

# Textual Analysis Speaks: Pedagogical Documentation as Relational Pedagogy

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*Despite growing international interest in pedagogical documentation, there is limited research investigating this professional practice. In strengthening the knowledge base, this paper offers textual analysis of material written about pedagogical documentation to enable greater understanding of its nature and purposes. The authors of this paper analyzed the contents of three publications they also contributed to and edited. International chapter authors and commentators shared their thinking related to definitions of pedagogical documentation, its processes and potentialities, as well as elements enabling or constraining engagement. Offering richly contextualised voices within analytical categories, this paper positions pedagogical documentation as conceived in different ways for various purposes. Analysis indicates a foundation of relational pedagogy throughout the data set, an element rarely apparent in current approaches to planning and assessment. Seeing these texts as a combined data source enables a clearer configuration of this phenomenon, thus foregrounding the potential of pedagogical documentation as an empowering transformative component of early childhood settings.*

*Malgré l'intérêt international croissant pour la documentation pédagogique, il existe peu de recherches sur cette pratique professionnelle. Cet article propose une analyse textuelle de documents écrits sur la documentation pédagogique pour permettre une meilleure compréhension de sa nature et de ses objectifs, renforçant ainsi la base de connaissances. Les auteures de cet article ont analysé le contenu de trois publications auxquelles elles ont également contribué et qu'elles ont éditées. Les auteurs de sections internationales et les commentateurs ont partagé leurs réflexions sur les définitions de la documentation pédagogique, ses processus et ses potentialités, ainsi que les éléments permettant ou limitant l'engagement. Offrant des voix richement contextualisées au sein de catégories analytiques, cet article positionne la documentation pédagogique comme étant conçue de différentes manières et à des fins diverses. L'analyse indique un fondement de pédagogie relationnelle dans l'ensemble des données ; c'est un élément qui est rarement apparent dans les approches actuelles de planification et d'évaluation. Le fait de considérer ces textes comme une source de données combinée permet une configuration plus claire de ce phénomène, mettant ainsi en avant le potentiel de la documentation pédagogique en tant que composante transformatrice et autonomisante des milieux de la petite enfance.*

For many years, the transforming of professional practice has challenged teachers, leaders, and researchers across the educational landscape. Cranton and Roy (2003) acknowledged that “since Mezirow’s ... initial introduction of the concept of transformation into the adult education literature, the theory has grown, been elaborated on, challenged, and in recent years, received

considerable attention in both the academic community and the world of practice” (p. 87). As a contribution to the growing discourse, this paper investigates transformational possibilities within one key aspect of early childhood educational practice. A radical evolution in practice has become apparent internationally with the development and use of pedagogical documentation as a core component of quotidian planning and recording. This particular approach to documenting pedagogically emerged from the work of educators in Reggio Emilia, Italy with the term “pedagogical documentation” coined (in that context) by Gunilla Dahlberg (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p.145). Increasing interest in pedagogical documentation, particularly in prior to school settings, is linked to debates around approaches to assessment and accountability. Demonstrated to facilitate formative assessment (Fleet, 2015), pedagogical documentation is seen as an option for those resisting linear approaches to records of children’s learning trajectories. This paper offers a questioning stance, open to the possibilities offered by pedagogical documentation, but resists a singular definition.

Inherent processes and products are conceptualised in a range of ways, thereby generating the research question for this study: How is pedagogical documentation conceptualised by authors recognised for their contributions to and involvement with this way of working? The following sections highlight key perspectives being brought to this work as enabling illustration rather than narrowing conceptualisation.

Conceptualising pedagogical documentation has been complicated as authors have approached the challenge with varying intentions. For example, Dahlberg et al. (2013) referred to pedagogical documentation as “a process of visualization ... a social construction ... a narrative of self-reflexivity” (pp. 155–56). Expanding on this foundation, Fleet (2017) described how pedagogical documentation “implies philosophical positioning related to the image of the child ..., roles of educators, usage of time and space, the facilitative role of physical and affective environments, and positioning of thinking within the local and larger community” (p. 14). In recognizing that many in the sector are interpreting this “visualization” in terms of products, Merewether (2017) explained that although pedagogical documentation may include “notes made by educators; children’s work samples; video and audio recordings; transcriptions of conversations; photographs” that on their own, “these materials are just a collection of artefacts. It is the process of reflecting on and interpreting documentary material that transforms it into ‘pedagogical’ documentation” (p. 134). A recent Special Edition of the *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* has also added to the available discussion (Fleet & Machado, 2022). These expansions circle the argument back to the point where Dahlberg et al. began.

