

Critical Reflection in Practice Guide

COMPANION RESOURCE



Family DAY CARE AUSTRALIA

1.

About this resource

This companion resource is intended to offer practical tips and ideas to help family day care educators to make best use of Family Day Care Australia's (FDCA) [Critical Reflection in Practice guide](#) ('the Guide').

download the poster here

- It looks at:**
- What "critical reflection" means and why it is important
 - How you can use the Guide to embed critical reflection into your day to day practice
 - How the Guide can help support conversations with your service and authorised officers or assessors.



FDCA has created the Guide and this companion resource as part of our ongoing commitment to produce practical resources for our members that assist in strengthening pedagogical and operational practice and performance. While these materials have been developed with an educator audience in mind, they will also be useful to services in addressing the professional development needs of their educators.



2.

Understanding critical reflection and its importance

What is critical reflection?

Critical reflection is an ongoing and dynamic process of thinking honestly, deeply and critically, on a regular basis, about all aspects of your practice as a professional educator. Simply put, it is a way of systematically evaluating your planned program, and actions, from alternative viewpoints through various levels of questioning.

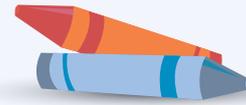
Through the critical reflection process you learn to ask yourself important questions to help you reflect on:

- what has happened
- children's learning and development in relation to the approved learning frameworks

- your knowledge and practices as a professional educator
- your learning program and learning environment
- your interactions with children and their families and the wider community.

Why is critical reflection important?

When embedded into your professional practice, critical reflection helps you become progressively more thoughtful about your work and motivates you to explore new ideas and approaches. This in turn helps to make you a more effective educator, ultimately resulting in the best outcomes for children.



Critical reflection helps you to:

- ✓ recognise and continue good practices
- ✓ identify opportunities for improving your professional knowledge, practice and skills
- ✓ foster your capacity to examine your practice from diverse perspectives, to challenge your assumptions and beliefs, and to try different ways of doing some things
- ✓ recognise when you need more support or more information
- ✓ learn about yourself and how you work with children and families
- ✓ develop your own self-awareness and sense of professional judgement.

For all these reasons, the National Quality Framework (NQF), the National Quality Standard (NQS) and the Approved Learning Frameworks all require educators to engage in critically reflective practice. It is also a specific element in the National Quality Standard (NQS 1.3.2).

A learned skill

It is important to realise that critical reflection is a learned skill, one that needs to continually be practiced.

Don't despair if the process of critical reflection feels a little contrived to begin with. You will become more comfortable with it, the more you practice.

When and how often should you critically reflect?

As a professional educator you are frequently reflecting 'on the spot' and adapting learning experiences or interactions in response to your observations. You may even do this without really being conscious of it. You will also likely reflect at the end of the day or the end of the week on what worked best and what not and what changes you should make.

However, for critical reflection to "drive program planning and implementation", as set out in NQS Element 1.3.2, it is important to build in some regular planned time where you can think more deeply about specific aspects of your program and practice, with a view to identifying improvements and making decisions as a result of your reflections.

Many educators take the 'natural' opportunity presented by the end of the week, to critically reflect on a particular aspect of their work, or learning environment with a view to implementing adjustments in the following week.

Others find it valuable to critically reflect at particular points in time such as when reviewing their observations of children's progress towards the desired outcomes, after a special activity, or following a survey of their families.

In addition, it is really helpful if you can find ways to critically reflect with other educators. Your service may facilitate opportunities for this through educator network meetings, or access to a critical friend or mentor, thereby encouraging consideration of alternative viewpoints.



3. How to use the Guide to embed critical reflection into your practice

Display the Guide

To be effective, critical reflection needs to be intentional and done on a regular basis. Displaying the Guide in your personal workspace will:

- serve as visual evidence of your professionalism and commitment to embed critical thinking into your practice
- act as a practical scaffold to assist you in the process of critical reflection as well as a useful visual reminder to keep to a regular routine
- help you explain to your coordinator or authorised officers how you approach critical reflection in your practice.

lead you to increasingly broader and deeper reflections through these three levels of questioning.

