

# Gowrie

INCLUSION AGENCY TASMANIA



## From Inclusion Agency Tasmania

Early Childhood Education and Care services in Tasmania are feeling the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Up until now we have been able to see how other states and territories have responded to outbreaks of this virus, and now, Tasmanian services are experiencing the uncertainty of COVID-19. It has been amazing to see the resilience and professionalism shown by educators as they continue to work together and support one another, the children, families and communities through a what can only be described as challenging times.

While COVID-19 remains in the forefront of all our minds, we encourage you all to reach out to relevant agencies, such as BeYou to support your individual services in looking after your mental health and wellbeing. While we do need to learn how we are going to live with COVID, we also need to make sure that we are taking good care of not only our physical health, but also our mental health.

The start of a new year is often a time not only for children to transition into new rooms, but also for changes to occur within educator teams. With this in mind, we have taken the opportunity in this edition to focus our information on critical reflection, working with families and thinking about the terminology we use to describe Early Childhood Education and Care.

We hope that these articles help to encourage conversation, bring new teams together and develop new ways of thinking and doing.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to your Inclusion Professional or the Inclusion Agency for any queries, requests and advice.

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## Acknowledgement



Inclusion Agency Tasmania acknowledges with deep respect the Traditional Custodians of the many lands over which we work. We pay respect to elders past, present and emerging and recognise the continuing connection and contribution the palawa peoples make to this land, the water ways and our communities.

# Simple critical reflection for educators

*This article features on The Empowered Educator website and is written by Jodie Clark, an early childhood professional who has 30 years of hands on experience across early childhood and human services sectors.*

'The new buzzword in early childhood seems to suddenly be critical reflection and this is where educators are getting confused and not sure of the difference between everyday reflective practice and the now common term – critical reflection. So I thought it was a good time to break it down into some simple steps and I'm also giving you an action plan you can download to make sure you can get started!

Critical reflection is an important part of many professions and workers and therefore not just a requirement of early childhood educators but in this blog I'm going to be focusing on how the concept relates to us as educators and how it can improve our work and the outcomes for children.....

## What is critical reflection?

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.

The idea is that 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 actions and approaches to early learning and an early childhood educator role. Critical reflection is a common practice in many professions to help workers improve, change or reexamine current practice, perspectives, thinking and skills. It is something I have had to do in my work as an educator over the years but also in my family services and project manager roles.....

Reflection shouldn't (or doesn't need to!) 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 colleagues view that might differ to your own. Discuss with others about 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 looking more closely at the viewpoints of others your aim is to engage in constructive debate and discussion that allows everyone to see some 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 critical reflection important?

To put it simply – because it helps you as a professional early years educator to make changes and improvements to your practice, knowledge, interactions, actions and learning environments.

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 try and keep in mind that our reflections and discussions should ultimately lead to the best possible outcomes for the children in our care. Don't get hung up on just what it means for you – try and keep an eye on the bigger picture and why you are reflecting in the first place!

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

I like to think of critical reflection as going one or two steps further on from your regular weekly reflective practice that you do when you look back on how last week's program went or make quick notes about an activity or child.

The aim of critical reflection is actually to use it as an ongoing tool to build on your current practice and ask important questions not only of those 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 can I get started with ongoing critical reflection?**

If you are still a little confused about the process of critical reflection or struggling to begin, try setting aside some time to think about how you might answer 1 or 2 of the following questions at the end of a week ..... 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.

When you have identified your answers to a couple of the questions below you could then use them to begin drawing up an action plan you can revisit and update regularly. This creates a simple yet visible system of ongoing critical reflection without it taking a lot of your time each week!

### **Questions to prompt deeper critical reflection**

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

[More Information](#)

# Collaborating with families: Not a problem!

*In this article from ECA's The Spoke blog, Anne Stonehouse reminds us of the importance of cultivating authentic partnerships with families.*

The *Early Years Learning Framework* (DEEWR, 2009) raises the bar for educators by requiring a rich and complex relationship with families. The *Early Years Learning Framework* asks educators to go beyond involving families in the operation of the service and reporting to them on their child's learning, to collaborating with them to support children's learning. In other words, the *Early Years Learning Framework* describes educators as working in partnership and collaboration with children and families to negotiate the child's experience.