Over time, however, engagement with the idea of pedagogical documentation has led to misunderstandings (e.g., any record-keeping with a photo and label has been called pedagogical) and to political usage (e.g., claims of excellence in pedagogical documentation have been used for marketing approaches claiming to replicate work in the Italian town). The current study is an attempt to gain a firmer hold on how the construct of pedagogical documentation is conceived and enacted across time and across countries. There is an expectation of complexity, with the compilation of perspectives enabling a rich kaleidoscope of perspectives, underlined by a shared conceptual foundation.

Recognising debts to Italian educators, many authors in this data set referenced their definitions to Rinaldi’s (2001) explanation of “a search for meaning” (p. 79), as “visible listening, as the construction of traces” (p. 83), as a narrative form, but also “a construction of relationships that are born of a reciprocal curiosity between the subject and the object” (p. 85). In considering pedagogical documentation, Rinaldi acknowledged the profound influence of Loris Malaguzzi

“who conceived and constructed the relational pedagogy orienting the Reggio experience” (2006, p. 169). Historically, this pedagogy was a direct response to the devastation of war experienced in the Romagna region in World War Two.

Pedagogical documentation is described in educational circles as a “continuous, rigorous and systematic research process” (Dahlberg, 2016, p. x). Although recognizing the view of pedagogical documentation as research, this paper focuses on research about pedagogical documentation by analysing a data set compiled by the authors over approximately 15 years of involvement with this way of working. From this data set, the paper highlights definitions of pedagogical documentation; how children are positioned in the endeavour; the roles and identities of teachers and/or educators as evidenced in these publications; and exploration of the processes, potentials, and enablers associated with effective pedagogical documentation. New (2006) commented on “the use of documentation as an unflinching process of re-search into the ‘deep politic’ of early childhood education” (p. iii). This study affirms that position.

In the first edition of the *Journal of Transformative Education*, Mayo, building on the work of Freire (1972), argued for retaining “an emancipatory vision of education” (2003, p. 42), including a brief foreshadowing of the importance of relational pedagogy. These arguments have continued to be affirmed, extended, and problematized in relevant literature (e.g., Baily et al., 2014; Yacek et al., 2020). Most aspects of these arguments are outside the scope of this paper, although with our particular focus on pedagogical transformation, it is helpful to note Curry-Stevens’ (2007) reference to “transformative education’s strategic tool kit” (p. 33). We draw attention to the value of pedagogical documentation in that hypothetical tool kit, particularly with “its capacity to pose an alternative to the educational status quo” (Yacek et al., 2020, p. 532).

### **Research Design**

As Freebody stated, “qualitative research works, in large part, through the juxtaposition of comparable but different events” (2004, p. 198). In this case, for “events,” read “representations of pedagogical documentation.” Furthermore, researchers have suggested that previous studies may be useful sources of data for subsequent analysis (Bowen, 2009; Doolan & Froelicher, 2009) when considering opportunities for reconceptualizing current professional practice.

In this study, a qualitative approach based on textual analysis was used to analyze the data. The authors accessed three publications: Fleet et al. (2006b), Fleet et al. (2012a), and Fleet et al. (2017). Each of these was contributed to and edited by the authors with their colleague Janet Robertson. Building on the idea of using existing data sets, the authors analyzed the component 47 book chapters contributed by early childhood educators, teachers, researchers, teacher-educators, and policymakers from various countries, with major contributions from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the UK, as well as chapters from Sweden and the US. This geographical spread is a reflection of visibility rather than any claim of global representation. There were approximately 50 different narratives (including mini-moments and extended investigations) shared in the books. We also analyzed 22 commentaries written in response to clusters of chapters with common interests. Contributions to the selected texts were based on the editors’ knowledge of people through conference participation and shared networks interested in these ways of working in a range of contexts. The ideas may also be explored elsewhere, but the diversity offered here enables an extended conversation about shared and diverse perspectives around this slippery pedagogical tool. Authors and commentators were invited to illustrate their understandings of and work with pedagogical documentation through vignettes, case studies, and shared experience.

Self-reflective positioning in this piece revealed us as both within and outside the frame of reference. Similar to the experience reported by Baily et al. (2014), the editors (and occasional chapter authors) of the focus texts were also the researchers for this piece. Somewhere between privileged informants and participant observers, we have been in a unique position to contribute a study to an area of transformational practice that has not been considered in this way previously.

