

Assessment 1: E-Portfolio Part 4: Reflective Essay

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Reflection is an important process that educators undertake to further develop their skills in their field of teaching. Freidus (1998, as cited in Clarke, 2004) shows that through her research on the topic of reflection, she discovered that “students learn to look for patterns and connections within and among the educational experiences they have found meaningful for themselves and their students” (Clarke, 2004, p. 12). Within this reflective essay, I will draw on connections and my personal experience’s to reflect on new ideas and skills learnt whilst creating my e-portfolio. I will analyse how my chosen literature has enabled me to reflect on my current teaching practices, and how new knowledge gained has enabled me to grow as an educator, for the benefit of my own teaching and learning as well as for the children’s.

Reflective practice enables educators to view their work in a different way, to challenge their thinking which can result in change (Ganly, 2018). Reflective practice allows educators to engage in deeper learning about their work and themselves as individuals. Momentous change can occur for the reflective learner as they delve deep into their work with purpose and non-judgment (Hedberg, 2009, as cited in Ganly, 2018). This task has made me reflect on what new ideas and skills I have learnt that have enabled me to grow as both an individual and an educator.

My ability and skills of using technology have developed through this process. Spending time engaging with Pebble Pad gave me the confidence I needed in navigating the site and the enjoyment of creating my work. Resizing images and adding in links and QR codes was challenging, but through practice I was able to create the layout I wanted. I feel confident teaching another educator how to use Pebble Pad to create their own e-portfolio. This process gave me new ideas that I want to engage in moving forward. Within my e-portfolio I chose areas of interest these being, creating parent partnerships and exploring play-based learning in early childhood. Researching these areas of interest has allowed me to reflect on my own classroom setting and how I am creating positive partnerships, what are the barriers, and what is my next approach. Similarly, am doing everything I can as a teacher to create an authentic play-based learning environment and what changes need to be made.

My e-portfolio consists of four main sections. The multimodal representation demonstrates my knowledge and interests about play-based learning as a professional early childhood educator. The artefacts showcase how I plan for child development and play-based learning opportunities. The playdough area highlights an example of free exploration and play-based opportunities in my classroom. The written response reflects what I know to be the best way that early childhood teachers should teach, and what is therefore valuable for children’s learning and development. Examples include planning for progress and research benefits that children develop through this type of learning and teaching environment.

The reflective blog post examines the important contemporary issue of parental partnerships in early childhood education. This blog post demonstrates my professional knowledge and learning as an early childhood educator as I highlight the research about this issue, and the positive impacts strong partnerships have for the learning and development of the child. The reflective blog post was created to show my professional thoughts and knowledge around a specific issue. Loughran (2002) underlines the essential link between reflection and teaching experience which is affected by the time when reflection occurs, which then has a direct impact on what can be learnt and implemented (Loughran, 2002). Reflecting on parent partnerships has enabled me to act in real time, and to plan new approaches moving forward to create more positive partnerships for my parents, myself as the teacher and the children.

The annotated bibliography demonstrates my learning and professional knowledge about areas of play. Examples include play in international settings, integrating technology into play, the profound benefits of play, what adults think play is and play and disabilities. The multiple annotations show the relevance to my current teaching context and my professional interests in the field. This reflective essay enabled me to reflect on my work and areas of interest as an early childhood practitioner. Along with thinking about what I have learnt and the changes I will make moving forward to allow my children to flourish in their education.

Throughout this process I have engaged with a range of literature which has included the topics of reflection and child play for example. The concept of reflection as a tool for learning and improvement has allowed me to see the benefits that this process can have on my teaching and learning. This has allowed me to think about how I am using reflection in my daily teaching and how I can adopt this approach in a different way moving forward. For example, engaging in weekly reflections on the learning environment and how the play opportunities are enabling child learning and development. I chose a variety of articles for my bibliography that showcased many different play issues and ideas. Learning more about the Scandinavian approach to play was particularly interesting. Reflecting on these articles allowed me to think about how outdoor play can be so enriching and cover many learning areas in the process. This allowed me to think about how I can use more outdoor opportunities in my setting.

Reflective practice is a process that allows educators to reflect on their work and the impact this entails for the learning and development for themselves as professionals, and for the students they teach. The reflection process “has the potential to deepen understanding of philosophy and practice, as well as knowledge and understanding” (Lemon & Garvis, 2014, p. 89). This means it’s vital for early childhood educators to be reflective practitioners to develop their “professional knowledge, skills and competences” (DEEWR, 2009, as cited in Lemon & Garvis, 2014, p. 89). As an early childhood educator I will use the process of reflection more often to enable this to improve my professional goals.

Currently, one of my professional goals is to improve the language development of children through play. Through observations, video’s and data collection, I can reflect on how the children’s language is developing and what changes are necessary to further improve this. Specific reflections involving note taking, discussions with colleagues and analysis will enable me to develop crucial professional skills and knowledge to improve the learning of the children.

The creation of my e-portfolio has allowed me to develop many professional skills and to engage in new ideas of learning. It has brought to light the areas of interest for me and how I can implement new ideas and teaching in my current context. I look forward to making changes based on reflection and to implementing these new

ideas moving forward. I am confident this will only have a positive impact on my children's learning and development.

Sample Blog:

Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Settings

A reflective blog by Gemma Price

A child's journey within an early years setting is a crucial time for their growth and development. A positive and strong partnership between a child, parent and the early years practitioner is essential. When parents and practitioners work together this can have a positive impact on a child's social skills and their capacity to adjust to everyday situations (Sheridan, 2016). The parent and the practitioner gain great benefits too. These include more effective communication, stronger relationships with each other and they create skills to nurture children's behaviour and learning (Sheridan, 2016).

When families and practitioners collaborate in a respectful way to support children's learning at home and at school, we see the greatest benefits. A strong partnership allows for a greater understanding of children's needs, allowing early years practitioners to create appropriate settings and to offer support that can be delivered in the home environment (Birth to 5 Matters, 2023).

If early years practitioners think about how to employ parents voices and their great understanding of their own children, parents expertise of their children can be tied into everyday practice (Birth to 5 Matters, 2023). Parents have closely formed relationships with their children. They know their children's abilities, interests, strengths and areas for development (Department of Education & Training, 2017, cited in Almendingen et al., 2021). Workshops and information evenings that teach parents how young children learn can provide chances for parents to develop their knowledge and understanding (Birth to 5 Matters, 2023).

The teacher plays a pivotal role in fostering this partnership. "A partnerships begins with mutual respect and trust" (Halimah & Mirawati, 2020, pp. 212-213). A positive partnership can occur when practitioners welcome parents and inspire them to be involved in the classroom and programs. When parents become more involved in the learning, they can see how their child is progressing at school. This can enable parents to further support learning in the home environment (Halimah & Mirawati, 2020).

An example of an effective program used in early years settings is Seesaw. Seesaw is an interactive tool that enables a strong connection between school and home learning. Practitioners share videos and photos of children's learning with the parents. Likewise, parents can share learning from home. When practitioners use digital technology to document students learning and development, "they can make largely invisible learning processes visible" (Buchholz & Riley, 2020, as cited in Sams, 2022, p.12). This helps to improve the partnerships between parents and practitioners as parents are actively engaged in their children's learning throughout the school year (Buchholz & Riley, 2020, as cited in Sams, 2022).

Reflective Questions:

What new questions have developed in regards to effective parent partnerships in my current setting?

- What am I currently doing to foster parent partnerships in my setting?
- Is it successful?
- What needs to be changed?

- Do parents feel a sense of belonging to our class? What is the evidence of this?
- What would parents like more of? For example, more workshops.