



# EDUCATION AND TEACHING IN EARLY YEARS FROM INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Being a Reflective Early Years Educator Handbook

INTELLECTUAL OUTPUT 3

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The adults working in Early Years settings will be referred to as Early Years Educators (EYEs). This includes all professionals with expertise, training, and qualifications to enable them work within the early years sector.

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## **Introduction to the Handbook**

Welcome to this handbook for Early Years Educators (EYEs), which will enable you to develop your understanding of reflective practice and how this can be used to improve provision within your setting. This handbook will support you in exploring different Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) realities from international perspectives. You will investigate similarities and differences, key ideas, and teaching methods in order to develop an informed position that will support your professional development. This handbook provides a framework to strengthen and develop collaborative reflection and critical thinking to enhance your job shadowing or mobility visit experience.

The aim of the handbook/framework is:

- To develop understanding and skills of reflection to deepen reflective thinking and professional development/practice

The objectives are:

- To develop an awareness of the value and purpose of reflection recognising and understanding its importance in supporting good practice and improving ECEC provision
- To establish an awareness of how reflection can be used to support and improve professional practice
- To develop a knowledge of the processes of reflection and how these can be used to support a deeper level of understanding
- To develop reflective skills through the use of reflective models and the reflective tool

## **How to use the handbook**

The ETEIP project is about supporting Early Years Educators' (EYE) professional development, collaboration and exchange of knowledge and key ideas. Through the exploration of different international educational systems, curriculums, legislation, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) good provision and practice you can development your knowledge, understanding and key ideas. To achieve this, good reflective skills are essential with the handbook being designed to address what reflection is and why it is important. This will help you to understand the purpose and value of reflection and how to use reflection to enhance your professional development. The introduction of different reflective models provides a framework to support the use of reflection asking key cue questions to help you in developing critically reflective practice. The use of the handbook can support the reviewing of your learning experiences during the mobility visits and also inform your professional development and practice. The handbook will enable you to consider the context and concept of your current practice comparing it to international perspectives and providing opportunities for you to respond to challenges, attitudes, and assumptions. "Reflection involves reviewing our

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own values, challenging our assumptions and considering the broader social, political and professional issues that are relevant to practice” (Atkins and Schutz, 2013:23).

### **Using the handbook:**

- Read through the handbook and consider how this informs your understanding of reflection:
  - Consider how you can use reflection to improve your provision and practice.
  - Have a go at using reflective models on an aspect of your provision and practice:
    - What has this told you about your practice, personal values, attitudes, and assumptions?
    - What can you do to improve this?
    - What might be the challenges and benefits?
- Explore the State of the Art and Ethos and Values in the Preschool Education materials:
  - Reflect on the societal, cultural, political, and economic influences on different countries’ educational systems, curricula (State of the Art) and provision (Ethos and Values)?
- When on a mobility visit use the Reflective Tool to support you with your reflections.

### **What is reflection and why is it important?**

In the daily running of an Early Years setting, teaching, and learning often takes place in accordance with factors such as tradition, habit, and accepted strategies and procedures of the institution. Dewey (1933) refers to this as ‘routine action’, which, on its own, does not lead to progression or change.

“The aim of reflective practice is thus to support a shift from routine actions rooted in common sense thinking to reflective action stemming from professional understanding and expertise” Pollard (2019a:97).

Although it is recognised that Early Years Educators evaluate daily practice in order to develop and improve provision and learning experiences for the children, through this handbook, we aim to enable more meaningful critique, which moves beyond the common sense, challenges the norm and explores questions in a safe manner.

You will be exploring how the theories of Dewey, Schön and Pollard support critical reflection and deeper level thinking. This is an important skill that requires an open-minded, continuous approach to self-appraisal; thus enabling Early Years Educators to develop a sense of where they are in their practice. “We do not learn from experience.... we learn from reflecting on experience” (Dewey, 1933:78).

