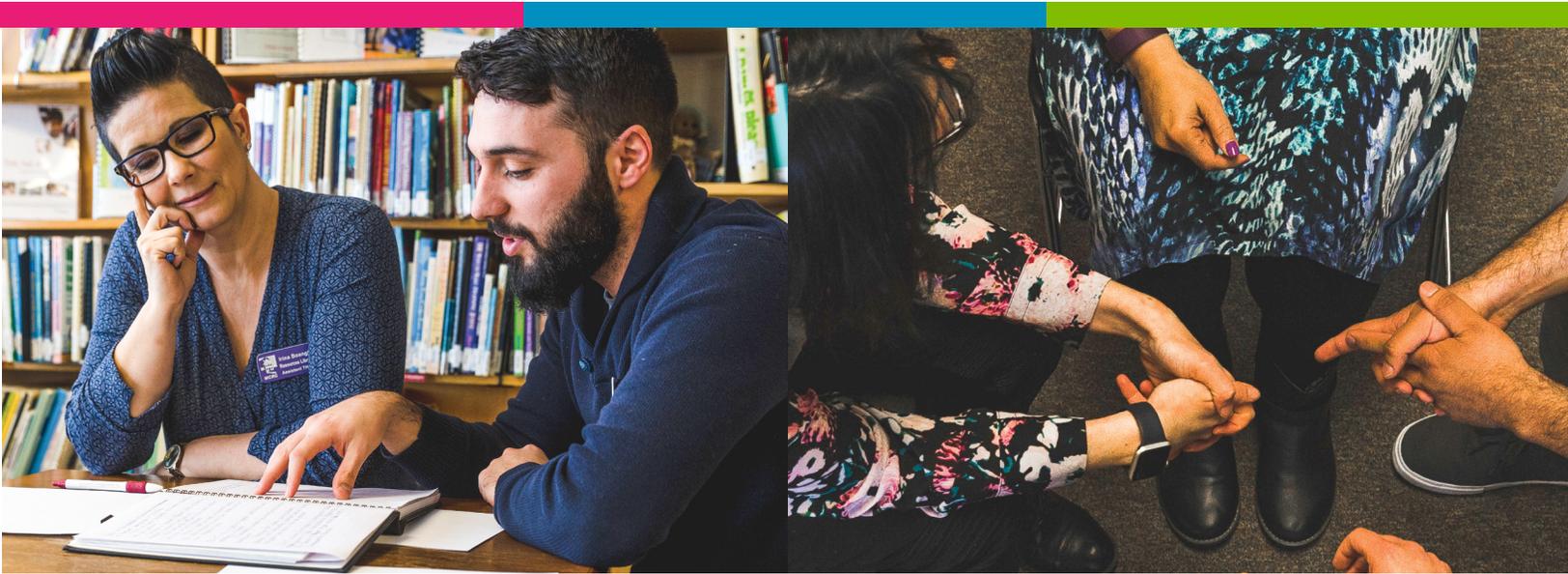


CPL Resource

Reflective Practice and Self-Directed Learning



The Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice says that early childhood educators “understand the value of reflective practice and leadership development and how continuous professional learning supports their professional growth and contributes to improving the quality of early childhood education for children, families and communities” (Standard IV: B.3).

The College of Early Childhood Educators has developed this resource to support registered early childhood educators (RECEs) understand two important aspects of professional practice—reflective practice and self-directed learning. Reflective practice and self-directed learning are fundamental to the CPL program. Consider using this resource as you complete your CPL Portfolio process and engage in professional learning activities throughout your career.



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What is reflective practice?

The College defines **reflective practice** for RECEs in this way:

An approach used by RECEs to analyze and think critically about their professional practice with the intention to better understand and improve their practice. Reflective practice is thoughtful, action-oriented and often, a collaborative effort. RECEs use reflective practice to plan, evaluate their strengths and challenges, make decisions and create change, if necessary. Self-reflection, critical reflection and collaborative inquiry are all important elements of reflective practice (*Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, 2017*).

To deepen your understanding of reflective practice, consider the following definitions:

Self-reflection is a process that early childhood educators use to think about their professional practice. Self-reflection may lead to changes or improvements in practice. RECEs may reflect in-the-moment during their practice, or they may intentionally reflect on a particular experience after it has occurred. Self-reflection may include:

- observing, recalling and interpreting professional experiences or events
- considering factors that impact practice
- thinking about interactions with others and taking multiple perspectives
- self-questioning and looking inward (*CPL Portfolio Cycle Handbook, 2017*)

Critical reflection is a way of reflecting that requires RECEs to consider and challenge the beliefs, assumptions, and understandings that frame how they view and respond to children and that shape learning experiences they make available for them. Critical reflection involves the active process of engaging with difficult concepts, tensions and uncertainties and changing practice as a result (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al, 2015 as cited in *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, 2017*).

Collaborative inquiry is the practice of engaging with others (colleagues, children, families) in critical reflection as a means to question theory and practice, discuss ideas, test theories and share learning (Ministry of Education, 2015 as cited in the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, 2017*).

