



CHILD PORTFOLIOS

What are they?

Jodie Clarke
The Empowered Educator

Hi Empowered Ed!

I truly hope you find this resource helpful.



A little about me...

Hi, I'm Jodie! I am a Mum in Australia to 3 girls - twins Ruby & Tara and my adult daughter Ashleigh. And I love the possibilities of early learning!

I'm passionate about helping educators **simplify** their documentation and planning and also enjoy more time engaging with the children in their care through **simple** play based activities & environments.

I enjoy creating blog posts, free tools and easy to use resources and training for educators, leaders and coordinators by drawing upon my 30 years experience in this profession.

I know what support educators really need because I have walked in your shoes. This profession is challenging enough so I aim to simplify not overcomplicate! My resources walk through the basics so you can take action.

The Facts.....

- I hold an Associate Diploma in Education (Child care)
- I hold an Advanced Certificate in Child Care
- I hold a Bachelor of Human Services Degree
- I have worked as an Assistant, Room Leader, Director, FDC Coordinator, IHC Coordinator, OSHC Coordinator, Occasional Care Coordinator, Project Manager, Service Manager, Family Day Care Educator, Presenter and Speaker in the Early Childhood and Community and Family Services fields.
- I have been writing and editing my blog now for over 6 years.
- I am the author of many E- Book resources for educators, A Postnatal Depression Workbook (& DVD) and a picture book for children.
- I have developed and presented webinars and online courses to support early childhood educators in their role.

Thanks for placing your trust in me....

Jodie Clarke

Child Portfolios in Early Years Education

One of the questions I am most often asked by other educators working in the early childhood profession with the EYLF learning outcomes is “Do you do child portfolios?” The short answer is NO. But then I find I need to explain that answer in more detail because I suddenly have people looking at me like am a nutter or at the very least a little unstable with no clue about documenting children’s learning.

I am constantly told...”But the EYLF outcomes (Early Years Learning Framework for Australia) say we have to!”. ***Do they really?*** Have you ever questioned that or just taken others interpretations as gospel without thinking outside the box?

When I decided to re enter the early childhood profession as a Family Day Care Educator I began to question my decision the more I read and heard about the new EYLF document and the extra time and workload it was apparently causing educators. Perhaps everything had changed too much in the years I had crossed over to the community services sector. Perhaps it was all too different to what I had previously studied all those years ago, perhaps I wouldn’t be able to do it as well as I used to. Perhaps it was now all about the paperwork and not the children as I was reading and hearing. I got scared. And then I realised it was up to me to research, read and understand the process for myself. So I did...and I still am.

I read the EYLF document front to back a few times and stepped through the flowery wording to underline the essential themes and expectations. I put sentences into my own words and drew on previous experience to apply outcomes to activities and experiences I used to plan.

And you know what I realised? The principles and heart of the EYLF and NQS weren’t that different to what I first studied and practiced over 25 years ago. I began to feel a little enthusiasm and excitement returning... I could do this! The key for me was interpreting what was required and what was suggested.

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Through my [Facebook page](#) and reading many educator forums I noticed a lot of people seemed to be struggling with the 'extra paperwork' now required which had me a little confused as I couldn't see anything additional to what I used to do many years ago, just in different formats with different names and less structured.

I began to get a little worried again (I'm good at that apparently) and did more reading...had I interpreted things wrong? Did I really need to do portfolios as well as learning journals as well as learning stories as well as observations as well as a mind map, floor book and weekly program? And link every activity to an EYLF outcome or theorist? Oh my goodness when was I going to be with the children? And what the heck was a floor book?

And then I came across [this document](#) outlining the planning cycle and I began to draw breath again. This is what I needed to see because it confirmed I could still use my own system of planning as long as I was following the principles of the EYLF and good early childhood practice. I could use what I was comfortable with, what helped me to manage my time most effectively and what I could see as worthwhile and useful.

And *for me* that means no portfolios to mess around with, no long winded learning stories and no confusing symbols, codes and colours on programs (those things do my head in just quietly).

Child Portfolios in Early Years Education

It also meant providing the parents using my service with lots of information that was easily understood, highly visual and that would encourage them to spend a little time with their child at the end of each day looking at photos, artwork and involving their child in a little chat about what they had been doing. The photos, meaningful text and art/craft all taken home on the day provided prompts for sharing and communication ...in the moment. Not 6 weeks down the track or even the end of the year. *The child's voice would be heard while they remembered their story and to me that is important, that is meaningful, that is meeting requirements.*

Another trick I have is to make sure my documentation can cover a few different planning cycle requirements from just the one piece of work.