As a research tool, textual analysis is differentially defined, and ranges from coding small chunks of language to a broader thematic analysis across texts (See for example, Andriessen, 2006; Ifversen, 2003; Park, et al., 2012). Fürsich (2009) noted that

this approach typically results in a strategic selection and presentation of analyzed text as evidence for the overall argument. ... Textual analysis allows the researcher to discern latent meaning, but also implicit patterns, assumptions and omissions of text. Text is understood in its broader, post-structural, sense as any cultural practice or object that can be 'read'...[and] textual analyses come in a multitude of variations. (pp. 240–41)

Gildersleeve and Guyotte (2020) advocated for “pushing against the limits of methodology” (p. 1127), thus enabling the approaches to research offered here. Rather than being limited by any particular formal approach to textual analysis, we have adopted an approach familiar to qualitative researchers, whereby we “gather pieces of data and consider their collective meaning. We add theory to the table, using the frameworks cultivated by others to better understand the relationship between what we have observed and the sociocultural complexities of our world” (Thomas, 2021, p. 626). Textual analysis across chapters enables a more multi-faceted understanding of the focus field than consideration of chapters in isolation.

Systematic procedures were used to organise and interpret salient features of the chapters and commentaries to gain more understanding of pedagogical documentation. Bowen (2009) described this process as “skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination) and interpretation” (p. 32). He explained that “this iterative process combines elements of content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis is the process of organising information into categories related to the central questions of the research ... thematic analysis is a form of pattern recognition within the data” (p. 32). In our interpretation of the data, we were guided by the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), employing an inductive “back-and-forth interplay with the data” (Bowen, 2009, p. 37). Trustworthiness—also defined as meeting a criterion of credibility—was enhanced by the two authors using cyclical collaborative processes including dual reading and data revisiting.

Findings were synthesised as presented below with voices of authors from the data set illustrating threads of analysis, thus following Curtin’s (1995) guidelines that “textual analysis maintains its rigor by using copious evidence from the text to support the interpretation” (p. 22). This synthesis is conceptualised in terms of *analytical threads*, that is, ideas that grouped together can be understood as portraying pedagogical documentation in the data set. These threads are organized in terms of

- pedagogies of relationships and listening,
- thinking around definitions,
- processes,
- enablers,

- professional practices, and
- potentials.

Each will be explained and illustrated in turn.

### **Limitations**

No attempt has been made to analyze visual components (such as photographs or formats) of pedagogical documentation; such elements were outside the scope of this research. The invitational nature of initial author selection could also be seen as a limitation to the data base. Further, acknowledging that findings will be interpreted within the frames of each reader's context, this study is built on a particular data set, shaped by sociocultural, geographic, and other contextual factors such as structures of early childhood sites and staff qualifications impacting implementation.

### **Analytical Thread: Pedagogies of Relationships and Listening**

Pedagogy is understood as the interplay between teaching and learning, as contextually-situated, and philosophically-grounded. From this perspective, one would expect early childhood sites that claim engagement with pedagogical documentation to incorporate relationships as key components of their educational environments. Indeed, data analysis revealed a complex web of relationships embracing “relational pedagogy, relational spaces and relational interactions” (Siraj-Blatchford, 2012, p. iv). Chapter authors highlighted the essential “inseparability of materials, children and educators’ engagement” (Hodgins et al., 2017, p. 197) through their investigations of encounters between children, adults, events, materials, and spaces. These interactions are at the “heart of relational pedagogy which is viewed as a reflective and negotiative process” (Papatheodorou, 2008, p. 5). The all-encompassing nature of relationships was accentuated by Robertson’s explanation that “everyone involved is a decision-maker: children, adults, materials and the events experienced ‘make’ decisions” (2017, p. 103). This integrated view of the teaching/learning nexus is particularly germane in early childhood contexts, privileging contextualized relationships in pedagogical thinking.

Analysis demonstrated that the philosophical stance of the work in Reggio Emilia, in terms of the “pedagogy of relationships and listening” (Rinaldi, 2012, p. 234) was central in these accounts of experiences with pedagogical documentation. Articulating relational pedagogy, Giamminuti (2013) explained that “Reggio Emilia educators have ... recognised the significance of relationships in pedagogical encounters; these relationships, they argue, are sustained by an attitude of listening” (pp. 22–23). Rinaldi (2006) proposed “the pedagogy of listening” as a “premise for every learning relationship” (p. 65), a strong foundation evident in a number of chapters. For example, Mitchelmore and Fleet (2017) wrote that “documenting pedagogically requires the documenter to consider listening as an intersubjective act” illuminating “the complexity, joy and constant amazement of young children’s ways of being and knowing” (p. 68). This sustained attention to listening was also noted by Stevenson (2012) who emphasized the importance of listening to “how the children are interacting with materials, with each other, to the spaces they inhabit and to the adults in their lives” (p. 238). This combination of relationships and listening was both stated and implied throughout the data.