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Reflection will also require rigorous analysis of your personal and professional experiences, values, and beliefs. Through challenging your assumptions, you will learn about yourself and how you work within the setting and wider society. You will identify how cultural, social, economic, and political agendas impact on you and your setting. Engaging in reflective practice will impact on the quality of provision and improve collaborative working within the Early Years team and other stakeholders. Dewey (1938:118) states that reflection is “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that supports it”.

The reflective guidance in this handbook will take you through the ‘messy and often confusing swampy lowlands’ (Schön, 1983) of everyday life in the setting. It will provide you with a map that will help you to clarify and make sense of the muddle (Bolton, 2018:4) and to develop intrinsic professional reflective skills and attitudes.

### **Theory underpinning the reflective process.**

The reflective theories of Dewey (1933, 1938) Schön (1983) and Pollard (2019a) underpin this handbook.

Dewey is recognised as an early advocate for reflective thinking to support professional development and practice. Dewey’s work explores the differences between ‘routine action’ and ‘reflective action’, promoting reflective action as an experiential process, which leads to learning. Dewey states that the attitudes of ‘open-mindedness’, ‘responsibility’ and ‘whole-heartedness’ support well-structured, coherent, and reflective enquiry that facilitate problem solving. It is not about accepting daily realities of doing things as we have always done them without question, but it is about reflecting to find effective and meaningful solutions and ways of working. This then takes the ‘routine’ out of the action replacing it with ‘reflective action’. It enables the challenging of perceptions and assumptions with a willingness to engage in self-appraisal and self-development.

Schön builds on Dewey’s theory, providing an alternative perspective to reflection as ‘professionals’ are encouraged to use their knowledge and experience to inform their actions when dealing with specific situations. He calls this ‘professional artistry’. Professional artistry comes from ‘reflection-in-action’ and ‘reflection-on-action’. It is where professionals move away from tacit knowledge, ‘knowing-in-action’, that is used in everyday life, through routine unconscious actions that are carried out because it seemed right, or it has always been done that way. It is about thinking again, in a new way, about the specific situation, drawing on professional thinking and professional knowledge. Schön refers to this reflective practice that engages conscious actions and contemplation as ‘professional artistry’.

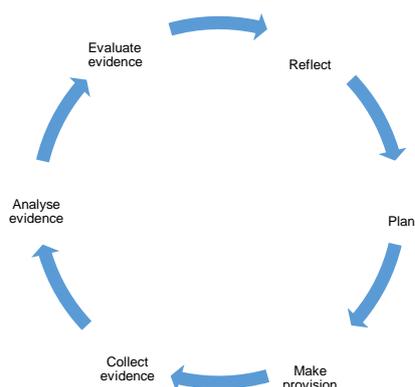
Pollard draws on Dewey and Schön’s notions of reflective practice and describes it as a moving away from ‘routine action’ towards ‘reflective action’ that is grounded in professional thinking. This is about more than just using ‘common-sense’ to address a situation or problem. It requires monitoring, evaluation, and revision of practice through evidence-based professional enquiry. Pollard uses seven characteristics of reflection that are key when applied to teaching:

1. “implies an active concern with aims and consequences, as well as means and technical efficiency.
2. is applied in a cyclical or spiral process, in which teachers monitor, evaluate, and revise their own practice continuously.
3. requires competence in methods of classroom enquiry, to support the development of teaching competence.
4. requires attitude of open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness.
5. is based on teaching judgement, which is informed partly by self-reflection and partly by insights from educational disciplines.
6. along with professional learning and personal fulfilment are enhanced through collaboration and dialogue with colleagues.
7. enables teachers to creatively mediate externally developed frameworks for teaching and learning.”

(Pollard, 2019a:85)

Pollard uses a cyclical process of reflective thinking, which has strong links between reflexive processes and action research, where educators also become researchers in their own practice (Pollard, 2019a:87, figure 1). This links to how Early Years Educators work in planning, making provision and implementing sessions for the children that they are caring for/working with.

