Pedagogical Documentation: the what, why and how

Module 7
Susan Stacey 2020
Intentions for today:

– To create a shared vocabulary for aspects of pedagogical documentation
– To find our places on the journey of documentation and consider next steps
– To recognize the important role of documentation in reflection, decision-making, research, and communication
What are your experiences?

What is the difference between display and documentation?

What is pedagogical documentation?
Documentation

The beginning... mixing results and photos
The project activity concludes with observations. The children next engage in a sensory activity where they mix several solids (e.g., flour, sugar, salt) and observe the changes.

The children and teachers later reviewed what had happened, using photographs.

Teacher: What did you notice today? What happened after the green dye?
Child: The kids colored, the bottom became just.
Teacher: What did we make?
Child: Chocolate fudge!

Over the next week, the children were encouraged to work together and try different ingredients, including spices, plant-based chocolate, and even candy. Our students were very excited to experiment and create their own unique chocolate bars.

A meeting on the last day, the children were asked: “Where does chocolate come from?” Some of our children had a few ideas:
- A tree in a tree!
- A tree in the ground!
- From a core
- And so we asked where we could find out more...

We could ask Mr. Garcia! The tree is called cocoa!
Getting to chocolate is a process...
- From a tree and its juice
- It changes on the farm
- It changes several times
- It becomes chocolate!
Pedagogical Documentation
Making children’s thinking, ideas, and learning visible: a form of ‘listening’ (Rinaldi)
What kinds of things might you document? Children’s...

- Understandings and misunderstandings
- Prior Knowledge
- Children’s theories about the world – how do things work?
- Connections and strategies
What does the Framework say? (p62 Educator’s Guide)

– ....putting into words, pictures, videos, sketches and artifacts the story of the child’s learning process – in collaboration with the children themselves. This deepens and transforms the learning itself, adding another layer of complexity to the work of children.

– It also serves to communicate with all who participate in the education process what is happening, what children are expressing, what is being experienced in the school.

– It serves as a way to learn more deeply and to reflect more complexly on what we do with children

– Teachers are communicating value to children, as well as to any audience of the documentation, showing that what children do is important and worthy of recording.
Documentation of Infants

- All the same facets of documentation apply...what was happening? What is this exploration about? What does the educator think about this?
– Exploration of interesting materials, and an interpretation of how the infants are exploring self-awareness.

– Connects nicely to the Framework, such as aspects of Discovery and Invention.
The importance of documentation for families

- Families are likely to better understand ‘how the program works’ when they read documentation
- It provides an avenue for families to collaborate with educators; they are invited into the process thinking about and understanding their child’s learning, ideas, and strategies.
- The uniqueness of each child’s thinking is represented through documentation
- Documentation is a useful tool in meetings – what has been going on? How are children engaging with materials and the community? How can families contribute? What are their opinions?
How to Begin?
With questions....

– Who is the documentation for?
  (Our audience dictates the content and the vocabulary)
  ✓ Ourselves as teachers?
  ✓ Children?
  ✓ Parents?
  ✓ Other professionals?
Keeping track of our thoughts (both children’s and adults’)…this is the data for documentation!
Nov 6  (Photos, artifacts)
"We were making chocolate"
"We were making powder"
(show crushed nibs)
"Is it powder yet?"  (No)
"They worked hard, what do we have to do? It’s still not a powder"
(Show cocoa pdr plus nibs to see difference)
-serial process (with some scaffolding)
How can we make it powder?
-crunch it with something bigger
-a big stick
-a machine
"they warmed it"
"What did he add, in the movie?"
(unsure)
-offered samples of cocoa pdr and ground nibs
"Don’t like any of them"
"one is yuck"
-what does it taste like?
It takes yucky
What did the boy add?
Raw documentation of children’s and teachers’ thinking and questions.

Child: ‘It doesn’t have bones so it can’t move’ (Adult wonders: What about bones? What do they know about bones?)

‘I saw it at the playground, and he was not alive’

Adult wonders: I wonder why these ‘beings’ come alive at night (ie do their ‘magic’ at night). What is so mysterious about the night?
First steps

- Make the decision about **what** you want to document, and **why**
- **How** will you document? What form is best suited to this focus?
- What about design? Things to consider.....
  - Layout
  - Font
  - Pathway for reader + accessibility
  - Voice of the child
Thinking about design....

