

Using Reflection to Connect and Inspire Learning

An important goal in early education is to connect and inspire learning in young children. Many early educators are gaining significant results in encouraging learning by embracing the use of reflection. What do we need to think about when considering reflection as a learning tool?

Reflection may be described as, To think quietly and calmly, To express thought and opinion or To form ideas as a result of meditation. A helpful term to consider when thinking about reflection as a learning tool is metacognition, or rather “to think about thinking”. In order to understand reflection as learning tool, we need to explore how we think and reflect.

What strategies do you use for reflection? Write some of your own inspirations here:

Using reflection to connect learning

Reflection helps children seek answers. Reflection strategies can support all types of learning experiences with children and becomes the tool to connect learning. Thinking out loud with children is a good start. Let them hear and see you using reflection, such as “I was thinking I might want to mix the blue and white paints together. I’m wondering what color it will make.” Thinking out loud is said to help in developing skills for self regulation. Children learn to verbalize and organize their thoughts when thinking out loud.

Reflections can also be supported by using photographs of experiences and adding written documentation, such as comments and conversations the children have shared. Display these photos and words on a bulletin board or make a display board. These visual displays are called documentation panels. Documentation panels highlight the reflections and show the learning. Use children’s drawings, paintings, and writings to highlight their reflections, as well.

It is helpful to show children how to use their reflections to connect to other resources such as books, pictures, art materials, and other people. They can use other resources to find out new information. For example, if a child has drawn a fire truck, you may say, “Let’s find our toy fire truck and our book on fire trucks and see if they have any of the same parts as the truck you’ve drawn.”

Reflection is a practice that can be adjusted to suit each person and experience. There are no fancy documents or materials needed. Although reflection does require practice and intentional strategies, it is an extremely simple and powerful way to connect learning and inspiration.

Questions and responses that spark reflection

One of the clearest strategies in implementing reflection is to begin thinking about and planning ways to talk to and to respond to children. Children need adults to encourage them to share their ideas, contemplate possibilities, and to help document what is learned. Reflection is somewhat like an investigation; you would not simply ask yes or no questions, but rather ask questions that collect details and ponder the possibilities. When we ask questions that only produce rote answers, such as “What color is the ball?” we don’t really get that much information about what the child knows or is thinking about.

It is helpful to engage children in thoughtful learning experiences by asking open-ended questions that encourage more than one response or idea. Open-ended questions prompt children to think about what information they know, what they may want to know or be wondering about. It’s important to pay attention to how children are responding to you. If they seem interested, continue to explore their ideas, if not, take the time to observe and document your ideas.

Question to Spark Reflection:

What do you know about...?
What do you want to know about ...?
How can we find out more about ...?
What ideas do you want to share with others?
How can we use this?
What other ways we can use this?
How might this work?
What might happen if...?
What do you remember about ...?

Responses to ponder:

Let’s try your idea and see what happens.
I’ve been thinking....
Let’s see if we can
Let’s find out if any of our friends might be able to help.
How interesting; you made ___ by ____.
This didn’t work for me. I’m wondering what else might work.
You look like you are really thinking about...
I’ve never thought about it like that before.
That’s an interesting way.

References:

Harle, Ardith Z, with Karen Trudeau, Using Reflection to Increase Children’s Learning in Kindergarten, Young Children, NAEYC, July, 2006

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