

INTERPRETATIONS OF PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTATION  
IN EARLY LEARNING AND KINDERGARTEN SETTINGS  
BY EDUCATORS IN ONTARIO, CANADA

ELLEN M. BROWN

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## **Abstract**

Pedagogical documentation is a multi-modal research methodology and semiotic tool for thinking in the practice of Italian early childhood educators in the Reggio Emilia Approach. In the Reggio Emilia municipal schools educators act as researchers with pedagogical documentation to study how children construct meaning. Their research is so startling that pedagogical documentation has been translated into educational contexts throughout the world. Since 2014 pedagogical documentation has become an expectation of practice for educators in child care and school settings in Ontario, Canada. How are educators interpreting a research practice from another culture? Eight educators from early learning and Kindergarten settings in Ontario were interviewed to learn about their experiences and understandings of pedagogical documentation. Four orientations toward purposes of pedagogical documentation were identified: as a tool to assess development and communicate with families; as an inquiry of educators' questions and theories; as an exploration of children's questions and theories; and, as a research practice for educator reflection and change in education. Participants' purposes for pedagogical documentation were closely tied with their perceptions of being supported. When educators felt supported their purposes included reflection and research. If they did not feel supported they considered pedagogical documentation to be for assessment and communication and did not recognize other possibilities. Pedagogical documentation reveals the ways creativity and emotion are involved in learning and for some participants this changed how they listen to children and go about their practice. Pedagogical documentation may act as a dialogic tool contributing to educator self-awareness and leading to rethinking ideas about children, learning, teaching relationships, and change in education.

**Dedication**

For Kaya, Paige, Jet, Cedar, and Goldie.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Most simply expressed, pedagogical documentation is a process for making pedagogical (or other work) visible and subject to dialogue, interpretation, contestation, and transformation. It embodies the value of subjectivity—that there is no objective point of view that makes observations neutral. (Dahlberg, 2012, p. 225)

Pedagogical documentation, as qualitative research processes and a multi-modal research tool, was developed by early childhood educators in practice and may be traced back to its beginnings, in genetic, developmental and socio-cultural historical ways (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, 1935/1978) to the desires of families in rural northern Italy seeking a more democratic form of education for their young children at the end of World War II (Cagliari et al., 2016; Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993, 1998, 2012). Oriented by families' hopes for democratic participation in their children's education and designed by a "specific intellectual," Loris Malaguzzi (Moss, 2016, p. xviii), pedagogical documentation emerged from within an educational experiment, where research and practice met dialogically.

Exploration in practice, in the search for a democratic pedagogy for early childhood education, was carried out informally over two decades by Malaguzzi and his colleagues in eight parent-built rural schools when the developing approach moved into the newly opened municipal schools for young children in Reggio Emilia, Italy (Cagliari et al., 2016; Edwards et al., 1993, 1998, 2012) in 1963. Ideas that had been born in the experimental schools became more formally realized in the Reggio Emilia municipal school system serving children from birth to age six (Cagliari et al., 2016; Edwards et al., 1993, 1998, 2012).

Loris Malaguzzi, along with colleagues Tiziana Filippini, Amelia Gambetti, Lella Gandini, Elena Giacomini, Claudia Giudici, Carlina Rinaldi, Laura Rubizzi, artists Giovanni Piazza and Vea Vecchi and others who joined them in the early years (Edwards et al., 1993, 1998, 2012), are regarded as the founders of this approach to early childhood education that has come to be known internationally as “the Reggio Emilia philosophy and experience in education” (Dahlberg, 2016, p. viii) and is newly trademarked as the Reggio Emilia Approach (Reggio Children, 2020)<sup>1</sup>

Educators involved in the contemporary experiences of the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia continue to be oriented by the shared hopes and dreams that first motivated families to build schools they imagined as a place for their children to enjoy democratic educational experiences rooted in beliefs, values, and principles stressing that, all children are intelligent and capable of making meaning, that is, learning, in their relationships from birth (Cagliari et al., 2016; Edwards et al., 1993, 1998, 2012). Acting as researchers engaged in dual pedagogies of “relationship and listening,” educators in

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<sup>1</sup> This approach has been in development since the end of WWII but has only recently given a trademark to the name.

the Reggio Emilia schools continue to use pedagogical documentation as their methodological approach to study children's co-construction of thinking strategies so they may offer meaningful educational conditions and contexts to encourage the continuation of their generative processes of learning (Edwards et al., 1993, 1998, 2012; Rinaldi, 2001, 2006, 2012).

### **Pedagogical Documentation as Educator Research and Semiotic Tool for Thinking**

Educators in the Reggio Emilia schools act as researchers gathering qualitative, multi-modal data samples showing children engaged in processes of thinking and expression. Educators' collections might be of traces of children's conversations, theories, and reflections and could consist of notes and photographs, and sketches and recordings. These collections might be also be posted, or sent through email or blog, or published in different formats including booklets, video, or panels. This collection of data, along with artefacts created by children, create a place for educators to democratically study and discuss interpretations of children's thinking and strategies of making meaning while simultaneously reflecting on their educational practice (Giudici, Rinaldi, & Krechevsky, 2008; Wien, Guyevsky, & Berdoussis, 2011).

Pedagogical documentation, as educator research developed from learning contexts that Malaguzzi regarded as "integral living organisms" (Gandini, 2012a, p. 41) of "amiable schools" (Gandini, 2012a, p. 41), traces children's learning experiences, while preserving the most interesting and advanced moments of teachers' professional growth, creating knowledge, not only for themselves, but also for academic researchers and colleagues (Rinaldi, 1998, p. 121). Jerome Bruner, a friend of Malaguzzi and a frequent visitor to the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia, referred to their educational

project as a “true university” because of the prevailing culture of research created using pedagogical documentation (Filippini & Vecchi, 1996/2005; Rinaldi, 1998, p. 121).

This culture of educational research, based in pedagogical documentation and pivotal to the Reggio Emilia experience, offers opportunities to study children’s and educators’ co-constructed thinking strategies and meaning-making processes and continues to be in development today in the municipal Italian schools, as well as in other early learning settings where it has migrated throughout the world, including to the province of Ontario, in Canada (Cagliari et al., 2016; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013; Edwards et al., 1998, 2012; Fleet, Patterson, & Robertson, 2017).

### **Pedagogical Documentation in Ontario**

Recently, for educators of young children in Ontario, working in early learning settings (including full- and part-time child care for children from birth to school age and in kindergarten school settings for children ages three to six), pedagogical documentation has become an expectation of practice (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, 2014a, 2016).

As a Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE), Ontario Certified Teacher (OCT), presenter and educational consultant supporting educators using pedagogical documentation, it is evident to me that the transition toward working with pedagogical documentation in practice is not easy, even for educators who are receptive to experimenting with new ideas in teaching and learning. Ontario educators have informally related to me that the processes involved with using pedagogical documentation are at times unsettling and disruptive to their thinking and result in an experience of troublesome “cognitive knots” (Edwards, 2012, p. 157) that challenge their

personal philosophical educational ideas and their socio-cultural assumptions of human development and learning, and cause them to reconsider their roles and responsibilities as early childhood educators (Susan Hislop, Leslie LeClair, Tonya Millsap, personal communications, 2018). Little formal research has been conducted on how Ontario educators' perspectives and understandings of pedagogical documentation develop in relation to their practice.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to learn about the experiences of educators of young children working with pedagogical documentation in Ontario, Canada. The educators' personal experiences are considered in relation to the Ontario Ministry of Education interpretations of pedagogical documentation, found in provincial early learning documents written for child care and Kindergarten in schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, 2014a, 2015, 2016), and are discussed in relationship with experiences of educators in the Reggio Emilia municipal schools, as told in their publications.

By gathering Ontario educators' perspectives in three-part interviews (Seidman, 2013), the aim of this research is to gain some insight into educators' understandings of the research, design, and study processes of the multi-modal tool of pedagogical documentation in terms of how the educators came to their understandings of pedagogical documentation, how they are currently working with pedagogical documentation in their practice, and their hopes for working with this methodology in the future. It is intended that this research will offer appreciation, support, and understanding for the challenges Ontario educators' face and the efforts they make using pedagogical documentation by making their reflective experiences and work "visible and subject to dialogue,

interpretation, contestation, and transformation” (Dahlberg, 2012, p. 225). It is also intended that by sharing these personal experiences, colleagues in areas of early learning, including those in leadership positions in early childhood education college programs, early learning administrations with the Ontario Ministry of Education, child care groups, and schools engaged in similar processes of bringing, using, and imagining pedagogical documentation in their educational practice will find the information relevant and helpful in their thinking, discussions, and reflections and will find the work supports them in their development of understandings of pedagogical documentation.

### **Cognitive Knots and Pedagogical Documentation**

Educators from the Reggio Emilia philosophy and experience in education describe events that cause children (and adults) to slow down in their relationships and more fully consider their experiences as “cognitive knots.” They liken these encounters to:

a whorl in wood grain that impedes a saw cutting through it, or...a knot (tangle) in thread [that] stops the action of a sewing needle...any problem that stops the children and blocks their action is a kind of cognitive knot. (Edwards, 2012, p. 157)

The Reggio Emilia Italian educators regard cognitive knots in their work not as impediments, but as opportunities that stimulate thinking and learning, and value them for the ways they,

Stop action and create...moments of cognitive disequilibrium, containing positive possibilities for regrouping, hypothesis testing, and intellectual comparison of

ideas...that can produce interactions that are constructive not only for socializing but also for constructing new knowledge. (Edwards, 2012, p. 157)

Ontario educators say that they have become aware of some of their own particular cognitive knots while trying pedagogical documentation in their early learning practice (Susan Hislop, Leslie LeClair, Tonya Millsap, personal communications, 2018). Educators say that their encounters with particular cognitive knots with pedagogical documentation have led them to come to realize that a philosophical shift in their thinking is required to learn to approach education as researchers. They report that such a shift in thinking causes a change in their educational stance and challenges them to reconsider their assumptions of the relational aspects of teaching and learning (Dahlberg et al., 2013; Wien et al., 2011).

Notable challenges or cognitive knots that arise for educators engaged in philosophical pedagogical shifts in practice using pedagogical documentation generally include: recognizing that there are divergent perspectives of documentation; encountering challenges using non-standardized processes of documentation; and realizing differences of understandings of potential purposes of documentation (Dahlberg et al., 2013; Gandini, 2008; Wien, 2013).

### **The Cognitive Knot of Divergent Perspectives of Pedagogical Documentation**

One cognitive knot that Ontario educators say they encounter first starting in their work with pedagogical documentation involves realizing they have divergent understandings of pedagogical documentation. Vygotsky (1934/1986, p. 217) notes that the words we use represent generalized concepts we have acquired and are understood more explicitly through our fields of experience; in different contexts and fields of

experience words have different meanings. The word “documentation” is one example of a word that conjures up a mixture of meanings for Ontario educators.

Before pedagogical documentation was introduced in Ontario, documentation for early learning meant gathering confidential “child observation” records consisting of objective and accurate data to measure individual children based on culturally created frameworks of human domains of development (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, 2014a, 2016). In contrast, documentation originating from the Reggio Emilia schools is regarded as observations that are gathered subjectively through the choices of the educators and are shared transparently so as to contemplate and learn from ways children co-construct thinking strategies and test their theories and hypotheses from their experiences (Avery, Callaghan, & Wien, 2016; Dahlberg et al., 2013; Kocher, 2009; Wien, 2013).

Recognizing that there were a variety of differences of understandings of documentation among educators in North America and what created differences of interpretations, the word “pedagogical” was added to “documentation” in an effort by Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (1999) to distinguish ideas of documentation as objective child observation from ideas of documentation as educational research (Wien et al., 2011). Currently, the term “pedagogical documentation” is generally used to reference educator research that has its origins in Reggio Emilia early learning contexts, although pedagogical documentation exists in a variety of interpretations, adaptations, and derivations in educational practice throughout the world with a number of different names including: pedagogic documentation, educational documentation and pedagogical narration (Berger, 2010; Fleet et al., 2017, p. 1; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher,

Elliot, & Sanchez, 2015). As a result of socio-cultural historical influences of interpretations of pedagogical documentation, differences or variations reflect the educational culture where it is being interpreted and result in an ambiguity of understandings among educators throughout geographical and cultural settings.

### **The Cognitive Knot of Non-standardization of Pedagogical Documentation**

A second cognitive knot that educators in Ontario regularly report they confront while bringing pedagogical documentation into their practice is their realization that documentation from the Reggio Emilia schools exists as non-standardized socio-cultural qualitative research with no template of design or procedure. Instead, it is based on shared philosophical principles rather than organizational rules. Gandini (2008) identifies particular principles of pedagogical documentation in the Reggio Emilia experience including: sharing an image of children as strong and intelligent, perceiving educators and families as being capable of co-constructing and making meaning in their relationship; recognizing that the environment and materials are participants in children's and adults' meaning making processes; acknowledging that children and educators are researchers; and assuming that creative and symbolic representation and interpretation may be valued as having the potential to offer understanding of the ways children develop cognitive and affective strategies in groups to express their ways of thinking and feeling (pp. 24-27). Gandini (2008) acknowledges that it is possible to translate these Reggio Emilia principles into different educational settings, but it is not possible to simply transplant them, or the processes of pedagogical documentation, from one cultural context into another. Gandini (2008) discusses the Reggio Emilia schools' pedagogical

documentation as a practice that emerged from within their particular cultural context and its optimal use requires educators in different socio-cultural historical contexts to make translations and interpretations of pedagogical documentation processes and principles in their own contexts in order to engage meaningfully with their research into their children's thinking. Reggio Emilia educators adamantly resist attempts to standardize or create a universal design for the ways they approach processes or tools of pedagogical documentation, insisting that all interpretations must evolve in the contextualized work of educators in their particular relationships with children, families and colleagues with an awareness that those interpretations or translations of pedagogical documentation belong uniquely to the interpreters (Gandini, 2008, p. 27). The educational project of Reggio Emilia municipal schools is known collectively as "Reggio Children" and has a website where they describe themselves as offering "the international centre for the defence and promotion of children's rights and potentials...that valorizes and safeguards the experience of the Reggio Emilia's Municipal Infant—Toddler Centres and Preschools" (Reggio Children, 2020).

The non-standardization of pedagogical documentation results in difficult philosophical and practical challenges for educators outside of Reggio Emilia who attempt to engage with this novel methodology because a great deal of practical, affective, and intellectual effort is required to find ways to work with processes of gathering, selecting and organizing information meaningfully; studying, discussing and responding to gathered research constructively with others; and effectively communicating these research experiences. Ontario educators have told me that the indefiniteness of structure and design for the processes from the Reggio Emilia

experience creates feelings of unease for them because they are required to begin to act with some degree of uncertainty, which is in contrast with typical experiences of educators in Ontario expecting to act with purpose and intention, confidently making assessments and transmitting their knowledge to students (Susan Hislop, Leslie LeClair, Tonya Millsap, personal communications, 2018).

### **The Cognitive Knot of the Purposes of Pedagogical Documentation**

A third significant way Ontario educators have related confronting a cognitive knot in their thinking as they begin their work as researchers concerns their differences of understandings of the purposes of pedagogical documentation. Before pedagogical documentation was introduced the purpose of documentation in Ontario early learning settings was to assess and evaluate the development of individual children at the end of learning experiences guided by culturally standardized development scales or curriculum expectations in order to be accountable to families and administrators (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, 2014a, 2016). In contrast, the purpose of pedagogical documentation from the Reggio Emilia schools is to hold the subjective memory of children's thinking in processes of engagement so these thinking strategies may be then studied, discussed and interpreted by educators, families and children in order to offer relevant and supportive contexts and conditions that allow the continuation of their learning or meaning-making experiences (Rinaldi, 2006, pp. 97-101). In these interpretative processes, the Reggio Emilia educators, offered documentation to families as a way of valuing their children, communicating ideas and sharing participation of children as members of groups rather than as a means of providing an assessment of the achievement of individual children. Assessment, in the Reggio Emilia context, is not of an individual child's progress of

development but is a record and map of possible educator pedagogical moves needed to sustain the exploration of children's theories and hypotheses and an opportunity to assess educational practice (Edwards et al., 1993, 1998, 2012; Giudici et al., 2008).

Philosophical and practical differences of understandings of the purposes of pedagogical documentation in Ontario have the potential to create educational tensions in the ways educators approach and engage with pedagogical documentation. Competing views of the purposes of pedagogical documentation in relation to assessment and evaluation may redirect the research and professional learning aspects of the democratic processes of pedagogical documentation so it becomes child observation (Wien, Jacobs, & Brown, 2015).

Dahlberg et al. (2013) address potential differences of understandings of the purposes of pedagogical documentation writing,

It is important to be clear about what pedagogical documentation is not. It should not be confused with "child observation" to assess children's psychological development in relation to already predetermined categories produced from developmental psychology and which define what the normal child should be doing at a particular age...[P]edagogical documentation...is mainly about trying to see and understand what is going on in the pedagogical work and what the child is capable of without any predetermined framework of expectations and norms and educators may not claim what is documented is a direct representation of what children say and do but is a social construction or interpretation of the educators' relationship with child/children documented. (pp. 154-155)

Reggio Emilia educators consider themselves to be researchers, documenting from their perspectives what they notice about children as a way of “valuing” rather than evaluating abilities; the “assessments” they are making are reflective of the suitability of the practices they are offering the children (Rinaldi, 2006, pp. 71-72). According to Malaguzzi, Reggio Emilia educators approach education using pedagogical documentation to consider “possibilities for children in learning as they engage in flights of reconnaissance...[over]...all the human, environmental, technical, and cultural resources...to get a full overview of the situation” (Gandini, 2012a, p. 63). These “flights of reconnaissance” include studying pedagogical documentation with others and making interpretive guesses about the children’s co-construction of thinking strategies so educators may organize and approximate what learning conditions and contexts they may offer children in response to encourage them to continue their research (Gandini, 2012a, p. 63). In this way Reggio Emilia educators use pedagogical documentation for planning and assessing their own teaching practice rather than for assessing individual achievement levels of children; this is a very significant difference from the idea that the purpose of child observation in North American contexts is to assess and evaluate development of individual children.

### **The Potential Underlying a Bundle of Cognitive Knots**

For Ontario educators taking up pedagogical documentation, these three cognitive knots (divergent perspectives of what pedagogical documentation is; the non-standardization of pedagogical documentation processes and design; and differences in understandings of the purposes of pedagogical documentation) and perhaps others, come bundled into large whorls that could create disequilibrium in their thinking and practice.

There is, however, the potential, and perhaps opportunity, for the pauses or stoppages that these knots create to provide a space for thinking where educators may become more aware and reflective of their personal philosophical ideas of the capabilities and rights of children, about what it means to learn and reciprocally to teach, and the significance of relationships involved in teaching and learning. One thing becomes clear working with pedagogical documentation—philosophical ideas and beliefs of children, learning, and education are consistently challenged and potentially revealed using this methodology.

### **Conclusion**

Regarding pedagogical documentation as teacher research affects teaching practice. Educators share similar challenges when they are making adjustments to become researchers in their work. Some of these adjustments might challenge educators' foundational assumptions of children, learning, and teaching in education.

In the following chapter the situational influences on pedagogical documentation from the Reggio Emilia schools, including the philosophers and theories that have influenced their thinking, are reviewed alongside published Ministry of Education frameworks that guide educators' work with pedagogical documentation in Ontario.

## CHAPTER 2

### SITUATING PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTATION

Pedagogical documentation is a culturally sensitive methodological practice. Therefore, I will review some major philosophical and research influences that Malaguzzi and colleagues reference as informing their pedagogical documentation in the schools of Reggio Emilia. I will then offer some background information on how interest in the Reggio Emilia experience, including pedagogical documentation, grew informally in small groups throughout Ontario and in Canada until it was formally recognized by the Ontario Ministry of Education in their official documents as an expectation of practice for child care and Kindergarten settings. Translating understandings of the meanings, processes, and purposes of pedagogical documentation into practice in Ontario has been a challenge for educators because it requires large reconsiderations of their ideas of education with young children. The ways educators are challenged to translate pedagogical documentation understandings into their practice forms the basis of my research questions, and these are shared at the end of the chapter.

#### **Initial Philosophical and Research Influences in the Reggio Emilia Approach**

Documentation research processes have been evolving in the Reggio Emilia schools for over six decades. Vecchi (in Gandini, 2012b) describes documentation “as

part of a particular communicative structure that is not so common in education [that] Carla Rinaldi and I have defined it as *visual listening*” (p. 312). To imagine documentation as making educators’ listening visible challenges educational assumptions about documentation causing educators to wonder: What is pedagogical documentation? What are the processes involved? and What are my purposes for pedagogical documentation? A review of philosophies and theories that have influenced the Reggio Emilia educators’ work with documentation follows to offer a way to begin to think about the meaning behind these questions.

### **Philosophies and Theories Influencing the Reggio Emilia Approach**

A wide variety of philosophers and theorists have been influential in the Reggio Emilia Approach (Gandini 2012a, p. 59-60). Malaguzzi noted that it was “from these origins we have extracted theoretical principles that still support our work” (Gandini, 2012a, p. 59). The educators’ exploration of ideas was described by Malaguzzi as occurring in waves (Gandini, 2012a), going from an exploration of educational theorists in the 1960s that were found in “literature, with its strong messages, [that] guided our choices; and our determination to continue” (p. 59), to studies of scholars from philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience in the 1970s, that spanned “several generations and...choices and selections we have made over time” (p. 60), and in making strong connections with artists to encourage appreciation and understanding of creativity of thought and expression among the children (pp. 74-77).

From these dynamic groups of influences, I have chosen some to illustrate how their ideas might be noticed as influences on the principles and processes of documentation from the Reggio Emilia schools. These ideas represent the Reggio Emilia

educators' principles of: the importance of the environment; the school as a culture of research; active participation for children and adults; studying learning in motion; and valuing creativity. I begin by first discussing Malaguzzi's role as the designer and coordinator of the Reggio Emilia project, credited with finding ways to bring all of these ideas together.

*Malaguzzi--designer, director, organizational leader.* Malaguzzi is recognized as the founding designer, director, and organizational leader of the Reggio Emilia project (Cagliari et al., 2016; Dahlberg et al., 2013; Edwards et al., 1993, 1998, 2012). In these roles Malaguzzi laid the groundwork for democratic research contexts for educators and children where “relationships and learning coincide within an active process of education using pedagogical documentation” (Gandini, 2012a, p. 66). Malaguzzi designed ways for children, educators, and artists to become researchers together with pedagogical documentation (Cagliari et al., 2016; Dahlberg et al., 2013; Edwards et al., 1993, 1998, 2012).

The Reggio Emilia experience was cultivated from the ideas of influential thinkers, but the design of the conditions and contexts to follow the new approach is due to the educational directorship of Malaguzzi who is described by Dahlberg (2016) as an “educator par excellence and not just an educator, but an educator who assumed leadership for the educational project in Reggio Emilia” (p. xvii). Dahlberg (2016) regarded Malaguzzi as,

an intellectual educational leader who loved the company of other intellectuals and a man of many interests, great curiosity and incessant border crossing, never losing his delight at encountering new ideas, new perspectives and new friends. A

man who wrote poetry, loved theatre and drama, and was very well and very widely read. A man who kept abreast of the latest developments and debates in politics, economics, culture and science. A man who wanted a modern education that understood and responded to contemporary conditions and needs and was open to contemporary thinking and knowledge—whilst never losing sight of its responsibility for the future. And a man with a strong critical faculty, applied not only to the outdated thinking and institutions that he found so typical of Italy, and to the organisations of which he was a member, but also to leading figures in psychology and pedagogy, many of whom he also admired greatly and took inspiration from. (p. xvii)

Dahlberg (2016, p. xviii) also appreciates Malaguzzi for being what Michael Foucault (1984) defines as a “specific intellectual” for establishing,

A new mode of the ‘connection between theory and practice.’...Intellectuals [that] have become used to working, not in the modality of the ‘universal’, the ‘exemplary’, the ‘just-and-true-for-all’, but within specific sectors, at the precise points where their own conditions of life or work situate them (housing, the hospital, the asylum, the laboratory, the university, family, and sexual relations). This has undoubtedly given them a much more immediate and concrete awareness of struggles. (p. 67)

Moss (2016) credits Malaguzzi as one of the most important figures in twentieth-century education (p. xii), although recognizing that even though he wrote prolifically his name is not well known among academic educationalists (p. xii) because most of

Malaguzzi's writing may be found in his notes, personal correspondence and lectures.