- Professionalism over ‘pretty’ !!
- Orientation of print – how will the reader be following?
- White space – do not overcrowd; this makes it harder for the reader to make sense of the information
- Size and style of font – how far away will the reader be standing?
What might pedagogical documentation contain?

– Photographs of the process
– Text, which can include:
  – A description of what happened, including brief transcripts of any important conversation/words from the child (utterances and body language in the case of non-verbal children)
  – **Educator’s thoughts about the meaning behind the child’s actions** (ie Reflection). Why is this event or play important?
  – Questions that arise for you as an educator; this invites others’ perspectives – especially families’ thoughts.
– Traces of the child’s work, if applicable
Forms of Documentation to explore today:

- Ordinary Moments for quick, one-time events
- Learning Stories
- Panels, for longer term interests, projects, or developmental paths
- Log book, for daily updates
- Digital Documentation
- Immediate documentation for revisiting with children
- Curriculum Paths for Teachers
- Raw Documentation
Examples of documentation from Nova Scotia early learning settings
Ordinary moments...
Earlier in the morning Kyrell had been intrigued with balancing four pumpkins on a shelf. Then, I noticed he had moved them to a corner and was concentrating hard on the same problem. It was not working – his theory of why this wasn’t working was that they were ‘slippery’ and ‘bumpy’.

After some time he tried balancing them against the side of the shelving unit. Still no success… however… there is a mirror on this side of the shelves … and his focus changed....
He had lined them up and was counting them carefully – ‘one, two, three, four.’ Then I heard him counting to eight! Eight? How did he get to eight? As you can see he is counting the pumpkins in the mirror. He counted the pumpkins over four times – checking each time and smiling.

I asked him ‘How did the pumpkins get into the mirror?’
Kyrell had a theory – he backed up into mirror and then slipped around behind the side of the shelving unit!

‘Like that.’

An interesting theory!
Later, Kyrell was explaining to two other children how he could count eight pumpkins. They were having a very difficult time believing him and kept insisting there were only four! His perseverance shows how certain he is in his information, and how he got there. A sign of a deeply thinking human!
Levi invents a computer game

‘After playing for several days with a non-working computer, pretending to type, L spontaneously created his own ‘game’ to play. He drew the graphic, placed it on the screen, and explained to others how to play his game. Several other children picked up on this idea, and for days created their own games’

What question(s) could we formulate about this event, to add to this documentation? What do you wonder about this kind of action by children in general? (This becomes a reflection to add to documentation)
Daily Log Books

Monday, March 12, 2007
AM

We are learning about the life cycle of an egg — and chickens!

Linda’s group read The Runaway Bunny

Just brought our snacks today — grapes, muffins, and milk — thank you!

In a few weeks the PALS will come to an end and winter will be here. We decided that our party float could have the theme "WELCOME, WINTER!" Now we will decide what it needs... today we painted ... WHITE!

HAPPY THANKSGIVING TO EVERYONE!

PATTERNS
Peter’s pattern ... blue, orange, red

It works R to L, too — if you start at the bottom R.

Notice: To read Peter’s pattern you have to work top to bottom and left to right (just like reading).
October 1st

When a new globe with 3-D effects was introduced to the children at morning meeting, it was an opportunity for them to think about yesterday's idea that the Earth is "bumpy" rather than smooth. It was hard to actually see the bumps (i.e. mountain ranges) even with a magnifying glass, but a gentle touch with fingers enabled the child to feel the raised areas.
Log books connecting one day to another, and revisiting with children over time
Panels

What do you notice is not here?
The importance of design: clarity, white space, and flow (courtesy of Aya Saito)
• A more informal arrangement, simply placed on the wall at the child’s height.
Immediate Documentation for Reflection with Children
Revisiting
Documentation of long-term play or projects
Adding to documentation day by day....
Learning Stories

Developed by Margaret Carr in New Zealand

Speaks directly to the child

Invites the family to respond
Today, V, we watched as you played your version of a popular game that we play often in our classroom: Hangman.

(In our classroom version, we call it Mystery Message. It’s a very brief message - perhaps 3 words - with letters represented by dashes. Everyone guesses letters that might fill in the dashes, and try to solve the mystery of what the message says)
Look at all the things that you know!

