PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTATION

1. WHAT ON EARTH IS PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTATION?

“Stand aside a while and leave room for learning. Observe carefully what children do, and then, if you have understood well, perhaps teaching will be different than before.” Loris Malaguzzi

Pedagogical Documentation is a natural part of early childhood education – a way to see day to day hassle with children and look at it from another perspective. Pedagogical documentation gives children a voice and reveals their thinking as 100 languages used in Reggio Emilia pedagogy (Reggio Emilia Approach 2019).

Simply, Pedagogical Documentation is observing for example children’s play, projects, discussions, ideas and inventions via taking photos, making notes, writing down explanations as well as tricky questions, saving artwork, videoing action, recording voice...and using all the documents purposefully. What makes documentation Pedagogical Documentation is the idea that educators use the documents wisely - reflect on them and modify in their planning and teaching accordingly (Katz & Chard 1996.)

Pedagogical Documentation is an essential, integral working method in early childhood education. It supports planning, implementing, assessing and developing early childhood education in many ways. It is an on-going process, which gives holistic knowledge about children and makes learning visible (Tarkka 2018). Pedagogical documentation opens educators’ new sides of children’s behavior, thoughts, ideas, challenges and creative processes. Each lovely, unique child deserves to be known and understood as individuals (Katz & Chard, 1996).
2. WHY TO DOCUMENT?

“The powerful contribution of documentation in these six ways is possible because children are engaged in absorbing, complex, interesting projects worthy of documentation. If, as is common in many traditional classrooms around the world, a large proportion of children's time is devoted to making the same pictures with the same materials about the same topic on the same day in the same way, there would be little to document which would intrigue parents and provide rich content for teacher-parent or child-parent discussion!” Katz & Chard

Here are five concrete reasons, why pedagogical documentation is a must in all early childhood education centers around the world.

LEARN MORE ABOUT CHILDREN’S LIVES

Via pedagogical documentation, educators learn to know individual children better – their interests, thoughts, skills, potentialities and ways of participation and expression. Via pedagogical documentation educators gain specific information about children’s experiences, competences and needs (Tarkka 2018). With visible documentation educators as well as children can deepen their understanding, learn from each other’s projects that are displayed in the classroom and appreciate each child’s uniqueness. (Katz & Chard 1996.)

ENGAGE FAMILIES

Pedagogical documentation enables families’ involvement in their child’s education. Families become deeply aware of their child’s experiences at kindergarten and get possibilities to contribute in the activities. The opportunity of gaining information about an on-going project, families can contribute in the project and take part in it by for example offering topic related books or materials at home, discussing about the project, sharing own ideas or helping to look for information that interests the child. (Katz & Chard 1996.)
GAIN KNOWLEDGE OF THE GROUP

Educators learn to know the group of children and understand the dynamics between the children in the group and their creative processes. By documenting group processes and play, educators learn from children and gain knowledge on how children work and think together. (Tarkka 2018.)

ENHANCE COMMUNICATION AND PARTICIPATION

Recognize and acknowledge the characteristics of communication between children and educators. Documentation opens possibilities for educators and children to plan activities together and be open to each other’s ideas, interests and challenges. Educators can also become aware of the level of participation and development of the children. When educators and children plan activities together and are open to each other's ideas, the activity is more likely to interest and inspire children. (Katz & Chard 1996.)

DEVELOP PROFESSIONALLY

Educator's self-assessment and professional growth. Assessing the Pedagogical Documentation is important as educators gain information about the pedagogical activities, own teaching patterns and the children’s creative learning processes. When educators examine children’s work and document it, also their own understanding of children's development and learning is deepened in ways that likely would not occur from inspecting test results. Assessing the documentations gives opportunities to develop and grow. Documentation provides an ongoing planning and evaluation process for educators. (Katz & Chard 1996.)

The most important part of Pedagogical Documentation is to return to it and assess it from educator’s, child’s, the child group’s and family’s level. Only then the documents will open up and share their secrets.
3. HOW TO DOCUMENT?

**TOPIC & QUESTION**

What is the most important issue in your childcare center/group/a child’s situation now? What should you focus on? Pedagogical documentation is a systematic process, so you need to think what are the central questions that you would like to have answers to. It is impossible to document everything and if you try to take a too big piece, it soon starts to feel overwhelming! Discuss with your colleagues and decide which areas you want to focus on now. (Tarkka 2018.)

**OBSERVE & DOCUMENT**

Next you need to think, what are the best ways to get answers to the questions you have and then start to look for clues. Go to different situations during the day, observe with open mind and use various documentation methods, for example photos, videos, audio, drawings and discussions. (Tarkka 2018.)

**SHARE & REFLECT**

Documents get pedagogical emphasis once they are being looked at and discussed about. Share and reflect the documentations you have collected with the families, with children and with your colleagues. Having the families and children involved in the reflection process make the interpretation richer. What do these documents tell about this child/group/childcare center? What type of answers did we get? What kind of views do we have? How to react? The aim of reflection is to plan, assess and develop the early childhood education and care. (Tarkka 2018.)

