

## Early Childhood Ireland's Reflective Framework

An objective of Early Childhood Ireland's annual awards is to encourage and support your ongoing reflective practice and professional dialogue. You are the bedrock of the quality education and care that children experience. Research and practice evidence suggest that reflective practice promotes and enhances the professional knowledge and skills of educators. Through engaging with the awards process, you can use the reflective framework to guide your discussions and reflect on planning and documentation both personally and/or within your service. Reflection in Aistear and Síolta further supports the development of reflective practice with young children. Thinking skills are the foundation of learning and decision making. By supporting children's thinking skills through a process of planning and reflection you enhance children's innate competencies.

The Early Childhood Ireland Awards are underpinned by the reflective framework below. The reflective framework is based on four areas that guide thinking in relation to practice, child-centredness, partnerships with families and educator reflective practice. These areas underpin quality practice within services. The framework can be used to guide you when entering a piece of documentation under an award category or if you are beginning the journey of meaningful planning and reflection. For each of the four areas you and your team can also use the accompanying questions to think more deeply and challenge professional practice:

**1. Motivation - Practice**

Why did you capture this quality practice, what inspired you? What changed for the child, family, educator, service?

**2. Child-centred - Children**

What did the story tell you about the child, what was the impact on the child(ren) and what was their experience?

**3. Partnership - Connection to Family**

How did it make the family feel, how did it impact on the family?

**4. Reflective Practice - Impact on Educator**

What does it tell you about your practice? Including implications for future practice.

The reflective framework combines four intersecting themes:



The image of the child held, should be held as principle guiding everyday interactions and practice, the child is seen as a competent learner, children take an active role in interacting with their environments and the people around them, to make sense of and construct meaning about the world. Educators should be deliberate and explicit in their practice; the child as competent and knowledgeable learner is a lens for shared dialogue, reflection, and action. The children are partners in learning, not just their own learning, but that of the adults around them.

It is for educators to consider their image of the child because experiences, beliefs and assumptions about children's agency and capabilities affect educators' practice every day.

### What is reflective practice?

Reflective practice is an opportunity to question, to look at strengths and actions for improvement. Planning and reflection requires thoughtfulness; reflective practice helps you to consider what you are doing and what you are learning professionally. In turn this reflective approach can be used with children to develop thinking and reasoning skills. This supports children to become active participants in their learning and care.

There is:

**Reflection IN Action** –this is happening every day; you are always thinking while you work with children. For example, when you are responding to children's questions or when implementing spontaneous experiences,

and

**Reflection ON Action** –this can happen before an experience – it is part of the planning process. When we think more deliberately, we begin to challenge our professional practice.

### What do we mean by reflection?

To think carefully about what you do and why you do it.

**What is the purpose of reflection?**

The purpose is to continuously improve and achieve the best outcomes for children.

**What do we want to achieve within our setting by reflecting?**

Our professional practices are improved when we celebrate our strengths and acknowledge our weaknesses.

**What gets in the way of reflection?**

Team member absences, time restrictions or not having a clear service philosophy are some examples of obstacles. That can prevent services in engaging regularly with the process of reflection. It is important to have strategies in place to support reflection.

How would you explore and overcome conflicting views? Bringing your reflection back to your setting philosophy or vision. This helps to keep you going in the right direction. You should reflect regularly.