

Understanding and Leading *Capable, Confident, and Curious:* Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework

APRIL 2020

A user guide for directors, pre-primary leads, and other pedagogical leaders, as they support staff in engaging with the framework in their everyday practices.

MODULE 7: PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTATION—THE WHAT, WHY, AND HOW

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Introduction

“Pedagogical documentation” makes children’s learning, ideas, thinking, and strategies visible. It serves to communicate to others—parents/guardians, colleagues, and community—not only what is happening in our setting, but how, and why the documented event is important. It is a crucial part of reflective practice and ongoing professional learning for educators and is also a way to revisit past events with children.

In addition, pedagogical documentation is a way of listening to children, and then reflecting and making decisions; for families, it is an invitation to understand and contribute to children’s learning and classroom practices.

“... pedagogical documentation offers more than a record. It offers a process for listening to children, for creating artifacts from that listening, and for studying with others what children reveal about their competent and thoughtful views of the world.”

(Making Learning Visible Through Pedagogical Documentation, Wien 2013)

“Specifically, documentation informs program planning by providing clear evidence to educators on whether activities are relevant to the capacities of the children, where children’s interests lie, what their ideas are, how children approach a new learning activity, and what kind of strategies children use to problem solve and meet new challenges.”

(Educators’ guide to Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia’s Learning Curriculum Framework, Nova Scotia, 2018, 63)

In Module 7, participants will

- be introduced to the many forms of documentation, and which type to use in which situation
- understand the difference between display, documentation, and pedagogical documentation
- discover tools that will assist in developing documentation as a regular part of their day
- understand the many ways in which documentation can be used—communication, reflection, decision-making, revisiting with children, a form of professional learning

This guide is a pathway to help you engage and support staff as they use and implement the early learning curriculum framework and its accompanying educators’ guide. This guide is a resource rather than a recipe or checklist. It allows for flexibility in how the framework is implemented and applied.

Possibilities for Use

Pedagogical documentation is a reflective process that takes time to develop. Learning about how to engage with it is a journey, and participants will be at different places within this journey. Below are some of the ways you can use this guide and develop your pedagogical documentation practices.

- Begin with “where you are” as a centre or classroom. What are educators presently doing? What is their existing understanding of pedagogical documentation? Does everyone understand the terms “pedagogy” and “pedagogical”?

***Pedagogy** refers to the theoretical approach to teaching as well as the actual practice of teaching and learning. Therefore, we use the term **pedagogical** to refer to anything that concerns the art or science of teaching. When using the term **pedagogical documentation** we are speaking of documentation that informs our practice and helps us—together with children and parents/guardians—to understand the learning taking place.*

- Identify areas where there may be challenges with documentation in your setting. In what ways are people struggling or misunderstanding? Photography? Note-taking? Design and assembly? Figuring out what to document? Who can help you in these areas? Perhaps you will need extra training or consultation for clarification in some areas.
- Use this guide to revisit concepts that are misunderstood or new to some staff.
- Think about the strengths within your group. Do some have more experience/training with documentation than others? Can educators offer assistance to each other?

Contents and Structure

Each module has either hard copies or links to useful articles, videos, and blogs. There is also background information about key topics, talking points, and connections to the early learning curriculum framework. Choose whatever resources you feel are most suited to your educators.

- **Reflection questions**

To help explore each topic. If these are given out in advance of the meeting, educators will have an opportunity to reflect on where they are with pedagogical documentation and relationship-building.

- **Background notes**

Review and take notes on the topic before meeting. Module 1: Pedagogical Leadership should also be reviewed. The reflection questions and exercises will support you in supporting educators' diverse needs and background knowledge.

- **Suggested group exercises**

To make the work authentic, accessible, and useable. It is helpful when staff bring their own photos, notes, and other documentation in order to work with them and reflect together.

- **Defining and embedding the process**

There is a process for documenting children's ideas, strategies, and learning. Developing this process so that it becomes a habit makes documentation a part of classroom life.

- **Suggestions for next steps**

Develop pathways for moving forward.

- **PowerPoint presentation**

Any or all of the slides can be used to present this topic to staff.