In our Guide we have included some example questions to illustrate what you might ask yourself at each of these levels.

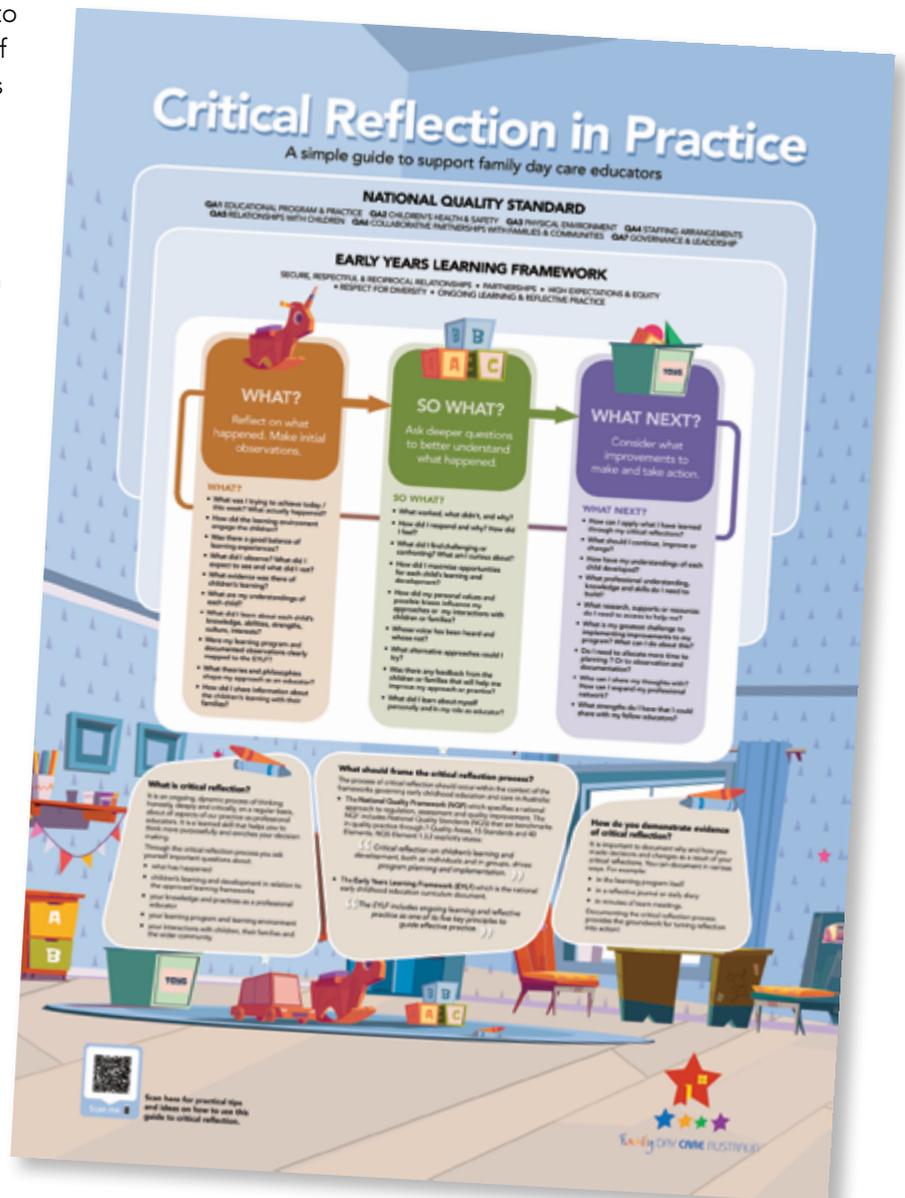
Note: The example questions in each column are not the only questions you might ask. ➔

Use the What? So What? What next? framework to scaffold your thinking

Over the years, many models have been developed to illustrate the layered questioning process that is a key feature of critical reflection.

In developing the Guide, FDCA makes use of a fairly simple model¹, framed by **What? So what?** and **What next?** questions.

