

# Making Curriculum Visible

## Using Pedagogical Documentation

Submitted By Kim Deibert

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to explore the process of *pedagogical documentation* as a method of authentic assessment in kindergarten. The paper will focus on how documentation is used to make curriculum visible. A theoretical history and the principles of Reggio Emilia schools will provide background information. Documentation is a teaching tool, a research method, and an assessment practice. There are three key audiences to consider; children, teachers, and parents. Implementing this method requires reflection on instructional methods, planning, scheduling, and classroom environment. Documentation can be a representation of both curriculum and of children's learning. Curriculum can be informed and enhanced by this illuminating process. Documentation values and respects each child as an individual, representing the 'whole child' by embracing children's diversity, interests, creativity, developmental growth, and learning styles. This method compliments and honors First Nations, Metis, and Inuit worldviews. There are many benefits as well as limitations, which teachers need to understand before deciding to implement this complex process.

*Keywords:* authentic assessment, pedagogical documentation, Reggio Emilia, transparency, emergent curriculum, metacognition, authentic assessment

## **Introduction**

Early childhood is one of the most formative times in a child's life. It is important that educators respect and value this time and honor it with developmentally appropriate practice throughout their programs. In a time when many school administrations are looking to improve school scores on standardized tests, it is imperative that our youngest citizens are not compromised in the process. Constructivism and inquiry learning are current trends in education; the schools in Reggio Emilia schools embrace these constructs in their early childhood programs. Documentation is a key Reggio practice that is a teaching tool, research method, and assessment practice. This method engages children, teachers, and parents. Kindergarten classrooms can use documentation to make curriculum outcomes transparent and to enhance the learning that takes place on a daily basis.

## **Reggio Emilia**

Reggio Emilia is a city in Italy whose schools have become inspirational to many early childhood programs and educators. To understand documentation it is important to first have some knowledge of Reggio principles and methodology. Reggio philosophy views the child as *capable* and *competent* and as *creator* not *consumer*; advocates a *child-directed curriculum*; and emphasizes the importance of *relationship* and *collaboration*.

Wien (2008) explored three practices that are valued in Reggio programs. *Environment as third teacher* refers to the "capacity of the environment to engage and shape learning interactions" (p. 9). *Pedagogical documentation* is a "presentation of what children are doing, thinking, and feeling in school, presented in visual and text forms" . . . (making) "children's thinking and theories about the world visible" (p. 10). The phrase "*hundred languages of*

*learning*” applies to the many ways children represent their knowledge, ideas, and theories (p. 10).

*Emergent Curriculum* is a Reggio inspired methodology that encourages teachers to plan and organize the classroom environment and curriculum based on their observations of what the children’s interests are. It is inquiry based, where teachers and children are considered ‘*participatory co-learners*’ in their attempts to make meaning (Wien, 2008, p. 1). Emergent curriculum incorporates documentation as research, and this “research is the driving force that propels emergent curriculum” (p. 153). Wien (2008) also claimed that the end result of opening up the curriculum to the interests and direction of the child “makes children want to learn and teachers want to teach” (p. 3).

## **Historical Influences**

“The Reggio Emilia approach, with its infusion of various theories and innovative practices, achieves a harmony among many contrasting philosophies” (Warash, Curtis, Hursh, & Tucci, 2008, p. 441). Like most teaching methods, Reggio inspired programs draw from the theories of many prominent educators. Two of these theorists are Vygotsky and Piaget. Vygotsky (1978, as cited Helm & Katz, 2001) believed that “effective teaching occurs when directed toward the child’s ‘*zone of proximal development*’ ”(p. 56). Teachers provide experiences at the child’s present level of understanding, first by assessing their understanding through observation, and then by providing learning opportunities that could expand on, or ‘*scaffold*’ to bring the child to the next stage of understanding. When observing, teachers look for what the child questions, can’t quite articulate, or explain, in order to guide their learning. Observation is a major component in documentation procedures.

Jean Piaget influenced Reggio principles, “Malaguzzi (1998), the founder of Reggio, claims that the richest potentiality of Piaget's work is in the epistemology domain or the theory of knowledge” (as cited in Warash et al., 2008, p. 443). Piaget’s theory of constructivism, or ‘learning about learning’, is at the heart of pedagogical documentation and Reggio values.