For example, my "Our Day" daily reflection form includes photos of the children engaged in activities, a brief list of some of the most enjoyed activities from the day as well as why we did those and what learning those activities encouraged. I also include the children's own voice where I can if it is relevant e.g " Sam said chicken for the first time today when we went to feed them the morning tea scraps".

There is also a space for a picture of each child's favourite activity from the day. At the bottom I have a section that allows me to add a few ideas for further extensions based on the play and learning I observed that day. Simple ideas not needing a lot of explanation but enough for me to refer back to when planning.

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So how does putting all this onto what is basically my parent communication form cover more than just parent interaction? Let's break it down...

- Parent communication
- Child's voice/brief observations of importance
- Daily reflection of planned and spontaneous activities
- Ideas for forward planning
- Photographic evidence of activities and interactions
- Fostering a sense of belonging
- Sustainability as I email these to parents rather than print. I print one each day for my record folder for easy reference when planning.
- Dated so I am able to link to this document easily in my fortnightly program
- Even if I don't do any formal observations in the planning fortnight i still have these documents to refer to and plan individual focus activities from.
- There is no specific link to outcomes because I believe this should always be evident to anyone reading or viewing the pictures. Parents aren't concerned with what outcome that activity linked to so I provide the information they want to know. My coordinator or an assessor should know the EYLF and NQS well enough to be able to see how I am meeting all areas through reading my documentation. I don't have time to spell it out for everyone.
- Saved in each child's computer folder as a record of their year at Jode's.

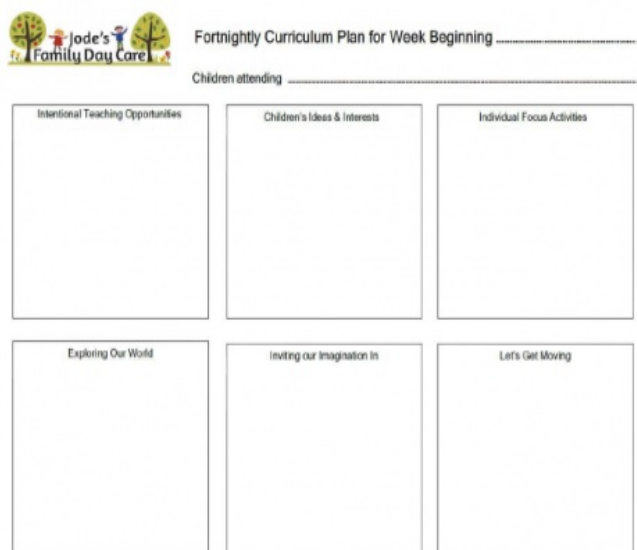
So can you see that just because you have to meet lots of documenting requirements it doesn't mean you can't be smart about **how you choose to do it and how much time you spend on different areas**. This is just one example and obviously I do family day care so there are less children to fit into this particular form but I used to do something very similar when I worked in centres too. It's just a matter of playing around a little until you find what suits you.

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Portfolios and learning stories do not suit my programming style or the amount of time I have to spend on out of care hours work. They aren't necessary so I don't use them. Yes it is as simple as that. What I do do is make sure I am **meeting requirements in other ways** like I have listed above.

This is what I do to meet what I perceive as the programming requirements of the EYLF and NQS.