### Analytical Thread: Thinking Around Definitions

Although the concept of *documenting pedagogically* is an accepted component of professional practice in education, the evolution of interest in *pedagogical documentation* references a particular philosophically-driven approach to professional practice, particularly in early childhood settings, as influenced by thinkers in Reggio Emilia, Italy, following devastation in the area in World War Two. A re-think of educational priorities and practices kickstarted what Swedish colleagues have called “a pedagogical revolution” (Dahlberg, personal communication). The impacts of this transformational wave are felt in diverse educational settings worldwide. With this diversity comes some uncertainty as to the nature of pedagogical documentation in the quotidian. Everyday usage can vary from “pedagogical narrations” in Canada (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015) to the “learning stories” of New Zealand (Carr & Lee, 2012), with a range of interpretations elsewhere. This diversity led to development of the LiLi proposal, that is the *Local Interpretation of Larger Ideas* as offered to a European conference, including consideration of

- the space (context),
- the individual (perspectives),
- the group (connectedness),
- the site (communities) and
- the goal (socially just practices) (Fleet, 2015).

Social and institutional contexts of the data cannot be underestimated.

Curiously, “the words for what we call ‘pedagogical documentation’ are elusive” (Fleet et al., 2006a, p. 6); “more is implied by this term than the creation of products” (Fleet et al., 2006c, p. xix). Sometimes misunderstood as simply narrative or photographic record-keeping, the complexity of pedagogical documentation can instead be portrayed as “bricolage” (Merewether, 2017 p. 135) or “assemblage” (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Nxumalo, 2012, p. 260). Often modelled rather than defined explicitly, and perhaps better conceptualized as a metaphor for complexity, data analysis indicates that pedagogical documentation in these chapters was portrayed as

- “a way of being with children with intentionality” (Felstiner et al., 2006, p. 60);
- “an anchor for reflection” (Semann, 2006, p. 248);
- “a way of teaching, pedagogical documentation is a way of thinking or a disposition” (Robertson cited in Fleet et al., 2012b, p. 6);
- “a catalyst” (Millikan, 2012, p. 78);
- “an iterative experience in which artefacts from classroom experiences are considered through various lenses and positions” (Wallberg, 2012, p. 145);
- “a vehicle to not only record but to help educators to unpack inherent meanings and to even produce new meanings” (Kocher, 2012, pp. 303–4);
- “an attitude, a way of experiencing ... [which] embodies the value of subjectivity” (Mitchelmore & Fleet, 2017, p. 68);
- “an inventive process” (Kind & Argent, 2017, p. 87); and
- “leadership enactment” (Berger, 2017, p. 183).

Australian Aboriginal colleagues Jo-Jeanette and Louise “likened pedagogical documentation to the Kamilaroi practice of ‘yarning.’ More than a conversation, a yarning circle is when ‘you give something to me and I’ll give something back to you; it’s an exchange’” (Cave et al., 2012, p. 60). This interpretation was echoed by Semann et al. (2012) who described pedagogical documentation as “a subjective experience ... influenced by the educator’s culture” (p. 257). In addition, authors referred to pedagogical documentation as a tool, perhaps for mediating “teacher puzzling, reflection and growth” (Cooper & Hedges, 2017, p. 161); as well as a vehicle for “dialogical cyclical processes” (Hodgins et al., 2017, p. 204); or “used to create opportunities for cooperative learning” (Bjervas & Rosendahl, 2017, p. 29).

These descriptors are not exclusive, as each chapter has layers of interpretation and differing social and institutional contexts. Writing from New Zealand, Bayes contextualized her chapter by noting, “the fact that curriculum is created by the people and the community that come together, means that documentation looks different in each setting. Just as curriculum is created, so is documentation” (2006, p. 291). This perspective resonates with the concept of LiLi, as mentioned earlier (Fleet, 2015, 2017). In terms of seeking definitions, the diverse range of portrayals resists simplistic categorization, which enables site-specific decision-making.

### **Analytical Thread: Processes**

Pedagogical documentation was referred to by some chapter authors as a process or a set of processes, illustrated through layers of data, analysis, and critical reflection. For example, Kind and Argent (2017) offered pedagogical documentation as “process-oriented and interpretive”; that is, “cultivated over time,” (p. 86). Or, as Chng wrote,

the experience of pedagogical documentation looks different from time to time, depending on context, the participating thinkers and the person reflecting, reviewing and proposing; it can take on many forms and go in various directions ... it is never a linear process. (2017, p. 147)

Central to the pedagogical endeavour is the need to balance information-gathering and sharing with analytical thinking to gain greater understanding of children and to strengthen decision-making and forward planning. As Robertson wrote in Fleet et al. (2006a), this is a “tug between fluid ideas and concrete organisation” (p. 12). Studying this data enabled us to step inside the thinking of documentors, such as Pelo’s recount:

The exploration grew step by step, observation by observation, as we practiced the circling, spiralling study and planning process of pedagogical documentation. ... As this exploration unfolded, we became more specific and clearer in our hypotheses and questions, distilled from our observations about the children’s interactions with the provocations we offered. ... And our planned next steps, week by week, became increasingly fine-tuned, as we learned more about the children’s specific understandings, misunderstandings, and questions. (2006, pp. 177–78)

Her thoughts resonated further in shared thinking with her colleague:

In carefully observing and recording children’s play, we have the opportunity to wonder, ‘what are these children trying to figure out?’ ... we take responsibility for noticing opportunities that seem rich with possibilities to investigate further, or to bring children together, or to provoke development of particular skills, or to emphasise issues of bias or cultural relevancy. (Felstiner et al., 2006, p. 61)

Engaging with pedagogical documentation intrinsically includes being respectful of children and adults, while watching thoughtfully and listening carefully to both spoken and nonverbal communications. As Chng explained,

recognising the significance of the moments throughout the day and learning to listen with presence are important aspects of the process ... being open to the unknown and unexpected is essential throughout the entire pedagogical documentation process, from identifying possible directions and the unfolding of pedagogy to collating a physical write-up. (2017, p. 148)

Analysis of this explanation highlighted four core processes:

- “recognising the significance of moments,”
- “learning to listen with presence,”
- “identifying possible directions and the unfolding of pedagogy,” and
- “collating a physical write-up” (p. 148).

These processes are not exclusive. Note Thompson’s comment that “the tidy, organized, even linear process I imagined and planned became a messy, fragmented, tangled multiplicity” (in Hodgins et al., 2017, p. 198). Highly interactive, analyzed, and captured through shared narratives, these processes are influenced by personal and organisational factors identified below.

### **Analytical Thread: Enablers**

In analysing reports about, and compilations of, pedagogical documentation in the data set, it is clear that contexts for engaging with this pedagogy must be considered alongside relevant processes. In addition to factors such as geography and cultural demographics, chapter authors highlighted factors enabling engagement with pedagogical documentation. As a starting point, Shepherd summarized, “before embarking on the task of documentation, there is the need for a pedagogical positioning of the self” (2006, p. 167).

This positioning draws from the philosophical grounding which is both stated and implied throughout the data, such as “quality of relationships” and “the reflective stance” which educators bring to this work (Carter & Nimmo, 2006, p. 94). Such a “reflective stance” was foregrounded by Forman and Fyfe (2012), Americans who had worked alongside the Italians (p. 247), so recognition of this factor is again an acknowledgment of thinkers in Reggio Emilia.

As well as personal attitudinal and mindset factors, there are institutional or organizational components which can encourage or constrain this way of working. An experienced Director of a recognised children’s centre/school, Shepherd noted that in acknowledging the importance of collaboration to support these practices, “the support cannot be tokenistic; it must be within the management structure, complete with funding to enable and motivate staff to engage in the process” (2006, p. 168). Bjervas and Rosendahl (2017) echoed this perspective. As Robertson concluded: “In an ideal world, it [pedagogical documentation] is supported by the environment, management and philosophy of the educational setting and becomes the ‘value’ placed on learning” (as cited in Fleet et al., 2012b, p. 6).

Alongside consideration of these enablers is the overarching consideration of leadership (e.g., Waniganayake et al., 2017). With regard to positioning pedagogical documentation within regulatory frameworks, Waniganayake et al. (2017) noted that

This process asks educators to question their practices in order to make connections between theory and practice and to understand and reduce the barriers which might restrict children's learning ... this involves the leader playing an integral part in establishing and making these principles visible, highlighting good leadership practice and establishing an environment which goes beyond an application of regulatory frameworks and policy, to critical thinking about why these are in place. (p. 167)

These enablers intersect with changes to professional practice made visible in the data as explained below.

### **Analytical Thread: Professional Practices**

Pedagogical documentation encompasses an expectation that teachers will work as co-researchers in collaboration with children, colleagues, and families. This provocation from the educators of Reggio Emilia creates opportunities to “disrupt our usual way of thinking about things—such as the curriculum, relationships with families, materials we present in the environment” (Stevenson, 2012, p. 238). Textual analysis indicated that writers recognised changes to their professional practices as the result of engaging with pedagogical documentation.