Moss (2016) writes about the processes of Malaguzzi's ability to,

work with others—politicians, parents, educators, fellow citizens—to make his ideas and ideals happen, not just in one school but in a growing network of schools, a municipal education system...we can find some...ample proof that the schools are indeed his books. (pp. xiii-xiv)

Although Malaguzzi's life's work was with schools for young children, the intention was that the principles underlying the schools would be recognized as relevant and helpful for learning contexts for people of all ages (Cagliari et al., 2016). Malaguzzi, as a designer, sought ways to carry, or translate, ideas from significant theories into practice and he did so by considering what contexts and conditions would allow for the research methodology of pedagogical documentation to emerge from a place where philosophies and theories of learning and human development live in the middle of theory and practice (Holquist as cited in Wertsch 1998, p. 17). Malaguzzi imagined and believed in developing educational contexts where,

learning is the key factor on which a new way of teaching should be based, becoming a complementary resource to the child and offering multiple options, suggestive ideas, and sources of support. Learning and teaching should not stand on opposite banks and just watch the river flow by; instead, they should embark together on a journey down the water. Through an active, reciprocal exchange, teaching can strengthen learning how to learn. (Gandini, 2012a, p. 58)

Pedagogical documentation became the methodology of the Reggio Emilia schools. These schools contained ideas of ecological, socio-cultural learning theorists,

and also experiential and artistic learning interactions. The philosophers and thinkers who contributed to the ideas behind the pedagogical documentation of the Reggio Emilia schools view learning as meaning-making experiences most effectively studied in process. In contrast, processes of making meaning are mostly eliminated or invisible in traditional schools that value learning as a product of education. Before the development of pedagogical documentation, a place for valuing and studying the co-construction of learning processes, dynamically living in practice, was missing from early childhood education. Pedagogical documentation became a means of making visible genetic developmental processes in change within dynamic zones of proximal development of learning, and in the process, creating a unique relationship for teaching and learning based on supporting children's co-construction of learning strategies (Cagliari et al., 2016; Edwards et al., 1993, 1998, 2012).

*Environmental theories.* Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Montessori (1995) are included here to emphasize the importance of the environment in their theories in relation to the Reggio Emilia schools. Environments are considered part of the pedagogy of Reggio Emilia, playing an active role in children's thinking and learning as made obvious in the pedagogical documentation they share. Malaguzzi describes "a school for young children as an integral living organism, as a place of shared lives and relationships among many adults and very many children" (Gandini, 2012a, p. 63). The environment in the Reggio Emilia schools is considered not only for the physical aspects but for the social, and emotional aspects which are discussed in the ideas of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Montessori (1995).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of human development considers children's relationships as part of the social and emotional aspects of their environment. These relationships begin with their families and extend outward in their layers of experiences in the world. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), children's relationships include schools and communities, and children's experiences there are carried into all of their relationships. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model acknowledges the significance and potential effect of all of the children's interactions and represents this idea as "a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls" (p. 3).

In the Reggio Emilia schools, the influences, elements, and interpretations children make in their relationships occupy a significant part of their pedagogical documentation. Layers of relationships made visible in pedagogical documentation show what Malaguzzi asserts, in that,

In our system we know it is essential to focus on children and be child centered, but we do not feel that is enough. We also consider teacher and families as central to the education of children. We therefore choose to place all three components at the centre of our interest. (Gandini, 2012a, p. 65)

Montessori (1995) theorized that if children are offered opportunities to learn in carefully considered and prepared environments then they will be successful learners. Montessori's (1995) recognition of the importance of the effects of a carefully prepared environment, including the materials, on the learning interactions that take place, is strongly evident in the Reggio Emilia documentation. In the Reggio Emilia schools, the environment is a critical aspect which educators and children co-construct together on an on-going basis. Gandini (2012c) explains,

The environment has to be flexible, it must undergo frequent modification by the children and the teachers to remain up-to-date and responsive to their needs to be protagonists in constructing their knowledge. All things that surround and are used by the people in the school—the objects, the materials, and the structures—are not seen as passive elements but, on the contrary, as elements that condition and are conditioned by the actions of the children and adults who are active in it. (p. 339)

Pedagogical documentation, as part of the research of children's experiences, captures aspects of the changing learning environment that might not be easily noticed otherwise. With pedagogical documentation educators are able to slow down to consider the significance of not only the physical aspects of the environments but also the social and emotional dimensions. In fact, the objective of the educators of the Reggio Emilia schools, is to “create an amiable environment, where children families, and teachers feel at ease” (Gandini, 2012a, p. 63). The environment is described as the heart of this amiable environment which operates as a “network of cooperation and interactions that produces for the adults, but above all for the children, a feeling of belonging that is alive, welcoming, and authentic” (Gandini, 2012a, p. 64). Interestingly, the pedagogical documentation becomes part of the school environment and encourages democratic participation and ongoing interactions. As Malaguzzi notes in an interview with Gandini, “Our walls speak and document” (Gandini, 2012a, p. 64).

*An attitude of research.* Piaget, referred to as “Our Piaget” by Malaguzzi (Gandini, 2012a), is acknowledged in the Reggio Emilia philosophy and experience in education as the “first theorist to give children an identity by paying close attention to

their behaviour and offering a detailed analysis of their development” (p. 81). Malaguzzi (Gandini, 2012a) describes how friends of Reggio Emilia value Piaget’s work:

Howard Gardner described Piaget as the first to take children seriously; David Hawkins describes him as the one who dramatized children splendidly; and Jerome Bruner credits Piaget with demonstrating that those internal principles of logic guiding children are the same principles as those that guide scientists in their inquiries. In fact, [added Malaguzzi] in Reggio we know that children can use creativity as a tool for inquiring, ordering, and even transgressing the given schemes of meaning (which Piaget attributed also to the very young in the last years of his life). They can also use creativity as a tool for their own progress in the worlds of necessity and possibility. (p. 81)

Piaget is noted by Malaguzzi for offering significant epistemological beginning places for thinking about the construction of children’s learning processes, all of which may be made visible through the use of the research tool of pedagogical documentation for consideration and continuation of thinking (Gandini, 2012a, p. 56).

Like Piaget, educators in Reggio Emilia are researchers and Rinaldi states, We want our research, as teachers, to be recognised. And to recognise research as a way of thinking, of approaching life, of negotiating, of documenting. It’s all research. It’s also a context that allows dialogue. Dialogue generates research, research generates dialogue. (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 192)

The teachers in the Reggio Emilia school regard themselves as researchers and want to be recognized as researchers. Pedagogical documentation is a testament to the fact that their research exists as the crux of their practice.

*Active participation.* Strong connections to Dewey's (1916, 1938) ideas of experiential education may be found within the Reggio Emilia experience, particularly in children's learning experiences and in the ideas of democratic processes that are involved with pedagogical documentation. Dewey (1916) writes about hoping that education would be recognized as a way for citizens to learn to live and participate in a democratic society. Dewey (1916) was determined that experiential education could offer a bridge between informal and formal education within the contexts of schools but keeping the informal learning of social life involving "hopes, expectations, standards, and opinions" connected with the formal aspects of learning. Dewey (1916) recognizes that experiential learning opportunities involve significant interactions with the environment and processes of learning. In later works, Dewey (1938, p. 36), develops a "criteria for quality" for children's learning experiences to clarify that "all experiences do not equate with learning." The criteria of quality involves four aspects:

A principle of continuity, or an experiential continuum, which means that every experience both takes up something from those who have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those who come after.

The value of an experience can be judged only on the grounds of what it moves toward and into.

Experience does not go on simply inside a person. It does go on there, for it influences the formation of attitudes and desire and purpose but that is not the whole of the story. Every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which experiences are had. (Dewey, 1938, pp. 36-39)

And, like Montessori, Dewey (1938) considers it a primary responsibility of educators....to be aware of the shaping of actual experience by enviroing conditions, but that they also recognize what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. Above all, educators should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worth while. (p. 40)

Dewey (1938) regards the educator's responsibility to prepare learning conditions for experiential learning as something new for education,

Contrary to what some might think, experiential learning is not an easier way for educators to approach teaching but, in contrast, traditional education did not have to face this problem of the consideration of the environment because it could systematically dodge this responsibility. (p. 40)

Dewey (1938) interprets the quality of an educational experience based on the "interactions" that are part of all experiences. Dewey (1938) notes that children always experience "collateral learning" which is the formation of enduring attitudes, of likes and dislikes which he felt may be much more important than a particular lesson because, for Dewey, attitudes are fundamentally what count in the future for the life of a person in a democratic society, and the most important attitude that can be formed is the desire to go on learning (p. 44). Interactions and collateral learning are present in the pedagogical documentation of the Reggio schools guiding and directing and indicating ways for educators to participate.

Dewey's recognition of the challenges involved in preparing environments for quality experiential learning events, where the social and emotional dimensions of learning are found in interactions also echoed by Malaguzzi. Dewey's influence might be noted when Malaguzzi describes an "amiable school" environment where "children, families, and teachers feel at ease (Gandini, 2012a, p. 63) and also when discussing challenges of working in experiential ways, when Malaguzzi says,

It is true that we do not have planning and curricula. It is not true that we rely on improvisation, which is an enviable skill. We do not rely on chance either, because we are convinced that what we do not yet know can to some extent be anticipated. What we do know is that to be with children is to work one third with certainty and two thirds with uncertainty and the new. The third that is certain makes us understand and try to understand." (Gandini, 2012a, p. 63)

Dewey's (1916, 1938) ideas of experiential learning and continuity of experience are part of the Reggio Emilia Approach (Reggio Children, 2020). Notably Dewey's (1916, 1938) ideas of quality, including continuity and interactions, are interwoven in the documentation.

***Learning in motion.*** Malaguzzi claims Vygotsky as a significant figure in the development of the Reggio Emilia schools as he does with Piaget, similarly calling him "Our Vygotsky" (Edwards et al., 1993, 1998, 2012). Vygotsky's (1934/1986, 1935/1978) influence is easily noted in documentation in the research of learning strategies in motion ongoing dynamic reciprocal interactions among children; attention paid to the environment; and children's use of cultural tools and symbols, all taking place within

zones of proximal development created among themselves and revealed in documentation.

Vygotsky (1934/1986, 1935/1978) focusses on researching human processes of thinking and growth of intellect in socio-cultural and historical contexts and shares his work through lectures with most of his writing published posthumously; however, his ideas remained, for the most part, inaccessible long after his death because they were not translated or widely distributed (Cole & Scribner, 1978). Vygotsky (1935/1978) recognizes that his socio-cultural historical theory requires a new methodology that would be different from the stimulus-response method and this requirement challenged the ideas of learning at that time. The methodology Vygotsky (1935/1978) sought needed to be different from stimulus-response methods. The research tool Vygotsky (1935/1978) required would need to allow “all phenomena [to] be studied as processes in motion and in change” (pp. 6-7) and in so doing, the genetics [the beginnings] of higher psychological processes could be revealed including processes evolving from interactions with semiotic tools. Language is a key dialogic semiotic tool for thinking, according to Vygotsky (1935/1978), but he also “studied other forms of sign-using activity in children” including “drawing pictures, writing, reading, using number systems, and so on” for the potential to affect thinking and “reorganize perception and create new relations among psychological functions” (p. 38). These forms of communication are present in much of the documentation from the Reggio Emilia schools.

Vygotsky (1935/1978, p. 81) turns away from dominant ideas of developmentalists and rejects major dominant theories of learning held by behavioural psychologists of the time including their ideas that processes of child development are

independent of learning; learning is development; or a combination of ideas, because he considered them to be partial theories of the actual relationship between learning and development. Instead Vygotsky (1935/1978) considers learning and development to actually have two separate concerns: the general relations between learning and development and the specific features of this relationship. For Vygotsky (1935/1978) learning and development are interrelated from the child's very first day of life with this historical learning being different from school learning, which is concerned with the assimilation of the fundamentals of scientific knowledge (p. 84). Vygotsky (1935/1978) writes that differences between school learning and the assimilation of scientific knowledge are missing in earlier theories of the learning and development relationship (p. 84). In response to this observed interrelationship, Vygotsky (1935/1978) formulated a new theory of learning as a "Zone of Proximal Development" which he describes as having,

*an actual developmental level, the level of development of a child's mental functions that has been established as a result of certain already completed developmental cycles and potential development which he called "the zone of proximal development. It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers"* (p. 86, emphasis in the original).

Vygotsky (1935/1978) describes the "zone of proximal development" as a space for learning and development in relationship, in functions that have not yet matured but are in the processes of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently

in an embryonic state” (p. 86). This theory focusses on the interrelationship of development and learning, simultaneously drawing on historical development and reaching ahead into development still forming, which Vygotsky (1935/1978) calls “the actual developmental level” (p. 87). Vygotsky (1935/1978) proposes “the actual developmental level characterizes mental development retrospectively, while the zone of proximal development characterizes mental development prospectively” (p. 87) and suggests the idea of the “zone of proximal development” as a place for psychologists and educators to reconsider the relationships between human development and learning in that one is looking backward and the other forward (p. 87).

Vygotsky (1935/1978) proposes that within a zone of proximal development, ...learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child’s independent developmental achievement...From this point of view, learning is not development; however, properly organized learning results in mental development and sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning. Thus, learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human, psychological functions. (p. 90)

With the theory of the zone of proximal development, Vygotsky (1935/1978) significantly redefines the relationship between development and learning by specifically recognizing that, “developmental processes do not coincide with learning processes. Rather, the developmental process lags behind the learning process; this sequence then

results in zones of proximal development” (p. 90). Vygotsky (Cole & Scribner, 1978) determines that a zone of proximal development of “complex mental functions” as “higher psychological processes” could not, *in principle*, be studied by experimental psychologists (p. 3, emphasis in original). These functions and processes could only be investigated by historical studies of cultural products such as folktales, customs, and language (Cole & Scribner, 1978, p. 3). Imagining that the study of the development of complex mental functions in processes of change, Vygotsky (1935/1978) knows that a new method of investigation and analysis of learning is required.

I would suggest that pedagogical documentation, as a new research methodology from the schools of Reggio Emilia, has the possibility to meet the requirements Vygotsky was seeking for his theory of genetic processes of development in zones of proximal development. I theorize that pedagogical documentation creates opportunities to study learning processes in motion and can potentially show ways that group learning creates zones of proximal development and reveals dialogicality in learning processes. I also propose that it would be significant for educators to approach pedagogical documentation simultaneously as a semiotic sign for becoming aware of their thinking in their practice while studying children’s experiences. Pedagogical documentation embodies the requirements that Vygotsky was seeking in a methodology and exists itself, as a semiotic sign, or tool for thinking, with the potential to reciprocally reflect and affect the thinking of participants and disrupt dominant cultural ideas, beliefs, and understandings of children and child development. In so doing, users of pedagogical documentation are democratically advocating for the rights of children by dialogically affecting those that engage with pedagogical documentation.

Malaguzzi (Gandini, 2012a) describes the Reggio Emilia educators' work with pedagogical documentation in ways that show Vygotsky's influence,

We seek a situation in which the child is about to see what the adult already sees.

The gap is small between what each one sees, the task of closing it appears feasible, and the child's skills and disposition create an expectation and readiness to make the jump. In such a situation, the adult can and must loan to the children his judgment and knowledge. (p. 84)

Malaguzzi (Gandini, 2012a) directly acknowledges Vygotsky in their work with pedagogical documentation saying, "Vygotsky's approach is in tune with the way we see the dilemma of teaching and learning and the ecological way one can reach knowledge" (p. 84).

***Creativity.*** Artists play integral roles in the schools of Reggio Emilia helping to stimulate and encourage children's creative expression of their thoughts and feelings and this is abundantly apparent in the pedagogical documentation of the Reggio Emilia schools. Vecchi began as an atelierista, working experimentally with children in the Reggio Emilia schools starting with the Diana School in 1970 (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. i). Currently Vecchi is responsible for the area of Exhibitions, Publishing, and Ateliers in Reggio Children, Reggio Emilia, Italy (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. i). According to Vecchi (Gandini, 2012b, 304), artists offer alternative expressive forms and engagements that "shake up old-fashioned teaching ideas" by igniting what Malaguzzi calls an "aesthetic vibration to activate learning" (Vecchi, 2010, p. 6) in the schools.

Gregory Bateson (1972) encouraged the educators of Reggio Emilia to value creativity with his theory of an “ecology of mind” or “ecology of ideas” posing questions that ask,

How do ideas interact? Is there some sort of natural selection which determines the survival of some ideas and the extinction or death of others? What sort of economics limits the multiplicity of ideas in a given region of mind? What are the necessary conditions for stability (or survival) of such a system? (p. xxiii)

Bateson (1972) writes that his theory is way to find

A bridge between behavioral data and the ‘fundamentals’ of science and philosophy...the conservative laws for energy and matter concern substance rather than form. But mental processes, ideas, communication, organization, differentiation, pattern, and so on are matters of form rather than substance. (p. xxxii)

Bateson (1972) regards this strong lack of regard for the ecology of mind in education and elsewhere in society as a “monstrous and dangerous attempt to separate the external mind from the internal...or to separate mind from body” (p. 470) and argues that connections may be made between one sort of thought and another in the ways they are found within the ideas of the artists and poets (p. 470). For Bateson (1972), connectivity among ways of thinking is made possible through creative artistic expression,

It is not that art is the expression of the unconscious, but rather that it is concerned with the relation between the levels of mental process...Artistic skill is the combining of many levels of mind—unconscious, conscious, and external—to

make a statement of their combination. It is not a matter of expressing a single level. (p. 470)

Reggio Emilia atelierista Vecchi readily notes that Bateson had “a great influence on my thought and work” (Edwards et al., 2012, p. 310). Drawing on Bateson (1972), Vecchi (2010) says that Reggio educators agree that aesthetics offer “pattern[s] which connect” (p. 6) ways of thinking and that they regard aesthetics as a “mega-structure” (p. 6) for making connections of thought. Vecchi (2010) and their colleagues see disciplines, or the language [of disciplines], as being made up of rationality, imagination, emotion, and aesthetics, even though [learning] cultures often rigidly separate these qualities of disciplines, noting,

Various philosophers and thinkers, when considering aesthetics have located it in the border zone of tension and vicinity that exists between rational and imaginative, between cognitive and expressive. This tension and vicinity tend to bring a greater degree of completeness to thinking. (p. 6)

Vecchi (2010) appreciates Bateson’s idea of aesthetics as a meta-pattern that could be regarded primarily as a dance of interacting parts, as a place where the diversity of thinking may live together (p. 6). It is Bateson’s idea of the ecological connectivity of human thinking through aesthetics and expressed in the arts that is so valuable to education in the Reggio Emilia school settings.

The use of Bateson’s (1972) ideas of an ecological way of thinking in the Reggio Emilia Approach enabled the realization that pedagogical documentation has the potential to contain and reveal connections among children’s ways of thinking and can contribute to the ideas of the importance of relationship, interconnectedness, and affect in

educational experiences, by re-imagining the construction of learning strategies as being multi-layered, non-linear, and dynamic processes. Pedagogical documentation allows, values, and makes visible the ways aesthetic and emotional experiences of children fuse learning experiences and make these connections accessible for study. This access allows educators opportunities to study thinking strategies that children are co-creating while making trans-disciplinary connections in their theories.

For Vecchi (2010),

Every language has its own grammar, its own specific nature, but it also has a structure disposed towards communication and relation. Structurally speaking a language is open to communication. When in Reggio pedagogy we declare that a child possesses and ‘speaks a hundred languages’—by which we mean the many communicative possibilities with which our species is (sic) genetically equipped—we are hypothesizing that learning processes take place in which several languages (or disciplines) interact together. (p. 18)

Vecchi (2010) describes the atelier, or artist’s studio or lab in the schools, as a place of “*aesthetic dimensions* in learning and education in general” (p. 5, emphasis in the original), and as original to the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia. The “aesthetic dimensions” emanating from the atelier are regarded by Vecchi (2010) as connecting learning processes in schools and in education through empathy by relating self to things and things to each other and guiding choices and desires for meaning (pp. 5-6). Empathy is described as an aesthetic dimension by Vecchi (2010) because,

An empathetic attitude, the *sympathy* or *antipathy* towards something we do not investigate indifferently, produces a relationship with what brings us to introduce

a ‘beat of life’ into explorations we carry out. This ‘beat of life’ is what often solicits intuitions and connections between disparate elements to generate new creative processes. (p. 8, emphasis in the original)

According to Vecchi (2010), Reggio Emilia atelieristas and educators consider aesthetics as significant in learning, believing “*if aesthetics fosters sensibility and the ability for connecting things far removed from each other, and if learning takes place through new connections between disparate elements, then aesthetics can be considered an important activator for learning*” (p. 9, emphasis in the original).

Children in the Reggio Emilia schools have the support of atelieristas, and with their help are able to explore ways to express themselves and their connections to the world creatively beyond using words. Vecchi (2010) writes about the potential of a multitude of ways to express oneself creatively considering

‘languages’ ...as different ways used by human beings to express themselves, using visual language, mathematical language, scientific language, etc....*Poetic languages* are forms of expression strongly characterized by expressive or aesthetic aspects such as music, song, dance or photography. (p. 9, emphasis in the original)

For Vecchi (2010) the atelier welcomes “beauty as an aspiration and right of the species,” as an aspect of “poetics of expression” and includes “aesthetic sense” (pp. 10-15) in learning environments because,

In Reggio’s experience of ateliers and work with visual languages—by nature sensitive and close to the other poetic languages—the *aesthetic dimension* has

found significant, tangible expression through eyes, ears, and hands that are capable of simultaneously constructing and feeling emotion. (p. 12)

According to Vecchi (2010), “aesthetics is a promoter of relationships, connections, sensibility, liberty and expressiveness, and its closeness to ethics appears natural” (p. 14). Vecchi (2010) appreciates the value of aesthetics as producing relations in learning, writing that, “Aesthetic tension, with its empathy, searching for relations and ‘connecting structure,’ together with its grace, humour, provocations and non-determinism, supports the process of thinking” (p. 13).