Before Beginning

- Invite participants to share what they already know about the topic. Keep this prior knowledge in mind as you move forward. What have been their successes so far?
- Consider how pedagogical documentation will engage diverse populations, cultures, and communities. How is pedagogical documentation assisting with relationship-building within your organization?
- Can you anticipate any concerns or challenges? If you are already hearing, for instance, that educators have challenges and need assistance in a particular area, you can keep this in mind and search for resources. Challenges should be discussed openly, not to always solve the issue, but rather, to hear everyone's perspective.
- Share reading materials and links in advance, whenever possible. This will lead to more productive discussions and helps staff raise questions.
- Balance talk and action. Find ways to make the early learning curriculum framework come to life in realistic and practical ways.

Preparing for Meetings

- Are you comfortable with pedagogical documentation? If not, it is important to read, talk with other leaders, attend workshops, and become very familiar with the resources made available in the resource list.
- Use a few minutes at the beginning of the meeting for a fun icebreaker that will put people into a relaxed frame of mind. Provide time to eat if your staff are coming to the meeting right from their workday.
- Every adult learner is different in terms of their way of learning. Take into account the dynamics of your group when planning a training event. Decide on a method of delivery and take into account the group's dynamics and knowledge levels. Acknowledge that newly hired staff should also share their experiences. Who is experienced with aspects of this topic? How can you use their experiences?
- Offer a way for participants to provide feedback after the event. This will guide you in terms of what to do next. Perhaps you will need assistance in order to move forward, or perhaps you will gather ideas from participants that are unexpected and novel. Pedagogical documentation, and building strong relationships, are journeys that do not need to be rushed.

Staff should

- read provided information beforehand
- come prepared with their questions, ideas, and details of prior experiences and be prepared to share.
- bring photos and notes from their classrooms—and their curiosity!

Module 7: Pedagogical Documentation—The What, Why, and How

How do educators begin the process of pedagogical documentation, or move forward from present practices? There are many forms of documentation, and many ways of beginning.

This module addresses the following questions, based on the practices described in Nova Scotia’s Early Learning Curriculum Framework:

- For what purposes will I use pedagogical documentation?
- What are all the varied forms of pedagogical documentation, and which ones will be useful and doable for my setting?
- What are the differences between display, documentation, and pedagogical documentation? Why does it matter?
- How will I fit this process into my day? What tools will I need, and how will I make time?

Background Information

In different parts of the world, and indeed around Canada, there are different terms and definitions used for the process of documentation, such as: Pedagogical Documentation, Learning Stories, Pedagogical Narration, and Action Research.

In *Educators’ Guide to Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia’s Early Learning Curriculum Framework*, we see the following description from Chaillé (2008, 7):

“Through documentation, educators ‘... are making children’s learning visible – putting into words, pictures, videos, sketches and artifacts the story of the child’s learning process – in collaboration with the children themselves. This deepens and transforms the learning itself, adding another level of complexity to the work of children ...”

In British Columbia’s *Early Learning Framework* (2019, 51), the following explanation of Pedagogical Narration appears:

*“**Pedagogical Narration** is the process of noticing and collecting moments from daily practice and sharing these with colleagues, children, and families to make children’s learning processes and inquiries as well as educators’ **pedagogical** choices visible and open to interpretation and reflection.”*

Whatever the similarities and differences in terminology, a shared purpose for pedagogical documentation remains: to provide a way to notice, reflect, collaborate with children and other adults, make decisions, and communicate to others the importance of children's actions, thinking, strategies, and ideas. Pedagogical documentation provides an avenue for all of this important work to happen as a part of our reflective practice.

Here is a comprehensive list of the ways that pedagogical documentation fulfills several roles in an educational setting:

