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PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTATION AND PEDAGOGICAL CHOICES

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This chapter offers exploration and reflection through voices from a Swedish preschool. With a focus on pedagogical choices, the authors share experiences of toddlers and teachers offering insights to conversations and organization. Links with families are highlighted through the evolving processes of documentation.

Introduction

This chapter builds on a case study conducted in a Swedish preschool where the teachers have long experience of using pedagogical documentation. The term 'preschool' is used in Sweden for the first step in the educational system. Although preschool is not mandatory, almost every child aged between one and five years attends.

The teachers at this preschool have organized for an exploratory approach and developed a common reflection culture. Each year, the whole preschool chooses a common theme with the focus on exploring some aspect of the city. This year they have chosen to investigate

transformations in the city by letting the children follow both longer-lasting changes, for example, construction of a new house, and more temporary changes in the city depending on weather and seasons. The children are also given opportunities to create changes in order to contribute to transformation in the city.

In this case study, we have followed the group with the eight youngest children, aged one to two years, and their two teachers. We have participated in the teachers' planning meetings four times during one semester and made audio recordings. On these occasions, we also posed questions about pedagogical choices in their work with pedagogical documentation. The parents, teachers and the head of the preschool have approved the publication of photographs used here. The chapter focuses on the teachers' choices in their work with pedagogical documentation before the project starts, during the project work and in their encounters with parents.

Preparation for documentation

When the teachers talk about pedagogical choices connected to the project work and documentation, they emphasize the importance of being well prepared. Before a new project, they must feel curiosity and inspiration and may need to acquire new knowledge. They stress that they must formulate overall issues in a careful way, issues which become guidelines and help them to sharpen their gaze and discover the children's strategies. Ahead of the new project, the teachers discuss what they should choose to focus on while they are documenting; this must be something connected to the selected issues.

When thinking about projects for toddlers, teachers may plan to take the children out of the preschool to extend their learning. There are a number of decisions to be made regarding the choice of an appropriate place. The teachers identify many aspects that they take into account. It should be a place that invites transformation and is close to the preschool so the toddlers can walk and don't need strollers. The place also needs to be free from cars so toddlers can move around and explore without being limited by teachers who must say 'No.' The previous year the youngest children investigated a nearby bird statue. The statue with its associated bird bath was an interesting place for these children; three of them, Emma, Johan and Viktor, are still part of the toddler group. According to the teachers, the existing relationship these three children have with the bird statue is a valuable starting point and therefore one reason for the choice of place for this year's project. Another reason is that cooperative learning is also enhanced when starting with a place that some children already have experienced.

Pedagogical choices in the process with the children

When the teachers introduce the project, they use selected pictures from the documentation of the previous year, since in their experience this helps children to remember and retell for their friends. This time, the pictures show the bird statue that Emma, Johan and Viktor already know. The teachers' intention is to begin in old experiences with the help of documentation, but then open up for new possibilities and for the unexpected. Their idea is that the children who already have experience of the bird and the place can act as a driving force in beginning the project.

The teachers show the chosen pictures, printed in a large format, so the toddlers are able to see simultaneously without crowding, in order to enable communication among them.

According to the teachers' experiences, it depends on the activity when deciding how many children should be invited to participate. The teachers want to be able to see and listen to each child. Hence, when it is time for the first walk to the place where the bird statue is, they chose to take four children. In this case, two of the toddlers who already have investigated the place have the task of showing it to two of their new peers. The teachers explain that it is manageable for them with four children who are walking and holding hands; one of the teachers has time to take pictures and the other has time to write down the children's communication. There is also time for the teachers to see and pay attention to what the toddlers discover during their joint exploration. The teachers argue that pedagogical documentation is a tool that can be used to create opportunities for cooperative learning since it shows what is going on for everybody. One child's discovery becomes everyone's discoveries. What the individual child does becomes visible and a concern for the whole group. At the same time the teachers claim that work with pedagogical documentation helps them perceive individual children's interests and strategies.

It requires careful organization at the preschool to enable two adults to walk out with only four children. At this preschool, the whole teaching team supports a joint pedagogical ideal including how to work with pedagogical documentation. When the two teachers are working with the four toddlers, their colleagues take care of other children. A shared reflective culture, where all teachers are involved in reflections about on-going project works for different groups of children, supports the teachers' willingness to cooperate in such a way.