Pedagogical documentation includes children’s processes of aesthetic thinking and expression. As a research method pedagogical documentation offers the opportunity to notice and relegate value to the depth of thinking and feeling that artistic expression offers in early learning and school settings and consider how we encourage creativity for young children. Vecchi (2010) recognizes this as an opportunity to appreciate how we allow children’s creativity of thought in learning:

It is important to society that schools, and we as teachers, are clearly aware of how much space we leave children for original thinking, without rushing to restrict it with predetermined schemes that define what is correct according to school culture. How much do we support children to have ideas different from those of other people and how do we accustom them to arguing and discussing their ideas with their classmates? I am quite convinced that greater attention to processes, rather than only the final product, would help us to feel greater respect for the independent thinking and strategies of children and teenagers. (p. xvii)

## Interpretations of Pedagogical Documentation

Although I am aware that there is a large body of literature regarding interpretations of pedagogical documentation (Berger, 2010, 2015; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013; Fleet, Patterson & Robertson, 2017; Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Mariett Olsson, 2009; Moss, 2014, 2019; Murriss 2016; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kind & Kocher, 2017; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot, Sanchez, 2015; Tarr, 2011; Taylor, 2013; Vintimella & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2020), my focus of research is narrowed to the relatively new experiences of Ontario educators translating pedagogical documentation into their early childhood education and Kindergarten contexts. For this particular reason, I chose to focus on a few sources that they would be familiar with for their understandings of educators' interpretations of pedagogical documentation: Gunilla Dahlberg, Peter Moss, Alan Pence, and Carol Anne Wien. These scholars agree that there is a confusion of understandings of purposes of pedagogical documentation that are tangled with educators' historical ideas of understandings. Dahlberg, Moss, Pence, and Wien show these entanglements by stating what pedagogical documentation is not, then what it could be.

Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (2013) state:

It is important to be clear about what pedagogical documentation is not. It should not be confused with 'child observation'. As we understand it, the purpose of 'child observation' is to assess children's psychological development in relation to already predetermined categories produced from developmental psychology and which define what the normal child should be doing at a particular age. The focus on these observations is not children's learning processes, but more on the

idea of classifying and categorizing children in relation to a general schema of developmental levels and stages. Viewed this way, ‘child observations’ are a terminology of normalization, related to construction of the child as nature and a reproducer of knowledge. They can also be related to the construction of the early childhood institution as producer of child outcomes, including developmental progress. ‘Child observation’ therefore is mainly about assessing whether a child is conforming to a set of standards. ‘Pedagogical documentation’ by contrast is mainly about trying to see and 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. 154).

Wien also regards educators’ conflicted understandings of pedagogical documentation as coming from ideas of assessment with child observation and describes the “tensions” that develop when educators make decisions “between forming authentic relationships with young children in which the children feel known and supported with pedagogical documentation *and* assessing and evaluating children’s learning according to instruments supplied by others outside the classroom” (Wien et al., 2015, p. 1 italics in original). Wien (2008) recognizes that,

On the surface, such pedagogical documentation appears to be a presentation of what children are doing, thinking, and feeling in school, presented in visual and text forms (photographs, children’s words, simple work, teacher’s explanations). But pedagogical documentation...is not merely about recounts of what children have done, although when North American teachers first try this complex process,

recounts are what they tend to produce....[instead] pedagogical documentation is a form of conscious teacher research. (pp. 9-10)

Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013) agree that, when pedagogical documentation is realized as being more than child observation to educators, then different relationships they have with the research of documentation become possible. Dahlberg et al. (2013) note that,

Many pedagogues around the world today have begun to use pedagogical documentation as a tool for reflecting on pedagogical practice, and as a means for the construction of an ethical relationship to ourselves, the Other and the world—what we have termed an ethics of an encounter...[that] enables us to take responsibility for making our meanings and coming to our own decisions about what is going on.” (pp. 153-154)

Moss (2014) regards pedagogical documentation as a “profoundly democratic” practice for making

Education visible to the public so it can be used for much more than evaluation...as a tool not only for evaluation but for the education of teachers, for the reflection of children themselves, and for researching and supporting children’s learning processes; a tool that works in ways that promote informal democracy in general and a democratic approach to learning in particular. (p. 127)

Dahlberg et al. (2013) write that through the act of “making pedagogical work both visible and a subject for democratic and open debate, pedagogical documentation provides the possibility of early childhood institutions gaining a new legitimacy in society” (p. 154). With these hopes in mind, I will show next how pedagogical

documentation has made its way into early learning contexts of Ontario, Canada, forming the basis of educators' interpretations of understandings in their practice.

### **Reggio Emilia Draws International Attention**

Nearly three decades after the beginning of the project of the municipal schools in Reggio Emilia, an international spotlight was shone on the developing educational approach by a *Newsweek* magazine issue dated December 2, 1991. The feature singled out the "Diana" school, as a representative of the Reggio Emilia municipal system, naming it as the best preschool in the world (Wingert, 1991). With this internationally recognized endorsement, pedagogues from around the world began to travel to northern Italy to learn more about this unique educational approach interpreted and described as being: grounded in a philosophy of democratic participation, with dual and dialogic pedagogies of listening and relationship; where children are considered intelligent and capable of learning in their relationships and learning is regarded as making meaning in relationship; a place where feelings and thinking strategies are revealed in graphic and other expressive languages; and where educator-researchers study children's thinking strategies, using pedagogical documentation as the methodological approach to offer responsive contexts for children's learning relationships to continue to develop.

The attention of the *Newsweek* (Wingert, 1991) article, coupled with the development of travelling exhibits of pedagogical documentation from the Reggio Emilia schools, drew a steady procession of educationalists to visit the Reggio Emilia schools. The first exhibit from the schools, *When the Eye Jumps Over the Wall*, later renamed *The Hundred Languages of Children*, began touring European countries in 1981 (Edwards et al., 2012, p. 13) and has been touring North America since 1987. A third edition of the

exhibit, *The Wonder of Learning: The Hundred Languages of Children* (Edwards et al., 2012, p. 11), continues to travel in North America drawing attention to the Reggio Emilia schools' democratic approach to early childhood education.

Reggio Emilia schools have now established their own identity as *Reggio Children* with a website: <https://www.reggiochildren.it/?lang=en>, a publishing company, and a central meeting place, the Malaguzzi International Centre, that houses archived pedagogical documentation and ateliers, hosts international study tours, and contains its own schools (Reggio Children, 2020). The Reggio Emilia educators also offer a place to make international connections and have consulting services for interested educational systems and businesses (Reggio Children, 2020).

Educators visiting Reggio Emilia settings bring their hopes of finding ways to import or at least infuse the Reggio Emilia philosophy and practice into their own work (Ontario Reggio Association, 2020). As a result, understandings of the Reggio Emilia project, including the methodology of pedagogical documentation, have been melded with diverse educational practices in unique forms of translation and transformation in multi-cultural and socio-cultural educational contexts.

Reggio Emilia educators who represent the philosophy and experience in education tend to emphasize two key principles to share with the visitors. First, they note that their educational practice should not be regarded as a model to be copied because their situation is unique and their work is grounded in their personal and collegial reflections and outlooks on theory and practice for young children that are always in a continuous state of renewal and adjustment (Gandini, 2008); and second, educators in any school anywhere, could, in their own context, reflect on their own ideas, keeping in focus

always the relationships and learning that are in process, examining their own needs and strengths to find possible ways to construct change (Gandini, 2008) within their personal experience.

### **Ontario Educators Take Notice of Reggio Emilia**

Interest in the Reggio Emilia experience among educators in Ontario began to percolate in the 1990s following the publication of the first edition of *The Hundred Languages of Children* in 1993, the presence of Reggio educators speaking at conferences in the United States, and the availability of study tours to Reggio Emilia to visit their schools in person. Wien reports that “interest first arose among instructors in early childhood education programs in community colleges, such as Loyalist, George Brown, Lambton, and Mohawk, amid great excitement that here was a city that had created and sustained the kind of schools many of us dreamed of for our own communities” (C.A. Wien, personal communication, 2021). From the outset, there were those who moved with a superficial formulaic response and said they were “doing Reggio” while others understood the city of Reggio Emilia had developed a radical approach, high complex and sophisticated, that required much study to understand and a transformation of values to practice (Wien, 1997). Interest and understanding expanded throughout the 2000s with particular reference points being the thoughtful work at The Bishop Strachan School to integrate a Reggio-inspired approach in the Junior School, the “Artists at the Centre” project in Hamilton to bring professional artists into child care settings to work with children and educators, and Wien’s graduate course on the Reggio Emilia approach in the Faculty of Education at York University, offered annually and open to the community. Lab schools in early childhood education programs, such as at

George Brown College and Seneca College were other touchstones. The founding of the Ontario Reggio Association in 2007 created an organizational presence which brought the Reggio exhibit to Toronto in 2006-07 and again in 2016. This group continues to offer conferences, programs in emergent curriculum, and other professional development opportunities. Interest and understanding about the Reggio Emilia experience percolated into the Ontario Ministry of Education's Early Years Division under the leadership of Jim Grieves, who visited Reggio Emilia and recognized its value as an exemplar for Ontario. Ministry analysts have attended study tours since 2011. The new Ministry documents previously discussed (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, 2014a, 2016) were the product, in part, of these exchanges and represent a departure from previous documents.

All of these exchanges were leading to understand pedagogical documentation as being about relationship—not assessment. This was described as a radical change in thinking for education. Callaghan and Wien were invited to contribute to the Ontario Ministry of Education document, *Think, Feel, Act: Lessons from Research about Young Children* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013) with Callaghan discussing the environment as an aspect early learning and Wien introducing ideas of pedagogical documentation as relationship. This information was shared around the province, but it was the videos, Wien recalls, that put the ideas of pedagogical documentation “on the map.” The work that was shared in the 2014 Ontario Ministry of Education documents and videos formed the basis of establishing pedagogical documentation as an expectation of practice in child care and kindergarten settings in the province.

In 2012, 2015, and 2018 the Ontario Reggio Association continued to organize formal study tours for large groups of Canadians to travel to the municipal schools

together and other organizations were being established across Canada. Volunteer members of the Ontario Reggio Association, Calgary Reggio Network Association and Vancouver Reggio Association, hosted tours of the exhibit *The Wonder of Learning: The Hundred Languages of Children* which was installed in the Canadian provinces of Alberta in 2006, Ontario in 2006 and 2016, and British Columbia in 2012 (Calgary Reggio Network Association, 2020; Ontario Reggio Association, 2020; Vancouver Reggio Association, 2020). As a result of these, and other group and individual cross-cultural exchanges, traces of the Reggio Emilia approach to early learning may be noticed throughout Canadian early learning conversations and practice (e.g., Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, 2014a, 2015, 2016).

The Reggio Emilia ideas of pedagogical documentation, as a research methodology, and as a tool or artefact of practice, are still a relatively new expectation of practice for Ontario early learning settings for children ages up to age six in both child care and schools in Ontario, including non-profit and privately owned child care centres, public and separate school boards, and these ideas are also becoming part of practice in some independent and private schools across the country.

### **Organizational and Policy Frameworks for Ontario Early Learning Settings**

In Canada, public education is a provincial and territorial jurisdiction and responsibility and in the Province of Ontario, the Ministry of Education from the same portfolio of responsibility, oversees and regulates public early learning conditions in both child care and school kindergarten settings. Current documents for both child care and school early learning settings in Ontario include: *How Does Learning Happen?: Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014a) for child

care and *The Kindergarten Program* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016) for school settings. These documents arose from the research included in *Think, Feel, Act: Lessons from Research about Young Children* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Each of these Ontario early learning documents contains orienting educational philosophies, theories, and principles about early education situated in the prevailing idea that learning occurs in relationship and therefore each document stresses the significance of offering children contexts that support learning in positive relational conditions. Significantly, these newer documents introduce pedagogical documentation and recommend that it be included in the practice of Ontario early learning educators: Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE), Designated Early Childhood Educator (DECE) and Ontario Certified Teachers (OCT).

### **Child care**

The document *Think, Feel, Act: Lessons in Research about Young Children* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013) opens with a statement that echoes the disposition of the Reggio Emilia schools about the ways they regard children: “You will notice a common thread throughout the brief: a view of the child as competent, capable of complex thinking, curious, and rich in potential” (p. 2) and presents ideas of the environment as a teacher (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, pp. 11-15) and pedagogical documentation as a study of children’s relationships in learning processes (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, pp. 27-30). Influence from the Reggio Emilia experience may be noticed in these documents in terms of the use of principles, phrases, quotations, references and specific attitudes about how children learn and the relational conditions and contexts that support them making sense in their lives. For instance, in one

document the purpose of “pedagogical documentation in this document [is described as] a way of listening to children, helping us to learn about children during the course of their experiences and to make this learning visible to others for interpretation” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 21).

In *How Does Learning Happen?: Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014a), the educator’s role in relationship with pedagogical documentation is described as being “co-learners alongside both children and families” (p. 21). This is a significant change from previous ideas of educators’ roles in relationships with families, in which educators were considered as the authority and evaluator of child development. This change in educators’ relationships with children and families is described where educators’ pedagogical documentation observations are “moving beyond simply an objective reporting of children’s behaviour...to find meaning in what children do and experience” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014a, p. 21).

This orientation is very different from previous ideas of an educators’ role being to conduct psychological assessments and evaluations of children using culturally developed tools and continuums of development that are included in the *Early Learning for Every Child Today* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document which may limit or perhaps not necessarily include children’s theories or strategies of thinking in ways similar to the teacher research from the Reggio Emilia municipal schools.

### **Kindergarten in Ontario**

The Kindergarten Program describes the introduction of a full day of learning for four- and five-year-old children in Ontario as calling “for transformational changes in the pedagogical approaches used in Kindergarten, moving from a traditional pedagogy to one

centered on the child and informed by evidence from research and practice about how young children learn” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 4). Before September 2010, Kindergarten was offered officially on a half-time basis in Ontario in various models including half days or alternate days. The full-time optional program was gradually phased in over four years until in all public schools beginning in September 2014 with the potential, that year, to serve almost 265,000 children aged 4 and 5 years (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b).

The intent of *The Kindergarten Program* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016) is described as, setting out a new philosophical disposition, with principles, and expectations for learning based in pedagogical approaches that are developmentally appropriate for four- and five-year old children aligning with, and extending the ideas in documents preceding it including: *Early Learning for Every Child Today* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007); *How Does Learning Happen?: Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014a); and the *Ontario Early Years Framework* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

The influence of these documents has been felt as this new educational design includes the requirement to have leading children pairs of educators consisting of a Designated Early Childhood Educator (DECE) and an Ontario Certified Teacher (OCT), recognized for their specific, but not mutually exclusive, knowledge of developmental understandings of children with the potential of setting up an amiable and stimulating educational environment together. Engaging in these new relationships was a change from the previous experiences of these educators who each worked with different approaches to child development and learning and were separated by Ontario Ministry of

Education portfolios that drew on different fields of educational backgrounds. The model of two educators working in relationship with groups of children is reflective of the Reggio Emilia schools approach (Edwards et al., 1993, 1998, 2012).

*The Kindergarten Program* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016) also includes understandings and beliefs similar to the Reggio Emilia educators in that four- and five-year-old children are viewed as competent learners, who are full of potential and ready to take ownership of their learning as unique individuals who live and learn within families and communities (p. 8). Other aspects of *The Kindergarten Program* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016) that are new in these documents and are similar to the Reggio Emilia approach include assumptions that: learning occurs in relationship; the environment participates in children's thinking; and pedagogical documentation as teacher research is needed to make children's thinking and learning experiences visible. Although the Ontario Ministry of Education (2014a, 2016) documents do share many values with the Reggio Emilia approach there are also differences that are worth noting, particularly in the ways pedagogical documentation is considered in relationship to assessment.

In *The Kindergarten Program* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016), pedagogical documentation is described as being new and different from traditional Ontario educational ideas of documentation and as being a change from previously held ideas of child observation as a summative process. It is described in the documents (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016) by explicitly noting it is not a form of summative assessment:

Pedagogical documentation is not a form of summative assessment and should not be reserved for the end of a given period of time. Instead, it is done on an ongoing

basis, and it may involve revisiting and rethinking evidence, as part of a cyclical process that promotes children's growth and learning. (p. 37)

Prior to the publication of these documents, documentation of young children in Ontario was typically presented as objective child observation for the purpose of assessing and evaluating an individual child's development. Assessing and evaluating a child simultaneously using observations gave little space or pause to study which observations to include or to consider possible differences of interpretations. Ontario educators, assured of the validity of the culturally centered developmental frameworks they were using, relied on them to evaluate children's growth. Pedagogical documentation in Ontario Ministry of Education (2014a, 2016) documents offers ways to re-consider educational documentation. *The Kindergarten Program* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016) described the new research approach:

The term "pedagogical documentation" is currently used to refer to the process of gathering and analyzing a wide range of a child's thinking and learning over time and using the insights gained to *make the child's thinking and learning visible* to the child and the child's family. This process enables educators to support further learning for each child in the most effective way possible. (p. 36, emphasis in original)

This definition of pedagogical documentation is a clear change from previous ideas in which documentation was collected for evaluation at the end of children's experiences but the expectation for educators to make assessments of individual children is still included noting, "Assessment is the key to children's learning in Kindergarten. It

takes place concurrently with instruction and is an integral part of learning” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 36).

### **Assessment and Pedagogical Documentation**

The confounding effects of educators’ interpretations of the relationships between pedagogical documentation and assessment seem to be the most difficult for Ontario educators to sort out. Most notably for me is that in the Reggio Emilia schools educators describe their work with pedagogical documentation as a study of the strategies children are constructing in their learning. Rinaldi (2006) describes their documentation as making visible,

at least partially, the nature of the learning processes and strategies used by each child. This means that the teacher, but above all the child and the children themselves, can reflect on the nature of their learning process as they are learning; that is, while they are building their knowledge. Not a documentation of product, but of processes, of mental paths. (p. 100)

To document processes of learning and strategies children are creating as they learn is different for North American educators but Vecchi (2010) notes that it was a new challenge to the educators of the Reggio schools also:

For years, the teachers and myself learned to undo learning. We learned to modify a part of the mental framework we had learned previously in our respective cultural and educational backgrounds and listen to reflections and experience different from our own ways of thinking. However the largest changes in mental framework and point of view were caused by observing and documenting children’s strategies. (p. 109)

Rinaldi recognized a difference of understandings of documentation in contexts outside of their experience writing, “the concept of documentation, which has only recently moved into the scholastic environment, and more specifically into the pedagogical-didactic sphere, has undergone substantial modifications that partially alter its definition” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 62). Rinaldi (2006) says that the ways that documentation is commonly used in schools reveal teachers negotiating between their ideas of relationship and assessment with children:

[In North American contexts] materials are collected during the experience, but they are read and interpreted at the end. The reading and recalling of memory therefore take place after the fact. The documents...are collected, sometimes catalogued, and brought back for rereading, revising, and reconstruction of the experience. That which took place is reconstructed, interpreted, and reinterpreted by means of the documents which testify to the salient moments of a path that was predefined by the teacher: the path that made it possible for the objectives of the experience to be achieved.

In short, according to this conceptual approach and didactic practice, the documents...are used after and not during the process. These documents (and the reflections and interpretations they elicit from teachers and children) do not intervene during the learning path and within the learning process in a way that would give meaning and direction to the process. (p. 63)

Using pedagogical documentation after, rather than throughout educational experiences, is a “substantial difference” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 63) between the North American and Reggio Emilia schools’ use of pedagogical documentation. Rinaldi (2006)

further describes purposes of documentation that have been developed in the Italian context that leave North American educators feeling conflicted,

In Reggio Emilia...we place the emphasis on documentation as an integral part of the procedures aimed at fostering learning and for modifying the learning-teacher relationship...[For us] documentation is a substantial part of the goal that has always characterized our experience: the search for meaning—to find the meaning of school, or rather, to construct the meaning of school, as a place that plays an active role in the children’s search for meaning and our own search for meaning (shared meanings). (p. 63)

Rinaldi (2006) describes the educators’ orientation or stance using pedagogical documentation in the Reggio experience as,

being in a state of inquiry, asking themselves: How can we help these children find the meaning of what they do, what they encounter, what they experience? And how can we do this for ourselves? These are questions of meaning and the search for meaning (Why? How? What?). I think these are the key questions that children constantly ask themselves, both at school and outside of school. (p. 63)

Rinaldi (2006) regards this search for meaning as central part to education: For us, these meanings, these explanatory theories are extremely important and powerful in revealing the ways in which children think, question, and interpret reality and their own relationships with reality and with us. Herein lies the genesis of the “pedagogy of relationships and listening” one of the metaphors that distinguishes the pedagogy of Reggio Emilia. (p. 64)

In the Reggio Emilia Approach, according to Rinaldi (2006), inquiry refers not to a structure or method but to the stance educators take in their practice in relationship with children to learn how the children are co-constructing strategies for thinking and making meaning. Pedagogical documentation is regarded as research and a cultural tool that brilliantly bridges a perceived research/practice divide for educators and children that so often dominates educational discussions. Using pedagogical documentation educators in the Reggio Emilia municipal schools offers educational practice a way to “live in the middle” (Holquist as cited in Wertsch, 1998, p. 16) of this perceptual divide between research and practice as educators and children become mutually active researchers of their experience. Pedagogical documentation, as qualitative research processes and as a multi-modal research tool, includes the ecology of relationships for children and families in the schools and communities and (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bateson, 1972; Montessori, 1995), and shares the democratic processes of working experientially in groups (Dewey, 1916, 1938). Pedagogical documentation also offers a methodological way to study processes of transformation and translation of children’s and educator’s thinking (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, 1935/1978) through the expressive use of materials allowing glimpses of understandings of complexity of thought and expression in non-linear creative processes (Vecchi, 2010). This methodology allows an opportunity to observe learning in progress in zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, 1935/1978). Pedagogical documentation as a socio-cultural tool for thinking also offers unique reflective learning occasions that potentially affect and re-shape our thinking about learning and teaching (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, 1935/1978).

As educators begin to include pedagogical documentation in their early learning and Kindergarten settings in Ontario they are in continuous states of negotiation trying to make sense of pedagogical documentation. My curiosity about educators' understandings of pedagogical documentation forms the basis of my research questions that are explored in the following chapters. The large research question for me is: How are educators making interpretations of pedagogical documentation in their practice? Further questions then emerged from the data including: What are their understandings of pedagogical documentation? How do they work with processes of pedagogical documentation? What are their purposes for pedagogical documentation?

### **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

What we document represents a choice, a choice among many other choices, a choice in which pedagogues themselves are participating. (Dahlberg et al., 2013, p. 155)

In my position as an educator, pedagogical team leader, and early learning consultant and presenter, I have observed a wide variation of understandings, interpretations, and intentions for pedagogical documentation in Ontario, Canada. The aim of the qualitative research of this dissertation was to develop an understanding of the ways educators of young children, from both child care and school settings in Ontario, are making sense of their experiences with pedagogical documentation in their practice by investigating how they are both affected by their interpretations of pedagogical documentation and how they shape pedagogical documentation.

Using a three-part series of interviews with each participant (Seidman, 2013), educators had opportunities to tell about and reflect on their lived experiences in the ways they came to learn about and understand pedagogical documentation, how they currently work with pedagogical documentation in their practice, and their intentions and hopes for working with pedagogical documentation in the future. In a grounded theory approach,

within an interpretivist framework (Glesne, 2011), the participants' responses in the interviews were studied and organized by the words that they used, the ways they said they felt, and the potential relationships between what they said about pedagogical documentation and their practice with pedagogical documentation.

### **Participants**

Pedagogical documentation is relatively new to early learning practice of Ontario, having been first formally included in early learning documents by the Ministry of Ontario in 2013 (Wien, 2013). Currently, pedagogical documentation is an expectation of practice (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014a, 2016) for educators in both child care and Kindergarten settings. Participants are educators using pedagogical documentation in child care and Kindergarten settings in Ontario.

### **Gaining Access to Participants**

As a registered member with both the Ontario College of Teachers and the Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators, I have worked as a classroom Kindergarten teacher in public schools and as a pedagogical team leader with educators in child care. I co-ordinated and instructed sessions for an Emergent Curriculum Certificate for educators that was offered in relationship with the Ontario Reggio Association. As an independent educational consultant, I regularly engage in conversations with people interested in early learning from different education-related work backgrounds such as: artists, college instructors, university professors, and those working on behalf of young children in administrative roles or as policy makers. Over the years I have hosted pedagogical documentation study sessions open to everyone interested in having their pedagogical documentation read, studied and interpreted by educators in attendance.