**DEVELOP & PLAN**

The process of pedagogical documentation is meaningful only, if you take advantage of the possibilities and challenges it offers. It is important to think how you can develop the activities. What themes, methods or goals should you choose next? What is your next step towards better early childhood education? (Tarkka 2018.)

4. BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN

Children are like the sun or a diamond, the central and the most valuable part of pedagogical documentation and of course entire early childhood education! Everything is about the children and they also benefit from pedagogical documentation most of all.
In order to do trustworthy pedagogical documentation, educators need to assess their own thinking. How do I meet the child? What kind of observations I make? How do I evaluate the observations? Do I act similarly with all children? Each educator’s personal history influences on her/his thinking and ways of acting. It is important to acknowledge your own personal experiences, views and feelings, and encounter each child as an unique individual — in equal and neutral way so that all observations and documentations would be as objective as possible.

Sometimes children might be considered as targets of action and assessment. In Finnish early childhood education and care, children are considered as competent, skillful and active participants in their own lives. Children think, learn, feel and act differently and they usually are eager to take part in decisions that affect them. (Tarkka 2018.)

Reggio Emilia approach has the same ideology; children are active heroes of their own lives. Children have extraordinary potential for learning and they are the subject of rights. In Reggio Emilia pedagogy, educators talk about child’s 100 languages. Children possess hundred languages, which means hundred ways of thinking, expressing, understanding, encountering… The hundred languages is a metaphor for children’s potentials, children are very capable!

Pedagogical documentation works with a similar ideology – celebrating children’s skills, knowledge and attributes, rather than focusing on negative. When educators make children’s learning visible with pedagogical documentation, children feel more confident (I did that!) and important (My project is displayed on the wall!).

Pedagogical documentation has also other sides that boost the children’s self-confidence. When the educator is collecting documentations and observations, they constantly learn new things about the children. Children feel heard (Teacher put my idea into action!) and understood (Teacher read me exactly that book I was interested in!). Via pedagogical documentation children feel that they are an important part of the group. It is also important that children feel they can affect on things.
5. PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Pedagogical documentation makes children’s learning visible, but what does it do to the educators? A study between Belgium and Finland by Hostyn, Mäkitalo, Hakari & Vandenbussche (2018) shows that educators use pedagogical documentation in many ways, but not often as a tool for professional development. This means that educators can benefit from pedagogical documentation much more than they do now.

According to the study, educators can reconsider their relationship with children as well as their personal view as educators through pedagogical documentation. Documentation is also a great tool for evaluating the educational activities, recognizing the needs of development and giving ideas to transform and modify used practices. Documentation can increase educator’s understanding and awareness of him/herself and his/her personal attitudes. It also gives information about the educational activities done, relationships with children, possible tackles between learned ECEC theories and the work in practice. Reflecting all this supports the professional development and growth of educators. (Hostyn et.al. 2018.)

As educators make observations and reflect on them, their learning becomes visible too! What makes documentation Pedagogical Documentation is the idea that educators use the documents wisely - reflect on them and modify their planning and teaching accordingly. According to Kati Rintakorpi, a Finnish ECEC professional, using documentation empowers educators as professionals, helps them to communicate with families and children, and guides them to focus on the children’s views better (Rintakorpi 2018).

6. FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

In Finland, early childhood education’s main goal is to support every child’s holistic development and learning in co-operation with the child’s family/guardians. Teachers and families work in collaboration for the best of the child. Family know their child best, therefore guardians play a very important role regarding their child’s learning, holistic development and overall wellbeing. Also the child is considered as an active agent in their own life. Early childhood education implements planned pedagogical practices and documentation via participatory work between teachers, children and families. (Kumpulainen & Ouakrim-Soivio 2019.)

The goal of pedagogical documentation is to support joint reflection and sharing knowledge. Pedagogical documentation can offer families information about the child’s life, interests, self-image as a learner and as an individual. The goal is to have families as active part of documentation process via reflecting upon their child’s interests, strengths and learning processes. According to
Suzanne Axelsson pedagogical documentation cannot be done in isolation, so parents are needed in the process too. (Axelsson 2018.)

**VIA PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTATION FAMILY...**

- Engagement in ECEC becomes possible
- Gains trust in your kindergarten and professionalism
- Kindergarten’s work becomes transparent, guardians know everything what is happening
- Feels their opinions are valued and they are an important part of their child’s education
- Knows that their child is truly appreciated, important part of the group and the child’s ideas and thoughts are meaningful
- Stays on track about their child’s learning and development
- Can communicate with the teacher and child

(Kumpulainen & Ouakrim-Soivio 2019.)

**7. HOW TO SHOW, SHARE AND SAVE DOCUMENTATION?**

After you have collected beautiful pieces of documentation, you need to find a way to show, share and save them so that children, colleagues and families are able to look, reflect and interpret.

