



Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework

Evidence Paper

Practice Principle 8: Reflective Practice

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Practice Principle 8: Reflective Practice

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The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework guides early childhood professionals' practice in Victoria. The Victorian Framework identifies eight Practice Principles for Learning and Development. The Practice Principles are based on the P-12 Principles of Learning and Teaching, the pedagogy from the national Early Years Learning Framework, and are informed by the latest research.

The Practice Principles are interrelated and designed to inform each other. They are categorised as Collaborative, Effective and Reflective:

Collaborative

1. Family-centred Practice
2. Partnerships with professionals
3. High expectations for every child

Effective

4. Equity and diversity
5. Respectful relationships and responsive engagement
6. Integrated teaching and learning approaches
7. Assessment for learning and development

Reflective

8. Reflective practice.

These Evidence Papers document the research that underpins each Practice Principle. The content of the Evidence Papers will be developed into a series of practical guides – *Practice Principles in Practice* which will provide practical advice to early childhood professionals on how to align their practice to the Practice Principles.

Executive Summary

The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework clearly acknowledges that highly effective early childhood professionals engage in reflective practice. In the early childhood development context, reflective practice is best described as a continuous process that involves professionals analysing their practice in order to identify what drives children's learning and development; as well as the impact of their own values on understanding children's learning and development.

A study of early childhood care and education across 20 countries found that improvements in children's long-term outcomes are achievable for all children when early learning experiences are high quality (OECD, 2006). Reflective practice and critically reflective practice is a key feature of high quality early childhood education and care settings. Reflective practice allows early childhood professionals to develop a critical understanding of their own practice, and continually develop the necessary skills, knowledge and approaches to achieve the best outcomes for children.

Research from MacNaughton (2005) and other experts found that professionals who regularly reflect on what they do, why they do it and how this new knowledge can be used to improve their practice, achieve the best outcomes for children and families (MacNaughton, 2005; Sylva et al, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2008; Raban et al, 2007).

Bae (2009) and Dall'Alba (2009) found that the most effective early childhood professionals reflect on and adopt flexible images of children and childhood and reconsider the roles they play in children's lives. Reflecting on and posing critical questions about the possible unfairness or inequalities of preconceived ideas about children has been identified as crucial in becoming more objective in how images of children are constructed (MacNaughton, 2003; Appl & Yordle, 2005; Smith, 2007). Moreover, when professionals consider the power inequalities between themselves and children, they are able to create real opportunities for children to express their own thoughts and feelings and actively influence what happens in their lives. This becomes possible when professionals reflect on the *how* and *what* of the decisions they make about their interactions with children and families.

In addition, Maccoby (1980) found that children whose views are respected are more encouraged to take responsibility for their actions than those whose views are not. Evidence shows that the degree to which a person feels "in control" of their life affects other measures of their well-being and self esteem, even amongst babies.

The positive impact that reflective practice has on outcomes for children is clearly documented in the research literature. The implications for practice informed by the research evidence and detailed in this Paper are:

- Reflection in action and reflection after the event achieves the best outcomes for children
- To provide high quality, effective services for children and families, there must be a commitment to ongoing learning, professional development and reflective practice in environments that are respectful and responsive to children, families and professionals
- Reflective practice provides a common goal for professionals working across agencies in early childhood
- Reflection and critical reflection are unifying practices for diverse groups of professionals
- Professional networks and learning communities support early childhood professionals to participate in professional development that encourages critical reflection
- Environments where reflective practice is valued need to be actively created
- Mentors can provide resources, skills and guidance to develop reflective practice.

Introduction

The Victorian Framework recognises the importance of reflective practice for highly effective professionals. It states:

Children’s learning and development is advanced when they experience interactions with highly effective early childhood professionals. Early childhood professionals become more effective through critical reflection and a strong culture of professional enquiry. Early childhood professionals:

- gather information that supports, informs, assesses and enriches decision-making about appropriate professional practices
- continually develop their professional knowledge and skills to enable them to provide the best possible learning and development opportunities for all children
- promote practices that have been shown to be successful in supporting children’s learning and development
- use evidence to inform planning for early childhood experiences and practice
- challenge and change some practice.

