

Pedagogical Documentation

‘to be part of something bigger than oneself’

STEVE SEIDEL IN MAKING LEARNING VISIBLE

DURING THE LAST WEEK OF NOVEMBER, as the city of Reggio readied itself for the festive season, Reggio Children hosted a small international study tour focusing on aspects of pedagogical documentation.

The 75 strong group comprised participants from the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, the Philippines, and a strong cohort from the United Kingdom. The programme devised by Reggio Children mirrored the very process of pedagogical documentation that the group had come to investigate. Through reflection and dialogue with teachers, atelieristas and pedagogistas, by interrogating material, sharing understandings and perspectives, and through the commitment of those hosting the group, the participants came to a deeper understanding of pedagogical documentation and underpinning values.

In Diana Pre-School, on the door of the atelier, is a wonderful quote from Primo Levi which captured the essence of the week for the participants. It said:

‘No matter where you come from, you are not a stranger here.’

Voices – a presentation in Reggio

On the first day of the study week, Carlina Rinaldi talked of documentation as, ‘a tool for dialogue....an approach to reciprocity’. She spoke of documentation being a tool, not only for teaching better, but for learning more: an opportunity for reflection, to challenge the choices we make, having the possibility for confrontation, debate, discussion, participatory democracy. These descriptions are rooted in the concept of documentation as a shared experience through which we can learn about learning and make visible the working theories of children. Through this process we interpret what we see, place value on it, give voice to different perspectives and open ourselves to change and renewal.

In another session Paola Cavazzoni and Mirella Ruoizzi traced the changes in the ways of listening, looking back at the different forms of documentation at the Archebaleno it Centre. They had begun with daily diaries, taking notes of what was happening for sharing and comparison. Discussion with parents brought in other points of view. Mirella then started working with a camera in the 1970s. The pictures enabled educators to look closely at children’s non-verbal communication and formed part of displays for people who came in to the centre. The use of slides and video made the work shareable with larger numbers of people and it could be accompanied by narration. They reminded us that every medium has its own ‘codes, language and grammar’ and highlighted the need to use multiple ways of showing, each suited to the situation.



Debi-Keyte-Hartland and Chris Holmes;
Loris Malaguzzi International Centre, Nov. 2007.

Visits to the various centres also gave us opportunities to see many different forms of documentation, to compare documentation from twenty years ago with current examples, and to engage in dialogue with atelieristas, pedagogistas and teachers about the development of documentation.

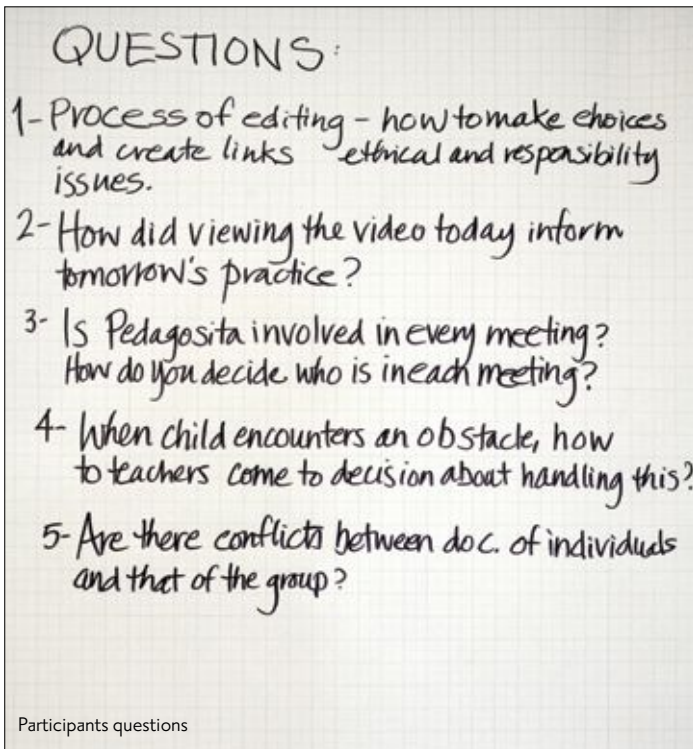
Introduction to our presentation



Shannon from Wharrier Street Playgroup, Newcastle upon Tyne, who found and gave away a beautiful white shell. **Image:** Chris Holmes

‘When a child makes an offering it can be a delicate moment – it can be a generous, or joyful, or hopeful or tentative thing. And it’s the same for us as we share our work with you. We are experiencing all of these emotions. It’s a great opportunity to come to Reggio and make this presentation, but it is also a challenge and so we offer you this work in the spirit of ‘beginning to understand.’

CHRIS HOLMES



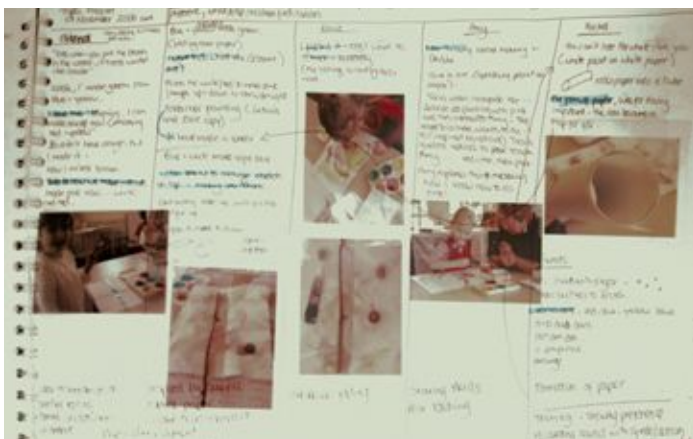
pictures it became apparent that the children were responding to different elements of the problem: the movement inherent in a spinning machine, the separation of the sheep from its wool and the feelings which might result. She demonstrated how, in making the children's ideas and learning visible, the educators understanding of children's construction of meaning grew and, how subsequent enquiries, such as looking at the strategies the children used in drawing, grew out of the initial investigations.

