

What is pedagogical documentation?

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Pedagogy is the study of teaching and learning, so pedagogical documentation must support these purposes: it is more than a record of daily events! It includes the intersection of people, places and events, thoughtful reflection and analysis to enable deeper understanding of children, more meaningful planning, and more authentic relationships than would be possible with narrowly defined ‘assessment’. So how might ‘ped doc’ help us to assess in a useful and authentic way?

In gaining greater understanding of this powerful form of professional practice, it is essential to:

FIRST consider who you are preparing it for. Who are the various audiences?

You may be able to use portions of a piece for multiple audiences, but may present it in different ways. For example, you might present photographs to share with some children to springboard further investigation, and use the photographs plus a written commentary to offer to families for additional perspectives. Who else might this work be valuable for? Who is likely to look at, read, enjoy and think about this material?

SECOND consider the multiple purposes for which you might be preparing the documentation. These might include those above, as well as refining your own perceptions, providing information to use for planning decisions, providing accountability, celebrating children’s curiosities, learning, achievements and so on. How many purposes can you imagine for this work?

Why are we considering documenting pedagogically?

In this context, because the Early Years Learning Framework asks us to:

Gather and analyse information “as evidence about what children know, can do, and understand.” We know that this is part of “inclusive assessment” that allows “new understandings to emerge” (p17).

How is this the same as or different from whatever else it is that we have been doing?

Challenging narrow approaches

Seeing assessment as ‘making learning visible’
(Giuduci, Rinaldi & Krechevsky, 2001)

Understanding each learner’s current
knowledge
skills
attitudes
dispositions
questions
concerns

A useful place to start is to brainstorm some ABCs of early childhood principles, things to value like Awe, Books and Boxes, Connectedness and so on. Then listen more carefully to children, and try to see engagement rather than just behaviour, to see thinking rather than ‘just play’. Record a sequence of events of interest, and analyse why it matters! What is unexpected? What does it suggest about children’s thinking or theory-making? What patterns of behaviour do you see? Who can you share your thoughts with? What other ‘voices’ can you include?

In moving through the day, pause and revisit earlier experiences or conversations. Be puzzled by things that intrigue children. Expect children to be artists, problem-solvers, and scientists. Offer work-in-progress to children, families and staff; imagine titles that might highlight the kernel of the story that you are sharing. Try to link with something you have read: ‘theorists’ are other educators who have ideas based on research, experience and thinking. There are many professional resources to help think through newer ways of ‘seeing’ and listening.

Be cautious about commercially produced solutions to EYLF challenges! Focus on the principles and practices in the document. Visit PSCTas and Early Childhood Australia websites and resources, and continue to learn with colleagues. Be excited about the possibilities!