## **Pedagogical Documentation**

Pedagogical documentation involves listening to and observing children in an attempt to understand their thinking, ideas, and interests; and then makes this learning visible. The choice of what to document usually revolves around a particular learning question. Documentation samples should include an extensive collection of various artifacts. These artifacts could be: photos, text (stories, letters, menus, lists, signs), creations (pictures, sculptures, models), maps, checklists, audio/video recordings, and transcribed conversations. Documentation is cyclical, process oriented, narrative, and promotes metacognition. It can also assist teachers in the planning and implementation of curriculum.

Documentation is a cyclical process involving observation, data collection, collaboration, reflection, interpretation, and planning for learning. The collected samples are arranged in an aesthetic manner and made visible to the learners, teachers, parents, and school community in various ways (panels, newsletters, web pages, slideshows, photo albums etc.). Once the documentation is reflected on and interpreted, it can be used to ‘scaffold’ and plan children’s learning experiences that explore curriculum outcomes.

Kindergarten children love to tell and listen to stories. Documentation can introduce *story* into another aspect of their lives; understanding their own learning. Seitz (2008) suggested that this narrative would bring others into the experience and help them to understand more about ‘what is going on’ (p. 88). Curtis and Carter (2000) suggested that teachers “approach the

task as a process of collecting and telling the stories of the remarkable experiences of childhood” (p. 141). Clyde et al. (2006) described documentation as “pages in the storybook of my students' learning” (p. 224).

Documentation should not be equated with traditional ‘observation’ methods. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) explained that *child observation* is an evaluation of how well a child has succeeded in meeting standards; whereas *pedagogical documentation* attempts to “understand what is going on in the pedagogical work and what the child is capable of without any predetermined framework of expectations and norms” (p. 146). Pedagogical documentation considers what children say or do, rather than what they produce. Macdonald (2007) described documentation as a “negotiation between *process* and *content*” (p. 233).

Rinaldi (2006) described the process of teacher and child reflecting together as they learn and build knowledge as “not a documentation of products, but of processes, of mental paths” (Rinaldi, 2006.). These ‘mental’ paths promote metacognition, which is an understanding and awareness of the learning process; thinking about thinking. When children are invited to reflect upon their learning through documentation, they are revisiting their learning and therefore becoming more aware of their thinking. Rinaldi (2006) claimed that “this reading, reflecting, assessing and self-assessing become an integral part of the child’s knowledge building process” (p. 100).

## **Documentation as a Teaching Tool**

When documentation is incorporated into the classroom it can be a valuable teaching tool. The reflection that a child is encouraged to participate in when viewing documentation can teach the child to be more aware of his/her own learning. Viewing photos or other artifacts, or revisiting conversations can spark children to see their work in a different way and expand their

leaning into other directions. Curtis and Carter (2000) believe that documentation serves as a “vivid” reminder of an experience, which motivates the learner to expand on their ideas and plans, “encouraging a cognitive leap” (p. 125). Edwards (1998) and Rinaldi (2001) (as cited in Lyon & Donahue, 2009) suggested that documentation is “embedded” in curriculum and instruction, and consequently encourages metacognition in teachers and students (p. 110). The Saskatchewan Kindergarten Curriculum described metacognition as “the ability to think about and reflect on one’s own thinking and learning processes” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 70). This valuable characteristic of documentation, as described by Wien (2008), “lifts thinking out of the stream of lived experience in education and makes it visible” (p. 154).

## **Documentation as a Research Method**

Rinaldi (2006) advocated for more research in the classroom in order to “create a culture of research”:

In Reggio we feel that the concept of research, or perhaps better, a new concept of research, more contemporary and alive, can emerge if we legitimate the use of this term to describe the cognitive tension that is created whenever authentic learning and knowledge-building processes take place. ‘Research’ used to describe the individual and common paths leading in the direction of new universes of possibility. Research as the emergence and revealing of an event. Research as art: research exists, as in art, within the search for the being, the essence, the meaning.” (p. 101)

Helm, Beneke, and Steinheimer (2007) stated that teachers have been expected “to become more reflective and to regularly analyze, evaluate, and strengthen the quality of their work. To do this, they need to accurately capture what is occurring in the classroom through documentation” (p. 12).

The concept of teacher as researcher will help the teacher better understand inquiry learning in students, and therefore model the research process for them to emulate. “If the teacher understands what it is like to have an inquiry and follow it through to provisional answers, then it is possible to cultivate the same stance in children” (Wien, 2008, p. 153). This is a focused and demanding process, expecting the teacher to collect and chose data, analyze and interpret data, collaborate and communicate with others. Wien (2008) emphasized that this process “is as demanding as writing an academic paper” (p. 10). Research has shown that teachers have found documentation to be a worthwhile endeavor (Buldu, 2010; Cooney & Buchanan, 2001; Goldhauber & Smith, 1997; Macdonald, 2007; McClow & Gillespie, 1998).