- Through the examination of, and reflection upon, photographs and notes, there is the opportunity to deepen our thinking about what took place, and how.
- If unsure about the children's thinking and ideas, consideration of our documentation may lead us to possibilities of what to do next.
- Curriculum develops as we document, emerging from everyone's curiosities and questions.
- Documentation, when carefully considered, becomes a form of professional development. We grow as critical thinkers, researchers of children's actions, and members of a community of practice as we think and construct meaning.
- When inquiry/play ideas are underway, we want the reader of the documentation to understand the children's role in the construction of learning; therefore, documentation becomes a powerful communication tool.
- Children, through interaction with and about documentation, can think together, clarify, and generate new thinking from the work of others.
- Documentation helps us to learn to be in the moment with children and seriously consider their perspectives as we interact, play with them, or simply observe in order to reach understanding.
- When we do not understand what we are seeing, documentation acts as a channel for putting our questions and dilemmas "out there" for possible responses and input from others. Family members, colleagues, and the children themselves may all respond with their own perspectives.
- Documentation can act as an archive. Children often move in and out of inquiries, and we need documentation to sustain their curiosity and move forward with investigations.
- When interests and inquiries re-occur within a group over time, documentation allows us to revisit what we thought before. Do the children hold the same views now?
- Documentation, especially with infants and toddlers or non-verbal children who cannot explain their thinking, often makes children's strategies visible. How many ways does an infant try to get into an upright cardboard box? And what strategies does she use to get out again?

Source: Adapted from *Inquiry-Based Early Learning Environments* (Stacey 2019, 71–72)

Forms of Documentation

Documentation Panels are one form of pedagogical documentation that many educators may be familiar with. This is a large format to be used upon a wall, either at the child's height if it is primarily intended for children, or at adult height if intended for colleagues or families.

A panel consists of a brief explanation of the context (Where? Who? What were the circumstances?), photographs that show the *process* that the children went through (note that the product is not important here!), any words, drawings, or scribbles from them that you were able to capture, and a reflection by the educator (What is the meaning of this event? What is your understanding? Why is this important?). As well, an educator will often add an outstanding question for others to reflect upon and respond to.

A panel often represents work over a period of time.

Learning Stories originated with Margaret Carr in New Zealand and offers a particular format. The "voice" of the narrative (text) is directed to the child and family, photographs are again used to show process, the educator points out interesting and valuable aspects, and invites the family to respond.

Ordinary Moments ('mini' documentation) are quick (and often handwritten) accounts, with the same content as a panel (text, photos, child's input, reflection) but address a much smaller moment in time that is interesting. These can easily be done on-the-spot in the classroom, where children are fascinated to see them under construction!

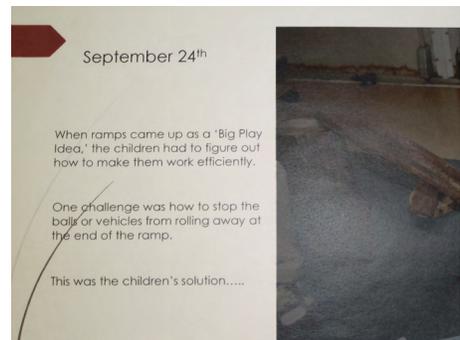
Floor Books are forms of documentation that are done with children. This idea originates from Dr. Claire Warden in Scotland and is now in wide use around the world. After a play event, or outing, or discovery, a photo or two are placed into a large-format blank book and this is placed on the floor for children to respond to. Inevitably they will have something to say, and this is written down by the educator, who is acting as a scribe (or older children will write or draw by themselves). This process may happen on a daily basis in some schools and becomes part of the daily routine that children enjoy.



Documentation Panels



Learning Stories



Ordinary Moments



Floor Books

Raw Documentation is done by and for the educators themselves. This is a source of data, and also records the many questions that arise about what children are doing and thinking. It is “rough and ready” and is not intended to be shared with the public, or families, but rather as a way of “holding on” to our thinking and wondering as we watch children. Raw documentation can be placed on a wall or occur in a sketch-notebook. It helps us to make informed decisions and may be used for a future documentation panel.



Raw Documentation

Daily Logs are a way to share with families one or two events from the busy day in your setting. Often placed near the entrance, they are short and easy to produce. Many educators use a PowerPoint page for speed and ease of placing one photograph and a small amount of text.



Daily Logs

Digital Documentation is becoming more and more popular, and many applications are available. In this case, take care to look for an app that contains a reflective segment. While most apps will link to learning goals, pedagogical documentation is about much more than those goals, and should include input from the child, a place for their ideas and strategies, their process, and a reflection from the educator.



Digital Documentation

Display, Documentation, and Pedagogical Documentation—what’s the difference?