Why should I engage in reflective practice?

Regardless of employment position or title, all RECEs benefit from engaging in reflective practice. If you think critically about your daily practice and the impact of your choices and actions on children, families, colleagues and the profession, you are better able to understand your practice and act to improve it.

Reflective practice promotes self-awareness and encourages a re-thinking of not only practices and skills, but of values and assumptions. For some, engaging in reflective practice may lead to new learning and transforming practice. For others, the critical lens and collaborative work of reflective practice may reveal forgotten strengths and skills. Reflective practice enables you to be more effective in your work— intentional, responsive, informed and confident.

Engaging in reflective practice is also empowering and supports your well-being and leadership development. By collaborating with others to create professional change on an ongoing basis, you are more likely to feel like a valuable contributor and leader in your professional practice. Reflective practice helps you to create coping strategies, problem-solving skills and build resiliency in order to continue to practise a profession that is complex and dynamic.

As a form of ongoing professional learning, engaging in reflective practice honours your professional knowledge and experience and the time needed to acquire and apply relevant and meaningful new learning in practice. It is not “drive-through professional learning” (Curtis, Lebo, Civandes, Carter, 2013). Participating in the College’s CPL Portfolio Cycle is also not a “drive-through professional learning” experience. Learning about reflective practice prepares you to complete the requirements of the CPL Portfolio Cycle throughout your career.



How do I engage in reflective practice?

Engaging in reflective practice takes time and can be challenging as you begin to identify new ideas, tensions and challenges in your practice. Ideally, reflective practice will be integrated into your daily life and your continuous professional learning activities. To engage in reflective practice you should first begin to think critically about your professional practice. Consider your:

- role and responsibilities within the workplace and community
- daily practice choices and actions
- interactions with children, families and colleagues
- current practice environment(s)
- observations of children
- knowledge of families
- ongoing learning choices and opportunities
- knowledge of the community and the sector context.

As you begin to examine the many factors that impact, guide and inform your professional practice, you can engage in deeper reflection and analysis. Some examples of this include:

- Questioning what is happening in your practice environment and engaging with colleagues, families and children to find and compare knowledge or perspectives
- Identify your strengths and challenges and analyze the factors that influence your actions, perceptions or experiences
- Challenge your daily practice by examining routine and repeated methods of practice that have not been questioned for some time
- Question your beliefs and assumptions about children, families and educators
- Observe children, their learning and well-being and consider the many ways they are or are not being supported
- Observe and monitor the outcomes of new strategies in practice
- Identify current issues, trends, policies and research that impact your practice
- Listen to the perspectives of others when making decisions and creating change.

Keeping a reflective journal, listing questions and observations, communicating, collaborating and planning with others helps you to act upon your reflections and make improvements to your professional practice.

What is self-directed learning?

Like reflective practice, self-directed learning is one of the building blocks of the CPL program. The College defines **self-directed learning** for RECEs as:

A method of professional learning that places the responsibility of identifying, planning for and engaging in learning activities on the RECE. Self-directed learning also means that RECEs monitor and evaluate their professional growth and decide what activities will best support their development, individual needs and how they will apply their new learning in their practice (*CPL Portfolio Cycle Handbook, 2017*).

How do I benefit from self-directed learning?

Engaging in self-directed learning provides you with full control and ownership over your own learning. It gives you the opportunity to choose learning activities that are relevant and meaningful to your professional practice needs and long-term goals. Like all adult learners, RECEs have a range of learning styles, needs and access to resources. Engaging in self-directed learning means that you can design and participate in activities that are particularly suited to you.

As an educator and leader, you are a competent and knowledgeable professional who is uniquely positioned to best understand your learning needs in ever-changing practice environments. Self-directed learning empowers you to take charge of your knowledge and identify your needs for professional growth and leadership development.



How do I engage in self-directed learning?

You will find that engaging in ongoing reflective practice and completing the Self-Assessment Tool as part of the CPL Portfolio Cycle will help guide you in finding or designing self-directed learning activities that are right for you and support your goals. There is no one way to engage in self-directed learning.

Brainstorming and researching learning activities or options are important steps in the process. Consider taking these steps:

- Review the CPL Activities Web and other CPL Resources
- Research the resources and options available to you in your area
- Communicate with others about local professional learning communities, networks, etc.
- Explore online learning options and resources.

Reflective practice and self-directed learning go hand-in-hand. Engaging in reflective practice can be understood as a self-directed learning activity. At the same time, reflective practice helps to guide you in making informed choices about your self-directed learning activities. Both self-directed learning and reflective practice are central to the CPL program

For more information on how reflective practice and self-directed learning are embedded in the CPL Portfolio Cycle, read the CPL Portfolio Cycle Handbook and visit the College's website at college-ece.ca/cpl. You can also e-mail the Professional Practice Department at cpl@college-ece.ca or telephone at **1 888 961-8558**.



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