The Process of Reflective Thinking (figure 1)



**How to reflect critically: models of reflection to support the reflective process.**

**Developing reflective thinking through describing, analysing and formulating actions/outcomes.**

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Reflective models provide a structure and framework to support the reflective process. They support with the breaking down and analysis of a chosen situation for reflection, engaging deeper levels of thinking through questions, and directing the reflector's thoughts. There is a range of theoretical reflective models that can be used to support diverse aspects of reflection as well as different situations. The following models can be used to support the reflective process (this is not a definitive list; there are other reflective models that can also be used)

- Brookfield (1995) – different perspectives and assumptions,
- Gibbs (1998) – influence of emotions and feelings,
- Johns (2017) – influence of factors,
- Driscoll/Rolfe (2007) – 3 simple questions.

**Brookfield** – learning from exploring different perspectives and assumption hunting.

Brookfield (1995) looks at the reflective process as an opportunity for reflectors to examine their assumptions by exploring different perspectives of experiences within practice using four lenses:

1. Autobiographical: themselves and their perspective,
2. Students' or children's perspective,
3. Peers' and/or colleagues' perspective,
4. Scholarship, literature, and the theoretical perspective.

Brookfield identifies the importance of critical reflection and how it “happens when we identify and scrutinise the assumptions that undergird how we work” (Brookfield, 1995: xii). Seeing practice from differing perspectives helps develop an awareness of any assumptions that might be held. Your own experiences as a learner provide an autobiographical lens from which to explore your own belief systems, values, assumptions, and practice. Consider what your own beliefs are about teaching and learning? Where have they come from? What barriers might you need to acknowledge? How might these impact upon your practice?

When looking at the students'/children's perspective it is beneficial to consider what they might perceive or experience from your practice. Gaining feedback either verbal or observational is useful in seeing situations from their perspective. This is very dependent upon their age and influences that might impact upon their feedback. The Mosaic Approach is a consultative approach that can be used to gain feedback from young children using observations and a range of multi-sensory approaches to listen to the children's different voices (Clark and Moss, 2001). In response to the children's perspectives and voices, you can then consider, for example, how you might change your attitude or practice.

The peer/colleague's perspective can be gained through engaging with them as critical friends and creating a reflective discourse that might support or challenge your own reflections and practice. A critical friend can share experiences, perspectives, knowledge, and expertise.

The scholarship, literature, and the theoretical perspective is where research and reading provide alternative theoretical positions and arguments to challenge or support current provision and practice. This can offer an alternative perspective from which to develop research informed practice and strategies. You might consider how research, literature and theory underpins your practice, beliefs, and values in education or what is the literature teaching you about your pedagogy?

Examination of assumptions can take place through challenging, reflecting upon and reviewing beliefs, values, and perspectives. Assumptions “are taken-for-granted beliefs about the world and our place within it, that seem so obvious to us as not to need stating explicitly” (Brookfield, 1995: 2). Assumption hunting is an important part of being reflective as this process can make you aware of any implicit assumptions that might impact upon thinking, and influence practice.

Brookfield (1995) identifies three different types of assumptions:

- *Paradigmatic*: assumptions that you use to understand and order the world around you. They are what you accept to be given and true and are the hardest to uncover.
- *Prescriptive*: assumptions about what you expect, or think should happen within a given situation. What you expect something should look like or how someone should behave in a situation.
- *Causal*: assumptions about conditions and change; the belief that one thing leads to another. These are the easiest assumptions to uncover.

Why do you need to assumption hunt? As already mentioned, it is about challenging your perspectives and ensuring that you are being critically reflective and aware of how your perspectives may impact, impede, or influence your reflections. Assumption hunting is about exploring what is the 'norm'; normal everyday way working, which is carried out for your benefit, but in the long term may not always be in your best interests or that of the children. This entails being alert to and uncovering 'hegemonic' assumptions that have been created by the ruling power or dominant society. Challenging hegemonic assumptions helps to ensure equality, diversity, and inclusion in institutionally, economically, or politically constructed systems. (Brookfield, 1995)

**Gibbs** – learning from feelings and emotions

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Gibbs model of reflection (figure 2) considers how feelings and emotions influence and impact on your responses when dealing with a situation or event. By reflecting on your feelings and emotions you can identify, understand, and make sense of what happened, what was positive or negative about the experience and how you could respond next time in a similar situation. It also provides an opportunity to explore what triggered any feelings and emotions that arose during the event, and to process and understand them (Bassot, 2016).