Display: many educators put much time and effort into beautiful displays of children’s work. They may involve coloured backgrounds, borders, etc. While they are lovely to look at, for children, parents/guardians, and ourselves, they are not pedagogical documentation yet. If these artifacts (e.g., paintings, drawings, photos) are “stand alone” (i.e., without text, or with just a simple label), this constitutes a display.

Documentation: Our society in general “documents” in many ways: we have birth certificates, medical reports, family trees, social media, and so on. But in the field of early childhood education, “documentation” refers to making children’s thinking, learning, and ideas visible. Therefore, the pieces of documentation that we produce involve traces of children’s thinking (perhaps in text, or with photos of their process, or through their drawings and paintings) together with an explanation of what was happening. This explanation is crucial, since it not only holds on to the children’s ideas and learning, but also communicates these ideas to others—families, community, and colleagues.

Pedagogical Documentation: As educators become more experienced and adept with documentation over time, it will become pedagogical. That is, it will become a way of reflecting and learning for everyone involved—educators, children, and families.

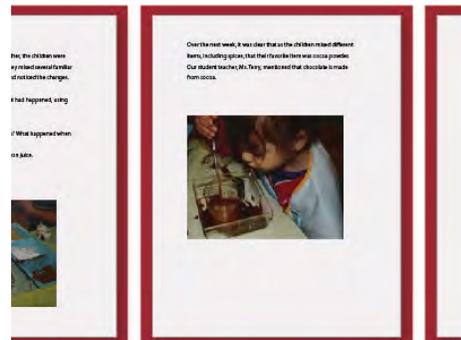
According to Dr. Carol Anne Wien

“Pedagogical Documentation invites us to be curious and to wonder with others about the meaning of events to children. We become co-learners together; focusing on children’s expanding understanding of the world as we interpret that understanding with others. We document not merely to record activities, but to placehold events so that we might study and interpret their meaning together.”

(Making Learning Visible through Pedagogical Documentation, Wien 2013, 2,)



Display



Documentation



Pedagogical Documentation

As educators become more experienced and confident with developing pedagogical documentation, they are able to add an important component their own reflection and interpretation of events. Some educators, when puzzled, also add their questions about what happened, inviting others to contribute their perspective.

The Process of Documentation

Appendix 1: Documentation Guidelines offers an overview of what to think about when considering a documentation process that can be used as individuals carve their own pathway through the process.

Guiding Questions

- What will you document, and why?
- What will your documentation do?
- What form will your documentation take?
- Stages of documentation; where are you in terms of documentation skills—what are you ready to try?
- Becoming a researcher through documentation—what questions arise for you from your observations of children?

In practical terms, staff will find it easier to document when they

- have developed a form of note-taking for observations (this is your data for documentation and was discussed in module 5, Observation for Decision-Making Purposes)
- have a camera and notebook or clipboard close by
- have access to a computer and printer, or alternatively, a digital app to use on their devices. It is essential to have the time and resources needed to support the process of documentation. Leaders can provide support for the process through staff meetings to share documentation, and by participating in the process themselves, through modelling, making occasional notes as they are in and out of classrooms, and by offering feedback.

Possible Activities to Support Pedagogical Documentation

The activities and discussions that you select depend upon your participants, their individual experiences and prior knowledge, and contexts. How the teams work together will also have an impact upon the development of pedagogical documentation.

- Provide an opportunity, first, for participants to examine “where they are” in terms of the documentation process.
- Encourage participants to bring along photographs and notes from their own settings. These will be useful for discussion purposes:
 - What is worth documenting in this scenario? Why?
 - What is interesting or puzzling for you?
 - How might you document?
- Provide rough materials (e.g., 11 x 14 paper, black fine-tipped markers, sticky notes, index cards, glue sticks) for participants to develop a small, raw piece of documentation—first from their own photos, and then from a short video clip. Mini documentation of small moments should include a brief introduction, the story of what happened, and a reflection or question. Thinking through all of these components, and learning to articulate briefly, is an important part of the documentation journey.
- Provide time for participants to examine many kinds of documentation and to critique them. What stands out in terms of content? Design? What thoughts does this documentation provoke? What are the strengths and challenges of this documentation?
- Choose a particular piece of documentation that you consider to be strong in terms of content. What can the participants learn about the child or children from this piece? What questions arise for them?
- Provide the opportunity to create a floor book. In small groups, provide an “experience” (using loose parts, an unusual piece of equipment or artifact, natural materials, or art materials) and give time for participants to explore. Then have them represent their experiences in a floor book (or on large format paper)—writing, drawing, etc. with everyone contributing. If you have access to an “instant” camera or printer, the facilitator can give each group a photograph or two to use. If not, participants should make rough sketches instead. Debriefing should include an opportunity to reflect upon what they chose to represent. What does this tell us?

