

Reflection Essay

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Abstract

As I complete my degree at Old Dominion University, I find myself reflecting on my academic journey and how it has equipped me with the skills necessary for my future career. Throughout this process, I have utilized my top three skills: creativity, organization and time management, and communication, to create an e-portfolio. An e-portfolio is typically viewed as a collection of materials organized in a meaningful way to showcase a learner's educational experiences (Forde, 2009). To illustrate these skills, I have selected three artifacts from my academic, personal, and professional experiences that highlight the connection between my coursework and the development of the skills that have prepared me to be an elementary teacher.

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Introduction

As I approach the completion of my final two courses at Old Dominion University, I find myself reflecting on the learning journey I experienced throughout my degree program. My experiences have driven me to manage multiple roles while remaining focused on my long-term goals. The purpose of this reflection essay is to connect my coursework completed through my degree program to the skills I have gained through education, profession, and personal experiences. These experiences have shaped my academic identity and prepared me for my future career as a leader of elementary-aged students. Within this essay, I will examine three of my strongest skill sets: creativity, organization and time management, and communication, and support each with three artifacts. I included an artifact called the Reflected Best Self assignment that I completed in CPD410, which illustrates the skills my peers and family believe I possess. As Nguyen states from our course reading, ePortfolios act as “living portals” which allow students to build a narrative for their identity by blending what they learned in learning, artifacts, and growth through a story of development (Nguyen, 2013). By connecting my course assignments, readings, and personal and professional applications, I aim to show my interdisciplinary learning has provided me with a strong foundation to succeed within and beyond the classroom as an educator.

Creativity

A skill that I have been able to strengthen through my academic journey is creativity, which is a necessary skill to have as an elementary school educator. Learning to create with intention and structure has transformed my academic journey. The transition from casual creativity to purposeful creation enhanced my understanding of how my creativity can address

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challenges and support learning objectives. Whether my creativity is required to create classroom tools, create digital projects, or map flowcharts for interdisciplinary theory, I have learned to adapt to various requirements and audiences. One example of this is my first artifact, a design project I completed in the Digital Writing course, where I explored color theory and multimodal compositions, which taught me how certain colors evoke specific emotions. This color theory can relate to creating a classroom space, where the decoration of a classroom can evoke a certain emotion in students. In my second artifact, IDS300 Interdisciplinary Theory class, I created a visual to explain the interdisciplinary research process abstractly. In my third artifact, I created voice level lights to aid in classroom management by creating a visual that helps students regulate their volume and stay engaged with classroom instruction. Even though there were some challenges and learning curves at first using the tools to build my visual aids, I learned to trust the process and my creative instincts, allowing room for trial and error. This ability to adapt creatively aligns with my future career as an elementary school teacher, as it shows I am prepared to blend imagination into my lesson planning, allowing for maximum student engagement. Research shows that being a creative teacher isn't necessarily about being artistic; it increases learning by nurturing innovation in educational settings (Susilo, 2021). The ability to think creatively under pressure has taught me that innovation and flexibility are interconnected. Applying this creativity I have strengthened has shown me that innovation is more than a teaching strategy, it's a mindset that is essential in inspiring the growth of young minds.

Organization and Time Management

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Adding to my creativity skill is my skill in organization and time management, which I have sharpened throughout my academic journey as well. While attending Old Dominion University, I needed to manage my time effectively and stay organized with all my tasks, including balancing coursework, parenting, homemaking, and substitute teaching. My first artifact, the Leadership Autobiography in CPD400 Foundations of Leadership, was an assignment that helped me better understand my leadership strengths. This assignment required me to take the DISC personality assessment, which helped me identify as an INTJ-T personality type. This personality type thrives in detail-oriented environments where problem-solving is innovative and creative planning is essential. This confirms my ability to organize and manage time is not just a habit, but a strong skill. My second artifact is a sample schedule, which proves that I can plan an effective morning routine that allows for transitions and present it to students in a creative way, a skill that is essential in managing elementary-age learners. My third artifact, The Paint Club lesson plan, shows how I can organize daily creative projects that follow specific camp learning objectives. This skill involves the expectations of an elementary school teacher, including efficient classroom management, planning, and instructional agility. Course readings like *Becoming a Reflective Learner* helped me self-reflect and self-monitor my growth and allowed me to make changes to manage my time better. There is research that shows that a teacher who can effectively manage their time has a higher impact on performance and better classroom outcomes (Khan, 2016). My time management and organizational skills enable me to prioritize tasks, structure lessons, and keep a class focused. These abilities will be essential as I transition into becoming a classroom teacher, where I will

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need to balance a daily schedule, meet student needs, and achieve instructional objectives seamlessly.

Communication

Both organization and time management are essential skills that contribute to a safe and successful learning environment. However, the growth I've achieved in communication skills has been equally important, as it allows the ability to build meaningful relationships. Through my academic assignments, I have learned the importance of clear and intentional communication, specifically in a classroom setting. My first artifact is from my Digital Leadership course, where I was assigned to take a course that ends with the Digital Leadership Communication certificate. This certificate shows that I have learned to expand my influence by being an active listener, authentically engaging, and expressing ideas with clarity. This transfers directly to being an educator, as at the heart of teaching is communication, offering feedback, and leading students. My second artifact, the Public Relations Mistakes to Avoid Public Relations Certificate, taught me how to build trust through transparency and how to respond professionally when mistakes occur, which are both important in maintaining strong relationships with students, their parents, and my colleagues. In my third artifact, a book review for CPD410 Leadership Ethics, I explored the book titled "Leading and Managing a Differentiated Classroom." I learned that effective communication goes beyond just speaking; it involves creating environments, establishing classroom routines, and interactions that foster community and support learning. Even the layout I choose to have for my classroom sends a message. Research supports teachers who foster social and behavioral skills through communication and a supportive environment positively impact academic growth (Jennings, 2010). I found it challenging to balance the

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additional coursework for the certificates with my regular class assignments. Over time, I noticed public speaking, active listening, and giving feedback are as relevant in a classroom as they are in the business sector. Pairing readings like Six Rules for Giving Feedback that I read during my portfolio course, I learned how to give constructive and respectful feedback, which is equally valuable in peer settings or in guiding elementary learners. Communication is a core skill for all educators, my educational journey has prepared me to lead with clarity, compassion, and purpose in a school environment.

Conclusion

Reflecting on my academic journey, I realize that my development in creativity, organization, time management, and communication has not only shaped me into who I am as a student but also shaped my identity as an aspiring educator. The skills I have gained do not just emerge because I completed assignments; they are strengthened through perseverance, reflection, and making connections that apply to real-life challenges and educational growth. Standing out most is not what I learned, but how I learned to reflect, adapt, and apply the lessons I learned in a meaningful way. Having a degree in interdisciplinary studies has allowed me to take courses that teach me how to approach challenges from an interconnected perspective. This means I draw insights from various fields, enabling me to develop a teaching philosophy grounded in structure and empathy. As I move forward on a new journey in my career as an educator, I bring not only a degree but also the mindset of an interdisciplinary thinker. This perspective will be useful as I step into a classroom filled with young learners, where every routine, lesson, connection, and conversation provide an opportunity to lead with compassion, purpose, and creativity.

References

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