VEYLDF, p.14

In summarising the evidence that underpins Practice Principle 8: Reflective Practice, this Paper highlights the crucial role reflective practice plays in the work that early childhood professionals undertake with children and their families (Colmer, 2008; Sylva, Melhuish, ammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, Sylva, Sammons & Melhuish, 2008; MacNaughton 2003).

Fundamentally, the research shows a positive relationship between professionals who engage in reflective practice and positive outcomes for children. This Paper concludes by providing examples of ways that systems and services can foster reflective practice in early childhood settings.

What is 'reflective practice'?

Donald Schön, in his influential book *The Reflective Practitioner*, developed the term “reflective practice” (Schön 1983). Schön introduced the concepts of “reflection-in-action” (thinking on your feet) and “reflection-on-action” (thinking after the event). Schön focused his attention on five professional fields – engineering, architecture, psychotherapy, town planning and education – and talked of the inextricable link between the concept of professionalism and the process of reflective practice.

Recognising that professionals face unique and challenging situations on a daily basis, Schön argues that the most effective professionals use their previous experiences to better understand how and why things happen. Schön’s work has been instrumental in influencing practice around the world by encouraging professionals to take responsibility for improvements *on* and *in* practice.

All professionals working with children and families in Victoria now acknowledge reflective practice as one of the crucial elements for improving child and family outcomes. Reflective practice underpins standards for registration and professional practice across all early childhood professions,¹ and has become one of the most popular engagement theories of the last 20 years. However, despite its popularity and widespread adoption, an issue commonly raised in the literature concerns the lack of what Kinsella (2009) terms “conceptual clarity”.

Ghaye & Ghaye (1998) interviewed 50 educators and received a different description of reflective practice from each one, highlighting the divergent understandings of what reflective practice is and what it actually involves.

Reflective practice is described by MacNaughton (2003) as “an intellectually engaged activity geared to changing practices by transforming knowledge”. The work of Gruska, McLeod and Reynolds (2005) describes reflective practice as a continuous process rather than a one off event involving, “repeated cycles of examining practice, adjusting practice and reflecting on it, before you try it again”.

¹ The Early Childhood Australia Code Of Ethics; Section VII.2, (Early Childhood Australia, 2006); The Victorian Institute of Teaching Graduate and Teaching Standards of Professional Practice; Professional Engagement, Standard 7 (Victorian Institute of Teaching, 2003); The Association of Speech Pathologist’s Australia, Code of Ethics, points 5.1.2; 5.2.2; 5.3.1; (Speech Pathology Australia, 2000); The Code of professional conduct for Nurses in Australia (1993); The Australian Association of Occupation Therapist Victoria, Code of Ethics, Professional Development (Australian Association of Occupational Therapists, 2001); The Australian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics and Practice Standards for Social Workers (Australian Association of Social Workers, 1999 & 2003 respectively) and The Psychologists Registration Board of Australia, Code of Ethics; (Australian Psychological Society, 2007).

Daudelin (1996) believes the process of reflection originates in the work of Socrates and his continual challenging and questioning of his student Plato. Daudelin (1996) also believes John Locke's famous publication, "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding" (Locke, 1690) helped to lay the philosophical foundations of our subsequent understanding of reflective practice as a crucial way of learning. Dewey's (1933) distinction between "routine action" (action driven by habit and routine) and "reflective action" (action given careful consideration and justification) is cited frequently in the literature. Dewey is attributed with having extended the notion of reflection as being critical to the development of professional practice (MacNaughton, 2003; Gahye, 2005; Gruska et al, 2005; Fernsten and Fernsten, 2005).