In response to queries from early learning educators expressing their desire to make connections with people engaging with pedagogical documentation in their practice I created a website, “Pedagogical documentation: Building Canadian connections” that was active from 2015 until 2018. This site held profiles of those in Ontario working with their interpretations of pedagogical documentation in their contexts, included a reference list for additional resources, and offered ways for educators to make connections through publications, affiliations, social media sites.

### **Selection of Participants**

Throughout my professional experiences I have collected contact information amounting to a pool of a large number of possible participants for this research and from this collection educators were selected. Beginning with a list of dozens of educators, potential participants were sorted into groups according to: gender, where they worked geographically in Ontario, their roles and contexts of their work, and the length of time they had been working in early education. It was important to me to have a sampling of educator experiences throughout the field of early learning that represented these differences so as to potentially show a variety of ways that educators might approach and translate pedagogical documentation into their unique contexts on a regular basis. Although this sample could not be considered representative of all educators working in Ontario, I hoped to share some ways pedagogical documentation might be developing characteristics from educators over time from different contexts. From the original contact list, I chose 20 educators’ names that I thought could represent characteristics of a broad range of experiences from different areas of Ontario using pedagogical documentation in practice. From this shortened list of 20 names eight were selected as the

first pool to invite to participate. Of these first eight that were contacted through email all agreed to participate and the remaining 12 potential participants were not contacted.

All eight participants in this study are educators of young children, five are from child care and are Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE) members of the Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators, and three are Ontario Certified Teachers (OCT) who are registered members with the Ontario College of Teachers. All participants have from anywhere between 9 and 26 years of experience as educators. They reported a range of between 3 to 13 years of experience including pedagogical documentation in their practices. All of these educators work with children up to age six in rural and urban regions of Ontario. Given that educators in the field of early learning in both child care and Kindergarten are predominantly female and given that, according to the Ontario “College of Early Childhood Educators” website (2020) two percent of their members are male (Ho, 2016), it was not surprising that seven participants in this study are female and one male. The genders of participants have not been included in their profiles so as to avoid unintentionally identifying anyone and participants self-selected pseudonyms. The singular “they” is used to refer to participants because it “is inclusive of all people, helps writers avoid making assumptions about gender, and is part of the APA Style” (American Psychological Association, 2020, p. 121). General attributes for each educator are listed in Table 1.

## **Backgrounds**

The participants live in one of three large geographical areas of Ontario including two in the Northern part of the province, two in Central Ontario and four in Southern Ontario, which includes Toronto and surrounding municipalities (see Table 1). The

Southern Ontario locations are distinctly urban while the Central and Northern locations are a combination of urban and rural settings.

Table 1

*Educator Information*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Registration and Work Role</b>	<b>Work Location</b>	<b>Years of Work Experience</b>	<b>Years Trying Pedagogical Documentation</b>
<b>Angel</b>	ECE dip, MPEd	RECE Child care	Southern Ontario	17	5
<b>Joy</b>	ECE dip, BA, BEd	RECE Child care	Southern Ontario	25	10
<b>Rosemary</b>	ECE dip, BA	RECE Child care	Central Ontario	16	3
<b>Shanice</b>	ECE dip, BA	RECE Child care	Central Ontario	9	3
<b>Christine</b>	ECE dip, Master's ECE	RECE Child care	Southern Ontario	10	10
<b>Michelle</b>	BA, BEd	OCT Public School	Northern Ontario	16	8
<b>Margot</b>	BA, BEd	OCT Public School	Northern Ontario	22	9
<b>Eloise</b>	BA, BEd, MEd	OCT Public School	Southern Ontario	26	13

The word “educator” is used throughout this research referring to both Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE) and Ontario Certified Teachers (OCT). The five Registered Early Childhood Educators work in not-for-profit child care settings designed for children ranging in age from infants up to age 12 and the three Ontario Certified Teachers (OCT) work in public elementary schools as Kindergarten teachers for children aged three to six. All participants said they engage directly in pedagogical documentation

processes in their work. The educators' credentials qualify them to work with children in different ratios and programs which would affect the ways pedagogical documentation is approached in their settings.

Everyone interviewed for this study has completed at least one university degree even though a university degree (see Table 1) is not required to work with young children in child care in Ontario. Early childhood educators of young children in this province are required to complete a two-year community college program which includes course work and job placements while kindergarten teachers are required to have an undergraduate degree and a Bachelor of Education that also includes practicums in order to be certified to teach in public schools in Ontario. Most of the participants have earned a Bachelor of Arts degree (BA) at an Ontario university in disciplinary areas such as: general studies, child development, psychology, history, business and French. Three educators in this study with an undergraduate BA are in child care settings and three are in Kindergarten. The other educators, working with children from each of the two settings, have additional undergraduate and graduate degrees in education. Educators in Ontario in child care and public schools are required to belong to a governing college. The educators in Kindergarten are members of the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) and the educators in child care are members of the College of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario (CECEO).

It is necessary to include post-secondary credentials and work place positions in this research because of the ways educators in Ontario have been introduced, guided and supported to use pedagogical documentation in their studies and work. It is my experience that interpretations and expectations of pedagogical documentation vary

among educators' depending on their work and educational backgrounds even though both groups are guided by the Ontario Ministry of Education. Some of these differences seem to come from the historical ideas of the word "documentation" in education where age-related developmental theories of learning expectations frame observation tools use as assessment (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014a, 2016) and some differences seem to originate from ideas of how children learn within educational settings.

### **Experience**

The participants are distinguished according to their years of work experience as an educator and also for their years working with pedagogical documentation in order to explore a potential relationship with the ways they are engaging with pedagogical documentation in practice over time. Overall the educators reported having between 9 to 26 years of experience working in the education of young children and comprise roughly three groups: educators with 9 and 10 years of experience; those with 16 and 17 years; and those with 20 plus years. All of these educators are very experienced with the average number of years of experience for RECEs being 15.4 and for OCTs being 21.3 years. Educators new to the field are not represented. The length of time the educators relate they have been experimenting with pedagogical documentation in their work is also included and ranges between 3 and 13 years. The average number of years educators said they have working with pedagogical documentation is 6.2 for RECEs and 10 for OCTs (see Table 1).

### **Working Relationships**

With some exceptions educators of young children in Ontario teach in collegial partnerships. RECEs in child care share rooms and spaces together with groups of

children and Kindergarten OCTs work with a Designated Early Childhood Educator (DECE) as a teaching team. A DECE in Ontario schools (Ontario College of Teachers, 2017, p. 2) is an educator who may have a background as an Educational Assistant or another education related field (recognized by their school board as a designated early childhood educator to work in Kindergarten but the title is for employment only).

Something that I was unaware of when I invited the educators to take part in the research was that at the time of the interviews three of the RECEs share selected supervisory positions with their colleagues, but two of these three RECEs continued to work directly with children. The third has several years of experience working directly with children, but at the time of the interview worked primarily with educators in a leadership role. Since the intention of the interviews was to learn about educators' experiences working with young children using pedagogical documentation, the three with the supervisory roles drew from their experiences with children and with colleagues working with children. The information about the ways supervisors engage with colleagues to encourage them to use pedagogical documentation was a welcome dimension in all three of the interviews.

### **General Descriptions of Children in the Educators' Groups**

Educators described the children who attend their child care or school as being either a homogenous group, in that the children's cultural family experiences are similar, or as a more heterogeneous group of families with a variety of background experiences. When asked to describe the children they work with in relation to their own cultural background, the educators, with one exception, indicated they felt that they and their colleagues' backgrounds reflected those of the group of children they teach. The

exception was a Kindergarten teacher who noted that they and their teaching colleagues were not representative of the experiences of children in their care. All educators described the children they teach as living in a wide variety of economic circumstances and varying family structures, but one believed most of their children's families as being from a high socio-economic background with traditional family structures.

Educators said they work in an English-language instructional environment except for one person teaching in a French immersion setting. Educators from the English settings said that they and/or their colleagues speak several languages, which often allows them to converse fluently with children and families fluently in a language other than English. One educator from child care said that there is a strong initiative among their colleagues and with their organization to recognize and acknowledge the cultural importance of family languages and a concerted effort is made to ensure that effective communication with families is taking place and includes translations of written materials and conversations in different languages when possible. Another educator also noted it was particularly important to them and their colleagues to engage with the children and families in languages that were familiar for the families.

### **Ethics Procedures**

When initial contact was made through email with the eight potential participants from the pool of 20, an invitation was included for them to talk with me either in person, through computer connections, or on the phone to discuss the possibility of their participation (Appendix A).

The Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) was shared in a follow-up meeting to discuss the possibility of becoming a participant. With this form we discussed the

purposes of the research, what they would be expected to do in the research, how the interviews could be organized, any possible risks and discomforts or benefits they might experience by participating in the research, that their participation was entirely voluntary and they could withdraw from the research at any time, how their confidentiality would be respected and how recordings and transcripts of our interviews would be securely stored and be accessible to them. Participants were provided contact information where they could direct any questions they might have, and we made initial plans about where and when we would meet.

### **Privacy and Confidentiality**

All participants stressed at the outset that they appreciated the assurances I offered that the privacy of children and families and their colleagues would be maintained in the processes of the research. The educators consistently avoided using children's, colleagues' work place names or attributing specific pedagogical documentation processes they discussed to particular children or colleagues. For these reasons participants chose pseudonyms to use and their gender is not revealed, work locations are not described in detail and the data and pedagogical documentation references shared in the interviews are discussed in generalities to avoid identifying anyone.

### **Procedures**

Seidman (2013) describes an in-depth interview method which involves a "search for the meaning that people are making of experiences" (p. 18) and discusses how interviews may be used effectively to gather qualitative data using language to get at this meaning. The intention in these interviews was to get at some understandings of the

effects of the experiences of the educators and the work they do as their theoretical interpretations of pedagogical documentation meet up with their experiences from their practice.

Seidman (2013) identifies themes or aspects of this approach that led to structuring the interviews in three parts including:

- recognizing that the human experience is transitory;
- recognizing participants' understandings are their subjective points of view;
- appreciating that participants' lived experiences may be reconstructed to be discussed as phenomenon; and
- emphasizing ways the participants are making meaning of their experiences (pp. 16-20)

These four themes are important according to Seidman (2013) because of the ways they play out in the interview structure and techniques by grounding and guiding the interviewer to explore the meaning of people's experiences in the context of their lives (p. 20). Interviews for this research were set up around finding out how the participants came to, and were introduced to, pedagogical documentation so as to try to understand their first influences in their thinking; how they are currently finding ways to make meaning in their experiences in practice; and how they reflect on these experiences, making meaning of them and sharing their hopes using pedagogical documentation in their future (Seidman, 2013, pp. 21-22).

In order to conduct this research the in-depth interviews were constructed with a broad anchor question and several smaller, more specific questions asking for details

about the participant's experiences (Appendix C). All of the interviews included an overarching anchor question but in some cases the interviews with the educators became more of a discussion where not all of the secondary questions were asked directly but served only as guideposts depending on the conversation and the length of time available in the interview. Adjusting interviews for each participant is something that Seidman (2013) acknowledges occurs because interviewing is a relationship that is individually crafted reflecting the "personalities of the participant and the interviewer and the ways they interact" (p. 97). In my experiences with this research it became apparent to me how differently participants regarded and approached particular questions. These differences among participants affected how I interacted with each of them so that gave them the possibilities to widen their responses by asking if they had something more they would like to share at different points in the interviews. I tried to be particularly careful in the interviews, keeping in mind that "the social forces of class, ethnicity, race, and gender, as well as other social identities, impose themselves" and "tend to affect relationships with participants" (Seidman, 2013, p. 97). I made sure I also allowed opportunities for the participants to include unexpected information they regarded as important.

In addition, since we met three times our relationships became more relaxed and changed over time. Seidman (2013) notes that care must be taken because these multiple meetings result in a relationship that is different from that which would result from a single-interview structure (p. 97). In a positive way these interviews allowed me to become more responsive as I learned more about the person being interviewed. I came to recognize certain behaviours that I interpreted as markers to how they were feeling in the interviews. These markers included being tired, or bored, or losing interest with certain

questions (checking their phone, talking about something else separate from the interviews, yawning, etc.). If participants had something else on their minds that they wanted to discuss then I could make adjustments in our interactions. As a result of these developments in our relationship, the second and third interviews changed in small ways. For instance, at the beginning of the second and third interviews I asked if the educators had any reflections from our previous meetings that they might like to add or share about or if they felt some ways they were thinking or working differently as a result of the interviews. Starting the second and third interviews off with this question before we went to the anchor questions seemed to be a welcome opportunity for the educators to take a lead in the interview while still developing an “appropriate rapport” (Seidman, 2013) that did not “transform the interviewing relationship in a full ‘We’ relationship in which the question of whose experience is being related and whose meaning is being made is critically confounded” (p. 99). This reflection question was added to the beginning of the second and third interviews because I heard the educators say that they had been thinking a lot about the previous meeting(s) and they wanted to tell me about how our discussion had affected them personally in their work before I had officially started the interviews. The educators’ responses helped to fill out some aspects of other questions that I had not anticipated when developing the interview plans.

Seidman (2013) advises that the three interviews should take place with a two to three week interval between them and be limited to 90 minutes. For these interviews there were some adjustments made to the intervals between the three interviews due to physical distance and our abilities to co-ordinate schedules in order to meet, but all of the

interviews were held within the limit of 90 minutes. The interviews were conducted at locations away from their work that were convenient for the person being interviewed.

The first interviews were conducted with the intent of gathering some ideas of each participant's "life history" (Seidman, 2013, p. 34). Educators were invited to share their basic demographic, educational, and personal backgrounds leading to their current work and to tell how they first came to use pedagogical documentation. Participants were next asked how they were introduced to pedagogical documentation, the ways they have been learning about pedagogical documentation and how they feel these experiences led them to consider the practice up in their work (see Appendix C).

In the second interviews the educators were asked about how they work currently with pedagogical documentation. The questions for this interview were written to explore what the experience is like for educators to work with pedagogical documentation on a day-to-day basis so that, as Seidman (2013) recommends, the questions "get at their contemporary experiences" (p. 34). The purposes of these questions were to learn what the educators' intentions are in their practice in the processes of making observations, collecting information, telling what they do with their collections, and reflecting on how the observations they generate affect their practice. Questions were posed to encourage the educators to tell something about their difficulties and successes with some processes including how they feel they have or have not adapted to using pedagogical documentation. The educators were invited to walk through their learning experiences in their daily work with pedagogical documentation (Seidman, 2013). Additionally, the educators were asked if they had anything they would like to add from the first interview or if they had reflections they would like to share from that experience. The opportunity

for the participants to reflect on their previous interview(s) had not been planned for originally and offered some unexpected, although welcomed, information into the data collection.

The third interviews were intended to probe what Seidman (2013) refers to as a “reflection on meaning” (p. 34) to encourage the educators to tell how they might imagine or hope pedagogical documentation could affect them and their future relationships in education with children, colleagues, families and their communities. The aim of this third interview was to develop some understandings of the ways educators’ hopes for future work were related to the ways they initially took up the practice of pedagogical documentation, and how their initial intentions and current work influenced their processes of data collection, organizing, studying, sharing, and working from their pedagogical documentation. Similarly, in this interview, as in the second, the educators were asked if they had anything they would like to add to the second interview or if they had reflections they would like to share from that experience and the responses were added to the interview data.

Finally, at the end of the third interviews all of the educators voluntarily offered their reflections on the experience of participating saying that they hoped that by agreeing to take part in the research that the information gathered from everyone would be helpful and supportive for their colleagues learning to use pedagogical documentation.

The interviews were audio taped, notes were taken on a computer and some jot notes were made by hand. All of the interviews were transcribed by me listening to the audio tapes which were transferred to computer files. These files were then copied and sorted twice—once according to the person being interviewed and then into the three

interview groups. They were stored on a separate device from the computer files. The transcriptions were printed three times to create collections for analysis across interviews and in-depth for each participant and are in secure storage. As the transcripts were created the participants' responses that I regarded as interesting, or significant, or could possibly connect thematically to other parts of that person's or another person's interviews they were starred and/or put into bold, depending on what was noticed. Information was added alongside the words of the transcriptions in brackets that told something about the ways the person being interviewed was communicating using body language (e.g. waving arms, shifting in their seat, sighing, laughing, etc.). There were also a few jot notes made during the interviews where a person described a movement or shape that I used to supplement the written notes and audio tapes. All of the collections of data (recording, transcriptions, and hand notes) were used in my thinking to consider potential themes and patterns from the words and emotional responses of educators.

### **Situating the Interviewer**

I was drawn to the practice of Reggio Emilia municipal project through my graduate studies and developed an appreciation for pedagogical documentation as a way to learn more about how children think and learn. Equally as fascinating to me was the idea that educators could use pedagogical documentation to discuss, share and develop a personal awareness that affected them and their practice. Regarding teachers as researchers working with pedagogical documentation felt like a "flip" in educational thinking for me and I became curious about the decision-making of educators in relation to their ideas of children, learning and children and the changes in their stance using pedagogical documentation. For me, pedagogical documentation also has the potential to

act as a catalyst for change in almost any experiential or emergent learning approach for valuing and appreciating the diversity and creativity of thinking among children.

For the past several years I have been a member of the Ontario Reggio Association and I acted as a member of this Board for two years. This association organizes professional learning events, study tours and creates experiences that advocate for educational rights of children for Ontario educators through their international educational connections with the Reggio Emilia schools. I have participated in two week-long study tours to Reggio Emilia, Italy in 2012 and 2015 with the Ontario Reggio Association. These tours consisted of full day academic lectures led by educational leaders of the Reggio Emilia schools and school visits that included encounters with pedagogical documentation existing in the practices. These visits also included opportunities for me to engage in discussions with the Italian educators and fellow Canadians and international attendees.

For my Master of Education thesis I examined published pedagogical documentation from Reggio Children publications for evidence of children engaged in self-talk (Brown Weatherbee, 2013). Enough evidence was found to allow me to sort the ways children were thinking aloud into several categories. This discovery and work encouraged me to expand my ideas of the potential for pedagogical documentation as educational research.

As a result of my cumulative academic, mentoring and practical experiences I am sometimes invited to consult with educators using pedagogical documentation and exploring Reggio-inspired emergent curriculum practices. In these consultations my goal is not to show educators how to “do” or implement the work of pedagogical

documentation, but instead I try to offer ways to allow participants to develop some awareness of their personal philosophy and understandings of the relationships between learning and teaching and the values of experiential learning (Dewey, 1916, 1938), and potentially recognize and appreciate the opportunity for self-reflection and engaging with pedagogical documentation as a form of professional development. These experiences are intended to foster an appreciation among educators of learning conditions that support them as well as to explore and construct their own ideas and interpretations of pedagogical documentation in professionally challenging and personally relevant ways. When working with groups and individuals my position is to listen and ask questions that require participants to reflect on their thinking, rather than listen as an expert of pedagogical documentation telling ways to implement this research methodology and tool for thinking into their practice.

All educators' professional encounters with me in my consultation and professional work are considered voluntary. I emphasize with the educators that the learning opportunities are meant to offer reciprocal opportunities for me to learn along with them. I do not include evaluations or grades in my work with educators, instead I regard my role as one of an activator of pedagogical documentation experiences that will encourage educators to build their own ideas for interpretation in their personal contexts.

Although, due to my experiences, I acknowledge that I may be regarded as holding a position of some authority about pedagogical documentation, I addressed this directly in this research with each participant on the outset and reiterated in our meetings that I was interested in learning about their own experiences working with pedagogical

documentation including how and why they use it the way that they do, and how they would like or hope to use it to support their colleagues.

### **Initial Interview Protocol**

The first interview with participants included gathering basic demographic information and an opportunity to draw on participants' experiences about how they initially came to learn about and use pedagogical documentation in their practice. The questions were organized to gather an understanding of the ways that they started to approach this work and what it meant to work with young children using pedagogical documentation. To generate this conversation the participants were asked how they recalled coming to learn about pedagogical documentation in their initial encounters and in further learning experiences, the resources they accessed and their experiences with colleagues. Through these questions, participants were encouraged to discuss their influences and their personal philosophical approach to pedagogical documentation in their practice. The first anchor question, from the first interview, "How did you come to use pedagogical documentation in your practice?" (Appendix C) became an overview of the smaller questions that followed. This approach is similar to Malaguzzi's description to Gandini the ways Reggio Emilia educators' go about their work:

Our schools start off with a reconnaissance flight over all the human, environmental, technical, and cultural resources. The more reconnaissance missions will be made to get a full overview of the situation: within and among schools, to families and advisory councils, to the pedagogical team, and to the town administration and elected officials. Also teachers do reconnaissance trips through workshops, seminars and meetings with experts in various fields.

What educators acquire by discussing, proposing, and launching new ideas is not only a set of professional tools, but also a work ethic that gives more value to being part of a group and to having interpersonal solidarity, while at the same time strengthening intellectual autonomy. The support resulting from an *itinerant reconnaissance education* gives us great strength and help. Its task is to startle and push us along new roads. There is not a better evaluation of our work than this.

(Gandini, 2012a, p. 88)

As the interviews with the participants progressed, I realized that the anchor questions served as a sort of flight of reconnaissance over the whole interview. I came to understand that the educators wanted to hear the anchor question first and have time to consider it and come back to it after they had had time to think with the smaller questions. This recall of educators' previous experiences seemed to have the effect of supporting them to find words to respond to the anchor question about their practical and emotional experiences in their work.

My initial intention was that each interview was organized with one large anchor question to be followed by smaller questions that were an elaboration of the first in an attempt to understand the underlying influences on their work; however, in the process of conducting the interviews the anchor question became a consideration or flight of reconnaissance over the ideas of the interview, and the smaller questions were asked first before we finally came back to the anchor question at the end of the interview.

### **Conducting the Interviews**

In planning for the interviews, it was assumed that the audio recordings of the interviews would be the main way of recording the interviews; however, I took notes on a

computer and made jot notes as we went along. This system of recording evolved over the course of the interviews when I noticed some discomfort with a person being interviewed in one of the first interviews. This person shifted their position in the interview to look away from me. I wondered if they were uncomfortable and asked if that was the case. They told me that they preferred to have the option of looking away to think when being interviewed because it was too intense sitting face-to-face for that length of time. I realized in that conversation that if I made notes, rather than gazing at this participant, they seemed more comfortable speaking in their interviews. As a result, at that point, I made this same adjustment for all participants.

### **Data Management and Storage**

Informed consent forms (Appendix D) included permission to audio record the interviews, take notes of gestures and other indicators not audio recorded, and also to make notes by hand and on a computer in the processes. The audio recordings were labelled with pseudonyms and were kept organized with an attention to detail, accessibility, and security (Seidman, 2013, p. 115) for reference. The transcriptions included some notations of nonverbal signs (Seidman, 2013, p. 117). A transcription service was not used.

### **Data Analysis**

This qualitative work was conducted from a grounded theory perspective with the methodology “grounded” in the data in order to “demonstrate relations between conceptual categories and to specify the conditions under which the theoretical relationships emerge, change, or are maintained” (Glesne, 2011, p. 21) in ecological ways

that included ways of valuing emotions and aesthetics as a meta-structure that connects diversity of thought (Bateson, 1972; Vecchi, 2010).