Gibbs 1998: reflection cycle (figure 2)



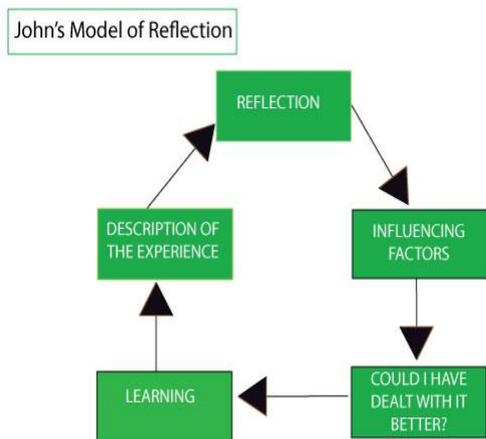
### Johns – learning from looking inward and looking outward

Johns' Model for Structured Reflection (figure 3) highlights the use of the reflective processes, looking internally and externally; looking inward and looking outward to understand and critically engage in depth with a specific issue or incident. It enables you to identify factors influencing your response to the situation, helping you to make sense of how you reacted and why. By looking inward at your feelings and emotions you can focus on the significance of how you felt and your thoughts and emotions during a particular situation. By looking outward, you can identify what issues seem significant and how these outward factors influenced your thoughts, feelings, and actions. By reflecting upon your past experiences, you can identify what has shaped your decision making, and any assumptions that might have been made. This can then enable you to respond more effectively should the situation reoccur.

Johns' 5 key cue questions focus the reflection through description of the experience and identification of any significant internal and external factors, thus leading to critical analysis of the event. You might consider if you could have dealt with the situation more effectively and how, in light of your reflection, you would do things differently in the future. This model will also allow you to explore assumptions you might have made and factors that have influenced you.

### Johns Model for Structured Reflection (MSR) (figure 3)

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### **Rolfe – learning from experience**

Rolfe (2001) and Driscoll (2007) build on Borton’s (1970) original three-stage model, providing three key questions for structuring reflection. These questions help you to reflect on and learn from experience using three cue questions: what? so what? and now what? The ‘what’ describes the event, identifying any problems, issues, difficulties you want to explore or learn from. The ‘so what’ analyses the event and what this means, implies, or tells you in order to develop your knowledge in dealing with this. The ‘now what’ leads to follow-up actions that enable you to improve future practice.

### **Mixed Methods for Reflection**

The reflective models do not need to be used in isolation but can be used in conjunction with each other, creating your own mixed method. Each reflective model has its own limitations and therefore it can be beneficial to use a mixed methods approach in order to address this. A possible suggestion would be to use Brookfield’s model to challenge your perspectives and assumptions alongside another model such as Gibbs, Johns or Driscoll/Rolfe. For example, you might select Brookfield’s (1995) student lens to explore the child’s perspective of the situation, while analysing aspects of your own feelings and emotions (Gibbs, 1998) or the internal and external factors that influence you (Johns, 2017).

### **Exploring the Quality of your Reflective Writing**

Moon’s (2007) framework for reflective writing helps you to analyse and assess the depth of your critical reflection. It supports in distinguishing between reflective writing and descriptive writing of a situation. Models of reflection support with the reflective process but using Moon’s framework can help you to assess the levels of analysis within your reflections. Moon has devised a range of scenario writing exercises to facilitate this, along with a self-assessment framework. While this handbook will not introduce you to the exercises, the framework

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below can help you to analyse and assess your levels of reflection. Once you have recorded your thoughts on the Reflective Tool (p12), use different coloured highlighters alongside Moon’s framework to identify how reflective or descriptive you have been in your account. If you have been very descriptive, consider reviewing your reflection using the questions provided on the Reflective Tool or by applying the recommended models.