Pollard (2002) has identified the following seven characteristics of reflective practice as useful in helping early childhood professionals gain a collective understanding of what reflective practice involves and how it can improve child outcomes:

1. An active focus on goals, how these might be addressed and the potential consequences of these
2. A commitment to a continuous cycle of monitoring practice, evaluating and re-visiting it
3. A focus on informed judgements about practice, based on evidence
4. Open-minded, responsive and inclusive attitudes
5. The capacity to re-frame one's own practice in light of evidence-based reflections and insights based on research
6. Dialogue with other colleagues, in-house and with external networks
7. The capacity to mediate and adapt from externally developed frameworks, making informed judgements and defending or challenging existing practice.

(Pollard, 2002)

In recent years, reflective practice in early childhood education has also been influenced by action research, which aims to bring about positive change in order to better respond to the needs of children and families. This process relies on *critical* reflection, where professionals question their own assumptions about children and their work with children.

Critical reflection draws on the work of Habermas, a German critical social theorist (Pinar et al, 1995) who identifies three main ways of thinking (adapted from MacNaughton, 2003):

1. Technical: when professionals are concerned with finding out how things happen and how they can control this. This way of thinking often leads to conformist practices that reinforce existing understandings.
2. Practical: when professionals are concerned with finding out what things mean to other people. This way of thinking is concerned with understanding events rather than trying to control them and often involves reforming thinking as professionals try to gain new insights.
3. Critical: when professionals examine whether what they know might somehow be biased. This way of thinking is most likely to lead to transformed ways of thinking as professionals ask themselves critical questions about whose needs are being met by the knowledge and beliefs that they have.

Importantly, *critical* reflection in early childhood education is defined by this third way of thinking where early childhood professionals critique practice in light of their own assumptions about children's learning and development and question what beliefs and values they bring to their practice.

Drawing on the work of Habermas and action research, MacNaughton (2003) states that critical reflection can provide early childhood professionals with some of the tools required to critique the "big ideas" that shape daily practice. MacNaughton (2003) suggests six questions that critically reflective professionals use to gain a deeper understanding of their practice and to bring about positive change:

1. How have I come to do things this way?
2. How have I come to understand things this way?
3. Who benefits from how I do and understand this?
4. Who is silenced in how I do and understand this?
5. How many other ways are there to do and understand this?
6. Which of those ways might lead to more equitable and fair ways of doing and understanding things?

The research shows that reflective practice is a crucial way of learning and extending professional understanding. Reflection and critical reflection are highly personal processes that require the professional to take daily experiences, internalise them, turn them over in their mind and filter these new thoughts through previous lived experiences and personal values and biases, before deciding how best to proceed.

The catalyst for reflection can be either internal or external; it can be self-reflective or involve others. Reflection can be spontaneous or can be deliberately planned. Reflection can provide both the basis and the motivation for further

inquiry which serves as a guide for future behaviour to improve our practice and ultimately the outcomes for children (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983; Daudelin, 1996; Pollard, 2002; MacNaughton, 2003; DEECD, 2009).

It is clear from the research and the discussion above that there are many interpretations of reflective practice. The definitions are influenced by the person who is reflecting and by the reason which has prompted the reflection to take place (Chitpin & Simon, 2009; Colmer, 2008; Deans, Brown & Young, 2007; Daudelin, 1996; Kinsella, 2009). A synthesis of the research suggests that in education, reflective practice is best described as a continuous process that involves the professional analysing their practice in order to identify what drives children's learning and development, as well as the impact of their values on children's learning and development.

Why is reflective practice so important in early childhood learning, development and teaching?

Settings with the best outcomes for children have staff who engage in reflective practice.

Research tells us that educators who regularly reflect on what they do, why they do it and how this new knowledge can be used to improve their practice achieve the best outcomes for children and families (MacNaughton, 2005; Sylva et al, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2008; Raban et al, 2007). A study of early childhood care and education across 20 countries found that improvements in children's long-term outcomes are achievable for all children when early learning experiences are *high* quality (OECD, 2006).

Reflective practice and critically reflective practice are features of high quality learning environments. Reflective practice allows early childhood professionals to develop a critical understanding of their own practice, and continually develop the necessary skills, knowledge and approaches to achieve the best outcomes for children.