When teachers gather the children in the morning, they start a discussion together with the children. Perhaps it ends in the decision that today there will be a walk to the bird statue. This discussion is documented in the folder containing the teachers' planning. The teachers might take a photograph of the children preparing for the walk. As they have created a culture of



- Emma:** That!
Johan: Water!
Lisa: Look!
Johan: Clap, clap!
Lisa: Look there!
Johan: Ah, look bird, water!
Viktor: There! [*Points to the sculpture and the water*]
Lisa: Look mouth [*points to the beak*]
Johan: Water and bird!
Emma: Water, bird!

Figure 2.1 Reviewing photographs from last year

documentation, they only need to look at each other and they have an agreement about taking a picture and thereby give a situation a value.

While the children are gathering at the gate, the teachers begin to document, to show that they are connected to the project again. They explain that they need bodily awareness when they are documenting and supporting the children's cooperative learning. As a result, the children hold hands on the walk, while the teachers go next to support their communication, but also to have their hands free to be able to document. One of them emphasizes: 'We are busy in the hands, but not in thought.



Figure 2.2 Gathering at the gate

Because we are busy, the children can keep the focus and they have a bigger responsibility to keep together.'

Afterwards, during a circle time when the children retell the walk with the help of the documentation, the teachers sit next to them or a little behind, preferably not with a child in their lap. They try to make it possible for the children to move around and communicate about the pictures. One of the teachers underlines:

When there are two children who are communicating, we sit back a little so we don't come between the two who are trying to communicate. It's about that cooperation, it has to sit in our bodies too. This is bodily knowledge. It's about small things, how we are positioning ourselves and how we are placing pictures on the table. You can destroy it with your body and become a brake pad, or you can babble on too much so the children's words can't be heard.

The teachers also highlight the value of coming prepared to the circle so attention then may be on the shared processes. They consider it as significant to decide in advance who should write and who should take photos so that an unclear division of roles does not lead to lack of concentration among the children.

Focus of documentation

When the teachers document the children's exploration of the place, they focus on what the place invites, and the repertoire of physical movements and verbal expressions that develop between the toddlers. For example, Emma tells her friends how to stand on the ramp and say 'ready, ready, go' and run, and then the children do and say the same.

When teachers document the children's exploration, they try to be attentive to what it is that sets the group in connection with the place, things and with each other. They try to capture both verbal and non-verbal expression. One teacher points out: 'We capture the children's interest through documentation. We see what they do with the body. When they don't have the verbal language, we capture gazes, a hand pointing out, and we have to catch stuff like that instead.'

They ask themselves what these children are interested in and how they may support this and challenge the children further. This makes it possible for the toddlers to continue their investigation and deepen their understanding. Sometimes, the toddlers come up with new ideas and sometimes it is the teachers who do. When the teachers are planning the next walk they find the starting point in a previous documentation, but sometimes a child brings forward new proposals. They give one example:

Johan said 'Paint' directly when we asked: 'Tell me what you want to paint!' And he answered, 'Paint out there,' and then Emma said, 'Paint brush.' We said that we could bring the paintbrushes out and paint on the bird. We made a choice to embrace Johan's idea. We could have done it another day but he has this idea now. It works like that with toddlers. Perhaps it is more about acting immediately. With the older children, we can say, 'We have written it, but we will do it on Tuesday.' But to say that to a toddler, what does it mean for a child, one year old?

The pictures taken on this occasion will later be used in conversation with Johan's parents. Then the purpose is to show the parents through the documentation how the preschool invites Johan to come up with ideas, which he can realize in the group.

Selection of documentations

The teachers begin by introducing one place for the toddlers: the place with the bird statue. After all the children have visited the place and

started to explore it, the teachers look through all documentation and chose pictures they want to share. They present the documentation as a big mind map on a low table where the toddlers gather. The teachers have chosen pictures to illustrate items that captured the toddlers' attention on their visit: the bird statue itself, the water in the bird bath, the rocks, the sloping ramp, line of stones and a bench, as well as what the children were doing at these places. Children's comments about the place ('Where!' 'Stones!') will be documented and added to the mind map.

When it comes to choosing pictures, the teachers say that they take into account different aspects in different contexts and for different purposes. They often choose only to take photos of the children's hands when they are acting. This can be an advantage for the children looking at the photographs, because if the focus is on the object, then there will not be so much pointing out each other. When the teachers focus on the movements, however, the whole child needs to be in the picture, otherwise movements will not be visible for the children. The teachers have selected some pictures to be shown in black and white, since the contents become clearer when the children's colourful clothes are not dominating. Other pictures that they choose to show in colour, and in this documentation the colour photographs make the light shimmering in the water recognizable.