*Framework for Reflective Writing*

Level 1	Descriptive writing.	Descriptive and contains little reflection. May tell a story but generally from one point of view.
Level 2	Descriptive writing with some reflection.	A descriptive account that signals points for reflection while not actually showing much reflection. What little reflection there is lacks depth.
Level 3	Reflective writing (1).	Description, but it is focused, with particular aspects accentuated for reflective comment. Shows some analysis, some self-questioning.
Level 4	Reflective writing (2).	Clear evidence of standing back from the event. Shows deep reflection. Self-questioning but the views and motives of others are also taken into account. Observation that learning has been gained.

(Moon, 2007:198-199)

Having explored reflection and why is it important along with the theory and models of reflection consider how you can use reflection to improve your provision and practice.

Have a go at using reflective models on an aspect of your provision and practice:

- What has this told you about your practice, personal values, attitudes, and assumptions?
- What can you do to improve this?
- What might be the challenges and benefits?

Now use Moon’s (2007) Framework for Reflective Writing to evaluate the quality of your reflection. How has Moon’s framework supported your reflection:

- What does this show you about your reflection?
- How reflective have you been?
- How descriptive have you been?
- How can you develop your reflection further, what do you need to do?

**State of the Art and Ethos and Values in Preschool Education**

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While reviewing the educational systems, curricula (State of the Art) and values in preschool education for each country, consider the following questions and information to help you with your reflecting:

- What are the societal, cultural, political, and economic influences on the country's educational system and curriculum? How do they compare to your own experience and expectations?
- What aspects of the State of the Art and Ethos and Values in Preschool Education has interested you and why? How does this relate to your own experience?
- What questions have been raised?

### **Overview of Key Themes**

A number of different aspects will be presented through the State of the Art and Ethos and Values in Preschool Education materials, and the key themes are as follows:

- Educational System
- Pedagogy and the Curriculum
- Learning Theory and Child Development
- Environment
- Roles and Responsibilities of the Adult
- Demography, qualifications, staffing and ratios
- Legislation, including welfare requirements
- Child's voice, perspective, and influence

### **Conclusion**

At the end of your mobility visit you will have explored different international Early Years perspectives using your reflective skills to compare and contrast practice and provision, thus developing your own 'professional thinking'. You have had the opportunity to collaborate with Early Years Educators from other countries, exchanging knowledge and ideas and developing a shared understanding of good Early Years pedagogy and practice.

Now it is your responsibility to use 'reflective action' to continue to improve the quality of provision and practice within your setting. Consider how this handbook and framework can be used to support your colleagues and peers in developing their own reflective thinking and professional practice.

Now that you have established skills of reflection within your practice continue to embed this into your praxis.

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## **Reflective Questions to Support the Early Years Educators with the Mobility Visits**

### **Introduction to the Reflective Tool**

The Reflective Tool below includes questions that will challenge your thinking and perspectives in order to support you in developing deeper reflections of your mobility visit experience. The reflective questions can be used as prompts to stimulate and help you focus on key aspects of your observations. You can draw on the models of Brookfield, Gibbs, Johns, and Driscoll/Rolfe as part of this process as they can provide a structure/framework for your reflections. The theories of Dewey, Schön and Pollard will help facilitate your understanding of the impact and influence personal experiences, perspectives and attitudes have on reflection.

### **Impact on your Professional Development, Provision and Practice**

An important part of the reflective process is to consider the 'now what?' The Reflective Tool has a third column to help you to identify 'good practice' within your setting, and inform any planned developments for the future:

- What did you learn from the visits and how will this influence your pedagogical approach in the future?
- How have you shared/disseminated your experience with other Early Year's practitioners and colleagues?

During your mobility visit you will have the opportunity to explore an international educational system through observing and reflecting upon practice within different Early Years' settings. Through your reflections and critical analysis, you can draw informed conclusions on how to move forwards with pedagogy and practice within your setting.