After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed and sorted into groups by individual participants and also organized according to the ways participants addressed questions and responses. Some responses to specific questions took place in different interviews so, although most of the data for particular questions were generated in the interviews where the ideas were discussed, some educators came back to questions or gave responses that would fit with questions that had not yet been asked. The data were then analyzed and grouped into patterns based on the experiences the educators described and how they said they felt in these processes. The data were analyzed to compare responses to categorize the data collected using a thematic analysis (Glesne, 2011, pp. 187-188) to generate theories about their working relationships with pedagogical documentation. Seidman's (2013) recommendations were used to conduct the interview and manage, record, transcribe, study, reduce, analyze, interpret and share the interview material. Assertions were made from these research processes with confirming and disconfirming data samples. The assertions made for the basis of the presentation of the data in subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

### **Timing of Analysis**

An in-depth analysis of the interview data was avoided until all of the interviews were completed in order to allow the generative process of the interviews to continue and to minimize the opportunity that I might impose ideas (Seidman, 2013, p. 116) from previous interviews. This meant that transcriptions of the interviews were completed only after all three interviews were conducted with all participants. A cursory analysis was

occurring over the hours the audio data was being transcribed and this cursory analysis formed beginning ideas of how the data might be handled when the transcriptions were complete. The beginning impressions led to parts of the transcription being starred or made bold and small bracketed comments added as a reminder of why the information seemed relevant. All of the original data from these interviews were retained for reflection and accountability purposes.

### **Studying, Reducing, and Analyzing the Text**

To transcribe a potentially “vast array of words, sentences, paragraphs, and pages” including gestures, inevitably involves a reduction “to what is of most significance and interest,” and the transcriber must maintain an awareness of “an open attitude to seek what emerges” (Seidman, 2013, p. 120).

Considerations made in reducing the transcripts in this research were meant to leave a “sense of what is important” to the data while choosing “meaningful chunks of transcripts” in “a close reading plus judgment” about “what is significant in the transcript” (Seidman, 2013, p. 120). The transcripts were reduced only after they were transcribed in full and copies were printed for analysis. Quotations from the interviews were selected, sorted and placed on large pieces of chart paper to group the responses by questions. Some of the educators’ responses to particular questions occurred throughout interviews and were not confined to one interview. Sorting the responses by question on the chart paper allowed me to notice participants’ choice of words and the development of themes. The responses were sorted again using large posted chart paper in relation to the participants’ choice of words and potential themes. Then the complete transcriptions were reviewed to see if there were other parts of the interviews that might belong to these

developing categories and themes. Along with the language and choice of words the educators' emotions were also considered. The educators did speak of their emotions but they also indicated how they felt with their tone of voice and body language. Even though the non-verbal cues were not included as part of the data reduction process, the information still helped to guide my decision making process during the analysis.

When the groups of data started to take on thematic shape I began to organize this information in ways that would share the Ontario educators' experiences over time in relation to Reggio Emilia educators descriptions of the ways they use pedagogical documentation in their practice, and that Wien et al. (2011) has noted, and the ways that the Ontario Ministry of Education describes the practice for educators of young children and processes of learning to use pedagogical documentation in practice. There were also some surprising aspects of the collection that surpassed my expectations of how pedagogical documentation was being used in Ontario as educator research and there was some evidence of ways the processes Wien et al. (2011) describe might be strengthened or expanded.

### **Assertions**

My work with the data involved developing theories of what I was noticing in educators' responses. These theories were tentative but some evolved into stronger ideas as assertions that I used to organize the data to offer my analysis. An assertion for me as a researcher is a statement of what I noticed going on in the data such as a similarity among educators' emotional responses or their use of particular words or phrases that connected their experiences of feelings.

In this research, with only eight participants, there was an abundance of information generated over the series of three interviews. To manage this information, I worked from a sense that particular data might be related. I sorted and resorted the data in a number of ways until I was able to assemble it in ways that made the most sense for me to look for and determine if there were patterns or repetitions of experiences that seemed important or significant. When I noticed similarities or differences in what participants were saying I grouped those samples loosely together to study them more closely for the possibility that I might be able to assemble them in ways that would form the basis of a tentative theory about the data to investigate more closely if the theory could be strong enough to become an assertion. When I thought an assertion could be tentatively made, then I would search the data for information that would confirm or disconfirm my theory which would result in either dropping the assertion or holding it and making adjustments until it worked well enough to hold the data together.

### **Limitations**

Limitations in the study included the potential perception of me, as the interviewer, as being in the position of having some expertise about pedagogical documentation and the ways that perception might affect the responses of the participants. I acknowledged this possibility with each person and tried to dispel that perception with the participants when I made my initial contact with them by reaffirming with them how little we know about what people actually do as they come to engage in the process of pedagogical documentation and that in this sense I have much to learn from their experiences.

Second, the educators' ideas and understandings of "pedagogical documentation" itself when they agreed to participate could be another possible limitation. As with most words and meanings we make of them, there are infinite possibilities of understandings (Vygotsky, 1934/1986) and possible changes in educator perceptions might have occurred over the course of the interviewing processes. For instance, in some of the interviews the participants shared and requested an exchange of resources such as articles, books, to further think about pedagogical documentation, while reflecting on their practice.

A third limitation could be that since the educators all had a number of years of experience with pedagogical documentation some of them might have been less likely to recall their initial challenges bringing pedagogical documentation into their practice with detail or clarity or previous issues they encountered might be remembered by them as being less important in retrospect and left unmentioned.

A fourth limitation is in acknowledging that qualitative work with eight participants is not generalizable when framed as probability it gives us strong pause to consider the implications. Qualitative research offers an opportunity for readers to identify with the experiences of participants and in so doing come to greater understandings of self and others.

The research that follows from the interviews relays the participants' initial and ongoing encounters with pedagogical documentation, the ways they gather, organize and share their collections and the ways they are focusing their analysis to make sense of their research.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **EDUCATORS' RESPONSES TO PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTATION**

In this chapter I will show educators' responses to their encounters with pedagogical documentation as being conflicted. Participants shared feeling both encouraged and discouraged making sense of pedagogical documentation from their initial encounters, their encounters with cognitive knots, and from their encounters creating pedagogical documentation. The conflicted responses of the participants offer indications of the effort required to make sense of pedagogical documentation in practice.

#### **Educators' Responses to Initial Encounters with Pedagogical Documentation**

Participants' first awareness of pedagogical documentation came from several sources—from reading Ontario Ministry of Education documents and other personal reading choices, by taking part in regional meetings, and by attending exhibits from the schools of Reggio Emilia. These initial encounters with pedagogical documentation were described as being professionally and emotionally engaging and challenging by the participants.

#### **Reading Ontario Ministry Documents**

Ministry documents, as points of first awareness of pedagogical documentation, left educators, such as Angel and Joy, saying they were trying to “make sense” of what was expected of them. The reading materials were described as being challenging and consequently required a great deal of time, effort, and expense to try to comprehend.

Additional time was spent looking for information online, seeking out learning opportunities, and purchasing supplementary print and audio-visual resources and materials. Both of these educators said they were left on their own to figure out pedagogical documentation to try to make sense of this new work expectation. Angel described going on a search for understanding saying, “I went on this learning curve to figure out what it meant.” Angel started by reading Ministry documents and then began to search out information offered on international websites and blogs about pedagogical documentation. Angel was motivated to understand pedagogical documentation to introduce it to their colleagues and bring it into their practice. Joy went on a quest as well to figure out pedagogical documentation and bring it into their work with colleagues and described the difficulties they encountered, “We had to search out our learning about professional development and there was no support—money—time....” Joy’s voice trailed off saying this and they looked down and slowly shook their head.

Angel and Joy found themselves with pedagogical documentation as a new expectation of practice they did not understand. Both participants went about trying to figure out how to develop their understandings so they could fulfill the expectations to bring pedagogical documentation into their practice. They described feeling both motivated to learn but also discouraged with a lack of direction. Unsurprisingly, developing awareness of pedagogical documentation by reading Ministry documents and searching online left these educators often feeling conflicted, alone, and generally unsupported.

## Child Care Events

In contrast, participants who were invited to attend professional development events and engage in discussions offered through their municipalities described their experiences learning about pedagogical documentation with significantly positive emotional responses in their first encounters although these experiences were also described as being challenging.

Some participants made connections between their emotional experiences with pedagogical documentation and their personal relationships. For instance, Shanice could recall the exact date and context of first encounters with pedagogical documentation when they realized the potential for pedagogical documentation. The impact was significant. Shanice was smiling and had tears in their eyes as they struggled to describe their emotional responses in this initial encounter saying, “I don’t know how to describe it. Words are really hard. It’s a very special part of my life when it happened. It made things very real for me. It was a very emotional experience.”

Rosemary, also encountered pedagogical documentation for the first time in a context similar to Shanice, but described the experience as discombobulating and challenging,

This was difficult for me, coming from a very analytical mind frame in my previous work where black is black and white is white and there is a formula for everything. It is a lot different from what I had learned, and where I am now, or where I am still learning. It is very different.

Both Shanice and Rosemary said that they felt strongly supported by their municipalities, organizations, and families during these initial encounters with

pedagogical documentation and described their experiences as both emotionally and intellectually motivating and challenging.

### **Kindergarten Events**

The introductory years of full-day Kindergarten in Ontario brought Michelle and Margot to encounter pedagogical documentation. A sense of familiarity seemed to be a starting point for educators in this group. Michelle said that the idea of teachers as researchers felt familiar because, “I was already taking pictures to remember things and I had been reading books from the Reggio Emilia experience on my own and I felt like I was already doing aspects of pedagogical documentation.” Taking photographs in their class was, for Michelle, a familiar foreshadowing for pedagogical documentation; their interest in photography was a motivator to create pedagogical documentation. For Margot, pedagogical documentation also felt familiar because it seemed to align with their philosophical ideas of education. Margot said, “I saw in children what I always wanted to see, which I was never able to talk about, or it wasn’t valued [in school]. All of a sudden, it was like, this is what education has always been for me.” Having a sense of familiarity with pedagogical documentation was affirming for both of these participants and evoked positive emotional responses that encouraged them to become invested in engaging further with pedagogical documentation in their practice. Although they both felt motivated, they also told how they were challenged with processes of pedagogical documentation.

Michelle and Margot appreciated being included in the introduction of pedagogical documentation work in their settings and they spoke with admiration of the “courage” of the administrators who offered the educational contexts and conditions for

thinking about and experimenting with pedagogical documentation. Margot avowed, “People believed in me and I believed in them.”

### **Attending an Exhibit From Reggio Emilia Schools**

Encountering pedagogical documentation for the first time attending an exhibit from the Reggio Emilia schools was related as an eye-opening experience for participants Christine and Eloise. Christine remembered thinking, “Wow, this makes sense!” and laughed saying, “It was mesmerizing! It opened my eyes to a different kind of life happening in the classroom and outside of the classroom, that’s the only word that I can think of—mesmerizing.” This exuberant response offered by Christine described their delight that children were being “allowed to express themselves in ways that we were not even aware of.” This initial encounter with pedagogical documentation of the Reggio Emilia educators was also significant for Christine because, like Michelle and Margot, it matched Christine’s desires for education. Christine believed they had found a match with their own thinking while viewing pedagogical documentation for the first time. Christine stated, “There is something within you as a professional, as an educator that you already look for. I think that you kind of a look for a match. It’s something that you look for always.”

Eloise similarly described their first impressions viewing pedagogical documentation in a Reggio Emilia exhibit as being “fascinating” saying, “It was incredible. You would be just be melting into the floor. I remember thinking this is unbelievable.” Eloise shared the effect of this encounter as,

It changed my way of thinking—from [thinking of] the delivery of the curriculum, to one where I was trying to figure out what children were thinking and what they

are getting out of any experience they were having and what they are making that into for themselves. I remember wondering as I read the exhibit, ‘How do you get children to say things like that?’

Eloise, like Christine, Michelle, and Margot, described their first encounter with pedagogical documentation as a place where they recognized their educational values. Eloise said, “When this [pedagogical documentation] came along then everything made sense to me. This makes sense for these young children in front of me. That was my motivation.” Eloise and Christine felt motivated to bring pedagogical documentation into their practice and meet the challenges they were wondering about in their encounters, including such things as, “How do you ever get children to say these things?” and “How am I going to do this?” Both Christine and Eloise reported feeling very strongly supported and valued in a mentored relationship learning about pedagogical documentation.

### **Educators’ Responses to Encounters with Cognitive Knots of Understandings**

Participants described encounters with cognitive knots in their thinking that challenged their understandings of pedagogical documentation. These challenges arose from their realizations that there were multiple understandings of pedagogical documentation and the interpretations of non-standardized processes involved and their purposes were diverse. The participants’ responses to their encounters with these cognitive knots of understandings also show that they are conflicted.

### **Multiple Meanings**

There were three ways participants realized differences between their own understandings of pedagogical documentation and the understandings of others. First,

they realized they held ideas of pedagogical documentation that were different from the Reggio Emilia educators. Secondly, participants realized they and their colleagues held multiple meanings of pedagogical documentation among themselves that became visible as they made interpretations of pedagogical documentation in their practice. Third, participants also felt conflicted wrestling with their previous understandings and the pedagogical documentation from the Reggio Emilia schools. Educators described feeling being both encouraged and discouraged when they realized the variety of meanings they were discovering for pedagogical documentation.

All of the participants had been working with young children using documentation before the Ontario Ministry of Education introduced pedagogical documentation as an expectation of practice. This meant that previous understandings they held of documentation were challenged with new ideas of pedagogical documentation. Margot recalled thinking in their earliest encounters with pedagogical documentation, “This is a different way of thinking about documentation.”

The participants were also heard comparing their former understandings of meanings for documentation alongside their developing ideas of pedagogical documentation which illustrated their cognitive knots of understandings. Rosemary reflected on their past practices in relation to pedagogical documentation noting, “We did documentation which was very checklist-like. It was only about the children. The other documentation we tried back then was to ‘follow the interest of the children’ using a ‘play curriculum.’ We did our spider web.” Eloise also made distinctions between their ideas of documentation saying, “There was regular assessment and then there was pedagogical documentation—two different things. There was the real information that I

was interested in—I think that drove my teaching. The other stuff was boring and there’s an ending but with pedagogical documentation there’s no ending or potentially no ending.”

The participants also indicated that they noticed differences of understandings for pedagogical documentation among colleagues. One difference was noticed from the ways they were using the phrase “pedagogical documentation.” Shanice attributed the lack of consistency in the use of “pedagogical documentation” in colleagues’ conversations as an example of different understandings. Shanice felt that, “Sometimes there are a lot of terminologies thrown around without understanding.” Rosemary, who also recognized there are different understandings of pedagogical documentation among colleagues, tried to resolve this conflict by not using the word “documentation” at work. Rosemary stated, “I don’t use the word only because we seem to get stuck on beautiful panels when I say ‘documentation.’ I try to use the term ‘research.’”

The data show that participants’ conflicting personal understandings of pedagogical documentation left them feeling challenged. Shanice spoke of at first understanding pedagogical documentation as being “an extra thing” and that’s why “it was so much work” noting that “a majority of people still think that.” Participants seemed to come to terms with some of their inner conflicts of understandings by making distinctions between types of pedagogical documentation. They referred to pedagogical documentation as being for different audiences. In some cases pedagogical documentation addressed rules of “compliance” and expectations while other pedagogical documentation was just “for fun.” Participants also described pedagogical documentation

that related to assessment and reports of child development or achievement and that which is shared with families as communication of their children's experiences.

Resolving these internal conflicts was a challenge for participants. Some were able to negotiate opposing ideas while for others it was too much. Joy acknowledged the effort that was involved to resolve their conflicted understandings of pedagogical documentation saying, "It's not practical to do two things. You end up suffering. It's only if you have a huge drive that you really want to do this because nobody is going to acknowledge or pay you for it."

### **Non-Standardized Processes of Pedagogical Documentation**

When educators first decide to try pedagogical documentation, it has been my experience they often seek out procedural steps for guidance. As Eloise pointed out, "A problem is that teachers just want to know the formula." Educators consistently show they find it perplexing when they come to realize pedagogical documentation offers no standardized procedures for them to follow and that creativity and improvisation are required on their part. The absence of these procedures becomes a challenge for them.

Working with non-standardized processes of pedagogical documentation means facing a deliberately missing external structure, that Reggio Emilia educators work to uphold, requiring educators to make personal interpretations of the processes within their particular contexts (Gandini, 2008, p. 27). Missing an external structure of standardization means that there is more at risk for educators because the responsibility for what they do is squarely on themselves, demanding curiosity and invention.

Most of the educators in this research reported creating pedagogical documentation over several years and possibly, for this reason, did not directly reference

experiencing a great deal of surprise recognizing that non-standardized processes are involved; however, participants did recall their early experiences as being challenging when they realized the purposes of pedagogical documentation were for something other than, or more than, child observation. These educators reported feeling tension in their work trying to meet what they regarded as conflicting requirements to make assessments of children's development while simultaneously making room for the extra work of pedagogical documentation as an exploratory research practice of children's thinking strategies. For them, the non-standardized processes of pedagogical documentation would not help them meet their workplace requirements and, as a result, they regarded this new pedagogical documentation as "only an extra thing to do." Encountering these seemingly conflicting understandings left these educators feeling they needed to continue to work with pedagogical documentation primarily as child observation as a structured process but also in "extra ways" to communicate children's experiences.

In moments of dilemma, pedagogical documentation, as non-standardized research processes, was considered to be extra work by these educators and something they might try after they have completed their required child observation documentation; however, when educators tried "extra pedagogical documentation" they described their experiences as being "enjoyable, showing children and educators enjoying themselves and interacting in beautiful ways" although "that kind of documentation is just for fun."

Non-standardized processes for generating pedagogical documentation encompass all the subjectivity that is generally involved with qualitative research practices including multi-layered decision-making processes and personal choices for what is noticed, documented, how interpretations are made and decisions about ways of sharing the work.

For people who are struggling with processes of pedagogical documentation  
Eloise believes

you can't tell anybody [how], you can't tell them because I've tried (laughs).

They'll get past it even they are convinced that they are not going to get past it. I think it's fear, anxiety and that perfectionism that (a) all women have and (b) that teachers have, and in particular elementary teachers put on themselves.

Everything has to be perfect. You have to show how perfect everything is. You can't make a mistake and you can't be guessing. You can't seem to be guessing because you are supposed to be perfect. That's hard to let go of but if you work in an emergent curriculum way, it's not got to be perfect. It's always going to be messy.

Eloise went on to say that they were unable to offer educators advice about the processes involved with pedagogical documentation because, "If you can predict everything that's going to happen (long pause) then I think you are doing it wrong."

Joy described their consideration of the differences of processes of pedagogical documentation as "almost like un-learning and trying to re-learn looking at kids and things in a different way." Michelle thought "educators are afraid of pedagogical documentation because they are really bad for thinking that it's only about the report card" and the non-standardization processes of pedagogical documentation "make them really uncomfortable."

Despite having taken part in creating pedagogical documentation for several years no one described themselves as accomplished or having complete understanding of processes possible with pedagogical documentation. Shanice noticed, "I am [still] trying

to figure out what to document, how to document and how to study it. We're still sort of on that surface level. We are getting more descriptive in our observations but those pieces around what's happening in the environment aren't always connected to the emotions and curiosities." While Michelle spoke of their ongoing learning saying, "I might not understand something in the moment. I'm trying to understand how a kid learns to see if there's patterns, to see if something reoccurs. A kid on their own or in a group. I like to revisit it to see if I develop theories and see if I can confirm my theories or my theories are changing." Christine told of ongoing efforts to develop understandings with colleagues saying, "We document bit by bit and then together with other colleagues we would have conversations about what each of us saw. The important thing is not just as individuals but together you help each other in processes of understanding of how to document, what to document. We learn from each other, right? We develop these abilities with each other's experiences." Feelings of not being accomplished or having full understandings of pedagogical documentation could be related to ever changing and evolving relationships that educators encounter with the non-standardized processes of pedagogical documentation.

### **Educators' Responses to Encounters Creating Pedagogical Documentation**

Participants' encounters creating pedagogical documentation affirm processes Wien et al. (2011) notice in the experiences of educators learning to document. In their encounters with five processes described by Wien et al. (2011), participants describe feeling simultaneously challenged and rewarded. According to Wien et al. (2011), educator understandings of pedagogical documentation evolve in neither linear nor

predictable ways and require time to make explorations and revision. These processes involve:

- developing habits of documenting,
- becoming comfortable going public with recounting of activities,
- developing visual literacy skills,
- conceptualizing a purpose of documentation as making learning visible, and
- making theories visible theories for interpretation with others and for design of curriculum (Wien, et al., 2011, p. 4)

Wien et al. (2011) group these five processes of learning to document into two parts. The first three occur simultaneously and in no particular order. The last two require processes of thinking which usually result in changes that are major leaps in understanding. All five aspects of learning to document described by Wien et al. (2011) are represented in this data.

### **Developing Habits of Documenting**

Habits of documenting noted by Wien et al. (2011, p. 4) are described as developing a familiarity with various tools and the practice of having the tools needed at hand while also developing the mental habit of thinking to document. While most participants in this research indicated that they were comfortable with having developed a habit of documenting they continued to try new tools and not all felt they were documenting as a regular part of their practice. For instance, Joy had a number of tools at hand but remarked that “documenting is not on our minds” and it was not yet “second nature.” Alternatively, Rosemary, who documented regularly, hoped that using pedagogical documentation tools would eventually become more comfortable and natural

in their work. Finding time to work “do” documentation could be considered one aspect of developing a habit of documenting.

### **Crafting Pedagogical Documentation for Public Engagement**

Becoming comfortable with going public with a recounting of activities “removes the teacher’s professional isolation and carries her work out into the community” (Wien et al., 2011, p. 6). Wien et al. (2011) observe that “recountings of classroom experiments are likely to be the first stories of learning that a teacher creates when beginning to document” (pp. 5-6) and they are descriptive, making doing visible (pp. 5-6) so as to begin the process of being comfortable with going public.

Excursions to arts events, attending celebrations, highlighting personal accomplishments and showing outdoor and community engagement were documented by educators who said they felt it connected them with families and their community while allowing them to note children’s developmental achievements (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, 2016) and relationships according the Four Foundations of Learning of Belonging, Well-Being, Engagement, and Expression (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014a, 2016). For example, Angel, who values pedagogical documentation for the potential of confirming developmental progress, remarked about not be able to share their documentation publicly and shared it only with colleagues and some with parents.

Several educators, having gone public with their pedagogical documentation beyond their worksites and among families, opened their classrooms for visits for colleagues and educational policy makers interested in their work. These educators also participated in public exhibits and accepted invitations from the community to share their pedagogical

documentation experiences in provincial, national and international presentations and publications.

*Using compositional skills.* “Develop[ing] an understanding of visual literacy and how the human eye reads images” (Wien et al., 2011, p. 6) is also part of learning to do pedagogical documentation. Participants discussed their ideas of how pedagogical documentation should look. The “Wonder of Learning” exhibit by the Reggio Emilia educators in Toronto in 2016 was acknowledged as influencing their ideas of what pedagogical documentation should look like. Yet educators also reported believing that what they viewed at the exhibit would not be something they could ever achieve. Most participants indicated that when they eventually came to realize that pedagogical documentation did not always end up becoming published panels like those of the exhibit, they realized they had to find different ways to discuss pedagogical documentation as research.

*Enlarging visual literacy skills.* Although the educators in this research had reached a point in their thinking where they had rejected the idea of panels as being pedagogical documentation, they did not elaborate on how they go about deciding how to design their research to share with others. Some shared that, in their attempts to create published work, they had moved from everyday research with a large number of photographs and pages of text containing whole conversations and tried to get down to the essence of the ideas. No one commented on exactly what happened in these processes or how they went about designing the documentation but when they did give some indications they said they were working on their own in the processes. Several had attended pedagogical documentation study sessions to have their pedagogical

documentation studied by others but none referenced these sessions as a time where they discussed visual literacy skills.