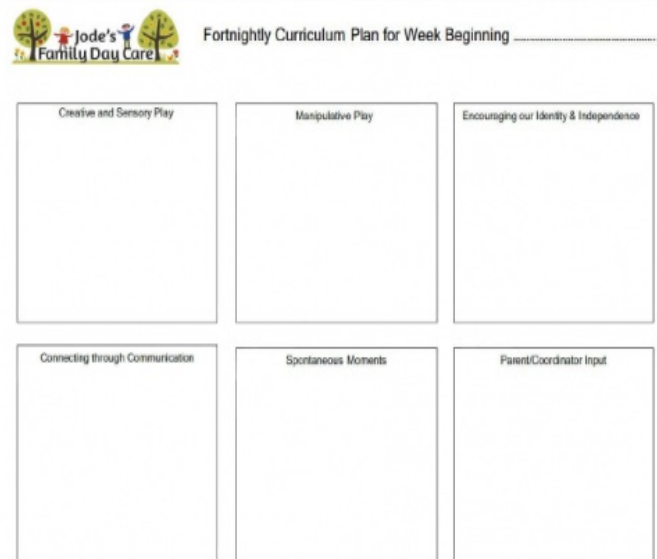
I use a fortnightly program with boxed interest and learning areas that I have developed from my understanding of the EYLF outcomes. They all ***cross over and aren't rigid in their entirety***. I also have spaces for **spontaneous activities** as they occur during the period and **parent/coordinator feedback**. There is a box for **focus children activities** and it is here I link to my observations/interpretations and daily reflections using a date (no dots, no colours, no blooming confusing symbols).



Fortnightly Curriculum Plan for Week Beginning _____

Children attending _____

Intentional Teaching Opportunities	Children's Ideas & Interests	Individual Focus Activities
Exploring Our World	Inviting our Imagination In	Let's Get Moving



Fortnightly Curriculum Plan for Week Beginning _____

Creative and Sensory Play	Manipulative Play	Encouraging our Identity & Independence
Connecting through Communication	Spontaneous Moments	Parent/Coordinator Input

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EYLF Outcomes achieved this planning period :

- L/O 1 – Children have a strong sense of identity
- L/O 2 – Children are connected and contribute to their world
- L/O 3 – Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
- L/O 4 – Children are confident and involved learners
- L/O 5 – Children are effective communicators

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Reflections over the fortnight :

Ideas for next week : *(Extensions of learning from observations, reflections and children's interests)*

A space at the end of my fortnightly program for me to jot down a few points about what worked well, what didn't, what we didn't get done, how some of the spontaneous activities evolved. Underneath that is a section where I can add a few extension ideas for next week's plan or perhaps link a date to an our day form to help with forward planning.



Weekly Curriculum Plan for Week Beginning

Creative and Sensory Play

- ⇒ Triangle twine printing—making shapes and patterns.
- ⇒ Bubble prints—exploring circles and the science of making bubbles
- ⇒ Styrofoam shrinkie magnets
- ⇒ Shape foil art creations
- ⇒ Sandwich bag colour designs
- ⇒ Slime sieving for letters in our name
- ⇒ Frozen cubes fishing

Manipulative Play

- ⇒ Weaving with DIY needles and wool.
- ⇒ Newspaper bead rolling and threading
- ⇒ Newspaper scrunch and paint mural
- ⇒ Number puzzles
- ⇒ Sewing cards
- ⇒ Letter tracing with glue and sand
- ⇒ Wooden bead threading games

Encouraging our Identity & Independence

- ⇒ Making our own fingerprint to use
- ⇒ Exploring emotions with mirrors and songs
- ⇒ Saving electricity game and take home activity card
- ⇒ Feelings fishing game

Connecting through Communication




- ⇒ Experimenting with natural dyes—what can we use, what colour did we make?
- ⇒ Sequencing cards for making compost
- ⇒ Follow Jodie—listening to and following directions hunting game
- ⇒ Musical statues
- ⇒ Big and small, under and over, behind and in front. Position concepts with the teddy bears.