The longitudinal findings of the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project (Sylva et al, 2004²) found that high quality early childhood settings had positive effects on children's development both intellectually and socio-emotionally. The study also found the higher quality the early learning environment, the better the outcomes for children (Sammons, 2010; Sammons *et al*, 2002). Further research concluded that children were found to make better

² The EPPE study focused on the effects of pre and school provision in 3000 children between the ages of 3 – 7 years old from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds in the UK.

all round progress in settings where professionals were aware of children's individual learning styles; where educators had a good understanding of appropriate pedagogical content and where there was a strong commitment to on-going professional inquiry (Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, Sylva, Sammons, Melhuish, 2008). This knowledge is developed when early childhood professionals reflect on their practice and on the impact of their values, attitudes and decisions on children.

- Early childhood professionals continually develop their professional knowledge and skills to enable them to provide the best possible learning and development opportunities for all children. (VEYLDF, p. 14)

Children learn the most when professionals reflect on their own values and consider how their views of children and childhood impact on their practice

The Victorian Framework is informed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). The Convention is underpinned by principles which are fundamental to all work undertaken with children (Woodhead, 2006). The principles are:

- the right to survival and development
- non-discrimination
- respect for the views and feelings of the child
- devotion to the best interest of the child.

The Convention signals a shift in ideologies about children and childhood, moving away from the concept of children as passive recipients of adult intervention who lack the capacity to make their own decisions (Lansdown, Children's Welfare and Children's Rights, 2000) and towards an ideology of children as active citizens with their own unique rights. In order to effectively incorporate the views of children, professionals need to continually challenge and reflect on the impact of their work on children (Copple, 2003; Amobi, 2005; Broadhead 2006, DEECD, 2009).

Professionals do this by reflecting on and adopting flexible images of children and childhood and reconsidering the roles they play in children's lives (Bae, 2009; Dall'Alba, 2009). Reflecting on and posing critical questions about the possible unfairness or inequalities of preconceived ideas about children has been identified as crucial in becoming more objective in how images of children are constructed (MacNaughton, 2003; Appl & Yordle, 2005; Smith, 2007).

In addition, children who experience respect for their views are more inclined to take responsibility for their actions. Evidence from as early as 1980 showed that the degree to which a person feels “in control” of their life affected other measures of their well-being and self esteem, even amongst babies (Maccoby, 1980).

Reflective practice can also help professionals to create real opportunities for children to express their own thoughts and feelings and actively influence what happens in their lives. Adults can do this by considering the power inequalities between themselves and children and by engaging reflectively with the *how* and *what* of the things they do.

- Early childhood professionals become more effective through critical reflection and a strong culture of professional enquiry. (VEYLDF, p. 14)

Reflective practice allows professionals to develop a deeper awareness of their own prejudices, beliefs and values and advance learning for vulnerable children.

Australia is rapidly becoming one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse countries in the world. Residents of the state of Victoria originate from over 230 different nations, speak more than 180 different languages and follow at least 116 different religions. One in four Victorian residents was either born overseas or has a parent who was (Clarke, 2009; Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009).

Research indicates that when a child’s first language is not English and their home language is not supported in early childhood, that this can have a detrimental effect on their later school achievement (Drury, 2007; Siraj-Blatchford, et al., 2004). There is also evidence suggesting that children from culturally diverse backgrounds are more likely to have low self-esteem, low self worth and a lack of belonging, all of which are contributing risk factors in poor academic success and social and emotional wellbeing (Drury, 2007; Mayr & Ulich, 2009; Li, D’Angiulli, & Kendall, 2007).

Professionals who are aware of their own prejudices are better able to support children from diverse backgrounds and advance their learning. This is because these professionals are more likely to be aware of their own emotional intelligence, their values, personal philosophies and individual belief systems and are more likely to challenge and change ineffective practice and improve outcomes for children with whom they work (MacNaughton, 2003; Raban et al 2007).