## **Documentation as an Assessment Practice**

Gronlund and Engel (2001) used the term “authentic assessment” to refer to the process of considering children’s development from the context of their everyday activities as opposed to isolated tasks commonly examined through standardized testing (p. 1). This form of assessment affirms the use of documentation in assessment for/as/of learning as outlined by the Saskatchewan Kindergarten Curriculum:

**Assessment for learning.** Requires the “educator’s reflections and interpretations regarding children’s progress to determine what each child needs. Based on this analysis, the educator can design learning experiences that provide a scaffold to new learning” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 69).

**Assessment as learning.** “Children become curious and interested as they review their experiences and describe the knowledge and processes that evolved during that particular experience” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 69).

**Assessment of learning.** “Provides evidence of the children’s learning in order to make

judgements about children's achievement. It also provides an opportunity to report evidence of achievement related to subject area outcomes. Assessment of learning occurs at the end of the learning cycle" (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 70).

Assessment *of* learning tends to be the focus for most teachers. Documentation requires teachers to view "assessment as an ongoing process rather than an isolated activity" (Suarez & Daniels, 2009, p. 178). The challenge that documentation can resolve, is how to show evidence of success without using standardized, group administered tests, which Helm et al. (2007) consider to be "inappropriate for assessing young children" (p. 9).

### **Audience**

Documentation gives voice to all participants, fosters collaboration and dialogue, supports a 'shared focus', and represents multiple perspectives (Buldu, 2010; Dahlberg et al., 1999; MacDonald, 2007; Rinaldi, 2006; Wien, 2008). "That which is documented can be seen as a narrative of children's, pedagogues' and parents' lives in the early childhood institution, a narrative which can show these institutions' contributions to our society and to the development of our democracy (Dahlberg et al, 1999, p. 158).

Preparing documentation for reflection needs to consider the audience and purpose it is intended for. Documentation intended for parents may focus on an explanation of the event's purpose and illustrate the learning outcomes experienced. If documentation is to be primarily viewed by teachers and staff in order to assess children and plan programming, then interpretation and reflection on learning will be the focus. If documentation is intended as a teaching tool for children's reflections then it will be important to pay attention to the children's own language and perceptions about the event or project. "Like a good storyteller, the teacher



must define what is most important to communicate to the intended audience” (Helm et al., 2007, p. 28).

## **Children**

**As competent and capable.** The image of the child as competent and capable is at the heart of the Reggio approach and therefore a priority in documentation procedures.

Documentation makes children feel that their work and ideas are valued. “The teacher doesn’t allow herself to think that a child can’t accomplish anything” (Wien, 2008, p. 157). Wien (2008) further echoed this belief by reporting that children are: “fascinated by seeing their words (“I said that?”) and work processes made visible to others. The children grasp that teachers value their ideas and value the intentional quest they have set” (p. 155).

Documentation encourages the audience to see children at their present developmental stage as opposed to where we want them to be, or, as Curtis and Carter (2000) advocated, “who they are in the here and now” (p. 25).

**Protagonist.** A second Reggio principle that documentation embraces is the image of the child as a protagonist of his/her own learning. Kim and Darling (2009) identified the importance of allowing children to revisit their “ideas, conversations, experiences, memories and pictures of their work” in order to encourage further investigation of a project or problem (p. 143). This is an aspect of documentation that often goes uncharted. I recently began a sharing project that illustrates this process. My students had been collecting documentation that demonstrated learning that took place in their home and family environment. They brought it to school enclosed in a ‘Home Learning Album’. They first shared it with me and we discussed the learning that it showed. I then scanned two samples of their choices to show the class on an interactive whiteboard. I will extend this activity to include classroom documentation samples.

When children share in the documentation process, they “became more careful about their work and more evaluative of their own efforts” (Helm & Katz, 2001, p. 56).

**Problem Solver.** Rinaldi (2005, as cited in Kim & Darling, 2009) suggested that teachers demonstrate their belief in children when they allow them to develop theories, ask questions and participate in their own knowledge-building (p. 141). This knowledge-building and critical thinking stems from children’s natural and “incredible urge to make sense of the world”(Curtis & Carter, 2000, p. 25). While striving to make sense of the world, children question and solve problems. Documentation allows teachers and parents to observe problem solving in action, and to develop deeper understanding about the child’s thinking process. Rinaldi (1998, as cited in Wien, 2008, p. 157) referred to these problems as “cognitive knots” that allow children to discover, creatively find solutions, and learn persistence. So often, our traditional methods of teaching show children how to solve problems rather than allow them to discover their own solutions through inquiry.