### Reflective Tool to Support the Early Years Educators with the Mobility Visits

Reflective Questions	Reflections and Thoughts	Impact on your Professional Development, Provision and Practice
<p><i>Suggested questions to challenge your reflecting on aspects of the mobility visit</i></p>	<p><i>Write your reflections and thoughts below</i></p>	<p><i>What did you learn from the visit and how will this influence your pedagogical approach in the future? How have you shared/disseminated your experience with other Early Years practitioners and colleagues?</i></p>
<p><b>Educational System</b> What are the societal, cultural, political and economic influences on the country's educational system and curriculum?  How does the country's educational system compare with your own?</p>		
<p>How does the country's educational system reflect?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Pedagogy and Curriculum</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ planning, observations, assessment, delivery, routines</li> <li>○ what is the statutory curriculum and assessments and how is it delivered?</li> <li>○ How do you support children's learning?</li> <li>○ Policies and Procedures e.g., Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Safeguarding etc.</li> <li>○ Subject Knowledge, such as, maths, sciences etc.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Learning Theory and Child Development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How does learning theory underpin the curriculum?</li> <li>○ How does child development underpin the curriculum?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>How does this compare with your own?</p>		
<p><b>Environment</b></p> <p>Reflect on and consider the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Physical Environment:</b> Flow, set-up, self-selection, resources, equipment, displays, use of space layout, safety, use of indoors and outdoors, mealtimes</li> <li>• <b>Social and Emotional Environment:</b> Positive trusting relationships, sharing and caring, socialisation, behavioural expectations and strategies, transitions and settling-in, confidence and self-esteem, therapeutic activities</li> <li>• <b>Inclusion and Diversity:</b> adapting the environment making provision for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, culture, language, family and social demographics, anti-bias and anti-discriminatory etc.</li> </ul>		

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication and Language: literacy, mark making, phonics, talk, listening, early reading</li> <li>• Cognitive Environment: Is it interesting and stimulating; use of Sustained Shared Thinking (metacognition), problem solving, exploration and technology</li> </ul> <p>How is the environment stimulating, interesting, and engaging for the children?</p> <p>How does the working environment meet the wellbeing needs of staff?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff room/space, lockers, facilities, aesthetics, workload</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Role of the Adult</b></p> <p>Reflect on how the adults are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting development and learning, modelling, developing positive and trusting relationships, supporting with transition, etiquette and routines, independence and autonomy, children’s voice, risk taking, health and safety, self-regulation, confidence and self-esteem, behavioural expectations and strategies</li> </ul>		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working in partnership with parents/carers/families – supporting culture, languages, beliefs, and values</li> <li>• Working in partnership with other professionals to support the needs of children</li> </ul> <p>What are the policies and procedures relating to staffing, adult-child ratios, qualifications, supervision, Continuing Professional Development and training?</p>		
<p><b>Child’s Voice, Perspective, and Influence</b>  Reflect on how the child’s voice is heard?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are children involved in the planning, organisation and decision making?</li> <li>• Making choices?</li> <li>• What systems are in place to support with listening to the child?</li> <li>• How are children with SEND, other languages or communication difficulties listened to?</li> </ul>		

### Reflective Tool to Support the Early Years Educators with Comparing Provision and Practice Across the Different Countries

Reflective Questions	Reflections and Thoughts <i>Write your reflections and thoughts below</i>				Impact on your Professional Development, Provision and Practice
<i>Suggested areas for reflecting on aspects you have seen in each country</i>	<i>English Settings</i>	<i>Norwegian Settings</i>	<i>Spanish Settings</i>	<i>Swedish Settings</i>	<i>What did you learn from each country and how will this influence your pedagogical approach in the future? How have you shared/disseminated your experience with other Early Years practitioners and colleagues?</i>
<b>Educational System</b>					
<b>Pedagogy and Curriculum</b>					
<b>Learning Theory and Child Development</b>					
<b>Environment</b>					
<b>Role of the Adult</b>					
<b>Child's Voice, Perspective, and Influence</b>					

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After you have completed the Reflective Tool (Reflections and Thoughts) it is recommended that you use Moon’s Framework for Reflective Writing to review the quality of your reflections.

*Framework for Reflective Writing*

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(Moon, 2007:198-199)

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