**Writing skills.** Composing with confidence was recognized as a challenge within collegial relationships and contributed to a reluctance to participate in working with pedagogical documentation and publicly sharing experiences. This personally challenging aspect of their work was mentioned by a majority of educators as a very stressful and a sensitive topic of discussion. One participant said,

I know there are people that actually don't want to document just because they are very uncomfortable writing. It does require so much of a person. It's like public speaking for some people. Writing really puts you out there and [as a result] some people are saying that they don't want to do documentation. I have to respect them for that.

For the educators who were in a teaching relationship where one person felt challenged writing for an audience, the educators reported privately working together to figure out ways to support each other by using technology or by sharing the work and responsibilities among the team members who were more comfortable with writing.

### **Documentation as Making Learning Visible**

For educators to imagine pedagogical documentation as a way of making learning visible rather than offering a retelling of events, their ideas of pedagogical documentation focus instead on children's understandings. Several participants indicated they valued pedagogical documentation as a way to make children's learning experiences visible for "the purpose of considering what to teach, what to learn, [and] how to facilitate curriculum" (Wien et al., 2011, p. 7). Eloise spoke about pedagogical documentation as

making learning visible by explicitly pointing out differences, about retelling an event and making learning visible:

It doesn't matter the sort of order of things that happened or the way they happened, but it matters what happened—or that you focus on the important things that happened. You focus, because for the longest time I thought that you had to tell the whole story. So, pages of: we set this up, then children did this, etc. Instead of: Here's one page with a couple of quotes from the children, and maybe some kind of little explanation or thing from the educator, not even necessarily explaining it. But maybe just describing what the children did or how the discussion came about, or whatever, to give some background to how things came to that point of organization of it. Even how to gather the information through the photos or through recording or through drawing, or whatever it happens to be. And also, like, almost like, boiling it down to get to its essence.

The idea of considering pedagogical documentation as a way to make children's theories visible is difficult. Eloise described creating pedagogical documentation to make theories visible as being challenging and yet fascinating. Eloise said,

It's a pain sometimes. It's an integral part of working in this way because none of the other pieces will fall into place unless you have that pedagogical documentation to go back to and revisit and use as evidence. I guess evidence is not a great word, but I think it's a necessary word. It's a challenge but that's where the fascination comes as well because you really sometimes miss a lot of things that happen and when you go back you notice a lot more because you slow down. I think it's very important.

Eloise seemed challenged to articulate their experiences of working with the confluence of processes and purposes involved in making children's learning visible:

So, it's kind of all in one: thinking and learning, but in a way assessment and then what happens next—planning. Well, it's sort of like that but not really like that.

I'm using old fashioned words but assessment doesn't really mean assessment the way people use assessment, if you know what I mean. Because I hate that word. I hate thinking about it.

### **Making Theories Visible for Interpretation and Further Design of Curriculum**

The understanding that pedagogical documentation may offer an overview of children's theories that invite participation of educators is again clearly articulated by Eloise saying, "I use pedagogical documentation like an historical record but also as future planning and thinking, like a map almost. A map? Yes, a map."

Eloise also described pedagogical documentation as a record, or map made up of memories,

That's what pedagogical documentation is. It's on a page, but it's also just those fleeting things in your brain. You carry those ideas around. The pedagogical documentation is like your remembrance of those experiences and thinking. You don't actually have all those experiences any more but you have a record of that through pedagogical documentation. It's almost like highlighter, highlighting the key things that stick in your head.

Imagining pedagogical documentation as a map for planning, with many possibilities for educators to consider, acknowledges ongoing choices made considering children's theories in relationship with further planning of curriculum. However,

pedagogical documentation doesn't only make children's theories visible, it also makes educators' theories visible. Eloise realized this saying,

I sometimes think people think that pedagogical documentation is just about the children, but it can't be just about the children because it has to be about the educators as well. The educator is always present, always interfering, interacting, managing, directing, guiding everything.

### **Summary**

Participants described their encounters with pedagogical documentation simultaneously challenging and rewarding. Participants' initial encounters with pedagogical documentation stirred feelings of recognition and appreciation but also left them feeling puzzled. When they encountered cognitive knots that challenged their ideas of the meaning of pedagogical documentation, and their understandings of the non-standardized processes involved, the participants reported feeling uncertain and hesitant to make interpretations, but they also felt curious to continue.

While creating pedagogical documentation the participants confirmed the observations made by Wien et al. (2011) of five aspects of educators' learning experiences with pedagogical documentation including: developing habits of documenting; becoming comfortable going public recounting activities; developing visual literacy skills; realizing a purpose for pedagogical documentation is to make learning visible; and, sharing children's theories with others to make interpretations and design curriculum. The participants described their learning experiences in progression with these aspects of pedagogical documentation as leaving them simultaneously frustrated and accomplished.

A significant challenge, which most of the participants acknowledged from their experiences, was the writing they believe is required as part of pedagogical documentation. Sharing writing with families or in public places is a very uncomfortable aspect for many educators and discourages some from wanting to engage with pedagogical documentation in their practice. To adjust to this difficulty, participants in this research told how they managed this problem in their teaching teams by assuming particular roles and taking part in ways they felt most comfortable in when creating pedagogical documentation.

## CHAPTER 5

### PURPOSES OF PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTATION

This chapter is about the participants' understandings of purposes for pedagogical documentation. I will show from the data that the participants consider pedagogical documentation to have a range of purposes that evolve from, and are challenged by, previously held understandings and experiences. Participants' purposes for pedagogical documentation include focussing on child development and communication with families. For some participants these purposes might expand to include educators' and children's questions and theories. For a few participants purposes expand further to include reflection on practice and ideas for change in education.

Perceptions of the meanings of pedagogical documentation were shown to be entangled with educators' conflicting ideas about child development and workplace requirements. From the outset, a divergence of ideas about the meanings of pedagogical documentation was apparent as the participants recalled how their first encounters with pedagogical documentation challenged their previously held meanings and understandings and how these new realizations had affected them.

For some, developing an awareness that the word "documentation" is imbued with personal meaning meant changing the ways they talked about pedagogical documentation with their colleagues. For instance, a personal conversation with Carlina

Rinaldi made Shanice realize they had been working with different understandings of the meanings of pedagogical documentation than the Reggio Emilia educators. Before this memorable exchange, Shanice had understood the meaning of pedagogical documentation to be a way to notice and follow children's interests, but after talking with Rinaldi, Shanice saw that the Reggio Emilia educators are not talking about "things" which are often a part of theme-based teaching, but that "they are definitely talking more about ideas." Shanice subsequently realized a different understanding of the meaning of pedagogical documentation, which deeply affected them and caused them to slow down to reconsider how they talk about, and reflect on, their work. As a result, Shanice consciously changed the words used in discussing pedagogical documentation in an effort to refocus attention from previously associated ideas of documentation as child observation in theme-based educational work. Shanice recalled the effect,

Changing from stating, 'we are looking for children's interests' to asking, 'What are their [the children's] ideas?' helps to open their [the educators'] minds more to look deeper. You can tell an educator to look deeper, but they don't always know what that means. Now I say, 'What are the children trying to research, what are their ideas? What theories do you think they are thinking about?'

Rosemary similarly tried to reorient impressions of pedagogical documentation by deliberately choosing to avoid referencing their work as "documentation" and instead, use the word "research"—

I don't say 'documentation' at work because we seem to get stuck on [the idea of] beautiful panels. I try to use the word 'research' [as being] just our notes and our

thoughts and our ideas jotted down, or pictures, that's what we usually look at and talk about and reflect on—although I love the beautiful panels.

Making a deliberate choice of word usage had the effect, for Shanice and Rosemary, of creating an awareness of differences of understandings of pedagogical documentation among colleagues. All educators related to this awareness of differences in understanding of pedagogical documentation and for some this led to a dismantling and reconstruction of their perceptions as they developed a growing appreciation for the potential for new meanings and understandings.

### **Multiple Purposes of Pedagogical Documentation**

Participants shared multiple interpretations of the purposes for pedagogical documentation. Samples of participants' understandings of purposes for pedagogical documentation were gleaned from the data, then sorted and arranged into four main groups with two defining aspects for each, as shown in Table 2. I first present samples of educator examples that focus on the purposes of pedagogical documentation as evidence of child development and as a way to communicate with families. Next samples shared represent the second and third grouping of the participants purposes for pedagogical documentation. These focus on exploring educators' questions and theories and then children's questions and theories. Finally, ideas from participants that regard the purposes for pedagogical documentation as an invitation for reflection are shared. This range of purposes is regarded as a widening of participants' ideas toward more complex understandings. The data in Table 2 are shown in gradients of shading to indicate that participants add to, rather than replace their previous ideas of purposes, and demonstrate a possible layering of understandings.

Table 2

*Educators' Understandings of Purposes of Pedagogical Documentation<sup>2</sup>*

Purposes	Orientation to Development		Orientation to Educators		Orientation to Children		Orientation to Change	
	Assess Child Development	Communicate with Families	Educator Questions	Educator Theories	Children's Questions	Children's Theories	Educator Self-Awareness	Reflection of Practice
Name								
Angel								
Joy								
Rosemary								
Shanice								
Christine								
Michelle								
Margot								
Eloise								

<sup>2</sup> Shading represents intensity of focus with darkest shading representing most intense focus on an element and no shading representing minimal focus on the element.

### **Orientations of Educators' Understandings**

The purposes outlined in Table 2 are discussed in the following sections with data samples for each orientation. The darkest gradients of shading in Table 2 show where educators are most focussed currently in their understandings of pedagogical documentation. All educators included at least four ideas of purposes with several having some sense of all of the purposes mentioned to different degrees. Non-shaded areas represent areas in which educators showed minimal focus in their discussions of pedagogical documentation. As might be noticed in the discussion of the purposes in relation to Table 2, educators who spoke of a broader range of understandings and purposes showed an appreciation for the likelihood that there might be more unrealized complexities of purposes they have yet to encounter in their work.

#### **Orientation Toward Assessment of Development**

Educators oriented toward development saw a purpose of pedagogical documentation as a tool for assessing development and achievement. The early childhood educators in this group referenced making assessments according to the social, emotional, communication, cognitive, and physical domains of development (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007), and organized their observations of children in terms of the behaviours of a sense of belonging, well-being, engagement and expression identified as “Foundations of Learning” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014a). The Kindergarten educators in this group referred to assessing learning expectations and identifying ways children demonstrated belonging and contributing, self-regulation and well-being; literacy and mathematics; and problem solving and innovating according to “Foundations of Learning found in the Kindergarten Program” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016).

One sample of how assessment was viewed as the primary purpose of documentation can be found in Angel's discussion of some examples.

These are the observations we do in a classroom every day, every week. You have observations of each child which inform your program planning for the following week. I try to connect the observations of the week with the monthly goals we have for each child and the observations of the activities that happen in that time. We try to connect them all so we can see connections to development in that way. For me pedagogical documentation is putting all those things together to inform where a child is at, and also to inform our practice. How do we move forward from here? We try to put it together, plain observation, specific observation, you have all those different things that come into play and if you were to put it all together to me that is pedagogical documentation.

Joy similarly discussed their pedagogical documentation as being "criteria bound" and focussed on expectations.

Yet both Angel and Joy spoke of "other documentation" of children who were demonstrating happiness or interest in what they were doing. Although this "other documentation" required extra work according to Angel and Joy, it was compiled because they enjoyed the photographs and quotes as positive memories of children's experiences and felt families also enjoyed and felt reassured receiving these materials.

### **Orientation Toward Communication with Families**

All participants regarded pedagogical documentation as an important way to communicate with families to demonstrate children's participation and assessment of development. Educators spoke of sharing with families pictures and videos that

demonstrated children's happiness. These acts of sharing were regarded as ways to reassure families that their children were comfortable in the educators' care and also built trust and strengthened relationships with families. Although all educators acknowledged that communication with families was a valued purpose of pedagogical documentation, Joy and Angel felt such communication was a primary purpose. Joy commented that, "We took pictures to show parents the events—as a gift to parents. Our picture documentation shows the wonderful things the staff are doing with the kids."

### **Orientation Toward Educators' Questions**

Pedagogical documentation was viewed by some participants as having the primary purpose of answering educator questions. That is, educators working from personally or collaboratively developed questions for group inquiries indicated they enjoyed this way to approach their work because they felt "more focussed" making collections of photographs, quotes and materials throughout the day. Rosemary described the experience of working from questions that educators had developed together as a way to guide and unite their work with different age groups and across locations. Rosemary remarked,

We recently have been working with a protocol to develop questions together. We are using a question [because] it gives educators something to focus on. It [the question] sometimes strays, but having a question gives us a focal point or a common thread.

Rosemary's reflections on processes of developing a shared question and then, among staff, gathering data to investigate this question revealed that these processes fostered feelings of collegiality, which in turn fuelled educators' interest to work

collaboratively with pedagogical documentation on an on-going basis. Rosemary reported that, in focussing on a research question, educators were encouraged to slow down and reflect on their own meaning for the question. One significant point that Rosemary noticed was that the educators' dispositions in their work changed. Educators came to realize in gathering their documentation that "they learned from the children and the children teach them" in the process. Experiencing this positive reciprocal learning relationship led Rosemary and colleagues to continue to work with educator questions as the primary purpose of pedagogical documentation.

### **Orientation Toward Educators' Theories**

Other educators reported that using pedagogical documentation influenced and shaped their previously held theories and interpretations and understandings of children. Shanice highlighted this complex realization of their work saying, "I learned about the importance of researching and studying an idea, and well, those ideas are everywhere! Children have ideas, but we [educators] have ideas. We have our own ideas and theories."

In this context, educator theories are more like hypotheses. Theories begin as provisionally held thoughts that invite checking and testing to determine how valid the theory might be for young children. Publications of pedagogical documentation from the Reggio Emilia projects include and invite children and educators to theorize as a central part of their research. Shanice had a similar orientation in focussing on ways educators encounter and build their own theories about children. Several educators expressed a developing awareness about their personal theories of children and that their dispositions toward learning and teaching may be challenged rather than only confirmed by studying pedagogical documentation.

### **Orientation Toward Children's Questions**

The desire to “faithfully” represent children and their thinking was exemplified by Christine’s comments about the purpose for pedagogical documentation,

My documentation is what it’s like to really give visibility to who that child is and to be able to really show what children do. To show their thought, *their thought*, really how amazing they are and how much they have and how they learn and what they want to know.

Christine regards pedagogical documentation as a way to genuinely represent children’s thinking with a conscious awareness that all attempts at representation of children involve educators’ personal interpretation. Christine’s thoughtful attention to the ways children are represented seems to demonstrate a complex understanding of ideas of visibility, perhaps similar to Reggio Emilia educator Rinaldi (2006, p. 68), who regards pedagogical documentation as “visible listening.”

### **Orientation Toward Children's Theories**

Reggio Emilia educators are disposed to listen to children engaged in their construction and testing of theories. Vecchi (2010) notes:

One of the foundations of our work is the careful, respectful, tender “listening” with solidarity to children’s strategies and ways of thinking....How children make theories is fascinating. The presence of rationality and imagination and such close intertwining between them is found only in the theories of great thinkers; in children’s theories there is also that highly empathetic approach to things which is highly developed in children and a sensitive filter for understanding in connecting things. (p. 29)

Like the Reggio educators, Michelle's documentation involves listening to children developing and testing theories in their conversations and ongoing encounters outdoors:

I am listening to children's conversations in the bush, hearing their questions, and theories, like, 'Why is that happening?' as more than just 'Why is there a hole in the tree?' or 'Who do you think lives in that hole?' but really, really questioning. 'Why are some of those trees cut straight and some are broken?' The kids started to piece together that humans have been here, and humans cut those down and why has that happened. Some things were horrible. Someone had set a fire and the children found broken glass and they were just taking ownership of it asking themselves, 'Now how are we going to stop those people from doing that?'

Michelle spoke of exploring children's theories in ways similar to the Reggio Emilia educators in that children's questions and theories are elevated and become a central aspect of the research, often serving as labels or titles in samples of pedagogical documentation such as *Everything Has a Shadow, Except Ants* (Sturloni & Vecchi, 1990). An orientation toward children's theories and questions demonstrates a shift of focus for these educators and is in marked contrast to a focus on assessment and child development.

### **Orientation Toward Educator Self-Awareness**

Some educators noticed the potential for studying pedagogical documentation to lead to change in educator self-awareness. Margot shared how their experiences with pedagogical documentation has merged with their relationships,

Pedagogical documentation just became part of who I was at some point. It just became part of what I saw and then I started to see the world a bit differently. I started to see people differently, like I started to see how people were all capable and that we don't give them enough credit.

In sharing this reflection, Margot showed their awareness that pedagogical documentation fostered a heightened sense of self-awareness in their learning relationships with children, that spilled over into other aspects of their life in general.

### **Orientation Toward Change in Educational Practice**

Eloise also valued the self-reflective processes with pedagogical documentation to notice and reconsider their practice. Eloise described the process of self-reflection in their experience saying,

I think it is kind of like a cycle, because you think you've realized something and then you sort of realize you don't know anything again—you realize what you don't know, but it takes time. You just keep on reflecting. I think it was my documentation that I have been looking at over the past couple of years that's led me to start thinking about my practice in a serious way.

Eloise regarded studying pedagogical documentation with others as critical aspect of being oriented to change in educational practice saying,

It takes a while to realize what it truly means, that pedagogical documentation is a reflection of your practice. Having other people who don't know your children, don't know your school, people who don't know you, look at your documentation and give their thinking around it, that really opens your eyes. Then you realize, 'this is a true reflection of my practice.'

Eloise explicitly comments on the purpose of pedagogical documentation to heighten educator self-awareness to challenge current educational values and practice:

I think pedagogical documentation has a role [in effecting change in education] because it is truly the way that educators can reflect on their practice. I think that's the more profound part of pedagogical documentation. It's not necessarily what I'm observing about the children. It's when I go back and look that it is showing me what I value as an educator. It's showing me how I view that child, maybe how I view that family, and it gives me a chance to reflect on my practice as a whole. If more educators could do that then maybe we could step back and look at the whole education system we have [now] and say, 'This isn't really what we want.'

Pedagogical documentation offers a place to notice the ways we go about our teaching practice and invites us to reflect on our decision making processes in relationship with children's learning strategies. When educators come to recognize creating pedagogical documentation as a place for the study of our practice, the purposes for pedagogical documentation offer an opportunity to initiate change in education.

### **Summary**

Participants demonstrated a widening range of purposes for pedagogical documentation that data added to, rather than replaced their previous understandings. The most limited understandings of educators' purposes using pedagogical documentation were shown to be focussed on individual assessment of children's development and communication of children's experiences with their families. For those who went beyond the ideas of development and communication, some collaboratively created educator

questions and theories to form inquiries that expanded their understandings of purposes for pedagogical documentation. Some educators also added an exploration of children's questions and theories to their own inquiries, further expanding their repertoire of purposes for pedagogical documentation. For a few educators the purposes of pedagogical documentation were further expanded by creating an opportunity for educator self-reflection that could potentially initiate change in educational practice.

There are certainly other possible aspects of educator understandings and purposes but these were uncovered in this data.

## CHAPTER 6

### SUPPORT AND PURPOSES FOR PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTATION

In this chapter I will show a relationship between participants' perceptions of feeling supported while learning and engaging with pedagogical documentation and their understandings of purposes for pedagogical documentation. Support was considered as being important to accomplish practical aspects of pedagogical documentation and also for the learning involved in collegial relationships. There was a positive relationship between participants' perceptions of feeling supported and their range of understandings of purposes for pedagogical documentation. This data demonstrate the more supported the participants felt the greater their range and complexities of understandings about the purposes of pedagogical documentation.

Using pedagogical documentation, according to the participants, involves a great deal of effort and, according to the experiences of the participants, requires support. Educators consistently referenced their perceptions of feeling supported to explore the practice and purposes of pedagogical documentation. Support was represented as having two aspects for the participants. The first aspect concerned practical experiences creating pedagogical documentation requiring time, materials, space and technology. The second aspect, which seemed to be most concerning overall to understandings of purposes for pedagogical documentation, was the educators' perceptions of feeling supported in their

relationships with colleagues while making efforts to learn with pedagogical documentation. Perceptions of educators' feelings of support were consistently referenced in the data and are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

*Educators' Perceptions of Feeling Supported*

Educators	Educators' Perceptions of Support	
	Practical Ways Educators Felt Supported	Levels of Feeling Supported in Learning Relationships
Angel	Time Technology	Unsupported
Joy	Technology	Unsupported
Rosemary	Time Space Materials Technology	Supported
Shanice	Time Space Materials Technology	Supported
Christine	Time Space Materials Technology	Supported
Michelle	Technology	Mentored
Margot	Technology	Mentored
Eloise	Time Technology	Mentored

**Educators' Perceptions of Practical Support**

All educators noted that consideration of the practical aspects of having time, materials, space and technology were not only needed but required adjusting on an on-going basis for them to feel supported to undertake pedagogical documentation.

## **Lack of Time**

Feeling supported meant having and using time effectively to work with processes of pedagogical documentation. This was a challenge referenced by all participants. The fact that lack of time was flagged as a significant challenge by all participants suggested possible systemic problems.

Participants said they worked with pedagogical documentation whenever they found time and often this meant they were alone and, for those that had time with their colleagues, work often filled their time. For instance, Christine and Angel had a time permanently included in their schedule but they found the length of the session was not sufficient or prioritized for pedagogical documentation. Both Christine and Angel said they usually completed required paperwork first in these meetings, leaving limited time for collaborative discussions. Even when they did get to discussions of documentation Angel reported that they used it for planning based on their observations of children's development. Christine also said they completed paperwork in their meetings before turning to a discussion of their pedagogical documentation, if they had any time remaining. Christine felt that when their attention did turn to pedagogical documentation their conversations were of a confirming nature rather than being professionally challenging.

Most participants said they were alone with their experiences with pedagogical documentation during the day but some worked into the evenings and on weekends in order to collaborate with colleagues. In Michelle's case they met with their partner every weekend, for at least half a day over several years in order to work collaboratively doing pedagogical documentation.

In public school boards Ontario Certified Teachers have preparation periods as part of their schedules that could be used to work with pedagogical documentation, but most of their partners, as Designated Early Education Educators, do not have such designated preparation times. As a result, Kindergarten teaching teams have no coordinated time for partners to meet without the children during the school day.

Kindergarten educators in this research said their teaching partners have volunteered many hours of time on a regular basis beyond their regular schedules donating weekend and evening hours so they could work together with pedagogical documentation. For Eloise “it was simply unreasonable and unfair to expect my partner to overextend themselves without compensation,” so Eloise worked mostly on their own. All educators expressed concern about their inability to find ways to meet with colleagues to create pedagogical documentation within their workday. The general feelings expressed among some of these educators was that they were facing insurmountable challenges to work collaboratively.

### **Problems With Materials, Space, Technology**

Most participants felt supported in some practical ways with materials, space, and technology available but several did not have what was necessary to meet to create pedagogical documentation in dedicated environments on a regular basis. Those without designated work spaces found themselves having to improvise trying to find storage and places to work, often over their lunch breaks, in common rooms and offices, and sometimes during children’s rest periods, which they said left them feeling exhausted with little or no energy for thoughtful or creative discussion together later.

## **Educators' Perceptions of Support in Learning Relationships**

The second aspect of support is the educators' perceptions of feeling supported in relationships to learn about pedagogical documentation. Participants consistently spoke of their feelings of being supported in learning relationships with colleagues. The educators' perceptions are categorized from the data as having three levels: Unsupported, Supported, or Mentored.

The three levels of participants' perceptions of feeling supported are illustrated here with their ideas of purposes for pedagogical documentation. The relationship between educators' perceptions of support and educators' understandings of the purposes for pedagogical documentation is presented later in this chapter in Table 4.