## **Teachers**

**Assumptions and beliefs.** Reggio principles stress that teachers learn alongside their students. The documentation process encourages teachers to reflect on classroom experiences in order to explore “their attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions concerning a particular aspect of their teaching, and use reflection to foster self-evaluation and possible change” (Katz & Galbraith, 2006, p. 19). A teacher who is a reflective practitioner can realize opportunities to provide the best possible curriculum for students. The documentation process provides this valuable insight. Revisiting and rethinking documentation “leads to new thoughts, connections, and possibilities for planning curriculum. Documentation slows down and place holds thinking for consideration” (Wien, 2008, p. 155).

**Stages of documentation.** Seitz (2008) identified six stages a teacher experiences when implementing documentation into their classroom. 1. The teacher decides to begin documenting children's work. This stage is not very selective; often every child's samples are the same. 2. The teacher explores the use of technology to aid in the collection of data. This includes the use of cameras, videos, scanning, and word processing or photo editing programs to produce documentation panels. 3. A teacher in this stage concentrates on the child's engagement in an activity, intentionally planning to capture a piece of a learning story. 4. The teacher strives to produce further information about learning and make connections to the learning. The teacher names the documentation and adds descriptions of the learning. 5. The teacher explores further connections in the storytelling process by complementing photos with a variety of artifacts. The goal is to tell a complete story that connects to learning outcomes or standards. 6. The final stage involves more decision-making on the part of the teacher. Based on documentation collected, the teacher frames questions, reflects, assesses, builds theories, and strives to meet learning standards (p. 94). These steps accurately describe my own journey through this process. It is important for teachers to realize that, as overwhelming as this process may seem, it can be accomplished if you accept the stages and the time it takes to implement. Lyon and Donahue (2009), who studied urban teacher's implementation of Reggio documentation, reiterated this sentiment:

Such changes take time, particularly for teachers to shift their notion of documenting student learning as a product – a panel on a wall 'proving' the children have been engaged in activities – to a process – one that supports inquiry into children's ongoing meaning making (p. 109).

Helm & Katz (2001) compared documentation to learning to drive, “The first attempts are slow, and each step has to be carefully considered and planned. Eventually a driver becomes so skilled and confident that she can drive without consciously thinking about most of the separate tasks, like starting the car” (p. 65).

## **Parents**

Documentation methods focus on learning and make learning visible. Parents play the most significant role in the learning of their child. Teachers who embrace this process “understand the importance of developing a culture of a learning school where children see themselves as learners, parents see their children as successful learners, and members of the community value the learning that occurs” (Helm et al., 2007, p. 11). Documentation can help parents appreciate that valuable learning occurs in a ‘non-traditional’ emergent curriculum environment (Helm et al., 2007; Kim & Darling, 2009). Many parents are not sure whether their child is meeting learning outcomes when teachers don’t send home completed paper/pencil tasks or teach lessons from a structured lesson plan. This is understandable, considering that parents are not in the classroom very often. This ‘invisible-ness’ of learning becomes visible through documentation (Buldu, 2010; Curtis & Carter, 2000).

Parents are accustomed to receiving traditional letter grades for their children at reporting times. Documentation provides an alternative way to receive information about their child’s success in school. A study done by Sisson (2009) researched teachers’ experiences with implementing Reggio methods. A teacher in the study commented on the use of documentation for accountability, "Now with the standards, that's a big worry for them (parents), so we put a lot of things (documentation) out so they (parents) understand that when you do just a certain project, all the things that are covered (align with the standards)” (p 359). Wien (2008) also

reported that parents shift their attention away from scores when documentation is used as an assessment method. Helm et al. (2007) confirmed this finding,

Letter grades or standardized scores leave parents with a sense of their child's performance or progress, but they do not provide insight into how the child goes about learning, what she is starting to learn and could use help with at home, or what she is not yet ready to learn (p. 125).

Studies have shown (Buldu, 2010; MacDonald, 2007) that documentation increased the frequency and depth of conversations that parents and children had at home. Parents understood more about what happened in the school day, and consequently were able to ask more detailed and informed questions after viewing documentation samples. I believe that children will be motivated to answer more focused questions than the traditional, "What did you do at school today?"