This way of showing the critical reflection process is designed to



¹ This minimalist model is based on that developed by Rolfe et al (2001), which used three simple questions to scaffold the critical thinking process: What? So what? Now what?



- ➔ They are designed to be useful thought prompts to illustrate the different levels of questioning involved in the process of critical reflection. Additional ideas for questions can be found in the Early Years Learning Framework and online.²

Below are some tips to understand the difference between the questions at each level:

- * questions shown in the **What?** column (e.g. *What happened? What did I observe?*) will generally lead to answers that are more factual and descriptive in nature.
- * questions in the **So what?** column (e.g. *What worked, what didn't and why? How did I respond and why?*) are more probing and will encourage you to come to a deeper understanding of what the experience meant.
- * questions in the **What next?** column (e.g. *How have my understandings of each child developed? What should I continue, change or improve?*) will take your thinking to a still deeper level by prompting you to identify what action you can take or what decisions you can make as a result of your reflections. Some of the questions in this stage also expand and challenge your thinking by encouraging you to examine other perspectives.

Start small and make critical reflection a regular part of your practice

The idea is to begin by selecting one or two '**What?**' questions from the Guide to focus on and take them through to the deeper '**So what?**' and '**What next?**' stages. You decide what aspect you would like to focus on. Then document your thoughts and feelings (see below for suggestions) and add any actions to your action plan.

The trick with embedding critical reflection into your practice is to find what works for you and stick to the routine.

How do you document your critical reflections?

There is no set method you must follow for documenting your critical reflections, however many educators choose to document their thoughts, feelings and decisions in their daily / weekly program diary.

Other educators use commercially available reflective journals, or diaries specifically designed for recording educators' critical reflections. For example, Jodie Clarke of www.theempowerededucatoronline.com has a range of such resources. You may also wish to discuss documentation methods with your coordinator, as they may have suggestions of their own, or include it as a topic for discussion at the next team meeting.

Whichever way you choose to document your critical reflections, it is important that they represent evidence of the process and the decisions or actions taken as a result.

² For example see [this blog](#) by Jodie Clarke, of theempowerededucatoronline.com

4.

How the Guide can help support conversations with your service and authorised officers or assessors

FDCA's Guide can also be used to support broader conversations about the process of critical reflection, as well as your own specific reflections, the insights you have gained as a result, and the actions you intend to take or have taken.

For example you can use the Guide to share or clarify your own reflections in discussions at educator meetings or in conversations with relevant support staff at your service. In addition, the Guide can be used as a reference to explain your approach to critical reflection if you are asked questions by authorised officers or assessors.

Element 1.3.2 of the National Quality Standard explicitly states :

“Critical reflection on children’s learning and development, both as individuals and in groups, drives program planning and implementation”

As part of the assessment and rating process, under the National Quality Framework, authorised officers or assessors may therefore request to sight an educator’s documentation showing evidence of critical reflection, such as reflection journals or diaries. They may also ask questions about how the educator approaches the process of critical reflection and how they use the critical reflection process to:

- make changes to their program and practice



- gain insights as to whether the program is an inclusive learning environment and supports each child to participate fully or if there are barriers to participation
- record and consider children’s comments about their experiences of the program
- inform curriculum decision making that supports and extends children’s learning, development and wellbeing.³

As noted above, one of the benefits of displaying FDCA's Guide is that it not only serves as a visual indicator of your commitment to embed critical reflection into your practice, but it can also assist you to confidently articulate the process you follow to authorised officers and assessors.

For example, you may direct the assessor’s attention to the framework displayed on the Guide, explaining how you follow the process of asking **What? So what?** and **What next?**, before providing an example of relevant documentation as evidence of your thinking and decision-making.

A final word

Critical reflection is an essential requirement of your professional responsibilities as an early childhood educator. However, it is also an ongoing, evolving, and dynamic process that, when embedded into your practice, will result in considerable personal and professional growth.

³ For more detailed information see the Guide to the National Quality Framework: ELEMENT 1.3.2 CRITICAL REFLECTION



References

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