Early years curriculum materials

Reflecting on my teaching practices

Queensland
Government

Queensland
Studies Authority
Partnership and innovation

Benefits of critical reflection

Research has shown how deliberate and critical reflection on teaching practices contributes to excellence in teaching, and improved educational outcomes for all children. Critically reflective teaching practices encourage teachers to:

- regularly evaluate their approaches to teaching and learning

- understand more about the positive impacts of high-quality effective pedagogies on children's learning

- become more aware of the importance of high-quality interactions, including strategic intervention and substantive conversations to maximise children's learning

- use action research approaches — e.g. drawing on alternative teaching strategies to help children to learn when familiar methods fail

- co-construct learning with children and other partners so it is responsive to the child's family and community.

What does critical reflection involve?

Preparatory year teachers recognise that their personal assumptions, values, beliefs and biases may affect decisions they make about curriculum (reflecting, planning, interacting, monitoring and assessing).

Critical reflection involves analysing your own learning and teaching practices that may contribute to effective pedagogies within key components of an effective curriculum. These key components are:

- understanding children

- building partnerships

- establishing flexible learning environments

- creating contexts for learning

- exploring what children learn.

Teachers in a preparatory year setting hold multiple roles and view children through various lenses, and recognise that their personal and professional identities are continually evolving. Often in collaboration with teacher aides and colleagues, teachers articulate, question, consider and debate their range of knowledges to make meaning of their theories and practices. (Refer to the Early Years Curriculum Guidelines for more information about teacher roles, lenses, and pedagogies within a framework for practice, and the list of questions to aid critical reflection at the end of each key component section.)

The following table lists questions for teachers to reflect on from the perspectives of their principal role as educator, and related roles of:

- builder of relationships

- scaffolder of children's learning

- planner for learning

- teacher as learner.

These questions are starting points for reflecting on, monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of teaching and learning practices used in the preparatory year setting. This support material can be used for critiquing and mentoring amongst colleagues, supplemented with other strategies such as viewing, discussing and reflecting on videotape excerpts of your own or your colleagues' teaching practice in a range of contexts and settings.

Key components of an effective curriculum	Learning and teaching practices which contribute to effective pedagogies			
	Intellectual quality • high order thinking • deep knowledge • deep understanding • substantive conversation • problematic knowledge • meta-language	**Supportive classroom environment** • child direction • social support • active engagement • co-construction of learning • self-regulation	**Engagement with difference** • cultural knowledge • inclusivity • narrative • group identity • active citizenship	**Connectedness** • knowledge integration • background knowledge • connectedness beyond classroom • problem-based curriculum
Understanding children	How do I: • use children's prior understandings and experiences to scaffold new understandings and experiences? • encourage children to be agents of their own learning? • scaffold learning to help children shift to higher order understandings and capabilities? • consider and include aspects of learning/teaching research when planning the Prep Year program, e.g. brain	How do I: • provide a child-responsive Prep Year program that engages with children's diverse interests, needs and capabilities? • collaboratively plan aspects of the curriculum program with children? • promote risk-taking, perseverance, sustained interest to aid task completion? • motivate learning, extend learning in self-selected projects?	How do I: • acknowledge, respect and value children's diverse and complex identities? • promote children's "voice" in the Prep Year program? • acknowledge alternative ways in which children learn, e.g. culturally-responsive learning styles, augmented communication strategies?	How do I: • include children's prior experiences in the Prep Year program? • connect children's prior learning with the "new"? • link children's learning between settings of home, school and the community?

	research re importance of sensory experiences, teacher/child bond to aid development of emotional intelligence?		
Building partnerships	How do I: • provide opportunities for ongoing conversations about the learning, and ways of doing, thinking and knowing? • establish interactions that are reciprocal, sustained and promote shared under standings?	How do I: • acknowledge the efforts, achievements and progress of children as they build dispositions towards learning? • provide children with feedback about their learning, e.g. through conversations, one-on-one discussions, child/parent/teacher meetings? • promote children's mentoring capabilities as "peer experts" • use conversations to create shared meaning-making with children?	How do I: • negotiate each partner's roles, rights and responsibilities as a member of this learning community? • promote working in teams, and why? • promote each child's talents, abilities and interests in the Prep Year program?	How do I: • involve parents/carers, family and community members meaningfully and collaboratively in learning experiences?