Reflective practice provides a common professional goal for professionals working across agencies in early childhood and is a unifying practice for diverse groups of professionals

There is a wide range of professionals working across different agencies who are involved in the early years of children's lives: school teachers, Maternal and Child Health nurses, early childhood professionals working in long day care, family day care, kindergarten programs, social workers, psychologists, play specialists and specialist children's services. At any point, a combination or group of these professionals will be involved in supporting individual children across Victoria (DEECD, 2009).

The professional regulatory bodies of all of these agencies – including: Early Childhood Australia, 2006; Victorian Institute of Teaching, 2003; Speech Pathology Australia, 2000; Nurses Board of Victoria, 2007; Australian Association of Occupational Therapists, 2001; Australian Association of Social Workers, 1999 & The Australian Psychological Society, 2007 – have codes of ethics and practice principles which clearly highlight the crucial role reflective practice plays in the continuing development and professional identity of each of these professions.

In addition, a great deal of international research, across a wide range of professional fields, reports the multiple methods that are employed across pre-service training to develop practitioner skills in reflection and critical engagement (Ovens & Tinning, 2009; Roberts, 2009; Shepherd, 2006). The majority of pre-service and in-service education courses endorse and promote the concept of reflective practice as a learning tool (Schön, 1983; Grushka, Hinde & Reynold, 2005; Russell, 2005). In this way, reflective practice serves as a common, unifying practice for all early childhood professionals.

How can we achieve best practice?

Developing an awareness of how professionals come to hold their assumptions and reflecting on how this informs and shapes practice is one of the first steps in the reflective process.

Guided self-assessment provides practitioners with a clear focus for reflection (Serafini, 2002, Dall'Alba, 2009; Kinsella, 2009). It also provides an opportunity to "become active in their own awareness of who they are as early childhood professionals, identify what they want to achieve and how they propose to set about this" (Raban et al, 2007).

The Early Childhood Consortium Victoria (ECCV) developed a Self-Assessment Manual (SAM), a tool for early childhood professionals to work through elements of reflective practice by systematically identifying current practices and guiding future practices (Raban et al, 2007). This type of tool assists professionals to address issues around service quality (on practice reflection), while allowing the professional to develop their practice through reflection in practice (see also Ovens & Tinning, 2009).

Mentors provide resources, skills and guidance to develop reflective practice effectively

Research indicates that creating time and regular opportunities to reflect and ensuring access to a mentor for continuing professional development are essential for promoting reflective practice (eg. Raban et al, 2007). The mentor has to be someone who will challenge the professional's thinking and encourage them to look at things from multiple perspectives rather than reinforcing and affirming old habits (Colmer, 2008; Kinsella, 2009).

Where face-to-face mentoring is not available, web-mediated professional development that provides on-line consultation and feedback focused on teaching and learning, can effectively connect professionals with mentors (Pianta et al, 2008). Pianta and colleagues developed *MyTeachingPartner*, a professional learning resource that included multi-modal and targeted feedback to educators about their interactions and instructional approaches with young children. Pianta's team found that educators who received on-line consultation in addition to access to the professional website had significantly higher independent ratings of the quality of their interactions than teachers who only accessed the website. The positive effects of the consultation were particularly evident where the classes of participating educators had a high proportion of children of low socio-economic status (Pianta et al, 2008).

Learning communities with a culture of respectful and responsive relationships support early childhood educators to engage in critical reflection

In *Shaping Early Childhood* (2003), MacNaughton contributes to our understanding of how early childhood professionals can embed critical reflection across all aspects of their work with young children and their families. In this approach, professionals question whose needs are being met by their existing practice, and they question the assumptions which influence their practice. This critical reflection focuses on three aspects: (1) the learner; (2) the curriculum (including philosophy, planning, pedagogy and assessment); and (3) the relationships (children, parents, the community and other professionals).

With this approach, MacNaughton (2005) discusses the concept of 'critically knowing early childhood communities' as environments for critical reflection. Three such learning communities – The Trembarth Project, The Curriculum Club and the Critical Reflection and Innovation Under Threes (CRUIT) Project – are detailed in MacNaughton (2005). All three projects are designed around critically reflective learning networks or hubs, where the participants meet regularly to discuss, critically reflect on and challenge their own and each other's practice in working with young children. This provides an opportunity to reflect on the day-to-day aspects of their practice. Regular discussions in a collaborative environment also encourage and facilitate reflection around the broader issues that influence professional practices.