At a personal level, teachers identified experiences of professional growth. For example, one teacher reflected that “recording the events gave me the opportunity to repeatedly read what the children had said. This revisiting process helped me learn how to be more responsive to the children ... and reshaped my thinking and understanding of children's learning” (Fleet, 2017, p. 24). Novices also described examples of professional growth. One student teacher noted the significance of learning to listen. She explained that she had become “tuned in to really listening and hearing what the children want to know” and was “challenged by the prospect of guiding, watching, and documenting their journeys respectfully, appropriately and meaningfully” (Burr et al., 2006, p. 121).

Writing as an early childhood teacher in partnership with an academic, Jovanovic described how a particular example of documentation changed her professional identity. She commented, “It was a break/rupture in my understanding about how curriculum is not what is written but is what is created” (Jovanovic & Roder, 2012, p. 134). Later, these authors noted that “We have found that the notion of the early childhood teacher's identity as a learner has been very thought provoking and worthy of our ongoing curiosity ... we see our identities as continually emerging, always in flow and contestable” (p. 140). Deep-seated changes in identity were also evident for two Singaporean teachers working in Australia. Familiar with the expectation of preparing children for primary school through an academically rigorous curriculum, Chng explained that she found it “confronting” to re-consider her “culturally embedded image of the child” (Chng & Wong, 2012, p. 47). Similarly, Wong described the “heavy responsibility” of pedagogical documentation as

representing children; what they were thinking and learning. This was an intimidating expectation of my role as it made me “less” and the children “more” ... I felt I had to re-learn how to be a teacher or rather, how not to be one. (Chng & Wong, 2012, pp. 47–48)

This issue of professional identity is also a focus for chapters by three primary school teachers working within educational bureaucracies with mandatory curriculum documents. Examples of

these teachers' self-reflections demonstrated personal questioning about the teacher's role. Studans (2006) described her experiences in responding to the challenges from Reggio Emilia as "a difficult, stumbling journey" (p. 144). She questioned her role in using documentation "within the 'confines' of the ... state syllabus" (p. 144). Others found that pedagogical documentation caused them to reflect on their power as teachers. For example, Harper (2006) explained how her growing uneasiness at "overseeing and ultimately controlling the investigative decision-making in the classroom" caused her to reconsider her role in "selecting which conversations were 'worthy' of exploring. Why did I follow up on some conversations and not others? This led to a reconsideration of my image of children" (p. 273). Similarly, McLachlan also re-examined her use of power. She reflected that "The journey towards shared power and control has begun for me. Children are powerful; I am learning to give some of my power away ... [this has] permanently altered ... my image of myself as a teacher" (2006, p. 28).

The isolation of teachers in a school context—usually one teacher with one class of children—contrasts with the situation of teachers in early childhood sites where a team of staff work together. Although collaborative teamwork was not evident in all settings, chapter authors often mentioned the power of a collective process. For example, one teacher commented that she had learned the importance of sharing "ideas, observations, pictures and provocations with all stakeholders to tell the story of children's questions and discoveries." She explained that this highlighted "the importance of collaborative work in revealing children's ideas, and in ... deepening relationships with peers and teachers. This depth can be missed if a documentor has to work in isolation" (Fleet & Hammersley et al., 2006, p. 328). Stremmel (2017) cited Rinaldi (2006) in reaffirming the value of this dialogic approach: "Pedagogical documentation makes teachers' perspectives and interpretations explicit and contestable through debate, dialogue, and negotiation. ... Therefore, the ideas and perspectives of others ... may help educators see what might not have been seen otherwise" (p. 208). This openness to perspectives of children, colleagues, and families asks teachers "to be in an attitude of research with children, maintaining a constant curiosity and doubt" (Millikan, 2012, p. 76). In discussing this role as co-researchers with children, Kind and Argent (2017) suggested that it is about "researching with, not on or about, children ... it is a collective search for insight and understanding" (p. 86). As a result, teachers began to recognise the complexity and untapped potential of children's learning, and question traditional early childhood pedagogical practices.

The ethical dilemmas inherent in this way of working were noted throughout these publications as the question of children's ethical participation in pedagogical documentation is a delicate one. It can be argued that there is long history of teachers observing children for purposes of assessment and instruction. Current thinking, however, prioritizes the rights of the child as conceptualised by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), therefore including children's rights to participate in decisions that concern them as well as to consent to being documented. In valuing the inclusion of children's voices, chapter authors also noted ethical issues involved in decisions regarding which children are heard (or silenced) and which content is included (or not). Britt and Rudolph (2012) referred to their work as "pedagogical documentation that is embedded within a notion of education as an ethical and political space" (p. 26). The actual materials and processes used (or excluded) also have ethical implications. As Robertson stated, what the adult brings to the process matters: "Two readers of the same photo will invariably create two meanings. Therefore, the lens (in the human sense) through which the photo is constructed is necessarily important and worthy of critique. Do we edit as we click the shutter? Yes." (2006b, p. 157). Extending this argument, the choice of ways to view children is an

ethical one, as in Wallberg's (2012) perception of young children as able to understand and pursue the notion of active citizenship by voting in a democracy.