Making learning visible is sometimes referred to as *transparency*, which Fraser (2006) indicated, invites parents to be part of their child's experience at school. This transparency would promote their awareness of their value in their child's learning, and help them see how they can become more engaged in the classroom program (p. 62).

## **Implementation**

Documentation requires that the teacher reflect on what has been collected and observed and cultivate it to enhance curriculum. It invites teachers to become "researcher, meaning maker, relationship builder, and curriculum planner" (Curtis & Carter, 2000, p. 148).

Implementation of documentation can be attained through: a shift in methodology, planning and scheduling; altering the environment (materials, aesthetics, climate); and fostering relationships.

## **Instructional Methods, Planning, and Scheduling**

Perhaps the greatest shift that teachers experience when implementing Reggio methods is in how they plan, schedule, and instruct students. This entails allowing students to theorize. If teachers allow theorizing, then children will want to go on a quest to find out if they are correct, thus inviting inquiry. Teachers must trust that outcomes will be accomplished through inquiry, but will know that they have been accomplished if they document the experiences.

Wien (2008) suggested that during free play or inquiry lessons, teachers always have instruments on hand, such as a camera, paper and pen, checklists etc. This process will become a habit once implemented. “Teachers who conscientiously document the children’s experiences during projects are more likely to make productive decisions when planning for the project” (Helm & Katz, 2001, p. 55). Wien (2008) suggested that these decisions can ‘scaffold’ learning and help teachers “connect learning together rather than in isolated ‘bits’ . . . [and] “restore connectivity in education” (p. 158). Themes and project approaches have been advocated in early childhood for many years, but may have been discarded by many teachers due to curriculum standards and accountability expectations. “The force of documents written in linear lists of expectations or outcomes frequently leads teachers to the interpretation that outcomes must be taught item by item” (Wien, 2008, p. 157). Wien (2008) contrasted this interpretation when referring to learning as “layered and tacit” (p. 158).

Buldu (2010) extensively studied the process of documentation in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Teachers in the study stated that the information documentation gave them was valuable in the planning of classroom experiences, scaffolding the learning of each student, and collecting materials and resources to promote further investigation (p. 1445).

## **Classroom Environment**

The environment involves much more than physical space and materials; it also includes the learning climate and the relationships fostered within. Multiple places for learning, teamwork, questioning, and listening are key factors in the documentation process.

**Places for learning.** The learning landscape occurs inside and outside of the classroom, including the child's home and community. "Since the environment is much more than just the classroom, this means the school, outdoors, and community should be visible in the observations and documentation" (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 16). Excursions outside of the classroom and school walls are important for providing children with a sense of the many places learning occurs.

**Teamwork.** The classroom climate should be one of collaboration and teamwork. Children learn from each other, the environment, and adults. "The children see each other as a resource for their learning, come to value what each other is doing and thinking, and feel part of the overall group" (Curtis & Carter, 2000, p. 143). Kim & Darling (2009) stated that this collaboration among children allowed them to "lend and borrow ideas for productive cognitive conflict" and see "their own knowledge, enriched and elaborated on by the contributions of others through communication and exchange" (p. 139). Clyde et al (2006) described how children grew in their ability to represent their thinking by sharing it with their peers. They noted that children's drawings were initially simplistic, but when they conversed with their peers, they added more elements. When other children disagreed with their theories, they included even more detail, as if using their drawing to prove their opinions (p. 222).

**Questions.** Wien (2008) suggested that, through documentation, children learn to collaboratively look for meaning and to theorize on various issues. The teacher's questions

should direct the children “to think their own thoughts, generate theories, and hypothesize possibilities.” She refers to these questions “as seeds to thinking” (p. 154).

**Listening.** One of the primary tasks of documentation is listening. Listening to children fosters a positive environment that shows children that they are valued. Rinaldi refers to documentation as “visible listening” (p. 68). Listening is necessary to produce authentic documentation of children’s language, ideas, and reflections.

## **Representation**

Documentation represents and makes curriculum outcomes visible. It also honors the diverse nature of the whole child. It illustrates the interests, developmental levels, creativity, and learning styles that embody young learners. It respects the way children express themselves artistically, symbolically, and verbally. This embracing of diversity and holistic representation honors First Nations worldviews and aligns with the goals of inclusive education.

