

Opportunities to reflect arise from a number of situations. Amulya (2004) suggests that reflection can arise from times of uncertainty and struggle, as well as from breakthroughs and successes. Educators can reflect on an aspect of the program that didn’t work well in order to consider what they might do differently in the future. They can also reflect on something that has exceeded expectations in order to determine what worked well and what they might continue to do or build on in the future. Educators can also reflect on a question or questions in order to challenge their thinking, consider things from different perspectives and examine the underlying beliefs, attitudes and values that guide their thoughts and actions. The EYLF (2009, p. 13) includes some reflective questions to get started.

There are a number of models educators can use to reflect on their practice. One such model, advocated by Peters (1991, as cited in O’Connor & Diggins 2002) is the DATA model. DATA is an acronym for the four stages of the model, as outlined below:

1. **Describe:** In the first stage of the DATA model educators describe in detail an incident or aspect of their practice. This involves paying attention to what happened, who was involved, and their thoughts, feeling and emotions as they related to the incident.

2. **Analyse:** In the next stage, educators explore why this practice operates as it does, examine the underlying values, beliefs and assumptions that maintain the practice and consider what sources of information they draw on to make sense of the situation.

3. **Theorise:** The next stage requires educators to think about new or additional sources of knowledge that may be helpful to make sense of what happened. Here, educators think about their practice from different perspectives in order to formulate a new or different understanding and consider a new or different approach.

4. **Act:** In the final stage of the model educators put their new way of thinking into practice by trying out a new or different way of doing things in order to enhance and improve their practice.

Educators can continue to use this model as part on a cycle of ongoing learning and continuous improvement.
Amulya (2004, p. 2) describes reflective practice as “simply creating a habit, structure or routine around examining experience”. The challenge for educators is to find ways to build reflective practice into their daily routine. There is no one way or right way to do this. Some ideas to get you started include:

- Discuss as a team what being reflective means to you and how you can incorporate reflective practice more regularly into your work;
- Use the questions in the EYLF (2009, p. 13) to reflect on your practice – individually or as a team;
- Use documentation of children’s learning to reflect on your role in capturing, interpreting and promoting teaching and learning;
- Start a reading group to discuss the issues raised in the readings and explore how you might use or apply this idea or knowledge in your work;
- Allocate time at team meetings to share ideas and insights, and critically examine aspects of the program or specific incidents or situations;
- Keep a reflective journal to record specific events or aspects of your practice and note your reactions, impressions and thinking; or
- Buddy up with a colleague to start off your reflective practice routine.

Questions for reflection:

- What does reflective practice look like for you and your team?
- What forms of reflective practice can or have assisted you in your work?
- What would increase your confidence and skill in incorporating reflective practice into your work?
- What resources and supports might you need to help you?
- What are the first few steps you could take to get you started?
References and further reading:

