

## A Framework for Engaging in Meaningful Self-Reflection

*Self-reflection* sounds like a great idea, but where might you start? Try thinking of *self-reflection* as having four parts or steps: *inquiry, observation, planning, and implementation*. Below is a framework and set of tips to support either individual self-reflection or reflection with peers, supervisors, and coaches.



- Choose a topic or an area of focus. For example, do you want to examine a particular activity such as circle time, teaching strategies such as fostering friendship skills, or ways to better reduce children’s exposure to stress?
- Write down a question that will guide your reflection related to your area of focus. For example, “What might I do to strengthen my role in teaching children to resolve conflicts?” or “What skills do I need to teach children to give them the ability to resolve conflicts on their own, and how might I specifically do that?”
- Take a moment to pause and consider, “What are my values/perceptions/beliefs in regard to this topic?” Are my values aligned with ‘best practice,’ current practice, and required policies? If there isn’t alignment, consider how this is impacting your decision-making.
- Always add a question similar to this, “How might I **individualize** my teaching practice(s) on this topic to meet the needs of all children in my class?” This will allow you to consider differences among children and ensure all are fully included in your planning.



- Be brave and videotape a part of your practice. Think of it this way...when you are in the movie, you can't see the movie. This means that self-reflection will always be limited because you can't truly "see" yourself unless you videotape yourself in action. Even if you have someone come in to observe, that person cannot accurately capture everything a video can.
- Keep the observation set for short doses of teaching to keep reflection targeted and specific.
- Watch for **specific** teacher practices directly tied to child outcomes. For example, "What did I/my co-teachers do?", "What was the impact on the child?", "What skill might that child be developing as a result?".
- During the observation, make note of possibilities for adding new practices. For example, "What might I do next time in this situation?", "How might I carry out that practice?", "What skills might be learned by the children?".
- It's easy to get caught up in watching the children, so do your best to connect what is observed to teacher practice.



- Begin by listing and/or identifying teacher **strengths**. Aim to identify 3-5 strengths observed by each person (including one’s own strengths). Here’s an example:

*During clean up time, teacher Zania was butterflying from area to area encouraging children by giving positive, descriptive acknowledgments to the children such as, “Dylan and Grace, you are picking up all the blocks!” or “Alexis, you are getting there! You are almost done putting away the paint supplies, you are being so helpful!” (**teaching practice**). As a result, the children cleaned up and transitioned to circle time in less than five minutes (**observed desired behavior**). With this, the children are developing the skills of following through with tasks, being responsible for their work, and working together as a group (**potential skills developed**).*
- Next, plan out the steps or additional teaching practices that might help answer the question or questions identified in the first step, inquiry. Remember, reflection is about changing yourself to help support change in the children, so keep your focus on what the adults might do in addition to what they are already doing.
- Come up with a specific plan to carry out the next steps so that it’s clear how to implement the strategies identified, not just what they are. Here’s an example:

*Teachers would like to start offering jobs to be the “community monitors” during clean-up and encourage those children to acknowledge peers they see cleaning up/working together (**plan to carry practice out**) to teach children how to observe for what is going well in the class and build connection among peers/community (**potential skill developed**). The teachers will model this behavior for the community monitors and even whisper ideas to them if they miss a chance to acknowledge a child’s efforts to clean up. Teachers also want to follow up with community monitors at appropriate times to inquire about their experience giving acknowledgement with open-ended questions such as “How did it feel doing your job today? What did you like about it? How do you think the other kids felt when you acknowledged them, etc.?” (**teaching practice**).*
- Understanding the “why” or the conceptual underpinnings of your next steps will help you move from first to second-order change (lasting change). Try asking and answering questions such as, “How does \_\_\_\_\_ promote social and emotional development and prevent challenging behavior?” or “How does \_\_\_\_\_ support developmentally

appropriate learning of this concept?”