## **Curriculum**

The 2010 *Saskatchewan Kindergarten Curriculum* and its supplemental resource document *Children First* were influenced by Reggio Emilia principles. These documents recommend that documentation methods be implemented in order to provide evidence of children’s learning (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009). “Documentation can assist educators to evaluate the degree to which children are achieving the provincial curricular outcomes” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010, p 71).

Seitz (2008) believed that as teachers document they learn what information is valuable, and why we need to assess certain characteristics of child development (p. 92). She suggested that, “the quality of the end product will depend on the teacher’s understanding of children, the



curriculum, and the standards, along with his or her effective use of technology and observation” (p. 89).

Helm et al. (2007) were concerned that teachers may view documentation as an end goal rather than a tool that “informs teaching”. They further explained that for documentation to be valuable it should “evaluate curriculum and instruction and translate to implementation” (p. 40). Therefore it is important that both explicit and implicit curriculum be present in documentation.

Clyde et al.(2006) stated that within child-directed projects and emergent curriculum, children become “co-creators of curriculum” (p. 221). This valuable teaching method takes time, commitment, and planning. Clyde et al. (2006) also noted that Reggio teachers do not have the standardized, linear curriculum present in North American kindergartens, however, “rather than delivering packaged programs, they invent unique ways to support individual and group learning. Planning for emergent curriculum is perhaps the most challenging aspect of Reggio” (p. 216).

## **The Whole Child**

Katz and Galbraith (2006) and Helm and Katz (2001) both expressed the importance of providing documentation evidence for all aspects of a child’s development: social, emotional, physical or sensory-motor, and academic or cognitive. These characteristics of children are mutually dependent on one another and should be documented holistically. Many testing procedures seek to isolate these features and therefore don’t permit the results to represent the child as a whole.

## **Diversity**

Classroom demographics consist of students who are diverse in many ways. When diversity and uncertainty are celebrated, then they become strengths not “obstacles” and

“uniformity is replaced by diversity” (Mesher & Amoriggi, 2001, pp. 240-246). It is important that teachers document in a variety of ways to allow the child’s strengths and uniqueness to shine, to ensure that the varied audiences (who are diverse in their own ways) will comprehend the learning being represented (Helm et al., 2007, p. 11).

Acknowledging the variety of the children’s linguistic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, pedagogical documentation enabled teachers to focus on a range of learning styles, rather than a ‘one-size-fits-all’ learning style, by allowing children to make sense of the world in their own ways through multiple languages -words, images, drawings, signs, building, sculpture or clay play, socio-dramatic play or music-as in the Reggio Emilia programmes. (Buldu, 2010, p. 1448)

Photos and other visual samples can be an effective way to bridge a language or cultural gap between students, parents, and teachers.

## **Interests and Creativity**

Documentation offers insight about the interests and creativity of each individual child. Careful observation can show teachers what topics are of most interest to the children and what processes they use to creatively express these interests. “Multiple ‘languages’-- speech, sketching and sculpture, discussion, movement, photography, and others--functioned for children as vital tools for observing, investigating, and representing their world” (Clyde et al., 2006, p. 224). Reggio-inspired schools passionately emphasize art, dedicating an area of the classroom to explore artistic expression (an *atelier*) and often employing an art specialist (an *atelierista*) to work with the children. Clyde et al. (2006) described a child’s artistic creations as “vehicles for sharing and responding to one another's theories” (p. 222). Displaying and documenting the art that children create shows that their work is valued, encouraging them to “produce art that

astounds most viewers and reflects creative, communicative and intellectual potential of young children" (Mesher & Amoriggi, 2001, p. 244).

## **Development and Learning Styles**

MacDonald (2007) studied the use of documentation in five Canadian kindergarten classrooms. A teacher in the study related this insight: "I find it is almost impossible to capture the child being unsuccessful (which speaks volumes about the success ALL children should be able to enjoy in their school day" (p, 241). When teachers look for accomplishments to document they promote a positive environment. Children's confidence is enhanced when they view and reflect on their own success. A teacher in a study by Clyde et al. (2006) shared that,

One of the most remarkable benefits of our inquiry into the Reggio approach was its impact on kids who typically struggle in school. We observed reserved children asserting themselves as their expertise on a subject grew. With each attempt, each experiment, each theory, "they got a little more confident and a little more assertive," Karen noted. "And even if they didn't do it right, the other children encouraged and facilitated success for that child, which made them feel more comfortable to try other things." (p. 223)

Documentation can be valuable in making learning visible for children with challenges. Photos of a child engaged in learning can communicate progress more fully than test scores. In Reggio Emilia, all children are welcome, and children with challenges are celebrated and referred to as 'children with special rights.' "By embracing a 'concept of differences,' an educator broadens one's own pedagogical approach for all children" (Gandini & Kaminsky, 2006, as cited in Suarez & Daniels, 2009, p. 179).