Through their documentation and research, teachers challenged dominant discourses about teaching and learning and became risk-takers asking difficult questions about their professional practices. Textual analysis identified further this role of pedagogical documentation in challenging the dominant discourse. For example, from a Canadian perspective of pedagogical narration, Berger suggested that pedagogical documentation

makes possible a new image of the early childhood educator. Educators of young children can no longer be depicted as merely passive observers of the child; rather, early childhood educators become narrators of unexpected stories that refuse to be contained within frameworks, thereby creating the possibility to transcend universalized categories and challenge assumptions about who children and educators are, what teaching and learning is, and who can participate in public conversations that create and enrich our common world. (2017, p. 183)

From another perspective, Hobba affirmed this position:

these teachers are challenging the dominant discourses about knowledge, learning, teachers and children through research, documentation, collaboration and other strategies that deepen our understanding about different educational paradigms so that we can make them visible and open to debate. Challenging the dominant discourse requires courage. (2012, p. 160)

In personalizing the discussion, Walker et al. (2017) wrote about challenges for Louisa, an educator who began to revisit children's experiences through pedagogical documentation: "It has troubled her acceptance of an 'ages and stages' view of development and opened her eyes to the realization that she has underestimated the complexity and depth of children's learning and cultural processing" (p. 172).

In some cases, it's the choice of subject matter, in others it is the vehicle chosen for record-keeping, and in others, it is the foregrounding of children's voices and their presence as co-collaborators in their educational lives which marks this work as transgressive and/or transformative. Perhaps sparked by children's interest in popular media products such as Barbie or Batman (Giugni, 2006) or considerations of gender roles (Robertson, 2006b) or willingness to struggle against the grain (Cochran-Smith, 1991, 2001) of traditional practice, the embracing of pedagogical documentation enables educators to meet their professional responsibilities in ways that offer greater richness of possibility than templated expectations. Ways to work within national guidelines were acknowledged, in chapters for example by Gould and Pohio from New Zealand (2006), or Hodgins et al. in Canada (2017). Although the intention may not be political, engagement with pedagogical documentation often becomes a vehicle of transformation. As Berger wrote,

The *raison d'être* of pedagogical documentation is the idea that educational responses cannot be predetermined but must remain open and be re-thought again and again ... pedagogical documentation can create a zone of emergence where early childhood education becomes a space for unexpected possibilities, as well as a venue for leadership that draws on 'creative engagement with the not yet known.' (2017, p. 182)

### **Analytical Thread: Potentials**

Stepping back from the data highlighted the importance of analysing potentials for engaging with pedagogical documentation to promote educational transformation. As Fleet (2017) noted,

While artefacts for record-keeping are part of the processes of pedagogical documentation, a product is not the purpose. Working in relationship with adults and children enables consideration of curriculum, of children's learning and development, of the affective culture of the centre, of goals of families and each larger community. (p. 21)

Similarly, Groom wrote in her Commentary, "In my Australian experience, the important realisation about pedagogical documentation is not about 'what it is'; rather, it is about 'what it does'" (2006, p. 349).

Often the potential for this work becomes apparent when considering provocations leading to an investigation. For example, we "hear" Janet saying (upon children seeing a wild rabbit in the garden), "I was alerted to the possibilities by their excitement" (Fleet et al., 2006a, p. 7). Responding thoughtfully to an observed encounter was the provocation for most narratives being shared. Note for example one teacher's attention to a range of provocations from children's responses to 9/11, to Karli's exploration of Aboriginality (Connerton & Patterson, 2006). Or hear Lesley responding to children dealing with writing in Chinese to be on a birthday-party list (Studans, 2006), or toddler Lukasz's concern about plants in an empty fish tank (Jovanovich & Roder, 2012).

Some chapters explicitly highlight benefits to children, such as in a Swedish contribution: "pedagogical documentation makes it possible for children to retell and revisit what has happened ... The aim is to create a group where each individual is made visible, but also connected to each other and the surroundings" (Bjervas & Rosendahl, 2017, p. 38). Perhaps sensing this orientation, Stremmel noted, "As a tool for democratic meaning-making, pedagogical documentation is an ethical and subjective means of assessing what children know and understand, in contrast to a process for measuring and judgmentally scrutinising children's work in relation to some standard of acceptability" (2017, pp. 208–209). These purposes intersect with purposeful planning, and potentially, with valuable approaches to assessment.