Key components of an effective curriculum	Learning and teaching practices which contribute to effective pedagogies			
	Intellectual quality • high order thinking • deep knowledge • deep understanding • substantive conversation • problematic knowledge • meta-language	**Supportive classroom environment** • child direction • social support • active engagement • co-construction of learning • self-regulation	**Engagement with difference** • cultural knowledge • inclusivity • narrative • group identity • active citizenship	**Connectedness** • knowledge integration • background knowledge • connectedness beyond classroom • problem-based curriculum
Establishing flexible learning environments	How do I: • scaffold learning through a range of strategies, e.g. open-ended learning experiences? • provide extended time for investigations? • plan and create learning environments which are challenging, stimulating and motivating? • help children to make links between concepts in an integrated, holistic way?	How do I: • provide equitable access to resources, storage and furniture for all children? • provide children with time and "interactional space" to explore/test independent problem-solving strategies, e.g. in social conflict situations?	How do I: • create a welcoming, warm, supportive classroom that is inclusive of all cultures, gender, special needs, interests and capabilities? • create a sense of a learning community by positively recognising children's group identities? • plan and create learning experiences that are inclusive and culturally responsive?	How do I: • use negotiated curriculum approaches to help children with independent and spontaneous investigations? • create flexible learning environments that are responsive to children's spontaneous inquiries?

	• promote making choices and making errors as part of active meaning‑making?		• provide a wide range of resources and learning experiences to cater for the needs, interests and abilities of all children? • value and embrace "difference" positively?	
Contexts for learning and development	How do I: • integrate learning within contexts of play, real-life situations, investigations, routines and transitions, and focused learning and teaching? • consider the problematic nature of inquiry-based learning to acquire deep knowledge? • encourage children to talk about their learning when investigating negotiated projects? • promote knowledge as changing and contestable?	How do I: • encourage collaborative learning approaches in each context for learning? • cater for all children's maximum engagement in learning within contexts for learning? • provide flexible blocks of time to cater for children's sustained interest in learning within a context for learning?	How do I: • include children's diverse backgrounds, e.g. social, cultural, lifestyle, familial setting, prior education/care contexts as a focus for curriculum decision making? • promote active, informed citizenship through contexts for learning, e.g. real-life situations — maintaining familiar environments?	How do I: • integrate learning experiences to aid children making connections between concepts across interest topics? • provide real-life learning that reflects and responds to community needs/interests?

Key components of an effective curriculum	Learning and teaching practices which contribute to effective pedagogies			
	Intellectual quality • high order thinking • deep knowledge • deep understanding • substantive conversation • problematic knowledge • meta-language	**Supportive classroom environment** • child direction • social support • active engagement • co-construction of learning • self-regulation	**Engagement with difference** • cultural knowledge • inclusivity • narrative • group identity • active citizenship	**Connectedness** • knowledge integration • background knowledge • connectedness beyond classroom • problem-based curriculum
Exploring what children learn	How do I: • make explicit during conversations how learning experiences support lifelong learning? • provide opportunities for creative problem solving through substantive conversations, open-ended questions and resources? • use conversations to scaffold critical reasoning, e.g. comparing similarities/differences, raising questions and applying new ideas?	How do I: • include children's personal interests and experiences when planning using the early learning areas? • assess what children know and can do with increasing independence in particular contexts for learning and development? • actively involve children in beginning to monitor and assess their own and others' learning?	How do I: • make stereotypes and biases in multimodal texts explicit through discussions? • use and encourage narratives (i.e. personal stories, literary/cultural texts) to build understandings across early learning areas? • cater for children's personal interests and needs when planning using the early learning areas?	How do I: • link real world problems and issues with children's personal experiences, e.g. peace, human rights and conservation of the environment? • use multimodal texts and information technology to investigate "the world' outside the classroom?

	• talk regularly/explicitly about language — its use, construction, meaning structures and distinguishing features (spoken/written texts)? • help children to begin to critically view their "positioning", and that of others, when co-constructing their learning?		