

<https://helda.helsinki.fi>

Commentary1: Living with a Growing Idea

Lipponen, Lasse

Sage

2017-08-09

Lipponen , L 2017 , Commentary1: Living with a Growing Idea . in A Fleet , C Patterson & J Robertson (eds) , Pedagogical Documentation in Early Years Practice : Seeing Through Multiple Perspectives . Sage , Los Angeles, CA , pp. 55-57 .

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/310298>

unspecified

acceptedVersion

Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository.

This is an electronic reprint of the original article.

This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Please cite the original version.

Lipponen, L. (2017). Commentary: Living with Growing Idea. In A. Fleet, C. Patterson & J. Robertson (Eds.) *Pedagogical Documentation in Early Years Practice: Seeing Through Multiple Perspectives*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage, p. 55-57.

Interest in pedagogical documentation continues to grow. We are, however, at the very beginning of understanding all of the educational and research uses and consequences of documenting and using documents in early childhood settings. The three chapters by Robertson, Fleet and Patterson, Bjervås and Rosendahl, and Stobbs, Harvell and Reed advance our scientific understanding of pedagogical documentation. Especially, they expose us the complex issues of pedagogical documentation and professional decision-making. Describing and analyzing a decision-making process, the authors cross the boundary of the classical divide between content and process, and demonstrate the meaning and consequences of the multi-voiced nature, and multiple functions of pedagogical documentation. All these chapters stress the importance of pedagogical documentation as a way of being and living with children.

These chapters, however, are not only about pedagogical documentation and decision-making, but they all ask, either implicitly or explicitly, more pro-founding question: what exactly are we talking about, when referring to pedagogical documentation, and how should we understand it both theoretically, and as a social practice. Despite giving slightly differing answers, these three chapters share at least one common idea, namely, that moving around terrains of early childhood settings, people always produce and leave traces, either material (like notes) or symbolic and immaterial manifestations (like memories) (Cussins, 1992; Ferraris, 2013). In the process of pedagogical documentation, we are giving form to experiences by producing objects that congeal them into “thingness” (Wenger, 1998); traces are turned into inscriptions, and finally, perhaps inscriptions into documents.

Documents, such as photographs, notes, pictures, and curriculum, play a crucial role in pedagogical documentation, and in studies introduced in these three chapters, in decision-making. Despite the central role of documents in pedagogical documentation, I think, that in most of the studies, documents are mainly taken as neutral tools. There exist a few theories that take the role of documents (or artifacts in general) seriously. From Vygotskian (1978) point of view, documents carry deep cultural meanings. As the three chapters demonstrate, documents are always complex, fluid and transitional, and have a multi-voiced nature (Engeström 1990), and they always imply more possible uses, and consequences than their intended one. In a decision-making, documents mediate communication between different parties by offering a point of shared reference. In the case of children, documents such as photos, help to mediate children’s memories and experiences and, in doing so, provide support in transforming life as lived to life as told, and vice versa (Lipponen, Rajala, & Paananen, in press).

The multifaceted, and very special nature of documents is nicely conceptualized and argued by Ferraris (2011; 2013). Not just any trace or inscription can be considered as a document. According to Ferraris (2011; 2013), documents are special kind of things in a social sphere. They are constructed through traces (for example photo, note, curriculum), and inscriptions. A trace that is registered and used for a particular purpose – and is shared by more than two people – can be

understood as an inscription. Only an inscription with institutional value can be regarded as a document. Thus, the minimum requirement to consider something as a document is that it has social significance. Because of their nature, having institutional value, documents are powerful tools: they can have control and influence over people and events, and as the three chapters show, serious consequences for the construction of social reality in early childhood settings (Ferraris 2013).

Thus, if we want to develop and transform pedagogical practices or decision-making in early childhood settings with pedagogical documentation, there are at least three things we should seriously consider. Firstly, we need to enhance the formation of inscriptions, and keep them alive, and especially through pedagogical documentation. This includes specific inscriptions for further actions instead of mere traces (descriptions): easily pedagogical documentation turns into a pure registration of facts, without any intention of using the traces later. Secondly, we need to recognize inscriptions with institutional value: these are the tools with transformative nature. Recognizing inscriptions with institutional value means following the chain of consequences they produce in space and time for everyday decision-making. These two concerns open up a possibility for shared decision-makings, and building up, for example, more participatory early childhood education. Thirdly, we need to understand more deeply the life cycle of documents. As stated by Thompson (1979), things (objects) are in many cases transient lasting only for a short time - they very easily lose their value and turn into rubbish. This can, of course, happen with documents as well. Or, in some occasions documents can become durables. From this point of view, the interesting question is, what happens to documents after they have been used to reflect and mediate decision-making? Do they somehow remain durable in people's daily lives in early childhood settings, or is their destiny to become rubbish? And if they are refound, and rubbish is put into practice, how does this happen, and do they become documents once again? These three chapters open up some possible directions for answering these three demands.

References

Cussins, A. (1992). Content, embodiment and objectivity: The theory of cognitive trails. *Mind*, 101, 651-688.

Engeström, Y. (1990). When is a Tool? Multiple Meanings of Artifacts in Human Activity. In Y. Engeström (Ed.), *Learning, Working and Imagining. Twelve Studies in Activity Theory* (pp. 171–195). Helsinki: Orienta-Konsultit Oy.

Ferraris, M. (2011). Social Ontology and Documentality. In, G. Sartor, P. Casanovas, M. Biasiotti, and M. Fernández-Barrera(Eds.), *Approaches to Legal Ontologies, Social Ontology and Documentality* (pp. 83–97). London: Springer Science Business Media.

Ferraris, M. (2013). *Documentality: Why it is necessary to leave traces*. Fordham University Press.

Lipponen, L., Rajala, A., Hilppö, J. & Paananen, M. (in press). Exploring foundations for visual methods used in research with children. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*. DOI:10.1080/1350293X.2015.1062663.

Thompson, M. (1979). *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value*.
Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher mental processes*.
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge :
Cambridge University Press.