A focus on developing professional networks and learning communities provides early childhood professionals with a model where critical engagement can flourish. Learning communities – communities that engage with contemporary research, strategic development, multi-agency participation and onsite or virtual mentors – provide multiple opportunities for supported, inquiry-driven changes to practice.

A culture of reflective practice is essential

Research demonstrates that in order to provide high quality, effective services for children and families, there must be a commitment to ongoing learning, professional development and reflective practice (Comer, 2008; Howard, 2003; MacNaughton, 2003 DEECD, 2009; Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2004). Learning and professional development are not necessarily tied to specific training or in-service courses, but instead can begin with looking at daily practice and being able to say, "that hasn't gone well, why might that be?" (Deans, Brown & Young, 2007; Nolan et al, 2005).

Creating a culture of respectful and responsive relationships with children and families can be demanding and requires a system in place that challenges both management and staff to look at everyday practice and reflect critically on it, without creating defensiveness or a culture of blame (MacNaughton, 2003; MacNaughton 2005; Colmer 2008). The research indicates that where critical reflection is embedded and supported in the day-to-day operation of services, professionals are encouraged to question not only their practice but that of their colleagues, including managers (Daudelin, 1996; Roberts, 2009).

Empowerment and leadership are essential in creating a culture of reflective practice

The trend towards greater employee involvement in corporate decision-making has changed the relationship between leaders and followers in corporations. As the values of empowerment and participation increasingly appear in corporate vision and mission statements, the manager's role has shifted from that of charismatic leader (a person who has all the answers) to that of coach—a person who works with employees to help them discover the answers (Daudelin, 1996).

To create a culture of respectful and responsive relationships with children and families, it is important to engage staff in all aspects of the leadership of the service (Colmer, 2008). This includes developing children's individual programs and room responsibility, child enrolments, staffing and resources choices, and participation in professional development and in-service training. Devolved leadership helps to build a culture of trust and shared responsibility, allowing more reflective dialogue and debate to take place.

Nurturing staff is an important factor in effective practice and building capacity within whole teams and individuals alike. This requires ongoing reflection amongst staff at all, including those with management and leadership positions (Daudelin, 1996; Colmer, 2008; DEECD, 2009).

What are the implications for achieving the best outcomes for children?

1. To achieve best outcomes for children, early childhood professionals need to reflect in practice as well as on practice

The evidence demonstrates the importance of reflection in practice (thinking on your feet) and reflection on practice (thinking after the event) if early childhood professionals are to achieve the best outcomes for children. Reflecting on one's own values and attitudes must accompany reflection on wider issues of practice such as the effect of child-adult relationships on children's overall learning outcomes. Reflection and the desire to continuously improve early childhood practice are necessary for children to achieve their full potential.

2. Early childhood professionals need guidance and structure if reflective practice is to be critical and bring about positive change

In order to make positive changes in early childhood learning environments, professionals need to deepen their understanding of their own and others' value base. For this to happen, some type of formal guidance and structure should be in place. Studies indicate that without structured tools – such as recording formats, guided questions or examples of others' reflections and how they linked to improvements in practice – there can be a lack of commitment to reflective practice from staff. Reflection also needs to be embedded as part of normal day to day practices.

3. Critically Reflective Practice is most effective when a mentor is involved

Evidence suggests that while guidance and structure are important factors in engaging a professional's long-term commitment to reflective practice, reflection is substantially more effective when the process involves a mentor. Another professional can bring a different perspective to the reflection and encourage early childhood professionals to think about what values they hold, why they hold them, and what works best for children and their learning.

