

Fostering quality parent and teacher engagement with children's learning using online portfolios

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With thanks to Sue Cherrington

Victoria University Winter Research Seminar
22nd June 2013

Overview of the Project

- Victoria University Summer Scholar Research Study
- Partnered with Educa Ltd. to develop a research proposal
- Undertaken between December 2012 until March 2013

iPhone

Computers

Smartphone

iPad

Wireless Internet

Laptop

Email

Digital Camera

Facebook

Literature

- **Assessment Practices in New Zealand ECE**
 - Te Whāriki curriculum base, Reggio Emilia and Socio-cultural influence, Learning Stories Framework.
- **Family engagement in children's learning**
 - Including family and community in children's learning, Te Whāriki, challenges engaging parents.
- **Digital technology and young children**
 - Technology higher influence of importance, including technology increased engagement.
- **Online portfolios and E-Learning**
 - Online portfolios in all other areas of education and work, encourage responses and reflection..

Research Question

What constitutes quality
parent/teacher
“engagement” in the context of online
portfolios in early child education?

That is:

- The factors that constitute *quality engagement*
- The critical elements of successful execution of *engagement*

Methodology

- Mixed method research design
- Grounded theory approach

Data Collection

- Online Survey
 - Sent to 1569 teaching staff, management personnel and parents and families from 80 ECE services throughout New Zealand. Questions tailored to each group of respondents.
- Case Study
 - Undertaken in two ECE centres in a major New Zealand city. Researcher spent three consecutive days observing and engaged in centre.

Respondents involvement within ECE Centre

Involvement	Number	%
I am a family member of the child attending the centre/service	470	81.2%
I am a teacher working at the centre/service	68	11.7%
I have a management role within the centre/service	41	7.1%
Total	579	100%

Length of time service, respondents have used Educa

Length of time	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
	ECE Service		Family		Teacher	
More than one year	8	29.6%	66	17.5%	13	25%
Six – twelve months	14	51.9%	183	48.5%	24	46.2%
Less than six months	5	18.5%	128	34.0%	15	28.8%
Total	27	100%	377	100%	52	100%

Extent using programme helped strengthen relationships between centre and parents/family:

	A great deal	Quite a lot	A little	Not at all	Total
Management	14 (53.8%)	9 (34.6%)	3 (11.5%)	0 (0%)	26
Teachers	16 (30.2%)	21 (39.6%)	16 (30.2%)	0 (0%)	53
Parents/family	103 (28.8%)	115 (32.1%)	111 (31.0%)	29 (8.1%)	358

Extent using programme helped strengthen communication between centre and parents/family:

	A great deal	Quite a lot	A little	Not at all	Total
Management	14 (53.8%)	6 (23.1%)	5 (19.2%)	1 (3.9%)	26
Teachers	21 (39.6%)	21 (41.5%)	9 (17.0%)	2 (3.8%)	53
Parents/family	116 (32.6%)	117 (32.9%)	102 (28.7%)	21 (5.9%)	356

I am a full time working mum, and the Educa programme is a great way to communicate with teachers, receive helpful information of activities coming up and keeps me involved with my child's learning.

Communication with the teachers and their relationship with my son definitely shows through the online Educa website, has helped a lot when the teachers introduce themselves and see their relationship grow through their stories they share.

Strengthened relationship with the Centre as I know they care enough to message me and send me relevant stories they know I would like or make me smile.

An understanding of our child's day, a feeling of [assurance] that he is being well looked after and his interests are being extended.

Extent using programme helped parents/family engage with their children's learning

	A great deal	Quite a lot	A little	Not at all	Total
Management	13 (50.0%)	11 (42.3%)	2 (7.7%)	0 (0%)	26
Teachers	22 (41.5%)	27 (50.9%)	3 (5.7%)	1 (1.9%)	53
Parents/family	168 (46.3%)	103 (28.8%)	75 (20.7%)	17 (4.7%)	363

I often review the portfolio at home. I don't always contribute to the 'parent voice' as I use the portfolio to prompt discussion with my son personally. That's what great about this tool, by having remote access to my son's learning, I can be PERSONALLY involved with it at home.

Seeing my daughter's progress at [centre], from being shy and clinging to one teachers, she now plays more with the other children and there are learning stories about her making new friends.

One of the teachers put a learning story about my son and his interest in [activity] at centre, I was able to comment on how he loves the one at home and now when we catch up at centre we are able to quickly identify things that will support his learning in and out of centre time, also improving the communication with the teacher and myself.