Spontaneous Moments

Parent/Coordinator Input

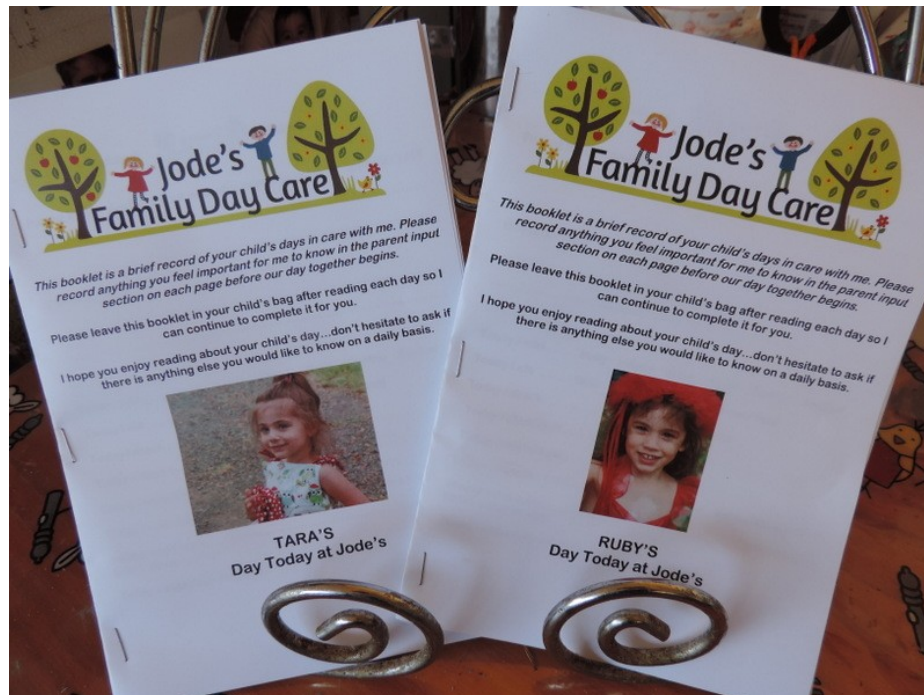
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- My daily reflections/parent communication form titled “Our Day”
- A separate form called “My Day” that is specific to each child and includes information about their day, highlights, any difficulties, photos and general wellbeing information such as sleep, bottle etc. This is emailed to parents or put into a dropbox folder at the end of each day along with the “Our Day” group form. Parents wishing to receive the group form sign to say they give permission for their child’s photo to appear.

My Day Today _____ Date _____		
My Day in photos	How was my day today?	Educator Notes
	Today I was.... Happy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Busy <input type="checkbox"/> Tired <input type="checkbox"/> A little sad	Next time I come to play please send more....
	Today I ate.... Well <input type="checkbox"/> Just picked <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Loved eating _____	My favourite activity today was....
	Today I drank _____ bottles. Today I slept from _____ to _____ Today I rested from _____ to _____ Today I used the toilet By myself <input type="checkbox"/> With help <input type="checkbox"/> With a few accidents <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	




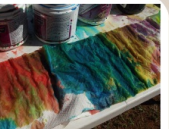




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I mainly use **photo observations** with succinct text to tell a story briefly. I also have developed a formal observation form for more detailed records but to be honest I prefer to use photos and not get caught up writing about every single detail. I let the **pictures tell the story** and then **highlight just the important facts with text**.

Child Name: _____ Observation Date: _____ Educator: _____

What story do the photos tell us?

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My final bit of paperwork is my '**forward planning form**' that basically just ties everything together so I can see it in the one place at a glance. It has the observation date, a brief interpretation of the learning occurring and suggestions/ideas for extending on this learning focus. After entering one of those activity ideas into the "focus children" box on my program and completing the activity with the child I come back to the forward planning form and write the date of the activity and a few sentences about how it worked and what happened. And that is linking done. I do something similar if it is a group focus activity.



INDIVIDUAL LEARNING – ANALYSIS AND FORWARD PLANNING RECORD



Date : 20/10/14

Child's Name : Tara

Format & Date	Analysis of Learning	Future Planning	Program/Plan Date	Planned Activity Evaluation
Daily Reflection "Our Day"	<p><i>From this observation I note the following:</i></p> <p>Tara is showing a real interest in problem solving and wanting to find out how things work for <u>herself</u>.</p> <p>She showed a willingness and concentration to stick with a task until completion</p>	<p>Possible Extension Activities:</p> <p>Tray of magnetic and non magnetic items – investigate & discuss</p> <p>Use internet videos to explore use of magnets and magnetic fields</p>	<p>24.9.14</p> <p>2. 10.14</p>	<p>11.10.14</p> <p>Tara spent quite a lot of time working out which objects on the tray were able to be picked up by the magnet and asked many questions about why some objects didn't 'stick' to the magnet.</p>
Formal Obs Or Learning Story	<p>She was able to use descriptive language To convey her thoughts</p> <p>She used reflective thinking to consider why things might happen a number of times</p>	<p>Intentional Teaching – using Scales and teddy bear counters to explore balance and weight- problem solving skills</p>		<p>She didn't show a great deal of interest in the <u>internet</u> videos. Need to <u>find</u> simpler videos relevant her age.</p>
Photo Collage Obs 18/9/14	<p>She was able to coordinate both hands to <u>Problem solve</u>, sort and sequence.</p> <p>She thought about a way to extend the <u>activity</u> and challenge her thinking.</p>			<p>She absolutely loved the scale activity and spent time looking for other objects around the house to use in the scales. Used <u>language</u> to express her thoughts and work through problem solving processes.</p>