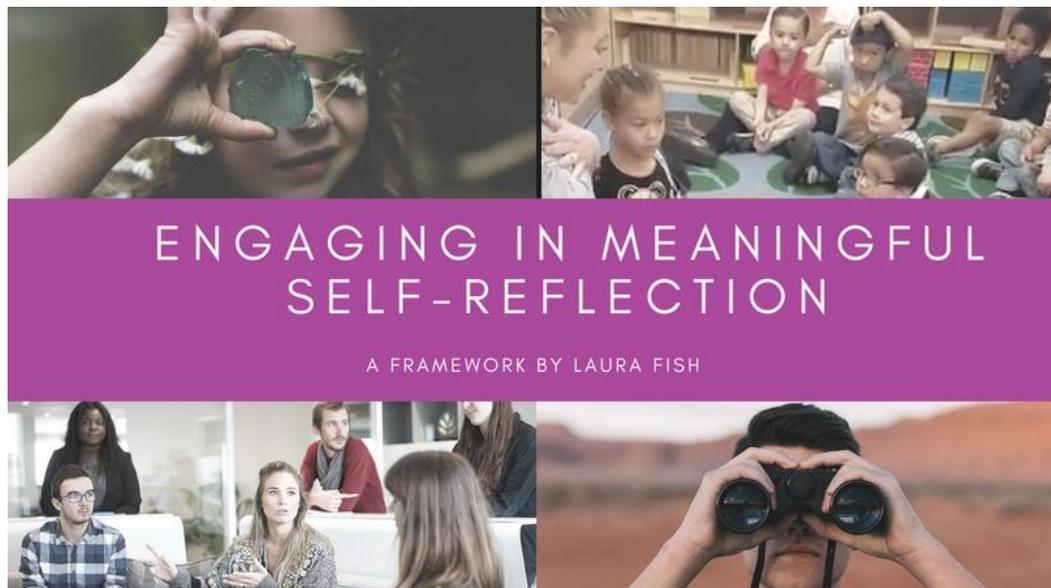
- Identify at least three outcomes you hope to see with implementation of the next steps (i.e., what specific change(s) might occur because of this change in practice?).



- Getting started often feels daunting, so you may ease into self-reflection at first by prompting yourself to take a few mindfulness moments, or “mimos,” throughout the day. To do this, merely pause, tune in to what you are doing in relation to the children, notice how you are feeling at the moment, and consider the impact you might be having on their learning and behavior. This habit of mind can launch you on the path of self-reflection and help you measure even small successes!
- Remember, during implementation, the reflection cycle starts over again. Meaning, once again there is an opportunity to *inquire* about the teaching efforts, opportunities to *observe* what’s happening in the classroom, and opportunities to revisit the **plan** and revise the **plan**.
- To stay motivated, it helps to share what you are doing with a like-minded friend, colleague, or mentor. Try finding someone you work with or trust in your personal life to share your experience of making changes in your teaching practices. Research also shows that keeping your focus small, as suggested above, and tuning in to notice even slight changes that occur as a result, can help you stay with something new. Remember to scan the room for what is going well, not just what is out of order, to notice the impact you are having on the children and even elevate your mood!

For more information about this framework for self-reflection, please email Laura Fish at [laura@laurafishtherapy.com](mailto:laura@laurafishtherapy.com) or visit [laurafishtherapy.com/consulting.html](http://laurafishtherapy.com/consulting.html) for training and coaching information.

SHORT VERSION FOR FREE GIVEAWAY



## ENGAGING IN MEANINGFUL SELF-REFLECTION

A FRAMEWORK BY LAURA FISH

Self-reflection sounds like a great idea, but where might you start? Try thinking of self-reflection as having four parts: *inquiring, observing, planning, and implementing*. Below is a framework and set of tips to support either individual self-reflection or reflection with peers, supervisors, and coaches.

### **Inquiring:**

- Choose a topic or an area of focus
- Write down a question that will guide your reflection
- Take a moment to pause and consider/discuss your values and beliefs

### **Observing:**

- Be brave and videotape a part of your practice
- Observe for short periods of time
- Watch for specific teacher-based practices
- Connect what is observed to your practice

### **Planning:**

- List or identify strengths

- Identify next steps or additional teaching practices
- Come up with a specific plan to carry out the next steps
- Understand the “why” or the conceptual underpinnings of the next steps
- Identify at least three outcomes

**Implementing:**

- Ease in by taking a few mindfulness moments, or “mimos,” throughout the day
- Take manageable steps to stay motivated
- Find others who can support you and be your champion
- Keep your focus on what is going well

To learn more about this framework for self-reflection, please visit my blog at <http://laurafishtherapy.com/blog/> or visit [laurafishtherapy.com/consulting.html](http://laurafishtherapy.com/consulting.html) for training and coaching information.