The educational environment in relation to pedagogical documentation

At circle time, the children and teachers gather at a round table that is a suitable height for toddlers to sit or stand and study the documentation. The children use their whole body when they point and communicate about the pictures and one teacher says: 'We have noticed that it can be a very advanced language even with the little ones. They are coming together through the language and the words get a value. There is a strong drive to conquer the words for the sake of the fellowship, in order to participate.'

The teachers have also made a reflection wall with large format, plastic-wrapped photos; one of them explains:

We are building up a reflection wall. The children will be involved in putting up the pictures. We think that we can take pictures of the walks. The reflection wall should be living, not finished; we can take down the photo and take it with us, even when we go outside, and then we put it back again.



Figure 2.3 Reviewing the visit

The teachers also tell about benefits they have discovered with the pictures on the table and the wall. The toddlers meet and communicate with the help of the documentation, although the teachers are not present. When parents come and pick up their child and ask what has been done today, sometimes the child goes to the documentation, points, and then the parent understands and can join in dialogue.

Sometimes, the teachers choose to project pictures from the documentation onto the wall. Then, the toddlers can play in the picture and according to the teachers, this supports them to deepen their relationship with the place.

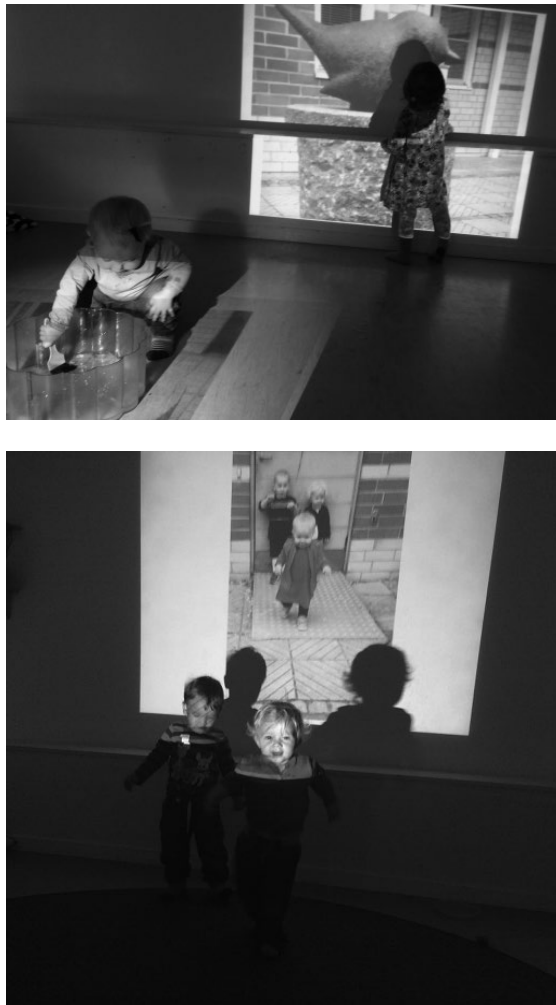


Figure 2.4 Being in the photographs

Pedagogical choices in collaboration with parents

In their work with pedagogical documentation, the teachers would like to direct the parents' attention towards what the children have done and experienced in preschool together with their peers. The teachers would like parents to understand that while questions like what and how the children have eaten and if they have slept well are important, they are not the most significant questions when parents come to pick up their children. To encourage parents to become more interested in what has happened in pedagogical practices, teachers talk with them about pedagogical documentation as an important tool to involve them into the children's learning processes.

When documenting, teachers also have the parents in mind. They ask themselves: 'What needs to be documented in order to give parents insight into and understanding of what their children experience and learn in preschool?' With the help of documentation, they want to expand the parents' image of what a preschool can be. One pedagogical choice they made in relation to parents was to document the children at the gate before the walk. According to the teachers, such pictures can demonstrate to parents how they trust children. It shows that they have chosen not to use strollers and they want children to hold each other's hands when they are walking. It can show parents that the children communicate more with each other without an adult walking between them.

The teachers explain that, during parent meetings, they choose to show documentation as a slideshow. They also point out, however, that they could further develop these opportunities by stopping the slide show a few times and discussing processes with the parents. One of the teachers says: 'The slideshow is a sort of recap of what we've done. We want to show the parents all the processes. We want the parents to participate and contribute. What do they think about the places we have chosen?'