4. Critical reflection is most effective when it takes place within a regular learning network

Local and centre-specific improvements and change can be achieved with structured and guided reflection using a mentor. However, if outcomes for children across whole communities is the aim of engaging with children and families then research advocates developing what MacNaughton (2005) calls *critically knowing early childhood communities*. Reflecting regularly with those outside professionals' comfortable and predictable worlds has been proven to create reflective early childhood hubs. Such hubs focus on policy development,

learning and pedagogy, sharing best practice and challenging taken-for-granted practices. The shared focus is on sustained improvement in the lives of children.

5. Professionals need to create adequate time and space for reflection

The research emphasises that without tangible leadership commitment to reflective practice *and* time regularly set aside for staff to reflect, meet with mentors or attend local learning networks, reflection is viewed by early childhood professionals as little more than a time-consuming exercise. Investment at both pre- and in-service stages of professional learning – where the benefits of critical reflection are explicitly taught – enables professionals to become familiar with contemporary theory and research, and understand how positive and lasting change can be achieved.

6. Professional development opportunities in the early childhood sector need to be informed by contemporary research

Most research on reflective practice as a learning tool focuses on pre-service preparation. There are a number of studies, however, which highlight the importance of continuing professional development opportunities for staff already working within the field. Research tells us that effective reflective practice is regular, and includes both reflection in practice and reflection on practice. The one off, in-service training calendar which dominates many professional development opportunities requires refocusing, moving away from single, isolated workshops towards a more strategic and collaborative suite of longer term, inter-related professional development programs.

7. Reflective practice is critical to all Practice Principles of the Victorian Framework

The Victorian Framework emphasises that highly effective early childhood professionals engage in reflection and critical reflection across all areas of their practice. The Practice Principles are interrelated and designed to inform each other. Family-centred practice, partnerships with professionals, high expectations for every child, equity and diversity, respectful and responsive engagement, integrated teaching and learning and assessment for learning and development are interdependent and enhanced by professionals who are acutely aware of their own practice and the practice of their colleagues.

Reflective practice allows early childhood professionals to develop a critical understanding of their own practice, and continually improve the necessary skills, knowledge and approaches to achieve the best outcomes for children.

Appendix A Methodology

The following sampling procedures and research methods were used in this Paper. To begin with, an online database search was carried out for current literature using the following search terms;

- Reflective practice in Early Childhood Settings
- Reflective practice in School Settings
- Critical Reflection as a tool for professional development
- Professional Enquiry and Early Childhood Professionals

This yielded more than 30,000 articles so in order to refine the search and identify the most relevant literature the following additional key words taken from the VEYLDF (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2009), were included;

- Best Practice Examples
- Supporting children's learning
- Evidence based planning
- Challenge and change in Early Years Practice
- Organisational Psychology
- Leadership
- Inquiry Learning

In addition to this, it was felt important to include a review of literature which, where possible, compared and contrasted the views of children, parents/carers and community groups as well as the views of early childhood professionals. As the Practice Principles for Learning and Development become the foundations for professional practice across a diverse range of Early Childhood settings these final key words were included;

- CALD
- Disadvantage
- Indigenous
- Disability

The University of Melbourne's online databases were search using "Supersearch". This provided a wide selection of electronic journals, scholarly databases, theses and government reports, locally, nationally and internationally, with a particular focus on those abstracts identifying a specific Australian context. Additionally, the international journal series, "Reflective Practice" was also searched. Only on-line, peer reviewed journal articles and literature

published in the last 20 years have been considered, with an exception to in relation to the work of Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983) for their work in the field of reflective practice.

The databases searched were:

- Web of Science
- JSTOR
- ERIC
- Family & Society
- Education Complete – PROQUEST

Finally, a number of texts have also been included, specifically, *Shaping Early Childhood; Learners, Curriculum and Contexts* (MacNaughton, 2003), *Doing Foucault in Early Childhood Studies; Applying Poststructural Ideas* (MacNaughton, 2005) and *Building Capacity; Strategic Professional Development for Early Childhood Practitioners* (Raban, Nolan, Waniganayake, Ure, Brown and Deans, 2007) for their focus on reflective practice in an Australian context. *The Reflective Practitioner; How Professionals Think in Action* (Schön, 1983) has also been included given Schön's pioneering work in this area.

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