Accessible, instantaneous nature of programme is the key:

The centre often posts information on the dashboard about what they have been doing that day. I can look at it when I am at work, then talk to my daughter about it that afternoon after I pick her up. I'm much more engaged with what she has been doing that day, rather than finding out about it days or weeks later.

It's simply so 'immediate'. If my child has done something significant that week I will usually receive a fantastic story about it!

Engagement of wider family members

Extent of Engagement	Parents	Management	Teachers
A great deal	40 (12.7%)	6 (22.2%)	6 (11.8%)
Quite a lot	58 (18.4%)	11 (40.7%)	18 (35.3%)
A little	96 (30.5%)	5 (18.5%)	25 (49.0%)
Not at all	121 (38.4%)	1 (3.7%)	2 (3.9%)
Do not know	0 (0%)	4 (14.8%)	0 (0%)
Total	315 (100.0%)	27 (100.0%)	51 (100.0%)

My whānau don't live in [city] so my Mum uses it to see how her moko is doing. Oh and my sister in Perth checks it out too.

My Mum is enrolled from Timaru and I've sent the link to my family in Christchurch, Rotorua and Brisbane to look at stories.

It gives them the ability to see how their grandchild is progressing and growing up. As they are overseas it helps making them feel a bit more closer and part of their grandchild's life.

Teachers Feedback

Grandparents overseas love to see their grandchildren's photos especially but also enjoy the stories. I like to include some special moments caught on camera between the parents and their children

Allows family members that live in other regions or countries constant access to the child's learning and development. This is especially helpful for parents from other countries

Positive comments that they share enables teachers to learn about the child's extended family

Challenges engaging parents with programme:

Challenges	Number	%	Number	%
	Management		Teachers	
Parents who don't have access to the Internet at home	17	68.0%	38	34.5%
Parents who are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with technology	15	60.0%	39	35.5%
Parents prefer hard-copy portfolios	12	48.0%	17	15.5%
Parents for whom English is a second language	8	32.0%	16	14.5%
Other (please specify)	6	24.0%	10	35.5%

Frequency families read or contribute online compared with hard-copy portfolios

	Frequently		Often		Not Often		Never		Total	
	Educa	Hard Copy	Educa	Hard Copy	Educa	Hard Copy	Educa	Hard Copy	Educa	Hard Copy
How often do you read new stories?	246	52	91	74	29	127	4	61	370	314
How often do you contribute parent voices or new stories?	54	10	76	28	135	106	97	161	365	305

Extent of support for teachers using online programme

Support	A great deal	Quite a lot	A little	Not at all	Total
Gather information that supports planning	10 (19.2%)	18 (34.6%)	22 (42.3%)	2 (3.8%)	52
Achieve better educational outcomes for children	10 (18.9%)	24 (45.3%)	16 (30.2%)	3 (5.7%)	53
Reflect on their own practices	11 (20.8%)	21 (39.6%)	19 (35.8%)	2 (3.8%)	53
Identify children's learning	11 (20.8%)	19 (35.8%)	20 (37.7%)	3 (5.7%)	53
Engage in reflective discussion with colleagues	12 (22.6%)	15 (28.3%)	22 (41.5%)	4 (7.5%)	53

Changes in teacher interactions with parents

Extent of change	Management		Teachers	
	Number	%	Number	%
A great deal	9	33.3%	8	15.7%
Quite a lot	10	37.0%	20	39.2%
A little	6	22.2%	21	41.2%
Not at all	2	7.4%	2	3.9%
Total	27	100.0%	51	100.0%

It has given me the confidence to speak with parents more on an educational basis about what their child has been up to and it has provided a door for parents to speak openly about what is happening at home. We are gaining more and more of an insight into these child's lives outside the centre environment.

Online dialogues mean that multiple whānau and staff members are able to contribute to discussions about a child's learning over a long period of time. However, we have always engaged in in-person discussions with whānau about their child's learning, so it is another way to communicate, rather than opening new channels entirely.

Gives the teacher and the parents a common ground to talk about and established links between the teachers and the child's day.

Case Studies

- Teachers more confident, assured and involved in learning of children
- More equipped to speak with parents about learning
- Another tool to empower parents
- Enjoyment in using the programme
- Observed closer relationships with parents/families
- Increased conversations, improved relationships and better learning outcomes.

In groups of 4-6,

discuss:

Thinking about your own centre/service, what possibilities do you see for using an online portfolio for strengthening or enhancing:

- Communication with parents?
- How parents engage with their children's learning?

What challenges might you face in using an online portfolio in your centre/service?

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