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All forms are kept in a child's folder on my computer. I have separate folders that I save their photo collage observations, my day and our day forms, photos of their artwork (and a few lines if it needs explanation), and lots and lots of photos of their learning journey with me. At the end of the year I place this folder onto a USB stick for the parents to take home and flick through at their leisure. Some choose to print things out to make a little book, some burn to disk and send to relatives and some just look at it on the computer with their children. Their progress over the year is easily seen without a whole lot of useless information that is important to us as educators but not so important to a parent. I know, I am one of those too.



So no, I don't use portfolios but yes I think I am covering what I need to without giving myself a stress attack and being able to fully engage with the children which to me is more important than any pretty scrapbook or learning journal.

Child Portfolios in Early Years Education

Please don't get me wrong, *if using a learning journal or portfolio is working for you than stick with it*. If keeping portfolios however is eating into your down time then I would say put them down and back away. You don't need to do them, they are just one way of documenting a child's learning journey with you as either a home based or centre based educator.

If you are trying to work out whether to use them or if you really need to then perhaps ask yourself some of the following questions to ensure you are making an informed choice. Obviously if your scheme or centre director is telling you you have to do portfolios then I guess there is not much you can do but you can ask them why and if they would consider another option or two...especially if it is really stressing you out!

1. What do you consider a child portfolio?

Is it an art scrapbook, does it show clear evidence of a learning journey or is it just a collection of 'time at the centre' photos and text snippets, a glorified memory book? Is there documentation that might not make sense to parents or that would be better kept in a child's record file?

You need to work out the answers to these questions before you begin to use a portfolio as your preferred system. Be very clear about what it is you are spending your precious time on!

2. Do you know why you do portfolios?

Did someone just tell you too or do you think it is a regulation or expected practice? Ask yourself if you really need to? Does the EYLF and NQS really state you have to to meet your obligations (I'll help...the answer is no, you can choose to document in any way you want to as long as you are meeting the requirements of the basic planning cycle!)

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3. Are your methods of keeping portfolios sustainable in terms of time management and skill?

Parents might love them the first time you present them but it will set up an expectation, be realistic and decide whether they are something you can confidently continue doing in the time you have available.

4. Are they really just a pretty form of parent communication in summary form?

Does it demonstrate the parent and child's 'voices' as part of that child's learning? Is there more to the contents than just memories, pretty pictures and artwork? Do you inform parents of the portfolio purpose and how they are used?

5. Does your portfolio document and identify learning throughout ..."a child's progress or distance travelled?" If not then you are going to have to double up and keep those records elsewhere using a different format.

6. What does the information in the portfolio tell you, tell the parents?

Will what you put in there today be useful to you tomorrow or next month for your planning? Overall is it a meaningful tool that supports individual and also group learning especially for the time you are putting into it? What does it actually tell you about the child?

7. Do you think in terms of quality over quantity?

Do you get overwhelmed with the quantity of documentation you feel you must do? Do you feel you need to make portfolios bigger and better to meet requirements and satisfy parents and management? Could you manage the same quality with less work?

Child Portfolios in Early Years Education

8. Do you show that not only have you understood and documented the child's learning but also extended it?

How do you show that?

A portfolio is just a simple communication tool if you are only showing what the child/service/centre has been doing over time, it is a *useful tool* when it also shows extensions to a child or group's learning and links to your programming in some way. Have you considered how you actually use the portfolios to make links within your program or is this not a consideration?

9. How does the portfolio help support you to plan for further learning?

If you aren't using the content but spending an awful lot of time working on them then why do it? Why not direct your energy into what you need to do, find another way that perhaps suits you better and covers the areas you need to rather than just being an extra "thing to do". Do you regularly check to see the connections between the child's interest/s and their progress as learners is evident within your portfolio document?

If it is just a parent communication tool for the end of the week/month/year then there are many ways to achieve this without the time involved in keeping pretty portfolios.

10. Do you find you are holding onto children's artworks or other special moments because you *need* them for the portfolio?