### **Feeling Unsupported**

Participants who felt unsupported or minimally supported said they knew that pedagogical documentation was an expectation of their practice but they felt there was no one to help them figure it out and no one available of whom to ask questions. Despite making remarkable efforts to learn about pedagogical documentation, mostly on their own, these educators were left with conflicting understandings of interpretations for pedagogical documentation which resulted in feelings of discouragement and frustration. They recognized a conflict of understandings attending a variety of extracurricular learning opportunities. They felt both hopeless and alone. "They suffer[ed], as all learners suffer, as they attempt to learn a new language and literacy" (Wien et al., 2011, p. 4).

As a result of feeling unsupported, Angel was uncomfortable trying to use pedagogical documentation beyond assessing and planning for children's development and communication with families, after feeling discouraged by perceived negative

responses from other educators towards their pedagogical documentation. Angel felt that their understandings of children and their professional judgement were being questioned in this encounter and could not see the value of pedagogical documentation beyond child observation. Angel hoped to gain more personal decision-making choices with pedagogical documentation and have more freedom to make decisions in their work.

Joy, who consistently spoke of personal internal pressures in developing an understanding of pedagogical documentation, made comments several times saying their efforts were “not enough.” Self-described as a beginner, Joy spoke of their “picture documentation” as being information that was collected and organized at the end of large group experiential art projects which sometimes included live presentations and participatory shows involving families. Joy tied documentation to *Early Learning for Every Child Today* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007), connecting their observations to development; however, Joy also engaged with “other documentation” depicting children participating in arts-filled contexts. Joy felt conflicted between meeting perceived professional requirements for the assessment of the children and sharing children’s meaningful arts experiences.

The multitude of arts experiences that Joy and colleagues offered children had the purpose of allowing for authentic and enjoyable expressions of cultural backgrounds of the children and educators and were described by Joy as being “beautiful.” These experiences, according to Joy, showed the children as talented and confident and capable of creating and performing in artistic projects involving dance, singing, acting, visual and other arts. Joy was eager to share these experiences as examples of the genuine relationships among children and educators. Joy valued the purposes of pedagogical

documentation as a record of these experiences and presented them in a variety of formats as recordings, photographs and booklets, and as an end of experience gift for families. Joy did not document the learning processes of experiences taking place throughout the children's work but commented about wanting to, because "there was so much learning happening among the children throughout the experiences and children were showing they are more capable than we realize in these art experiences."

Pedagogical documentation, at this point in Joy's work, had the main purpose of being a record of celebration at the end of meaningful artistic cultural experiences. For example, Joy reflected on some of their project work saying, "We've done a lot of music. I love it. We even did a cappella and we did drumming for a session and it was amazing." When I asked if this work was documented, Joy shook their head slowly and said, "No. We didn't realize the value. I mean, we took pictures but we didn't actually document to see how progress was being made. We just took pictures to show parents as events. We weren't really documenting the processes." These arts experiences were regarded by Joy as relevant cultural celebrations for children and educators,

We had one educator that actually brought Bollywood to us, the kids love listening to it and dancing to it. Another staff brings their Filipino language and background with clothing and things and we hired another person to teach acrobats as part of their dance and we made outfits. This has been going on for years. We do dramas too. We performed one drama that I wrote as a score with no words and it was performed by the children. This is when I first learned how talented kids are. You really just have to present them opportunities, you don't have to do anything than present opportunities and tools. We have had games

night where families learn and play games children have invented. We did an art gallery that was amazing, with hors d'oeuvres and delicacies the children made and served. We've had karaoke booths, chess nights, yoga experiences and we have saved these experiences, printed in a book or taped and offered to the families as a gift. The families love it. Everyone attends.

For Joy, working with little support, pedagogical documentation meant holding a memory of the event for children, colleagues and families to enjoy as a memento of the experience. In our conversations Joy demonstrated a growing appreciation of these arts projects as being worthy of a larger range of pedagogical documentation work. At the final interview Joy expressed appreciation for the arts projects as being important to study in broader ways while also being appreciated by children, colleagues and families and was considering taking this thought back to their setting.

### **Feeling Supported**

Those educators who related feeling supported said they felt connected with leadership and could think with others creating pedagogical documentation. Although these educators felt supported they were still doing a lot on their own, learning by doing, with no one directing them. They explored many interpretations of pedagogical documentation and could get confused in those explorations of learning. As learners of pedagogical documentation some were also trying to teach colleagues about it, which is a stressful combination.

Educators who reported feeling supported spoke of working in collaborative and mutually respectful relationships with colleagues learning side-by-side with one another, regularly attending meetings, learning events and conferences together. For example,

Christine said at the beginning of their explorations with pedagogical documentation supervisors worked with them and their colleagues to create pedagogical documentation, together. Christine also valued their participation in study groups where they worked “not as individuals” but “helped each other in processes of understanding of what and how to document...learning from each other.”

Educators, who had a responsibility to share their learning experiences back with their colleagues, described this responsibility as both stimulating but exhausting because of the amount of effort required to work with colleagues in a position of leadership when they themselves were learners. Rosemary described the stress as difficult saying, “I think some people don’t think that thinking is work—it is. I think you burn calories doing it.” Yet, it was the interrelationship of feeling supported combined with the purposes of documentation that propelled them forward. Shanice, while working alongside colleagues beginning to use pedagogical documentation in their practice, had the opportunity to document changes in their colleagues’ ways of thinking as they were learning over a number of months. Shanice told how their experiences progressed saying,

I collected so much data about our [educator] learning time together and at the end of the year I brought it all into a staff meeting and we looked at it and we reminisced and talked about it so they could see the journey that they had been on. As we started digging through the documentation and research and seeing the power of it, we realized it’s not really just for families, it’s for us. And it’s all a part of our work. So, we realized our whole idea about documentation had shifted. Everyone had different ideas. Some had observed and tried to participate but still didn’t really get it and some had completely transformed and some classrooms

were transformed. They were surprised by how much had been accomplished and were blown away by the amount of experiences. They did so many things they didn't know were possible. They did not realize they would have that much involvement. They were used to the workshop system [of learning] where you go, you learn about it, and then you implement it. And that's not what we did. We tried new ideas, then we had to step back and then we learned a little more and then that shifted that and then next thing you know we are talking about how to make sure our pictures are telling our story instead of just posting it on a board. (Laughing) We wondered, how could people see this? When all was said and done the educators felt a bit accomplished, like they had done something. And I think that they didn't realize that they had those capacities and then they were finally about to bring it out. I've always felt really proud of this work, as something we were trying to research together.

I never felt like it [pedagogical documentation] is just for children. It's not just for children. As I learned about the importance of researching and studying an idea, well, those ideas are everywhere. It's not just children that have ideas, we have ideas about how educators work. We have ideas about ideas or theories about what pedagogical documentation is. I don't want to say it's a theory but it kind of is a theory that you studied and so why wouldn't that make sense?

For Shanice, sharing and studying pedagogical documentation of educators, meant collecting educators' research of their learning experiences with pedagogical documentation. The materials that Shanice gathered which the group studied buoyed educator interest by acknowledging and encouraging a recognition of their professional

growth and change over time, expanding their ideas of potential purposes for pedagogical documentation as including aspects of educators' thinking.

### **Feeling Mentored**

Participants who felt mentored were working with leadership who worked *with* them as learners themselves to understand pedagogical documentation, whereas those who felt supported had leadership happy to have educators engaged with pedagogical documentation but did not engage with it themselves. They spoke of strong collegial relationships with people that fully supported their ideas and gave them time to think and talk together. The educators described their mentors as also being learners who would engage in pedagogical documentation with them and be there for their questions and concerns. Educators who felt mentored to learn about and try pedagogical documentation described their collaborative working relationships with colleagues and administrators as being key to feeling confident and encouraged. These educators said their practical needs were met as part of their relationship and they were consistently invited to study and work collaboratively and attend meetings with other significant educators in their community. Educators described feeling closely attuned in their learning relationships with colleagues as they engaged in pedagogical documentation explorations together. Michelle described a mentor as a “courageous” person for their leadership supporting and guiding them and their colleagues creating pedagogical documentation. Michelle referred to participating in ongoing meetings with colleagues and administrators about pedagogical documentation as being “one of the most powerful experiences I’ve ever had.”

Margot and Eloise, two participants who described feeling mentored in their learning relationships with pedagogical documentation, valued pedagogical documentation as having the purpose of inviting change in education by encouraging educator self-awareness. For Margot, an appreciation that self-awareness arising from the study of pedagogical documentation can effect change is revealed in their emotional expression when they described feeling mentored; they cried while saying they felt “honoured” to be in a mentored learning relationship. Creating pedagogical documentation for Margot involved self-reflective processes and affected the ways they interpreted and responded to children. Studying pedagogical documentation with others was integral to Margot’s self-reflective processes in order to develop and heighten awareness of how they go about their work. The collegial relationships developed in these processes of self-reflection were regarded as being very important to Margot and were described as a privileged aspect of their work. Positive emotional involvement was apparent in Margot’s interviews and seemed a cohesive aspect in their understandings and appreciation of the complexities of understandings of the purposes for pedagogical documentation. The possibility that pedagogical documentation may be recognized for the purpose of developing educator self-awareness that might effect change in education through emotional connection is highlighted in all of Margot’s efforts to work with others to consider how children make meaning.

Eloise also felt mentored by several significant educational leaders in learning about pedagogical documentation. Eloise regarded pedagogical documentation as a place where educators could study, discuss, and reflect on their research of children’s experiences. Eloise embraced the idea that their purpose of pedagogical documentation

could be to initiate change in educational practice and ideas. As part of their orientation of purposes toward change, Eloise engages with families to find ways to share pedagogical documentation in public places to invite participation in the community. Eloise hoped that with pedagogical documentation the “focus of education would be [changed to be] on children first, instead of the curriculum.”

These three levels of educators’ perceptions of feeling supported with pedagogical documentation are shown in relationship with their understandings of the purposes for pedagogical documentation following in Table 4.

### **Relationships Between Levels of Support and Understandings of Purposes for Pedagogical Documentation**

Educators’ ranges of understandings and orientations toward purposes for pedagogical documentation are shown to be related to their perceptions of feeling supported in their learning relationships with pedagogical documentation. As an extension of information shared previously, the two concepts of educator perceptions of feeling supported and purposes for pedagogical documentation are presented together in Table 4. As outlined in discussions of previous tables, the gradients of shading extending from each person’s name are meant to represent an emphasis of the educators’ explorations of orientations of purposes for pedagogical documentation. The darkest shades represent the places where educators have indicated they are working most consistently with pedagogical documentation, while the lighter shades are meant to indicate places where the educators are occasionally trying something or possibly wondering about in their work.

Table 4 shows that educators who feel less supported in their ideas of pedagogical documentation are more oriented toward assessment of development and communication



with families. In contrast, educators who felt supported include enlarged orientations toward pedagogical documentation including the exploration of children's and educators' questions and theories as purposes for pedagogical documentation and for some, greater personal awareness and fuel change in education.

### **Summary**

According to the participants in this research, pedagogical documentation involves considerable effort to understand and requires support from others to develop that understanding. Participants described support as having two aspects, a practical aspect and a personal aspect. The practical aspect involved ensuring the time, materials, space, and technology necessary in order to construct pedagogical documentation. The personal aspect involved others with whom they might discuss, question, and learn to understand pedagogical documentation to form a learning relationship. All participants noted a lack of time for constructing pedagogical documentation and various problems with materials, space, and technology. In terms of learning relationships some participants perceived themselves to be minimally supported, some felt supported in general and some were mentored in their attempts to learn to construct and discuss pedagogical documentation.

A major finding of this research is the relationship between the level of support perceived by participants and the range of understandings they expressed about the purposes of pedagogical documentation. Those who perceived themselves to be merely minimally supported understood the purposes of pedagogical documentation to be assessment of child development and communication with families. Those who perceived themselves to be supported in general, understood broader purposes of pedagogical

documentation that required more thinking such as addressing children's or educators' questions and theories. Those who perceived themselves to be mentored understood the broadest range of purposes of pedagogical documentation, including research, reflection on practice, and the possibilities of change in education.

## CHAPTER 7

### AFFECT AND PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTATION

For some educators, engaging in pedagogical documentation challenges their perceptions of learning. It challenges their perceptions of children's learning and also their perceptions of their work. This research shows that challenges to perceptions about learning are connected to moments in which educators recognize and relate to affective aspects of learning experiences while using pedagogical documentation. That is, through using pedagogical documentation some educators recognize that learning includes affective aspects. When they recognize affect as a dimension of learning, educators' thinking widens, like the opening of a fan, to more understandings about complex purposes of pedagogical documentation.

Affect and emotion are recognized as valued aspects of learning by many leading theorists in education (Bateson, 1972; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dewey, 1938; John-Steiner et al., 2010; Montessori, 1995; Vygotsky 1934/1986). In addition, Reggio Emilia educators view affect as integral to children's meaning-making experiences (Cagliari et al., 2016; Edwards et al., 1993, 1998, 2012; Rinaldi, 2006; Rodari, 1973/1996; Vecchi, 2010). Emotional aspects of children's relationships, including empathy and creativity, figure prominently in the published pedagogical documentation from the Reggio Emilia schools, such as: *Tenderness* (Malaguzzi, Rinaldi, Ferretti, Guidi, & Piazza, 1995) and

*The Little Ones of Silent Movies: Make-believe With Children and Fish at the Infant-toddler Center* (Cipolla & Reverberi, 1996). Also, it is notable that emotional involvement in learning is recognized by some educators in this research.

In this chapter, I will show that some educators recognized that emotions propel thinking. They discover this through the processes of pedagogical documentation and there is evidence in the data that some see it first in children. When educators recognize emotions in thinking, through constructing pedagogical documentation, they reveal empathy, which might lead, in some cases, to educator self-reflection. In addition, I will share hopes of educators, expressed as desire for a future vision, as part of the affective enterprise of pedagogical documentation.

### **The Interplay of Emotion and Thinking in Pedagogical Documentation**

The challenge of creating and working with pedagogical documentation stirred up powerful emotional reactions in all participants. Educator's descriptions of working with pedagogical documentation were marked by the language of emotion and were more pervasive than expected. When asked what it is like to use pedagogical documentation in their practice, educators described their experiences as emotionally challenging and simultaneously rewarding. This combination of emotional challenges and rewards stands out from the everyday experience.

Examples of educators' word choices for their feelings about working with pedagogical documentation are presented in Table 5. These word samples do not represent all the nuances that were expressed but a range of educator descriptions. These samples are indicative of the dynamic emotional experience of thinking about pedagogical documentation.

Table 5

*Characterizations of Pedagogical Documentation as an Affective Enterprise*

Challenging Descriptions	Rewarding Descriptions
Exhausting	Curiosity
Emotional	Emotional
Difficult	Fun in the moment
Perfectionism	Amazing
Stressful	Rewarding
Frustrating	Exciting
More work than I thought	Connecting my emotions to my work
A constant struggle	Beautiful
Filled with tension	A bridge connecting children and educators
Competitive	Offers freedom
Time consuming	Very much enjoy it
Extra work	Makes work meaningful
Filled with uncertainty	Really important
Overwhelming	Powerful
Sometimes it feels like not doing my job	Fascinating
Filled with fear and anxiety	Supported in all ways
Unsupported professionally	Integral to my work
Unsupported – funding and time	

Almost all participants said their responses toward engaging with pedagogical documentation had evolved from their first encounters which had piqued their curiosities. For instance, while reading *The Watch's Tick-Tock* (Edwards & Rinaldi, 2009), pedagogical documentation from a Reggio Emilia school, Eloise first noticed emotion connected with children's and educators' thinking. Eloise described this idea as, "just so fascinating." Eloise described the realization of connections between the child's and teacher's emotions and learning as significant because up to that point their understandings of learning were focussed on "just the thinking" as an "intellectual and academic experience." Reading this documentation sample allowed Eloise to make connections among emotional and intellectual aspects of learning. Eloise emphasized the effect of this experience saying, "It was such a big game-changer for me."

Most participants recognized and demonstrated some appreciation for the potential of pedagogical documentation to highlight learning as existing in an ecology of personal relationships involving emotions for children and educators. Making cognitive and emotional relationships visible is a critical aspect of pedagogical documentation and is in contrast to understandings of pedagogical documentation as being for assessment that excludes personal and emotional involvement. The visibility of the interplay between emotion and thinking challenges understandings of learning, perceptions of children, and educative practice.

Most of the challenges represented in Table 5 are related to the effort required for educators to make adjustments in their practice. This includes not only practical decisions to create pedagogical documentation but also refers to the ways assumptions of educating might be challenged to change. Changes in practice, coming from challenges of perceptions of learning, involve emotional and intellectual effort. As Rosemary pointed out, “I think that people don’t think that thinking is work, but it really is hard work.”

I will discuss educators’ characterizations of pedagogical documentation as simultaneously challenging and rewarding by highlighting aspects from each column of Table 5. To do this I will illustrate two of the challenging characterizations and two of the rewarding characterizations. These samples will show that educators hold a weighty burden managing these conflicted, but interrelated feelings, toward pedagogical documentation.

Many of the words representing a challenge in Table 5 refer to the strong effort required for educators to make adjustments in their practice to use pedagogical documentation, which educators called “exhausting” and “filled with tension.” They use

these two words to describe the ways they are challenged with practical aspects and in their assumptions of educating young children. Changes in practice, that occur as a result of challenges in perceptions of learning, require personal effort.

Challenging aspects of feelings of exhaustion and tension were part of all of the educators' experiences with pedagogical documentation. Feelings of being exhausted were associated with finding time to create pedagogical documentation. Joy referred to this as "stolen moments" where they could do the "extra work of pedagogical documentation." For several years Michelle and their partner also quietly worked additional hours on weekends and Eloise, too worked several hours at the end of each day completing transcriptions because they were unable to find a way to work with their partner and worked mostly alone with pedagogical documentation.

Along with exhaustion educators also spoke of being "filled with tension" when their work expectations and assumptions of learning were challenged while creating pedagogical documentation. Joy was unable to negotiate what they saw as competition for time between meeting criteria for licensing and conducting the research of pedagogical documentation. Some celebrated overcoming tensions as they adjusted their familiar thinking of pedagogical documentation as assessment into an unexplored idea of pedagogical documentation as teacher research. Eloise shared making this shift in thinking by confidently stating their experience with pedagogical documentation as an opportunity to "blast those [curriculum] expectations out of the water. Children's thinking and abilities go so far beyond [expectations] that if you don't actually document, then people don't believe you."

Although all educators acknowledged the challenges of constructing and discussing pedagogical documentation, most described the processes as rewarding and the rewarding aspects of the process kept them interested and motivated to continue. Curiosity, as noted in Table 5, is a rewarding emotional factor of learning for the participants evident throughout the data. Eloise described curiosity as fuelling their interest to work with pedagogical documentation,

As I reviewed pedagogical documentation from the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia, I was so curious [wondering], How would you even notice what children were doing and thinking? I am saying that now, but at the time I wasn't thinking, How do you get children to be able to say these things or to be able to think in this way? I was just so curious about it.

Eloise later recalled making emotional connections between their curiosities for the children's experiences and their personal experiences as a child saying,

I can remember being a kid, I had so many amazing thoughts and ideas. I mean some of them were totally weird and mistaken, but some of them were brilliantly smart and nobody ever noticed all these amazing things I was capable of doing and thinking and nobody would ever acknowledge that. I can remember thinking that. I think I just realized this right now.

Several other educators spoke of curiosity as an aspect of their work with pedagogical documentation. In fact, educator curiosity was mentioned by everyone interviewed either in their encounters with pedagogical documentation from Reggio Emilia, in the documentation created by colleagues, or in questions that arose from their

own experiences. Curiosity was found to be a positive emotional motivating influence to create pedagogical documentation.

Joy and Eloise associated the idea of beauty with pedagogical documentation. Joy described pedagogical documentation as being a gift and specifically noted the photographs, videos, ideas, materials, and the display as being beautiful. Eloise spoke of revisiting their earlier documentation because, “It was so beautiful!” but then goes on to juxtapose this rewarding thought with a challenging one by lamenting, “Sometimes people just notice the beautiful part [of pedagogical documentation] and they don’t realize how deep the thinking is, or the hard work that’s gone on to get to that point.”

### **Recognition of the Fusion of Emotion and Thinking in Learning**

When educators noticed children in pedagogical documentation from the Reggio Emilia project they related the experience to their own practice. They wondered how children could come to say such things (Eloise), how they could offer the children the environments they saw (Angel), about the teachers’ roles (Rosemary), but significantly they were also drawn to notice that children’s emotions were included as part of their thinking.

Seeing the emotion in children’s thinking stretched a participant to see educators’ emotions, a connection that increased empathy for both children and educators. Shanice pointed out that it is difficult for educators to embrace and include emotional aspects of learning relationships in documenting children’s experiences and it was even more difficult to appreciate the role of affect in educator’s teaching experiences. Shanice believed the potential to recognize the effect of educator emotions involved in working

with pedagogical documentation would be a revolutionary way to approach education, with potentially transformative effects. Reflecting on this idea Shanice remarked that,

Some educators are really good at documenting children and working to help strengthen skills but to document our ideas or thinking, or own our curiosities and our emotions, about what we are feeling in these dialogues, I think that's a bit foreign to us and part of that comes from when we were first learning to document as we were supposed to be objective, factual, so when you are in that role of authority, and I don't want to say that, but when you are in a role of authority, those things [emotions] are sometimes [regarded as] weaknesses and can be seen that way and left out of pedagogical documentation.

Shanice emphasized that emotions *are* very uncomfortable for educators and especially anything other than a happy emotion is uncomfortable in their work situations because,

When we go to work, we are supposed to be professional and we are supposed to have it all together. You are not supposed to make mistakes and then, you know, if you cry it's a weakness. I'm saying this is why educators don't acknowledge our own educator emotions in pedagogical documentation.

I think we [educators] are good at documenting our work progress but not our work curiosities, like the things we think we can measure, and we leave out things we think we can't. So when we are thinking of children using a behaviourist model, showing if we do something, this will happen. We train educators to be certain ways, to form children's thinking. You teach a child how to go to sleep, or you teach a child how to put on their things and [then we think]

when we are looking at children we can tell what's going on because we are looking objectively, we are removing our emotions. But, as I have learned about the importance of research, children just don't have ideas, *we* have ideas about how to work, *we* have ideas and theories and *we* can learn more about that using pedagogical documentation.

Shanice recognized that affect is not only an important aspect of learning for children but that it also brings to light educators' conflicted feelings about including emotions in their pedagogical documentation.

For Joy, feelings of being tied to requirements for licensing that led to valuing documentation as assessment competed with alternative views of pedagogical documentation that included emotional aspects of learning. Joy noted, "We have one type of documentation that is very driven by what compliance requires us to do for reporting and then there's the other documentation, which is also driven, partially by compliance needs as children's criteria, but has to focus on program related [experiences]."

Educators who recognize the fusion of emotion and thinking in learning are fraught with divisive tension because it is different from conventional understandings in education. The idea that the education of young children involves affect, which is highlighted with pedagogical documentation, challenges educators' perceptions of learning and is a change from previous understandings upheld in educator training in Ontario.

### **A Change in Ways of Listening**

Recognizing the fusion of emotion and thinking has the consequence of changing the ways educators listen to children. Educators indicated that they listen to assess

children but pedagogical documentation requires a more complex and relational way of listening for understanding. Christine highlighted the reasons they enjoy working with pedagogical documentation as a way of listening to children saying it offers ways “to be able to pause really, to show what children do [and] to bring visibility to who they are and their thought.”