Also of benefit, as Walker et al. (2017) wrote in the UK, "Children are shown that practitioners value their learning" (p. 167). This is evidenced in Richard's (2017) view of "making learning visible in dance" (p. 73):

Used in conjunction with embodied arts education experiences, I believe that pedagogical documentation allows teachers to confront biases and assumptions inherent in the professional education community—assumptions about control of children's bodies and minds, assumptions about assessment and evaluation and assumptions about what learning looks like. (2017, p. 79)

Another lens on the potentials of pedagogical documentation appears in a consideration of contributions to site goals. For example, in reporting an investigation alongside children and cockatoos (an Australian parrot-style bird) Robertson noted that the team decided to follow the thinking of a group of children "as it illuminated anthropomorphic empathy" (2017, p. 107). In Vancouver, Canada, Wallberg was "curious about how children understood and acted out beliefs about equality in their social lives" (2012, p. 145). Similarly, the work by Pelo and Felstiner sat

with the centre's interest in children's perceptions of gender (Felstiner et al., 2006), and Giugni employed pedagogical documentation "to demonstrate what children are doing with media products in their 'everyday' living, in order to show the ways they constitute their identities through daily rituals" (2006, p. 206).

Textual analysis revealed clear intersections between children's perspectives, decisions about curriculum, and the roles of educators. For example, Hill noted that "pedagogical documentation challenges practitioners to consider the many choices that they make throughout their time with children and to think reflectively about the inevitable moral and ethical nature of those choices" (2006, p. 303). She continued, stating that "When documentation is knowingly pedagogical, practitioners not only make choices in the moment, but they are also compelled to revisit those choices, knowing that they must mull over the issues of social justice that lie beneath every social interaction" (p. 303).

### **Change and Continuity**

Issues beyond the analytical threads are evident when reflecting on change and continuity in the three publications over time. First, there is a change in the starting places of chapter authors. The earlier chapters are mostly drawn from practitioners exploring their own practice and improving their work with children and families. This tended to reflect local interest in pedagogical documentation in the mid-2000s. The more recent publications, however, have more doctoral students and newer graduates writing about their work as researchers. This may reflect an increasing interest of the nature of pedagogical documentation in teacher education institutions. A second change closely related to this point, is the more sophisticated language in the recent chapters reflecting the writing of postgraduate students and academics. The language has become more symbolic and metaphorical. Reader responses to this change suggest that although some find this language distancing, others respond positively to the challenge to stretch their thinking. A third change relates to the increased use of technology. Initially, examples of pedagogical documentation were produced on large pieces of cardboard with photographs and analysis pasted on for wall displays. Very rapidly, this changed to the use of integrated digital texts and images which provided more freedom and flexibility for both practitioners and doctoral researchers. The innovative use of digital technology enables more extensive and accurate recordings of events, and as a result, children have become more involved in decision-making about documentation processes.

As well as these changes, there are some remarkable consistencies across all three volumes. The adults' appreciation and wonder at the nature of children's theory-making is evident. Acknowledging children as co-researchers and co-constructors of knowledge leads to unanticipated provocations and possibilities including the recognition of children's theories as inspiration for more profound learning. Whether writing about their own professional work, or collaborating with researchers, practitioners reveal deep sensitivity in watching and listening to children and adults; their curiosity and passions are unmistakable. They are prepared to take risks in their work and embrace uncertainty in their professional lives. Another constant feature across the years is the significance of relationships. Complex webs of connections are apparent as practitioners and researchers reflect on their deepening understanding; share their observations with children, families, and colleagues; and incorporate these responses into ongoing documentation. All three texts illustrate how pedagogical documentation is built on strong foundations of respectful and reciprocal relationships between staff, families, and communities.

## Conclusion

As a commentator, Stremmel wrote,

In essence, pedagogical documentation is important because it repositions teaching as scholarly enterprise and the teacher as someone who questions, challenges, theorises, researches and generates the knowledge on which classroom practice is based. It moves us from a position of certainty to a position of questioning, wondering and seeking possibilities. (2017, p. 209)

This article has built on existing research, using insights generated to move our thinking forward in the potentially empowering spaces of pedagogical documentation. The study uncovers diverse perceptions and enactments of this way of working, highlighting the professional growth of teachers as they challenge dominant discourses of educational practice. By offering a multivocal approach and leaving space for reader interpretation, textual analysis reveals pedagogical documentation as an intricate tapestry of relational pedagogy with multiple encounters and possibilities. Engaging with pedagogical documentation is shown to be an intentional choice, highlighting relational pedagogy while meeting a broad range of purposes and possibilities for educational transformation.

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