

Arts-based critical reflection

with early years educators

Research Overview

The work of early years educators is emotional work. Often reflection focusses on an experience (reflective practice) without getting to the 'critical' elements. Group arts-based critical reflection can support educators to reflect on their practice and consider values, assumptions and multiple perspectives that can be difficult to identify when reflecting individually. By engaging both emotional and cognitive ways of knowing, it offers meaningful opportunities to explore professional practice, support wellbeing and sustain the workforce.

Methodology

Qualitative research -arts-based approach

- Three arts-based critical reflection sessions using collage, plasticine and drawing.
- Participants from the UK and Australia, including educator and leadership groups.
- Individual interviews incorporating artmaking and reflective discussion.
- Data generated through journal reflections, session transcripts and individual interviews.
- Visual data used to support participant reflections.
- Thematic analysis of transcript data.

UK findings

The findings are represented through five themes:

- Art at the Heart of critical reflection
- Art Impacts the Self
- Art Influences the Team
- Art Invites the Relational
- Art Inspires Action

Aus findings

Data analysis is in progress - early findings include:

- the art served multiple functions
- a high number of references to stresses and pressures
- challenges discussed are relational
- changes were evident
- sharing with the group and facilitator was valued
- embedding critical reflection requires ongoing commitment and engagement

The art... 'to get to the root and the heart' of reflection (Clara)



Session 1 - collage



Session 2 - plasticine



Session 3 - drawing

Conclusion

Amelia Murphy
La Trobe University



Clara (UK research participant) reflected that artmaking enabled educators to reach "the root and the heart" of their experiences, providing a powerful lens for interpreting the findings. The themes demonstrate how arts-based critical reflection deepens understanding of professional practice. The findings highlight the value of dedicated time and space for reflective artmaking to support educator wellbeing, strengthen relationships, and improve practice through deepened critical reflection.