NEXT STEPS

- Is there an educator at your setting that is experienced with documentation? How can they assist others, or take the lead?
- As a leader, are you yourself comfortable with documentation? If not, how can you learn more? Reach out to the Early Childhood Development Support Coordinators in your area, your consultant, or other educators in your area that may lend their expertise.
- Help each other by taking brief notes or taking photos while another educator is working with a child/children.
- Allocate time at staff meetings to share documentation. This could be a rotating event (e.g., infant classroom at one meeting, preschool at the next, and so on).
- Include parents/guardians in this process. How can you bring panels to their attention? How can you send documentation home? How can you elicit a response from families?
- Celebrate small successes. If this is new to educators, it is important to share first steps, no matter how small.

CONNECTIONS TO THE FRAMEWORK

In the *Educator's Guide to Capable, Confident, and Curious* (EECD 2018, 63) we see that documentation

- provides feedback to educators about how children interact with prepared learning environments, provides information about how to re-design environments, and suggests ideas for professional development topics
- informs parents/guardians about their child's progress, and allows parents/guardians to build on learning activities and their child's ideas and interests at home
- may sometimes be focused on the learning goals and learning objectives outlined in Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework

Reflective Questions for Leaders

- How can I provide even small pockets of time for educators to have reflective conversations, and begin the process of documentation?
- Do our job descriptions describe staff responsibilities for documentation? If not, what would be reasonable to expect, and who can help me develop these expectations?
- How can I best use staff meetings as a time for sharing and discussing documentation? How can this become a celebratory routine rather than a chore?
- What do you believe are the benefits of documentation for your setting? Can you articulate this to others?
- What are some possibilities for involving families in this process? How will we begin to reach out to them?
- How might I model this process?

Reflective Questions for Educators

- What am I still unsure about, and how can I find out more?
- Practice makes perfect! What will be my first step in making documentation a part of each day or week?
- What practical tools will I need? (e.g., notebooks, clipboards, bristle board)
- Do I have a way of noting observations? These will provide the raw data for documentation.

Appendix 1

Documentation Guidelines

One of the most important aspects of documentation is that it conveys the children's thinking, ideas, and actions. The developmental milestones are there within the text, but we also strive, through documentation, to interpret children's processes, ideas, and actions for the reader. Here are some things to keep in mind as you move forward.

1. **Make the decision, through reflection and dialogue with your colleagues, about what you want to document, and why.**

- Why is this event significant? (Even small events can be significant if we explore underlying intentions.)
- What do you wonder? In other words, what puzzles or intrigues you about what happened?
- Can you form questions that will inform your responses to children? These can be included in your documentation.

2. **Perhaps your documentation will**

- make learning visible, through telling the story of the children's ideas and work
- facilitate discussions with parents/guardians, colleagues, visitors
- revisit explorations with children, to elicit further information (for instance, their own thinking about what happened)
- become a reflective process that supports your decision-making and informs your teaching—documentation, ideally, should support your curriculum and planning. Gather your data (photos, sticky notes, logbook notes, questions you've jotted down, etc.). Think about the information you have, the types of ideas and actions that are present, and talk about it as a team. Consider all perspectives!

3. **What form will your documentation take? What is most appropriate for your audience?**

- Documentation panels?
- Learning Stories?
- Logbook?
- Digital documentation?
- Rough documentation for teacher reflection purposes? (May be shared, for instance, at team or whole-staff meetings)

4. **Remember that you will progress through levels of documentation. High quality pedagogical documentation does not happen immediately, but is a journey and involves practice, reflection, and dialogue.**
- Develop a system and form a habit of documentation.
 - When comfortable, begin to “go public” with your documentation, i.e., share with other educators, parents/guardians, etc.
 - Develop visual literacy skills (design) through study, trial and error, workshops, and feedback.
 - Eventually, the idea of documentation as “making learning visible” will come to life in your graphics and text.