Do you consider the child's 'voice' in this action? Are you supporting them to share their day with their parents and fully participate in the moment rather than filing it away in the scrapbook/folder/portfolio? This is one thing that really bothers me about portfolios and the way they are often used. I have seen many a child get upset because they are not allowed to take their precious artwork home because it needs to go into the book!

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11. Do you think there are other more meaningful ways you could share the term or year of a child's care with the parents rather than giving them a book/folder at the end of the year?

Is the whole folio relevant and of interest to the parent or is it more aimed at making the service or educator feel good? As a parent would you really want to read lots of text and learning stories, reflections and observations or see visual and tangible evidence of a child's learning and progression in 'real time' as it occurs?

12. What other ways are there to document learning and share with parents if I don't use a portfolio?

Perhaps you could consider some of the following ideas...

- Digital portfolios put on a USB at the end of the year
- Powerpoint slides emailed to parents
- Communication books sent home each day
- Photo observation collages displayed around the environment or emailed to parents to share
- Wall displays of photos, special moments and activities that a parent can share with the child at drop off and pick up time.
- Photobooks and photo collections (including pics of artwork on disc)
- Computer and phone based apps and programs for sharing information (although personally I think you could save your money and just do your own system)
- Digital photo frames at sign in area
- Powerpoint slides live on the computer for parents to view
- Video or audio clips shared with parents

13. Are there other recording/documenting methods and techniques besides portfolios that would work better for you as an educator?

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Some of these might include a combination of a few of the following ideas....

- Observations—recorded through video, annotated photographs or audio clip
- Observations—formal, written, learning stories
- Basic Checklists
- Discussions with families, documented in children's files
- Discussions with colleagues and then documenting for professional use only
- Conversations with children documented regularly in communication sheets or forms to keep in the digital folders
- Specific testing (where issues of concern are raised, sometimes undertaken by a specialist.)
- Reflection book , diary or space on the program
- Photos of work samples



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Don't try and do all of these all of the time...there is absolutely no need, use your time more effectively and really think about how you can record learning within the planning cycle without having to repeat yourself. Your time is precious so use it wisely. I know some of you will say "Yes I do all the above but that's what I put in a folio...that's great but again....**reflect upon whether the information added to your portfolios is also being used to inform and link directly to your program and individual focus activities. How are you incorporating information from the portfolios? Is there a clear review loop?**". If not then you need to be doing that somewhere else....and that is more work and time out of hours for you.

14. Could you keep digital portfolios instead?

I do a version of this but just call them my children's 'All About Me' folders and find them so easy to maintain and add to daily without the need to fill pages or scrapbook!

In my digital folders I include photo observation collages, group and individual daily communication forms, group event collages, recorded children's conversations, photos of artwork with accompanying learning and other photos with annotations of the learning occurring or outcome being demonstrated or working towards. Because I'm doing it digitally I am also able to add video and audio clips if I want and as I provide a copy of each folder to the parents at the end of the year I think it provides a great keepsake.

I am loving this digital method as it allows me to share with parents and children each day and yet it is also building a valuable record of learning and progression. I can easily look at the folders to help inform my program, notice new skills and support analysis and review.

Child Portfolios in Early Years Education

15. Finally, ask yourself if compiling and adding to portfolios is taking away from your love of working with children.

If the answer is yes then you **need to find another system**. I am hearing too many stories of people giving up on a profession they love because of myths and perceived 'regulations and requirements'. Ask for support from your leaders in exploring other methods or at the very least make sure you are well informed and know why you are doing portfolios and ensure that they are meeting a number of documenting expectations rather than being a lot of work but in reality not very effective.



This simple series guide may or may not prove helpful to you but at the very minimum I hope it makes you at least reflect on your current practice whether you are considering using portfolios or already using them.

Child Portfolios in Early Years Education

I don't have anything against keeping portfolios, if it works well for you and doesn't cause you to spend a lot of time out of hours doing work on them then I say well done and keep up the great work....but please make sure they are effective and helping you to enhance all areas of your programming and documentation.

If there is one thing you take away from this guide let it be this....*all you have to do is document children's learning in the best way that you can and demonstrate that children are learning and are on a continuum of learning "the distance travelled"*.

As always keep in mind that I express *my opinions and offer what has worked for me over my years in the early childhood profession*. They might not work for you and you also need to consider your own scheme guidelines and management decisions. What I hope to do is help you to feel empowered and informed because we all deserve that!



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