- That print goes from left to right, top to bottom
- That sentences consist of words with spaces in between
- That letters are symbols
- That print sends a message

We loved how you gathered your friends to play this game; it was a tricky message and you realized they needed some clues!! You understood how this game works and what you needed to do as the leader of the game.....
What might be next?

– We wonder if you would like to do mystery messages at home for Mom and Dad? Would it be done in the same way in German?!!
– Could you do a message for us all at morning meeting?

The Family’s Voice...
We were so excited to see this! You know that we worry about V’s development in English. We see that she knows a lot....and she did some mystery messages for us at home, in German! We noticed that she used the same methods in both languages....dashes and spaces and symbols. We’ll send them along to school so you can see!
Reflecting upon this learning story, what educator questions could we generate about V’s actions?

– What kinds of classroom settings encourage this type of engagement with print?
– What do children first notice about print?
– Does printing occur naturally in the ‘right’ kind of environment?
– What other symbols do children use to express themselves? What other ‘languages’ of communication are available to them?

– Educator’s questions are a part of documentation and reflective practice!
Digital documentation; toddlers in action

From Garden Gate Children’s Centre, Martha’s Vineyard, using PhotoShop.

Spinning offers children a sense of sustenance, of freedom. Spinning, getting dizzy, and regaining balance helps children orient themselves in space. The development of muscular system results in balanced and coordinated movement. When the children were first asked about things that spin, their first response was, “I’ll spin.”

As children spent time engaged in these kinds of movement activities, they explored the concept of spinning with their whole bodies. What does everything look like when you are spinning? What do you hear? How does your body feel? These are questions not be exploring in the children’s play.
Documentation of toddlers’ theories

The children have spent a great deal of time investigating how our spinning objects work. Through engaging inquiry in the classroom and in the studio, the children have begun to develop their own ideas and theories about spinning.

“It works. You spin it round.” - Julia

“It’s a truck. I just put a car on it and then it spins.” - Opalina

“Yay! So that Protein Foster.” - Angus

“My hand makes it go and my hand makes it stop.” - Stella

"It's a spinner. It spins. (What makes it spin?) Maybe the stripes? Oh! Maybe this part is a screw?" - Sienna

"I know a little tiny button." - Opalina  "It's a button!" - Silas

The children studied pictures and models and discussed how to represent a horse.

“I’m going to do a tail and a leg and a face and one of these — a saddle.”
“I draw a tail. A big tail!”
“A head is right on the top.”
“Tada! I made a horse!”
The language of documentation

– Must be clearly understood by the intended audience
– Must be grammatically correct
– Brief and to the point, but NOT captions!
– Pull out enough information to make learning and ideas visible.
– Describe why this event or series of events is important. What does it mean? Include your interpretation and your questions!
For instance......for a parent

Today, the children used Magna-tiles for the first time.

These tiles contain small magnets, which means that they can be easily formed into 3D shapes such as pyramids or cubes.

As the building became more complex, the children made connections between their previous knowledge of 2D shapes (e.g. squares) and the base of their 3D shape (e.g. pyramid)

Cognitive development through hands-on exploration of manipulatives

(not appropriate!)
Raw Documentation, for ourselves

From Point Pleasant childcare centre, Halifax
another form of raw documentation, with and for children
16th June - creating fairies and pixies

We saw a bunny near our log circle

Fantastic contribution to the floor book. Jacob and Jordan!
Let’s try the whole process…. 

- Watch this short video clip **while writing little notes or sketches**
  - In groups of 3, reflect upon the video and get everyone’s perspective. Refer to your notes. (10 mins)
  - Together, create a small piece of documentation on your 11 x 14 piece of paper. Write on post-its and/or cards, then paste down. Remember design points!
    - An intro (context)
    - The story of what happened (brief!!)
    - A small sketch in place of a photo
    - Your own thinking about this: why is it important?
    - What questions arise for you about what the children are doing? Include them!
    - ‘mess about’ with where to place pieces before committing
Gallery walk…

– What similarities and differences do you notice?
To summarize and inspire...

‘Pedagogical Documentation invites us to be curious and to wonder with others about the meaning of events to children. We become co-learners together; focusing on children’s expanding understanding of the world as we interpret that understanding with others’

Dr. Carol Anne Wien, 2013
Thoughts and questions?