Listening using pedagogical documentation requires that educators attend to children in ways that go beyond listening for what they say. For example, listening for children’s curiosities was important to Margot to “see what they think about” noting that “they don’t always verbalize it.” Margot said they watched “for a difference [in their behaviours] and sometimes I just get a feeling that some kid is doing something that is in their brain, like they need to do it, they have to do it.”

Listening in relationship with children, through emotional connections and feelings of empathy among the children and with educators, offers a different perspective of children’s learning experiences and emphasizes the difference between the research work aspect of pedagogical documentation and collecting documentation for assessment. Documenting to note children’s development for assessment purposes does not include the affective dimensions of experiences and requires educators’ interpretations of children’s behaviours. Several educators reflected on their initial understandings of documentation stating they were trained to make objective observations of children that did not include an appreciation for emotional aspects of learning and that using pedagogical documentation changed the ways they listened to children.

### **Self-Reflection as Re-Living the Experiences Documented**

The self-awareness required in reflection on practice through pedagogical documentation causes intense emotions because the educator *re-lives* the emotions of the experience documented. This experience of re-living emotions occurs in at least two contexts. It occurs when educators are alone when constructing documentation and it occurs when they are studying it with others. At this point, their emotions have been experienced three times. Thus the consequence of creating pedagogical documentation amplifies and intensifies the events documented. In my view, this experience is similar to experiences with a work of art.

Eloise described their daily transcriptional work as demanding because for them it meant reliving the emotional experiences of the day. Rather than merely transcribing conversations, Eloise was engaged in self-reflection while also considering the children's emotions in the memories of the day. Eloise described these feelings,

You are going back and sort of re-living all of those experiences, so you are kind of feeling it as it is going on but then you are also looking at it going, 'Oh, why did I say this this way?' or 'I loved how I did that there.' or 'I just can't believe that...' So, you are going through all those emotions as you are reviewing, as you are typing and listening and creating.

Typing recordings of the day is not a simple process of transcription for Eloise: the act of self-reflection while transcribing was a highly emotional experience. In the transcriptions process perspectives of participants become visible and allow for an analysis of their participation. The role of the educator and the environment is also made

visible and encourages self-reflection on practice. A re-living of the experiences occurring in transcription processes require a great deal of personal energy.

Margot was invested in self-reflective and affective experiences of pedagogical documentation. Margot consistently noted making connections in learning experiences in emotional ways with children, colleagues and families with pedagogical documentation, saying that they became emotional when “they realized how lucky they were [to have such strong support]” and when they knew “people believed in me.” Margot often described the experience of children “seeing themselves in documentation” and their working with colleagues through teary eyes.

Although Joy hoped that “they could become more reflective” using pedagogical documentation, not all participants embraced the effort required to engage in self-reflective practice. Angel considered the additional work of pedagogical documentation beyond their work expectations. Angel felt such a requirement questioned their professionalism and decision-making capabilities. Angel stated,

Reggio has specific people that they call pedagogistas. Their sole job is to do the reporting and observations and you know, and to try to discern what is happening, that’s the way I saw it. That’s not our job. Our job is to provide care for the children.

For Angel, because of feeling unsupported while exerting a great deal of time and energy to work with pedagogical documentation, the experiences resulted in disillusionment and a discontinuation of their efforts. However, uncomfortable or negative feelings were also part of other educators’ experiences with pedagogical

documentation but these difficult feelings were often counterbalanced by recollections of their experiences as being amazing, rewarding, exciting and meaningful.

### **Pedagogical Documentation as a Vision for Change in Education**

Hopes and desires encompass strong emotions that are generally positive for us. In this section I will show how educators envision pedagogical documentation being appreciated in the future work with young children. Educators were hopeful that pedagogical documentation will become recognized: as going beyond having purposes of child observation and assessment; as an authentic way to strengthen relationships with families and communities; as a supportive place for educator reflection and learning; and initiate change in educational practices for young children.

Rosemary shared children's engagements in community projects and with elders using pedagogical documentation. Through these engagements Rosemary hoped that "families come to appreciate pedagogical documentation for more than what they already do now [as a way] to check that their children are happy and come to value their [educators'] work as being more than just babysitters." Deepening and facilitating connections with families was a common hope for many educators. For example, Shanice hoped, "we would see each other [educators and families] as resources" and as Angel observed, using pedagogical documentation would help to know the children more fully by encouraging families to share their "observations and conversations with us about their child because we know half the story, [and we would like to know] what's the other half?"

Educators expressed their hopes that pedagogical documentation will come to be recognized as going beyond ideas of child observation and assessment through valuing

children rather than evaluating them. They wanted pedagogical documentation to be known as not only a “beautiful memory of their [children’s] work in the classroom” that “allows for reflection” and “will give us a chance to get to know children” (Margot) but that “when children see themselves—their ideas represented, they feel valued and realize how much they are valued” (Eloise) to “honour and represent children truthfully” (Christine).

Educators hoped relationships with families and communities could be strengthened through pedagogical documentation. As Eloise noted, pedagogical documentation offers the opportunity for families to know “the reality of school.”

Educators hoped too that pedagogical documentation would become recognized as a place to reflect on practice that challenges learning assumptions and taken-for-granted practice. As one educator said, “I hope to study pedagogical documentation with other educators to offer another level of understanding.” Most educators indicated they would like to become part of, or continue to meet in, collegial study groups to feel supported discussing and studying their pedagogical documentation. They acknowledged study groups as being sources of support for themselves but they recognized these groups could also support colleagues just starting out with pedagogical documentation. Michelle and Margot in particular, spoke with empathy and the need to remember “to appreciate beginning processes for others just starting” to use pedagogical documentation, adding that “it’s easy to forget how much time that it takes to think about how to go about the work.”

The act of slowing down to reflect on pedagogical documentation that occurs in pedagogical documentation study groups was described by Shanice as offering a kind of

“self-regulation” opportunity for educators challenging them to move from living in a “reactive culture [of education] to a proactive culture” for children and for themselves.

Educators also hoped that pedagogical documentation will be made more publicly accessible and initiate change in education. Most of the educators commented on their hopes to make their pedagogical documentation more public and subject to larger audiences as a way of valuing the capabilities of children in education. As Margot said, “documentation can’t just sit in schools.” However, some were constrained by privacy issues. Educators imagined potential places to share pedagogical documentation including public libraries and outdoor meeting spaces. Rosemary, Joy and Eloise expressed interest in making pedagogical documentation available in places where the children had been developing relationships with members of the community such as long term care centres, post-secondary educational settings such as Faculties of Education in universities and Early Childhood Education programs in community colleges and in neighbourhood centres. Educators expressed hope that these sites would be places that would draw the attention of educators throughout the community and initiate discussions, in “these hanging spaces” (Margot) to reflect on ideas of children and learning.

### **Summary**

Throughout the data participants showed that creating and working with pedagogical documentation stirred up powerful emotions and responses. When participants noticed children in pedagogical documentation from the Reggio Emilia project they related the experiences to their own practice. For some, the realization that emotions propel thinking challenged their perceptions of learning. Recognizing the fusion of emotion and thinking has the effect of changing the ways educators listen to children

and expands their ideas of the purposes of pedagogical documentation. Additionally, self-awareness required in the act of reflecting on practice through pedagogical documentation causes intense emotions as the educator re-lives the emotions of the experience documented.

The data also show that participants described their emotional experiences with pedagogical documentation as simultaneously challenging and rewarding which led to changes in their thinking about learning and potential purposes for pedagogical documentation. Most participants shared the hope that pedagogical documentation will become recognized as going beyond traditional ideas of child observation and assessment. Through valuing children and sharing educators' roles in pedagogical documentation all participants expressed their hope of strengthening relationships with families and communities. Participants who valued pedagogical documentation as a place for self-reflection and development hoped this emotional work would be recognized as deserving of supportive conditions. Finally, several educators hoped that by making pedagogical documentation more publicly accessible change might come about in education.

## CHAPTER 8

### SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The introduction of pedagogical documentation to early learning in Ontario brought new expectations of practice to educators. Pedagogical documentation challenges educators to reconsider their role as assessors of children's development and learn a new role as researchers of children's learning strategies to support them. I was motivated to learn more about Ontario educators' experiences with pedagogical documentation because, from my participation in presentations, pedagogical documentation study groups, and working with groups of educators and individuals, the educators were struggling. The RECEs, OCTs, and DECEs from child care and Kindergarten were being encouraged to create pedagogical documentation but they seemed to have different ideas of what was expected of them. They were seeking resources and trying to make connections with others to discuss their experiences. I wanted to help. I wanted to understand the educators' experiences and find ways to support them.

Observing the efforts of educators engaging with pedagogical documentation generated many questions for me, but the large research question that contained most of what I had been wondering about was: How are educators making interpretations of pedagogical documentation in their practice? I started my research with this large question in mind and over time, as my research progressed, further research questions

emerged from the data as I wondered: What are educators' understandings about pedagogical documentation? How do educators work with processes of pedagogical documentation? What are educators' purposes for pedagogical documentation?

### **Summary of Major Findings**

The data show that participants described their encounters with pedagogical documentation as simultaneously challenging and rewarding. They reported that their initial encounters with pedagogical documentation stirred feelings of recognition and appreciation but also left them feeling puzzled. When they encountered cognitive knots that challenged their ideas of the meaning of pedagogical documentation and their understandings of non-standardized processes involved, the participants reported feeling uncertain and hesitant to make interpretations, but they were also curious to continue.

While creating pedagogical documentation the participants confirmed the observations made by Wien et al. (2011) of five aspects of educators' learning experiences with pedagogical documentation including: developing habits of documenting; becoming comfortable going public recounting activities; developing visual literacy skills; realizing a purpose for pedagogical documentation is to make learning visible; and, sharing children's theories with others to make interpretations and design curriculum. The participants described their learning experiences in the progression with these aspects of pedagogical documentation as leaving them feeling frustrated and yet accomplished.

A significant challenge, which most of the participants acknowledged from their experiences, was the writing they believe is required as part of pedagogical documentation. Sharing writing with families or in public places is a very uncomfortable

aspect for many educators and discourages some from wanting to engage with pedagogical documentation in their practice. To adjust to this difficulty, participants in this research told how they managed this problem in their teaching teams by assuming particular roles taking part how they felt most comfortable creating pedagogical documentation.

Participants demonstrated a widening range of purposes for pedagogical documentation that data show added to, rather than replaced, their previous understandings. The most limited understandings of educators' purposes using pedagogical documentation were shown in the data to be focused on the individual assessment of children's development and for communication of children's experiences with their families. For those who went beyond the ideas of development and communication, some collaboratively created educator questions and theories to form inquiries that expanded their understandings of purposes for pedagogical documentation. Some educators also added an exploration of children's questions and theories to their own inquiries, further expanding their repertoire of purposes for pedagogical documentation. The data show that for a few educators the purposes of pedagogical documentation were further expanded by creating an opportunity for educator self-reflection that could potentially initiate change in their educational practice. There are certainly other possible aspects of educator understandings and purposes but these are what was uncovered in this data.

According to the participants, pedagogical documentation involves considerable effort to understand and requires support from others to develop that understanding. Participants described support as having two aspects: a practical aspect and a personal

one. The practical aspect involved ensuring the time, materials, space, and technology necessary in order to construct pedagogical documentation. The personal aspect involved others with whom they might discuss, question, and learn to understand pedagogical documentation and in doing so form a learning relationship with these other people. All participants noted a lack of time for constructing pedagogical documentation and various problems with materials, space, and technology. In terms of learning relationships, some participants perceived themselves to be minimally supported, some felt supported in general, and some were mentored in their attempts to learn to construct and discuss pedagogical documentation.

A major finding of this research is the relationship between the level of support perceived by participants and the range of understandings they expressed about the purposes of pedagogical documentation. Those who perceived themselves to be merely minimally supported understood the purposes of pedagogical documentation to be assessment of child development and communication with families. Those who perceived themselves to be supported in general, understood broader purposes of pedagogical documentation that required more thinking such as addressing children's or educators' questions and theories. Those who perceived themselves to be mentored understood the broadest range of purposes of pedagogical documentation, including research, reflection on practice, and the possibilities of change in education.

Throughout the data participants showed that creating and working with pedagogical documentation stirred up powerful emotions and responses. When participants noticed children's emotions in pedagogical documentation from the Reggio

Emilia project they related the experiences to their own practice. For some, realizing that emotions propel thinking, challenged their perceptions of learning.

Recognizing the fusion of emotion and thinking has the consequence of changing the ways educators listen to children and expands their ideas of purposes of pedagogical documentation. Additionally, self-awareness required in the act of reflecting on practice through pedagogical documentation causes intense emotions as the educator re-lives the emotions of the experience documented.

The data also show that participants described their emotional experiences with pedagogical documentation as simultaneously challenging and rewarding which led to changes in their thinking about learning and potential purposes for pedagogical documentation. Most participants shared the hope that pedagogical documentation will become recognized as going beyond traditional ideas of child observation and assessment. Through valuing children and sharing educators' roles in pedagogical documentation all participants expressed their hope of strengthening relationships with families and communities. Participants who valued pedagogical documentation as a place for self-reflection and development hoped this emotional work would be recognized as deserving of supportive conditions. Finally, several educators hoped that by making pedagogical documentation more publicly accessible, change might come about in education by sharing what is happening in child care and school.

The data show that through pedagogical documentation several participants spoke of feeling trusted by families and administrators who felt that their children were learning and that the participants "really knew their children." One participant made confident

assertions that they believed they “blast those expectations right out of the water” using pedagogical documentation.

The data also reveal one participant felt so unsupported and discouraged in their attempts to understand and use pedagogical documentation they gave up. Even though only one participant is represented this way in the data, I suspect that it could be a fairly common experience for many educators across Ontario.

Given these assertions, I now turn to potential ways these findings might have implications for educators’ experiences with pedagogical documentation in child care and Kindergarten in Ontario.

### **Implications**

In any structural system there are places that offer no possibilities for movement or change and there are other places where some movement might be possible. If we can identify these places and make them visible to administrators and policymakers change might be possible. From the assertions found in this data there are some obvious implications of two ways where change might be possible to support Ontario educators using pedagogical documentation in their practice. These two possibilities concern making time available to do the work of pedagogical documentation and creating opportunities for educators to work with mentors in reciprocal learning relationships. Although these aspects are related they represent both practical and personal dimensions of their experiences. The practical dimension of working with pedagogical documentation and mentorship involves a learning relationship that includes perceptions of support.

First, a lack of co-ordinated time to work with pedagogical documentation highlights the practical needs of educators and was addressed by all participants as a

barrier in their work. For pedagogical documentation to be considered as more than assessment or communication with families it needs to be studied and discussed with at least two people who could challenge each other's interpretations. Without being challenged the pedagogical documentation materials are assumed to be accurate while representing only one person's ideas. When this happens, pedagogical documentation reverts to a representation of child observations. The participants in this research have shown how they approach this problem of a lack of time by working alone or by working additional hours to work with their colleagues. If administrators have an appreciation for the educators to have time together as an aspect of pedagogical documentation then perhaps this issue could be addressed. This appreciation come from administrators understanding why pedagogical documentation requires educators to have co-ordinated time together. I have seen some educators figure out ways to alter schedules to deal with this problem in child care but a school setting would require not only understandings among administrators but also larger adjustments would need to be made in the contracts of the partners. Changes in contracts would involve negotiations between unions and school boards. In both cases, finding time for colleagues to work together with pedagogical documentation would begin with administrators understanding pedagogical documentation as educator research and the reasons why adjustments in scheduling would be necessary.

Second, learning relationships were noted as critical for participants to develop more complex understandings of purposes for pedagogical documentation. The act of having someone to talk with or ask questions or simply turn to for supportive reasons seemed to give participants the strength and the desire to engage with pedagogical

documentation in creative ways that extended their ideas of purposes beyond assessment and communication. The data show that the more strongly educators described being supported in their learning relationship the greater their range of purposes for pedagogical documentation. A supportive learning relationship was described by several participants as learning with colleagues. Participants considered their relationships with administrator and leaders in education as a mentorship. In this research, no participants included their teaching partners as part of a mentored learning relationship. Perhaps consideration of the mutually positive effect of these learning relationships might encourage more participation between administrators in child care and Kindergarten and educators.

Engaging in reciprocal learning relationships could encourage educators to take risks that might show children exceeding developmental or age expectations that challenge standardized frameworks of expectations created for children. If pedagogical documentation was understood as educational research by administrators and policymakers, this could potentially initiate change for educators creating pedagogical documentation.

Alternatively, a perceived lack of support negatively impacts educators. The data show that one participant felt so unsupported and discouraged trying to make sense of pedagogical documentation they gave up trying. I suspect this person might be representative of many other educators' experiences throughout the province. Even if only a small percent of educators reacted this way, it could still represent a large number of children affected. The data show learning relationships are tied to educators' understandings of pedagogical documentation, so finding ways to mentor educators could

be a priority for the Ontario Ministry of Education to advance understandings of pedagogical documentation as research rather than as assessment.

A notable aspect of this research shows that engagements with pedagogical documentation are hampered by educators' reluctance to write. Some educators have the assumption that pedagogical documentation requires a significant amount of personal writing. In fact, pedagogical documentation does not require a significant amount of writing. Pedagogical documentation begins as a collection of pieces of information, such as photographs, jot notes, recordings that may be shared for discussion and might remain in those formats as educator research. There are in fact, many examples of published pedagogical documentation from the Reggio schools that offer very little text. The intention of the Reggio Emilia educators is to invite engagement with pedagogical documentation so that others make their own interpretations of what they notice. The idea is that once an interpretation has been placed on pedagogical documentation that is shared, whether it includes an educator's written retelling of the event or assessment information, further interpretations of the pedagogical documentation research are perceived as complete. This occurs because written interpretations are often considered to be final and correct such that they discourage new interpretations. Ideally, the less text the better with pedagogical documentation so readers may digest the information themselves to make their own interpretations. In learning relationships educators provide the support for educators reluctant to write for pedagogical documentation that is shared by showing that exemplars of pedagogical documentation that focus on the juxtaposition of artifacts and images that provoke contemplation about the child's thinking rather than describe it interpretively.

For my future plans to assist educators, I intend to re-establish pedagogical documentation study groups for educators seeking relationships with colleagues so they may continue to engage in conversations and to discuss interpretations of their research and practical aspects of their work. These meetings will also offer opportunities to exchange resource and extend their learning relationships. I also plan to write about the processes involved with studying pedagogical documentation with groups that were developed by Carol Anne Wien and have been shared in their many encounters with educators throughout the province that have been shown to be helpful for educators to realize complexities of purposes for pedagogical documentation.

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## Appendix A

### Email Invitation to Participate

Dear

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at York University in Toronto. I am preparing to gather data for my dissertation in the next few months and I am interested in interviewing educators, like you, who have been working with pedagogical documentation in early learning settings in Ontario for a number of years.

I would be happy to make arrangements to meet with at your convenience in person, or on the phone, to offer you more information about this invitation, if you like.

I appreciate you considering this as a possibility. I would appreciate having your perspectives become part of my research work about pedagogical documentation.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

Ellen Brown  
PhD Candidate, York University

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent Form

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Study Name:** The Terroir of Pedagogical Documentation: As Told by Educators From Ontario Early Learning Settings

**Principal Investigator's Name:** Ellen Brown, PhD program, Faculty of Education, York University, 4700 Keele St., Toronto, ON, M3J 1P3.

**Purpose of the Research:** Pedagogical documentation is a relatively new teacher research approach used in some early learning settings in Ontario – both in child care and in kindergarten classrooms. There are a variety of ways people use pedagogical documentation in their practice and I would like to gather understandings of the purposes and uses of pedagogical documentation in interviews from educators working in early learning settings in Ontario. This research will be used in my doctoral dissertation and may also be used in presentations or publications related to the dissertation.

**What You Will Be Asked To Do in the Research:** You will be asked to participate in three interviews that will be held approximately two weeks apart. Each of the interviews will be less than 90 minutes long.

**Risks and Discomforts:** We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.

**Benefits of the Research and Benefits to you:** You may think more about the values of pedagogical documentation in your work. Your colleagues and educators new to pedagogical documentation may benefit from learning about your experiences.

**Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff, or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible. Should you wish to withdraw after the study, you will have the option to also withdraw your data up until the analysis is complete.

**Confidentiality:** Unless you choose otherwise, your name will not appear in any report, presentation, or publication of the research. All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research.

The interviews will be audio recorded and notes may be taken. Your data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only the researcher Ellen Brown and Sharon Murphy, supervising professor, will have access to the information. We will keep this information until September 2020, which is the date I anticipate completing the research. The audio files will be deleted and any notes and transcripts will be shredded. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions about the research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor Dr. Sharon Murphy. You may also contact the Graduate Program in the Faculty of Education [gradprogram@edu.yorku.ca](mailto:gradprogram@edu.yorku.ca)

This research has received ethics review and approval by the Delegated Ethics Review Committee, which is delegated authority to review research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University.

#### Legal Rights and Signatures:

I \_\_\_\_\_,  
consent to participate in, *The Terroir of Pedagogical Documentation: As Told by Educators From Ontario Early Learning Settings*. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Participant

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator

Additional consent

Audio recording

I consent to the audio-recording of my interviews.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant

## Appendix C

### Protocol for In-depth Interview

Pedagogical documentation is a relatively new teacher research approach used in some early learning settings in Ontario. I would like to develop an understanding of Ontario educators' ideas of pedagogical documentation, their purposes for using pedagogical documentation, what educators are collecting as data for pedagogical documentation, how educators are using pedagogical documentation in their practice, and how educators imagine using pedagogical documentation in the future.

The first interview questions are:

Basic demographic information – years of teaching experience, geography, cultural diversity

Anchor question: How did you come to use pedagogical documentation in your practice?

Follow-up questions:

How did you first become aware of pedagogical documentation?

How did you learn about pedagogical documentation?

Why did you start to use pedagogical documentation?

The second interview questions are:

Anchor question: What is it like to use pedagogical documentation in your practice?

Follow-up questions:

What are some of the processes you go through to develop pedagogical documentation?

What tools do you use?

What do you choose to document?

What do you do if you notice something different than what you were choosing to document?

What do you do with the documentation?

The third interview questions are:

Anchor question: What does it mean to use pedagogical documentation?

Follow-up questions:

...for you

...for the children

...for your colleagues

...for families

...for the community

## Appendix D

### Informed Consent Form

**Date:**

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**Study Name:**

The Terroir of Pedagogical Documentation:  
As Told by Educators From Ontario Early Learning Settings

**Principal Investigator's Name:** Ellen Brown, PhD program, Faculty of Education, York University, 4700 Keele St., Toronto, ON, M3J 1P3.

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**What You Will Be Asked To Do in the Research:** You will be asked to participate in three interviews that will be held approximately two weeks apart. Each of the interviews will be less than 90 minutes long.

**Risks and Discomforts:** We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.

**Benefits of the Research and Benefits to you:** You may think more about the values of pedagogical documentation in your work. Your colleagues and educators new to pedagogical documentation may benefit from learning about your experiences.

**Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff, or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible. Should you wish to withdraw after the study, you will have the option to also withdraw your data up until the analysis is complete.

**Confidentiality:**

Unless you choose otherwise, your name will not appear in any report, presentation, or publication of the research. All information you supply during the research will be held in

confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research.

The interviews will be audio recorded and notes may be taken. Your data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only the researcher Ellen Brown and Sharon Murphy, supervising professor, will have access to the information. We will keep this information until September 2020, which is the date I anticipate completing the research. The audio files will be deleted and any notes and transcripts will be shredded. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

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consent to participate in, *The Terroir of Pedagogical Documentation: As Told by Educators From Ontario Early Learning Settings*. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Participant

Signature : \_\_\_\_\_ Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator

#### Additional consent

##### Audio recording

I consent to the audio-recording of my interviews.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant