

reflections

GOWRIE AUSTRALIA PUBLICATION ISSUE 8 2019



LOOKING IN – CHILDREN AS REFLECTIVE THINKERS

Mellissa Stringer and Dr Amanda McFadden, Lady Gowrie Red Hill Community Kindergarten

In early childhood, reflection is viewed as a valuable process that builds knowledge, informs decision making and enriches teaching and learning. Reflection supports planned exploration of thoughts and experiences, the exploration of relationships, shares insights into children's learning and assists in connecting theory to practice. However, it is not just educators that benefit from engaging in reflection. This article focuses on children as active engagers in reflection. Providing time and space for children to reflect and comment on their experiences is vital. Their reflections reveal what is important to them and illuminates opportunities for co-constructing

meaningful experiences. A reflective culture where children are invited to reflect on their experiences, is a culture that values unhurried time to sit, think and talk and make meaning through creative experiences.

Reflection can be understood as the understanding of one's own experience from a looking in perspective. John Dewey (1993) conceptualised reflection as encompassing three major components including 1) a systematic way of thinking and a way to make meaning, 2) the cultivation of reflective dispositions and 3) a dialogic component, using language or communication to share thoughts. Dewey also considered reflection a form of freedom:

LOOKING IN – CHILDREN AS REFLECTIVE THINKERS (CONTINUED)

“Reflection emancipates us from merely impulsive and merely routine activity, it enables us to direct our activities with foresight...to act in deliberate and intentional fashion, to know what we are about when we act” (Dewey, 1993, p.17).

In our Kindergarten context we regularly encourage children to think and reflect upon their learning experiences and how they felt in those situations. Dewey referred to reflection as ‘an affair of personal disposition’ (1993, p. 30). Cultivating a reflective disposition is an important component to building meta-cognition thinking skills. What we have found has contributed to a rich culture of shared dialogue, meaning making through reflective drawings and built a shared language of reflective practice.

By creating an environment where children have the space and opportunity to regularly express their views and be heard, we are creating a culture of collaborative learning and partnerships with children. Providing time and opportunities for children to engage in reflection enables them to make sense of their world and think more deeply about their beliefs, experiences and feelings.

“When we engage children in reflection, we encourage them to go beyond merely reporting what they’ve done to helping them become aware of what they learned in the process, what was interesting, how they feel about it, and what they can do to build on or extend the experience. Reflection consolidates knowledge so it can be transferred to other situations, thereby leading to further prediction and evaluation” (Epstein, 2003, p. 2).

A benefit to the reflective culture we have built has been families sitting down beside children and asking about their reflections at the end of the day. Reflective discussions have supported us to engage more deeply with families and share insights with families about their child’s thoughts, beliefs, hopes, challenges and musings at Kindergarten.

Reflection is a slow pedagogy and demands time. It serves as a way to be present and explore experiences, to slow down and find deeper connections and meaning. It is a way to build a dialogic culture between children and educators and provides solitary, small group and large group opportunities for connection.

Adding reflection into the rhythm of our day we have noticed as educators, the growth in children verbalising their thinking while engaging in challenging situations and interestingly, reorienting challenges as learning opportunities. Providing unhurried time to then draw these thoughts has taken the reflective practice to a deeper level again through creative expression.

The thinking skills and mental habits children are experiencing while engaged in reflection are important for cultivating resilience. Reflecting with children helps to guide children to reflect upon their own learning experiences and to engage in thinking that builds upon their prior learning and is facilitated through high quality interactions.

Below are some examples (used with permission) of children’s reflections on thinking through challenging scenarios. Reflection is not just for educators. Building a shared culture of reflection with children offers children a looking in perspective. After all, children are first hand witnesses of their own experiences.



“Today I tried to push myself on the hanging ladder and it was tricky so some friends helped me”

Madeleine



“Today someone was pushing me on the ladder thing (hanging ladder) and it was a bit tricky to hold on. I tried holding on a bit tighter and that worked”

Millie

LOOKING IN – CHILDREN AS REFLECTIVE THINKERS (CONTINUED)



"This is me and that boy and we were having a fight and he was trying to knock over my cow with his bull. I went to where the boats were to play somewhere else."

Ollie



"Today choosing if I was going to play in the sandpit or go to play at the boats was challenging."

Harriet



"Doing the spider game was challenging. It was tricky to wait to get to the top."

Elina



"It was tricky to push myself (on the hanging ladder). I tried to get my legs to get myself swinging."

Ruby

References

Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think: a restatement of the relations of reflective thinking to the educative process*. Boston: D.C. Heath & Co.

Epstein, A. (2003). *How planning and reflection develop young children's thinking skills*. Young Children on the Web.

For your professional learning and support contact your state based Gowrie listed below:

NSW www.gowriensw.com.au

TAS www.gowrie-tas.com.au

QLD www.gowrieqld.com.au

VIC www.gowrievictoria.com.au

SA www.gowriesa.org.au

WA www.gowrie-wa.com.au