One teacher also said that parents tell them what children do when they are at the place together with their children. The teachers are curious to hear this because it may contain ideas for further investigation. Another choice that they mention is that they could engage the parents more at the beginning of the semester by inviting them to be involved in the choice of issues for the project. According to the teachers, this would create expanded opportunities for parents to be involved and influence what the children would experience at preschool right from the beginning.

Building relationships with pedagogical documentation

In a review of our increasingly individualized society, Bauman (2001) points out that what makes a society is what holds us together. At this preschool, the teachers have the hope that through project work the children will create a better relationship with their city and become active participants in society. This effort is visible in all the choices the teachers make in the pedagogical process with the toddlers. The aim is to create a group where each individual is made visible, but also connected to each other and the surroundings. Teachers direct their attention towards both individuals and the whole group of children, and their pedagogical documentation shows how they value differences and use them to expand children's learning. This is in line with what Dahlberg and Moss (2005: 2) underscore, namely that preschools don't need to be institutions where 'the Other' is made into 'the Same'. Instead, they can be places open 'for diversity, differences, and otherness, for new possibilities and potentialities' (ibid.: 2). The teachers show in practice Dewey's ([1916] 2007) thoughts about the necessity to learn, as a part of an education, how to use other peoples' experiences as a complement to one's own limited experiences.

The teachers' work with pedagogical documentation has supplied them with valuable tools to create relations between the child, the group and the city, and to support children's cooperative learning processes. One tool is to formulate questions as guidelines in the work. This is assessed by teachers as useful for finding focus for the documentation. Preparation is important since it evokes curiosity to know more, and wonderment when the unexpected arises (Dahlberg, 2015). Wonderment is considered to be the foremost prerequisite for experiences and learning by Dahlberg et al. (2013) and it is something that the teachers emphasize, too.

Another useful tool for cooperative learning is previous documentation. These teachers have consciously chosen to build on some children's previous experiences, and with the support of this documentation ask the children to recall their memories. In this way, children can share what they have learned with new peers. This can be interpreted as illustrating what Dewey ([1916] 2007) defines as education. He emphasizes that education means to reconstruct and reorganize experience and thus provide meaningful experience and increase the sense of connection and continuity of the activities one is involved in. When children share their memories, documentation becomes an active agent contributing to learning, which is a role that Lenz Taguchi (2010) stresses when she describes pedagogical documentation as a tool for creating knowledge, learning and change. In order to support cooperative learning, these

teachers consider it significant that the children have access to and can meet and communicate about documentation all the time. This can be compared with the discussion from Dahlberg et al. (2013) describing the creation of meaning. They point out that interaction with others makes the world meaningful; they underline that pedagogical documentation makes it possible for children to retell and revisit what has happened.

The teachers' work with pedagogical documentation highlights the value of a supporting organization and supportive forms of work, including a culture of reflection. Teachers at this preschool have chosen to organize time and space in a way that creates possibilities to work with children in small groups. This case study also reveals that the teachers' work with pedagogical documentation makes it possible for toddlers to be involved in the planning of the day. The teachers welcome the children's ideas and strive to include their perspectives in learning opportunities. In a practice which values negotiation, children's participation may be seen as an ethical and a democratic approach (Åberg and Lenz Taguchi, 2005) and this permeates the teachers' talk about their work with the children and with pedagogical documentation.

Finally, the teachers see that with the help of pedagogical documentation, parents are not only able to be involved in their children's experiences, but they also gain understanding of the pedagogical practices. In line with this, Åberg and Lenz Taguchi (ibid.) ask how parents can be expected to influence professional practice if teachers cannot describe the child's everyday life at preschool and explain the children's learning. In this case study, it is evident that teachers see pedagogical documentation as having a valuable role in representing what happens at the preschool for parents.

Conclusion

In summary, pedagogical documentation appears to help individuals to be connected to others and to the world. It takes advantage of ordinary moments in children's lives at the preschool and turns them into special moments of learning or discovery. It helps deepen adults' understanding of children's learning and creates opportunities to strengthen relationships between children, teachers and families. The teachers in this chapter have shown courage in sharing insights into their experiences; their thoughts illustrate the rich possibilities of pedagogical documentation, while acknowledging the complexities of decision-making within their preschool community. It is through the sharing of such experiences that teachers learn from one another and the profession continues to grow and develop.

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