## **First Nations/Metis/Inuit Worldviews**

The Mother Earth's Children's Charter School Society (MECSS), (2002) stated the importance of the medicine wheel in a “traditional Indigenous approach to education”, which “supports each person's mental, physical, social/emotional, and spiritual elements. Teaching approaches, then, require far more experiential learning approaches than are currently used in 'mainstream' public education systems" (Baydala et al., 2009, p. 79). Documentation and the teaching methods that accompany it (emergent curriculum, inquiry) represent this experiential approach and assess children in a holistic manner.

The image of the child is key in FNMI worldviews, which coincide with the Reggio image of the child. Rousselot (2007) corroborated the Reggio image of the child as competent and capable;

The First Nations child is above all a gift from the Creator. In my Innu language we say *auassiss* when we wish to refer to the child. It means "little being of light," and we must take care of this light so that it does not go out. Children have an honest mind and wisdom that call for respect from the adults. These are the values on which we base the education of children in First Nations communities, and this is true for First Nations throughout the whole country. (p. 56)

## **Benefits and Limitations**

### **Benefits**

Buldu's 2010 study of documentation in the UAE noted the value of pedagogical documentation for teachers, children, and parents. For teachers, documentation informed

teaching, encouraged self-reflection, created a professional learning community, and increased communication with parents. For children, she found that documentation helped scaffold learning, created a community of learners, increased their “ participation, motivation and interest in learning” and enhanced self-awareness. For parents, documentation increased parents’ knowledge of what their children were experiencing at school, improved dialogue with the school and with their child, and educated them on how to assist their children at home (pp. 1443-1447).

Helm et al. (2007) supported these findings with six ‘*promises of documentation*’. Documentation provides “evidence of children's learning in all areas of a child’s development- physical, emotional, social, and cognitive;” offers participants an understanding of learning in an “integrated environment”; creates a structure for “organizing & recording observations”; supports learning as interactive; demonstrates the value of inquiry-based authentic learning experiences; and helps teachers scaffold learning (p. 12).

A case study by Goldhaber and Smith (1997) studied three teachers’ experience with documentation. She discovered consistent themes from their reflections: “documentation promotes staff development and collaboration; creates a climate of inquiry; communicates to children, parents, and families; invites meaningful dialogue; and advocates for the child (p. 3).

## **Limitations**

Documentation takes time, commitment, and effort to implement (Helm et al., 2007; Wien, 2008). It is not a process that can be accomplished overnight, nor is it finite. Pedagogical documentation is not a program that teachers can simply ‘plug into’ and follow. McClow and Gillespie (1998) theorized that teachers could easily change their classroom’s physical space, but it is much more challenging for them to adopt a new teaching style and “belief system” (p. 133).

Both Buldu (2010) and MacDonald (2007) reported that teachers were disappointed by the number of parents who were able to view the documentation on a regular basis, and their apparent disinterest in the documentation. They also cited a lack of funds and equipment (such as cameras, recording devices, and color photocopiers), as a major implementation issue.

Suarez & Daniels (2009) and Macdonald (2007) both reported that collaboration with colleagues was imperative to the process of documentation. Collaboration can be a fundamental limiting factor for many teachers who only have one kindergarten and no teacher assistants.

## **Conclusion**

Buldu (2010) speculated that,

While it is not easy to adopt and implement pedagogical documentation, it holds potential in highlighting children's learning processes, increasing children's motivation, interest and participation in learning processes, helping them to reflect on and contribute to improve their own learning. (p. 144)

I believe that these limitations can be overcome with creativity and motivation. Teachers can limit the amount of time spent on observation by concentrating on observing just one child a day, one area of the classroom at a time, or placing a time limit on daily observations. Collaboration can be encouraged by inviting parents or support staff to participate in viewing and reflecting on documentation panels. Documentation samples can be sent home in albums or made available online to assist with informing parents who do not regularly visit the classroom.

Curis and Carter (2000) likened the "observations of ordinary moments" to a "treasure chest of examples of this remarkable time of life, . . . They are gifts children are giving to you" (p. 119). Documentation is a rewarding and valuable experience for all participants, it provides authentic assessment for diverse learners, and makes curriculum outcomes visible.