In this context and with these aspects of documentation at the forefront of our minds we set about putting together a presentation for a morning dedicated to sharing work. We had many pieces of documentation that people had brought and as we sat and tried to decide which we might share we discussed the different media, the different forms and functions of the documentation we had before us. We wanted to reflect the many and varied formats that had been used, the different voices to be heard and the different audiences we had tried to engage with. The dialogue proved rich and vibrant as we tried to make choices, edit pieces and make visible the richness of work being done.

Documentation for professional enquiry into learning

Debi Keyte, an artist working at Bushbury Nursery School in Wolverhampton gave us examples including individual notebooks, children's pictures and conversations. They showed how the data from these, in consideration with colleagues, became research questions and avenues for professional enquiry. Looking at the

Debi-Keyte-Hartland: Documentation record



Documenting children's lives and understandings

Making individual children's learning and understanding visible was picked up by Paddy Beels from Wingate Nursery in Durham and Louise Lowings from Hillfields in Coventry. Their examples showed how we might attempt to document children's lives and give value to their learning. As Chris Holmes said in her introduction to their work, 'When children's daily lives are touched by powerful and destructive events, or loss, then documenting them poses an ethical dilemma.' Paddy's documentation, like Debbie's showed children's pictures and conversations, this time about the tsunami and the related images they had seen on television. Presented in a different form, this time to communicate with a wider audience, it shows in detail how the children tried to relate the events to their own lives and contexts and the ways they dealt with their uncertainty and fear. Paddy also shared documentation of one child's ability to make use of his understanding in different contexts and to be an active participant in documentation. On a regular basis his grandmother had shared with him photographs and memories of the grandfather he had never known. His understanding of using a camera to capture images for reflection led to his own use of photography to capture his own memories to keep and revisit. In this way the child becomes a protagonist in the documentation process.

Lou talked with passion about the children who attend Hillfields Children's Centre in Coventry. As well as children from the local area, they have many children whose lives can be full of change such as those of asylum seekers and other groups whose stay is sometimes transient. In developing their documentation they have been keenly aware of the children's right to participation, to be heard and to be seen as valued citizens with democratic rights. The children have documentation sent home with them each day so that, should they need to move on at short notice, their experience and learning is evidenced. This documentation is an informal collection of material, full of annotated pictures and photographs documenting their learning. It is also a statement of their being, valuing each as an individual.



Documentation for a public purposes

Our final examples were designed to make children's learning visible to a wider audience, to celebrate and publicise ways of working. Debbie Hoy from the Wirral and Chris Holmes from the North East both had films of projects that they had been involved in. Their films had narrations which sought to explain the context, the nature of the provision, the rationale and the learning that took place through the children's engagement in the two, very different, projects. Loris Malaguzzi wrote of the courage of utopia, and in 'The House of Objects' children's work is turned into documentation which has as its goal the development of a higher culture of sustainability and environmental awareness – a utopian aim. It seeks to show how the philosophies that underpin Remida, the creative use of recyclable materials, can be made real and meaningful. The second film, Debbie's 'Living in the Wall', shares the artist's perspective and celebrates the creativity and imagination of children. Sadly we ran out of time to show the films.

Form, function, context, audience, and the hidden complexities of documentation

We had tried to demonstrate some of the different ways of presenting children's own words, their pictorial representations and photographic evidence as a basis for analysis and decision making, professional dialogue about curriculum, professional development and public debate. In dialogue with each other we deepened our own understanding of the strengths and limitations of different media in making learning visible to different audiences and giving voice to the children. We constantly returned to three questions: what is this for; why did we do it like this; what were we trying to show? But, in asking these questions, through engaging in dialogue, we experienced much more.

Choosing the pieces of documentation to share made us acutely aware of the need to value and respect different perspectives. We recognised the emotional investment and uncertainty of opening up our work for interrogation and, ourselves to change and renewal. Being open involves trust, responsibility, compassion, patience and understanding, a recognition that we're all on a journey. To return to Carlina, 'Listening means to deconstruct, lose our theories, to come to a deeper encounter with others.'

Our thanks for the 'deep encounter' not only to those involved in putting the presentation together: Debi Keyte, Paddy Beeles, Helen Watson and Louise Lowings, but to all the people who brought examples of their work for display during the week and who shared their thoughts, ideas and feelings during the visit.

Chris Merrick has worked as a teacher, headteacher and early childhood inspector in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. Since 2002 she has been working as the Assistant Principal at Zurich International School, Switzerland and is soon returning to the UK to develop her career as a freelance professional development consultant. cmerrick@zis.ch www.zis.ch.

Chris Holmes (BA General Arts, B Phil Early Childhood Studies, HND Photography) is an early years educator and professional photographer who has worked for Sightlines Initiative since 1997, as an educator, project mentor and documenter. She is particularly interested in the creative use of the documentation process; has undertaken a case study of a 'Creative Thinking in Action' project and co-authors project evaluations. Chris has also worked as associate on an early years research project at Newcastle University, looking at the effect of study programmes in developing reflective practice.

