



Supporting lifelong learning: A diffractive toolkit for postgraduate reflective practice

Our research design used reflective ‘learning stories’ as an effective way to support participants to describe their experiences (White and Sands, 2022; Trodd and Dickenson, 2018). This built on the creativity of the participants who work in the early childhood sector (Craft, 2002) and used techniques familiar to the practitioners (Sakr et al., 2018).

What was it about the particular experiences identified that made them notably encouraging or challenging?

How do you see yourself as a learner now?

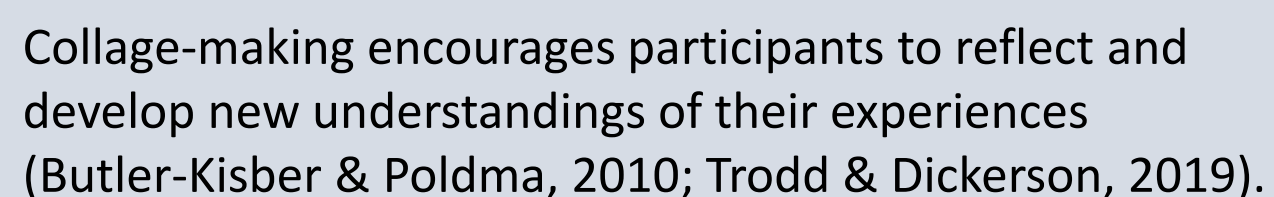
Has your perception of yourself as a learner changed as a result of engagement with the programme?

Has your perception of yourself as a professional changed as a result of engagement with the programme?

If you could go back and speak to yourself-at-the-start-of-the-programme, what would you say?

Prompts:

- What emotions do you most strongly associate with the learning experience?
- What did you experience as particularly encouraging?
- What did you experience as particularly challenging?
- How might you represent these moments in your collage?
- How did you feel at the end of the learning experience?
- Where are you now on your professional learning journey?



The original research project included a short Zoom interview where participants verbalised and developed their reflections in conversation. Our workshop did not require this discussion stage, but participants identified the value of articulating reflections in a supportive discussion, although the importance of participants choosing whether and what to share was highlighted.

References

Butler-Kisber, L. & Poldma, T. (2010) 'The power of visual approaches in qualitative inquiry: The use of collage making and concept mapping in qualitative research', *The Journal of Research Practice*, 6(2).

Cengiz, C. (2020) 'The effect of structured journals on reflection levels: With or without question prompts?', *Australian Journal of Teacher Education (Online)*, 45(2), Pp. 23–43.

Cole, A. (2012) *Creativity and early years education*. London: Bloomsbury.

Forde, C. McMahon, M. & Reeves, J. (2008) *Putting together professional portfolios*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Fox, I. (2023) 'Diffraction as a Feminist Research Method' in Webb, S. (ed) *Full Stack Feminism*, July, <https://doi.org/10.21242/6094d7d2.29c6866>.

Jenkins, N., Ritchie, L. & Quinn, S. (2021) 'From reflection to diffraction: exploring the use of vignettes within post-humanist and multi-species research', *Qualitative Research*, 21(6), Pp. 975–989.

Koelsch, L. E. (2015) 'I poems: Evoking self', *Qualitative Psychology*, 2(1), 96–107.

Koelsch, L. (2016) 'The use of I poems to better understand complex subjectivities' in K. Galvin & M. Prendergast (eds) *Poetic Inquiry II – Seeing, Caring, Understanding*, Pp.169-179.

Sakr, M., Trivedy, B., Hall, N., O'Brien, L. & Federici, R. (2018) *Creativity and making in early childhood: Challenging practitioner perspectives*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic.

Trodd L & Dickerson, C. (2019) 'I enjoy learning': developing early years practitioners' identities as professionals and as professional learners', *Professional Development in Education*, 45(3), Pp.356-371.

White, A. & Sands, L. (2022) 'Learning stories used with adults in and outside of classroom settings', *Cultures of play: Actors, affordances and arenas*, 30th European Early Childhood Educational Research Association Conference, Glasgow.

Wingrave, M. & McMahon, M. (2016) 'Professionalisation through accreditation: valuing and developing the early years sector in Scotland', *Professional Development in Education*, 42(5), Pp. 710-731.

Introduction

While the need to support non-traditional students entering the University has long been recognised, we also identify a gap at the point of graduation, particularly where study has been part of an existing career development pathway.

Individual writing was a good start. The freemix tool might have caused me tension if I had to present to others, but since this was just for me and it was quick to learn, I relaxed into the experience and the reflection tool worked well! The final reflection and way forward has given me clarity on the next steps in my professional development. – TP1

I found the collaging very good... I like to use a lot of pictures, because I think a picture can sum up a lot of things, and it means maybe something different to each individual... reflecting that whole journey, you know, it has been a journey, and from collage it was clear to see the progression that I've made, you know, and the the learning that's improved, and I just feel with more knowledgeable. - Tricia

It was wonderful. – TP3

I think I'd already reflected quite a lot about the process myself, and with other people that had been through the process, too... It moved me personally on but it also moved my career on quite a bit too. - May

Students on professional learning programmes particularly stand to benefit from context-specific forward planning to support lifelong learning and contribute to sustainable ECE systems.

Next steps:

- Publish open-source toolkit to share with a wider audience
- Build toolkit into Childhood Practice programmes and alumni support
- Trial across professional practice disciplines and with international ECE partners

I - poems are a powerful way to display interview data as they offer a unique and personal way to represent participant's voices and experiences (Koelsch, 2015; 2016). They show personalisation, have an emphasis on agency and can highlight emotional undertones which may be lost in traditional data presentation, capturing the nuances of participants emotions.

I am an early years practitioner - that's currently what I am
I think I felt initially imposter syndrome
I was like, 'I'm not in a leadership role here'
I want to improve my skills. I want to move to management... but how do I do it?
I think I've really grew as a professional
I feel like I'm qualified. I feel like I'm more confident
I've studied hard. I've earned where I should be
I feel now that imposter syndrome is gone
I know my stuff now... I did before but it's proven... because I've got through my course
I'm the most qualified person in my establishment.
I am a capable individual to be able to continuously learn and I enjoy learning.

Using a professional standards framework (e.g. Standard for Childhood Practice, SSSC, 2016) and updating a professional autobiography (Forde et al, 2008) provides another way of tracing patterns and identifying priorities for next steps in learning.

- Significant events - e.g. stages of career development, role changes, specific tasks or experiences (such as leading a meeting or development area), a notable professional learning experience
- Significant people - e.g. inspiring individuals from work or personal life, family members, children or young people (or groups of these), negative role models
- Significant feelings - e.g. confidence, enjoyment, challenge
- Significant wider contexts - e.g. influential policy or theoretical positions, new areas of 'good practice', opportunities to develop new skills or take on responsibilities (based on Forde et al., 2008)

Wingrave and McMahon's professional learning framework identifies four learning spaces for professional practice students. This highlights multiple contexts for learning and sources of knowledge.

marie.mcquade@glasgow.ac.uk Twitter: @mariemcquade2
elizabeth.black.2@glasgow.ac.uk Twitter: @eblack 2

Collaging tool used: <https://www.freemix.com/newdoc> which does not require registration to use.