## References

- Baydala, L., Rasmussen, C., Bisanz, J., Kennedy, M., Weigum, N., Worrell, S., . . . Wikman, E. (2009). Evaluating success: Mother Earth's Children's Charter School longitudinal study. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 32(2), 78.
- Buldu, M. (2010). Making learning visible in kindergarten classrooms: Pedagogical documentation as a formative assessment technique. *Teaching and Teacher Education: An International Journal of Research and Studies*, 26(7), 1439-1439-1449.
- Clyde, J., Miller, C., Sauer, S., Liebert, K., Parker, S., & Runyon, S. (2006). Teachers and children inquire into Reggio Emilia. *Language Arts*, 83(3), 215-215-226.
- Cooney, M., & Buchanan, M. (2001). Documentation: Making assessment visible. *Young Exceptional Children*, 4(3), 10-10-16.
- Curtis, D., & Carter, M. (2000). *The art of awareness: How observation can transform your teaching*. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press.
- Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A.R. (1999). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Postmodern perspectives*. London; Falmer Press.
- Fraser, S. (2006). *Authentic childhood :Experiencing Reggio Emilia in the classroom* (2nd ed.). Toronto, Ont.: Thomson/Nelson.
- Goldhaber, J., & Smith, D. (1997). "You look at things differently:" The role of documentation in the professional development of a campus child care center staff. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 25(1), 3-3-10. doi:10.1023/A:1025673629095
- Gronlund, G., & Engel, B. (2001). *Focused portfolios: A complete assessment for the young child*. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press.

- Helm, J. H., Beneke, S., & Steinheimer, K. (2007). *Windows on learning: Documenting young children's work* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Helm, J. H. & Katz L. (2001). *Young investigators: The project approach in the early years*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Holland Stairs, A., & Bernhard, J. (2002). Considerations for evaluating 'good care' in Canadian aboriginal early childhood settings. *McGill Journal of Education*, 37(3), 309-309.
- Katz, L., & Galbraith, J. (2006). Making the social visible within inclusive classrooms: JRCE. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 21(1), 5-5-21.
- Kim, B. S., & Darling, L. F. (2009). Monet, Malaguzzi, and the constructive conversations of preschoolers in a Reggio-inspired classroom. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 37(2), 137-137-145. doi:10.1007/s10643-009-0323-2
- Lyon, S., & Donahue, D. M. (2009). Reggio-inspired professional development in a diverse urban public school: Cases of what is possible. *Teacher Development*, 13(2), 107-124.
- MacDonald, M. (2007). Toward formative assessment: The use of pedagogical documentation in early elementary classrooms. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 22(2), 232-242. doi:DOI: 10.1016/j.ecresq.2006.12.001
- McClow, C. S., & Gillespie, C. W. (1998). Parental reactions to the introduction of the Reggio Emilia approach in Head Start classrooms. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 26(2), 131.
- Meshar, P., & Amoriggi, H. (2001). Adapting to change: Can the Reggio Emilia approach help with the implementation of the new Quebec curriculum? *McGill Journal of Education*, 36(3), 239-239-250.
- Rinaldi, C. (2006.). *In dialogue with Reggio Emilia :Listening, researching and learning*. London: Routledge.



- Rousselot, N. (2007). A multitude of identities. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 30(1), 54-54-60,191.
- Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. (2009). *Children first: A guide for kindergarten*. Retrieved from <https://www.edonline.sk.ca/webapps/moe-curriculum-BBLEARN/index.jsp>
- Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. (2010). *Kindergarten curriculum*. Retrieved from <https://www.edonline.sk.ca/webapps/moe-curriculum-BBLEARN/index.jsp?lang=en>
- Seitz, H. (2008). The power of documentation in the early childhood classroom. *YC Young Children*, 63(2), 88-88-93.
- Sisson, J. H. (2009). Making sense of competing constructs of teacher as professional: JRCE. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 23(3), 351-351-366.
- Suarez, S. C., & Daniels, K. J. (2009). Listening for competence through documentation: Assessing children with language delays using digital video. *Remedial and Special Education*, 30(3), 177-177-190. doi:10.1177/0741932508315649
- Warash, B., Curtis, R., Hursh, D., & Tucci, V. (2008). Skinner meets Piaget on the Reggio playground: Practical synthesis of applied behavior analysis and developmentally appropriate practice orientations: JRCE. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 22(4), 441-441-453.
- Wien, C. A. (2008). *Emergent curriculum in the primary classroom: Interpreting the Reggio Emilia approach in schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.