## What are partnerships? What do they look like?

A partnership is a relationship, not a set of activities or strategies. Principle 2 of the *Early Years Learning Framework* contains a description of what family–educator partnerships include:

- collaboration about curriculum decisions
- understanding each other's expectations and attitudes
- valuing each other's contributions to and roles in the child's life
- mutual trust
- ongoing open and respectful communication
- valuing each other's knowledge of the child, building on and contributing to each other's knowledge through sharing insights and information
- deciding together about the child's experience.

This list demonstrates that the relationship has certain characteristics and dispositions and also involves particular ways of working. Together these add up to negotiating the child's experience.

Partnerships and collaboration are created and strengthened during quick and unconscious daily interactions and communications, as well as in practices that are grounded in thoughtful statements of philosophy and enacted through carefully considered policies and procedures. Real collaboration with families arises not from specific activities or strategies, but rather from a pervasive attitude and perspective that educators bring to every aspect of service operation.

## Why do partnerships matter? Why are they important?

Answers are stated clearly throughout the *Early Years Learning Framework*:

- Families are 'children's first and most influential educators.' (p. 5)
- 'From birth children are connected to family, community, culture and place.' (p. 7)
- 'The diversity in family life means that children experience belonging, being and becoming in many different ways.' (p. 9)
- 'Children thrive when families and educators work together in partnership to support young children's learning.' (p. 9)
- Learning outcomes are most likely to be achieved when early childhood educators work in partnership with families.' (p. 12).

There is now, more than in the past, a greater understanding within the profession that in order to support children's learning we need to know them in the context of their family, culture and community. It is difficult to imagine really knowing a child without knowing the child's family.

## What's the difference between family involvement and partnerships?

The difference between involvement and partnerships has to do primarily with who has power and authority. Most family involvement activities are decided by educators and allow them to maintain control and power. Genuine partnerships, on the other hand, involve sharing power. That is the essence of negotiation.

Another difference is that many family participation activities focus on service operation, social events or parent education. Partnerships focus directly on the shared aim of supporting children's learning as it is described in the Learning Outcomes in the *Early Years Learning Framework*.

Partnerships require confident educators who are open to families' priorities and requests. They are clear about areas where compromise or negotiation is possible and where they are not because of regulations, conflicts with the service philosophy or policies or when families' requests are clearly not in the child's best interests. When there are partnerships, educators encourage families to express their concerns, question practices and policies and ask for what they want. When their requests cannot be granted educators explain this respectfully and without any implication that it was inappropriate to ask.

## Where does parent involvement and participation fit in? Is it no longer important?

Having a variety of ways for families to become involved is important, and can contribute to a partnership. However, it is possible for families to be very involved and not have a partnership—that is, not have much of a say in their child's experience. Similarly, it is quite possible for families to have robust partnerships with educators and not be involved in the service.

What matters most is that families:

- feel welcomed
- are respected
- see themselves as members of a learning community
- are empowered in their child's experience.

The aims listed above are a useful lens for critically reflecting on the parent involvement opportunities offered in your service and the extent to which they contribute to partnerships and collaboration.

## Questions for reflection

- What is there in the physical environment that says to families 'You are welcome here, you belong here'?
- What messages do families get about their 'place'—their role in the service—from your communication with them and the ways you go about your work?
- What matters most in a child's life is the relationship with family and the family's ability to support the child's wellbeing. If you genuinely take on board this message, how will it affect your work tomorrow? What might you do differently?

Most service's philosophy and policy statements place importance on good relationships and communication with families. Putting these words and ideas into daily practice is much more challenging than coming up with the words. Many educators would agree that establishing and maintaining partnerships with families is the most complex and challenging part of their work. Family involvement can be a good base to build on.

Taking seriously this requirement to work in partnership with families is challenging but well worth the effort.

[More Information](#)

# How to talk about early childhood education and care

*Professional language is one way to advocate and begin changes necessary to support the work we do every day. The following article was published on ECA's blog, The Spoke*

## How do you talk about early childhood education and care?

The words we use daily to describe early education matter. Professional language is one way to advocate and begin the changes necessary to support the work we do every day. If we use this professional language every day with children, families and our community—in documentation, in conversations and embedded within frameworks—it will begin to catch on, the messages will get through, and more and more people will start using this professional language without a second thought. It will become the new norm.

ECA observed the varied use of language to describe ECEC which can be confusing and outdated, reflecting the many voices in the early childhood space.

We decided to develop a new resource to set out professional and positive ways to talk about ECEC. We also wanted to build recognition of the important role of ECEC educators and teachers. Our members and focus groups debated many words but everyone agreed the resource was needed.

In response, Early Childhood Australia (ECA) developed and launched '[How to talk about early childhood education and care](#)' recently, which includes some examples of language that can be changed.