**SHOW**

Children’s artwork and photos lighten up the kindergarten, so put them on the wall for a show. Any documentation that you have created digitally, eg. with Kindiedays, can be printed out and arranged beautifully on a bulletin board or wherever you find good wall space. Think about the visual look as colours, font size, amount of text and location of the documentation panel. It is important that also children are able to see and comment on the documents. Let children participate in the process - ask their opinion which pieces they’d like to have displayed, what colours they’d like to enhance and where would be a good wall space that everyone can see the documentations.

**SHARE**

Documentation can be created, displayed and shared digitally. Digital documentation is sometimes shared via email or social media, but this is generally not acceptable as these channels are not fully secure. It is highly recommended to share via secure software applications, such as Kindiedays. Software applications have good data protection and sharing photos is safe. When sharing documents digitally, it's good to have a consent form for each child. If you decide to share photos in social media, choose photos where children cannot be identified.
SAVE

As new documents appear, displays change over time. Saving documentation is important so that each child’s individual learning journey stays in trust. A lovely way to save documentation is to make portfolios for children. Each child can have their own personalized portfolio, which consists of all kinds of documents during their learning journey. Include children in the process and let them be part of deciding which items to save and let children also comment on their work and photos. Portfolios are meant to describe the abilities of the child in a positive light. Portfolio can be done digitally or for example in a form of a folder. Digital portfolio has its’ advantages as it is easy to share, edit and store. Digital portfolios are attracting increased attention as a means of pedagogical documentation (Kumpulainen & Ouakrim-Souvio 2018).

8. DIGITAL DOCUMENTATION

Digital documentation can be shared with families easily, gets organized automatically and is secured behind passwords. What is there not to like! Digital solution should support and benefit your work and save your time, so that you can truly be present with the children more often.

Digital solution helps families to see all documentation in real time. They are able to reflect and discuss about it and the child’s day at home. Child’s learning can be directly connected to curriculum objectives and personalized notes may be added by the educator. At the end of term, all digitally saved pedagogical documentation can be shared with families in a form of a portfolio. It’s your choice if you’d like to print it out or save it on your computer.

Digital documentation helps educators to plan pedagogical activities and to grow professionally. Educators can add photos and videos of learning moments quickly and connect them with meaningful context, eg. curriculum objectives or notes. Going back to view the older documents (that are in chronological order) is simple.

Manager loves pedagogical documentation as it makes tracking children’s learning way easier. It is interesting to look at charts and reports of different child groups or individual children. The manager can instantly see which learning area of the curriculum is lacking or which one has been focused on. Reports are great for team meeting discussions and educators’ professional development.

Time to go digital mate!

9. PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTATION IN PRACTICE

How does pedagogical documentation happen in practise in the middle of a busy day? First of all, always have materials and tools ready for documenting! A camera, mobile phone, tablet...
Think of what to document specifically in your group. What are meaningful and current questions, issues or topics? It is impossible to document Everything so narrow it down. Once you have chosen a topic, sort the documentations and plan your future activities according to your Curriculum’s learning areas, eg. Rich world of languages, Diverse forms of expression, Me and our community, Exploring and interacting with my environment & I grow, move and develop.

➔ Sit down and discuss with each child eg. once a week/month about all the things you have done that month
➔ Show all art works, photos, videos, recordings and other documents from that time and let the child tell his/her views and write the child’s words down
➔ Finding out the child’s opinions and views is the most important thing! Ask the child questions like: What was fun? What was difficult? What made you happy/unhappy? What were you thinking in this moment? What would you like to learn or do in kindergarten?
➔ Plan next themes and projects according to the discussions with the children and families, observations and documentations
➔ Connect the observations and notes to the kindergarten’s and child’s individual curriculum and include the learning areas that have been left out in future planning

Here are 5 examples of Pedagogical Documentation methods that can be used with children:

- **Portfolio**
  Educator sits down with each child regularly to see which documents to add in the child’s individual portfolio and discusses about the child’s learning journey, experiences etc.

- **Day of Children**
  Children decide all the activities that happen during the ‘Day of Children’. Educators find out children’s views and wishes prior the day and organize the day accordingly. Educators document children’s wishes, and outcomes on the ‘Day of Children’ and plan future activities accordingly.

- **My Day**
  A true story of a child’s day focusing on positivity, strengths and abilities. Educator writes down a story of a child’s day as authentically as possible. Photos of the day, practiced
curriculum objectives and child’s quotes can be added and story. Story can be shared with family and added in the portfolio.

- **Project wall**
  Add all documents related to your project on the ‘Project wall’. Children, but also families should be able to see the wall and comment and reflect on it. Encourage families to comment and take part. Ask children what they know about the topic at the start of the project and at the end of the project. When the project is over, add all/parts of the documentation and children’ learning journey into children’s individual portfolios.

- **Storycrafting**
  Child tells a story and educator writes it down from word to word as the child tells it. In case the child is not inspired, ask again next time. Aim is to find out child’s wishes, ideas and experiences. Educator says: “Tell me a story, a story that you want to tell. I will write it down and read it to you aloud in the end. If there is then something you would like to change, we can.” When the story is ready, it can be shared with the group and child’s family and added to portfolio. Educator can use the gained knowledge in future planning.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


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