5. **Consider yourself a researcher of children and their actions:**

- How can you look underneath the surface of what’s happening?
- What do facial expressions, actions upon materials, conversations, responses of children to your documentation, tell you?
- How will you answer your own questions through using your environment as a teacher, invitations, interactions with children, further observation?

6. **Some useful articles/books/links:**

<https://tecribresearch.wordpress.com/2016/01/02/digital-documentation-making-teaching-and-learning-visible/>

www.pedagogicaldocumentation.ca/about/

<https://tecribresearch.wordpress.com/2017/01/21/the-progression-towards-pedagogical-documentation/>

Pedagogical Documentation in Early Childhood Settings by Susan Stacey, published by Redleaf Press and distributed in Canada by Login Canada (www.lb.ca). Also available through Amazon.

www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/Wien.pdf

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8aaxrHOG4o

Appendix 2

Resources

Videos

Ontario. Ministry of Education. 2014. Think, Feel, Act. Toronto, On: Government of Ontario.

<http://edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/document.html>

(A series of short video clips of Dr. Carol Anne Wien on Pedagogical Documentation. Ideal for beginning discussions such as “What is documentation and what is it for?”)

Axelsson, Suzanne. 2017. “Pedagogical Documentation.” YouTube.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NmEgp1gzZs

British Columbia. Saanich School District. 2014. “Learning Stories: Pedagogical Narration.” YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRWKp4hXadQ>

Nova Scotia. Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. “Documentation.”

<https://vimeo.com/282215878>

(Documentation explained by Sue Stacey and Donna Stapleton, produced for the province of Nova Scotia. The Password for access is: porter. English with French subtitles.)

Blogs

The Compass School. 2018. *The Power of Documentation in a Reggio Inspired Classroom.*

www.thecompassschool.com/blog/power-documentation-reggio-inspired-classroom/ (March 21, 2018)

Susan Stacey. 2020: www.suestacey.ca

(Overview of Emergent Curriculum intertwined with documentation; blog posts on documentation.)

Technology Rich Inquiry Based Research. 2020. <https://tecribresearch.wordpress.com/>

(Many of Diane Kashin’s blogs relate to pedagogical documentation.)

Debi Keyte-Hartland. 2017. *Pedagogical Documentation in Challenging Times.*

<https://debikeytehartland.me/2017/01/29/pedagogical-documentation-in-challenging-times/>

(January 29, 2017)

StoryPark. 2019. *Documentation: Changing Perspectives through a different lens.*

<https://blog.storypark.com/2019/02/documentation-and-the-image-of-the-child-through-a-reggio-lens/>

(February 14, 2019)

Books and Articles

Wien, Carol Anne. 2013. *Making Learning Visible Through Pedagogical Documentation*. Queen's Printer for Ontario: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/Wien.pdf>

(A clearly written article describing the difference between display and documentation.)

Stacey, S. 2015. *Pedagogical Documentation in Early Childhood: Sharing Children's Learning and Teachers' Thinking*. Minneapolis: Redleaf Press.

Stacey, S. 2019. *Inquiry-Based Early Learning Environments: Creating, Supporting and Collaborating*. Minneapolis: Redleaf Press.

Penfold, L. 2017. "Making Learning Visible: An Interview with Mara Krechovsky". Cambridge: Harvard. www.louisapenfold.com/making-learning-visible/ (September 13, 2019)

Project Zero and Reggio Children. 2001. *Making Learning Visible: Children as Individual and Group Learners*. Cambridge: Harvard.

(The classic book on documenting children's ideas and thinking.)

Avery, Jason, Karyn Callaghan, and Carol Ann Wien,. 2016. *Documenting Children's Meaning: Engaging in Design and Creativity with Children and Families*. Davis Publishing.

(Through photographs and text, the authors explain how documentation brings children's ideas and thinking to others.)

Warden, C. 2006. *Talking and Thinking Floorbooks*. UK: Mindstretchers Publishing.