Simple changes include using words such as 'children' rather than 'kids' (we are not educating baby goats!); 'experiences' rather than 'activities'; using respectful language such as 'children with special rights' instead of 'children with additional needs' or 'children with a disability'.

It also means thinking about why the word 'friends' is so commonly used to group children when, as adults, we choose our friends. What are the underlying messages children receive from being grouped with people who are not necessarily their friends? And why are children in early childhood services called by the room they are in, rather than by their name?

While we may think these words are relatively harmless, they reflect an image and send a strong message. It's important that we view children as individuals, rather than as just part of a group, and that this is made clear by our language.

Some of these phrases you may have heard before, others may be new; however as part of your reflective process we invite you to look at the bigger picture, and perhaps unpack your image of the child and think about the language you use every day.

Professional language is one way to advocate and begin the changes necessary to support the work we do every day. If we use this professional language every day with children, families and our community—in documentation, in conversations and embedded within frameworks—it will begin to catch on, the messages will get through, and more and more people will start using the same language without a second thought.

Educational leaders and mentors play a vital role in role modelling and challenging their colleagues to explore, reflect and use this terminology within all aspects of service life—this includes family day care and outside school hours care services. Ensuring unity of language across the sector stops confusion and makes a powerful—and essential—stand.

[More Information](#)

# Shifting the terminology

Kids

Children

Child care worker

Educator or  
early childhood teacher

Day care

Early childhood service

Industry

Sector or profession

## How to talk about early childhood education and care

A new resource from ECA



Early Childhood Australia  
A voice for young children

[ECA Resource](#)

# Community professional development opportunities



## Understanding Anxiety Parent Workshop

Our Anxiety Workshop Series is back for 2022.

Come along to our evening workshops to learn more about anxiety and how to support your child or young person.

[More Information](#)



## Supporting the developmental needs of children with neurodiversity

This webinar will explore what the evidence says about how neurodiversity can affect children. It will outline how practitioners can adapt their work to support children with neurodiversity. The webinar will enable practitioners in a range of settings to recognise the effect of neurodiversity on children's learning and social development and to understand the principles for support.

[More Information](#)



## Trauma Informed Practice

Inclusion Agency Tasmania has partnered with ECA Tas Branch and University of Tasmania to deliver Trauma Informed Practice—Trust Based Relational Intervention® (TBRI) project throughout 2022. This project has been designed to build the capacity of ECEC Services to understand and respond appropriately to the needs of children from trauma backgrounds. TBRI® project is aimed at educational leaders, service directors or educators who have a leadership role within ECEC service which involves coaching and mentoring the implementation of new learnings into all aspects of daily program and practice.

### North West Region

#### Centre Based Day Care:

Face-to-face: 23rd February 2022

Learning Circles: 23/3/22, 4/5/22, 1/6/22, 29/6/22, 27/7/22, 24/8/22, 28/9/22

#### Outside School Hours Care:

Face-to-face: 24th February 2022

### Hobart Region

#### Centre Based Day Care:

Face-to-face: 1st March 2022 or 2nd March 2022

Learning Circles: 6/4/22, 11/5/22, 8/6/22, 6/7/22, 10/8/22, 9/9/22, 19/10/22

#### Outside School Hours Care:

Face-to-face: 3rd March 2022

### Launceston Region

#### Centre Based Day Care:

Face-to-face: 16th March 2022

Learning Circles: 13/4/22, 18/5/22, 15/6/22, 3/8/22, 31/8/22, 21/9/22, 12/10/22

#### Outside School Hours Care:

Face-to-face: 17th March 2022

Centre Based Day Care session times:

Face-to-face: 8.45am—5pm

Learning Circles: 9.30am—11am

Outside School Hours session times:

Face-to-face: 9.30am—12.30pm

*Please note: Nominated participant for the Centre Based Day Care session needs to commit to participation in all sessions.*

To express your interest please email [inclusion@gowire-tas.com.au](mailto:inclusion@gowire-tas.com.au)

[More Information on TBRI®](#)



### **INCLUSION AGENCY TASMANIA**

Please note Lady Gowrie Tasmania Inclusion Agency has offices in all three regions of the state, however, as Inclusion Professionals work predominately in early childhood and education and care services across the state, please direct any enquiries to Head Office where we can ensure a timely reply to your enquiry.

Monday to Friday 8:00am – 6:00pm (Head Office)

Operating 51 weeks of the year

After hours by arrangement

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