

PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTATION IN CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: A REVIEW OF CONCEPTS

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Abstract

Documenting is a complex, dynamic process that is still difficult for early childhood educators today. It is more than describing and narrating the events, encompasses the selection, interpretation, reflection, and evaluation of them. It requires a close look from educators on all children and at all learning times, including moments of free exploration, and a reasoned reflection of practice in general. Considering the ideas of Malaguzzi, mentor of the Approach Reggio Emilia, systematically documenting the child's learning processes offer memories to educators, children, and their families. It also acts as a starting point for new learning and allows educators to improve their practices through reflection. This study focuses on the in-depth reading of scientific articles by different authors, intending to understand the evolution of the pedagogical documentation concept, as well as knowing different current approaches to evaluation in education. It assumes a qualitative methodology, which aims to access the authors' conceptions through heuristic and hermeneutic processes. In this sense, the investigative process followed the following steps: (i) research and systematization of the relevant literature; (ii) organization of relevant texts on pedagogical documentation, in a diachronic way, to analyse the evolution of the concept in childhood education; (iii) collection of ideas for education, expressed by the authors, framing them historically; (iv) establishing relationships between the different designs. Pedagogical documentation is analysed as a form of evaluation, with a relationship with the construction of participatory pedagogies. The data that emerged from the analysis revealed the importance of knowing the evolution of the concept of evaluation, to document the processes and integrate the right of participation into the institutions' daily practices. The importance of formative strategies that allow educators to understand their role in the construction of evaluation is reinforced. Strategies are also evidenced, including for children, to make visible the processes of documenting. It should be noted that this form of evaluation is based on a time-consuming but rewarding process, as it allows us to focus on the process and to show progress.

Keywords: Evaluation, children, kindergarten teachers, literature review.

1 INTRODUCTION

Several pedagogical approaches focus their action on valuing the child as an active participant in their learning, highlighting all their skills of discovery of the world around them. However, in the current educational reality, there is an action centred on traditional methodologies, focused on professionals, with a little active role for children [1] and the relationship between educational practices and children's interests is scarce [2].

To understand the potential of children's actions, both in development and learning and in creating situations that complexify discovery, the educator must develop skills that allow them to observe, narrate and analyse the child's actions while playing. Early childhood educators need to adopt participatory pedagogies, valuing the voice and the action of children, to ensure respect for their rights [3]. According to studies carried out in Europe [4], teachers must seek continuous professional development to achieve this. Educators should, among other things, reflect on their practices, how they can enhance the development of children and how the evaluation process should take place. Assessment and its process have long been debated, taking into account the search for the best way to assess child development but also the quality of early childhood education [5].

However, nowadays it is still verified that educators have difficulties in the implementation of the children's assessments. The way of assessment that is usually developed in early childhood education institutions is circular and not very focused on a holistic perspective. Educators should see the child as a whole, paying attention to the child's physical, personal, social, emotional and cognitive well-being [6]. In their actions, educators seem to focus on the evaluation of products rather than processes. Furthermore, these professionals experience difficulties in carrying out careful and detailed observation of the children, which should include highlighting the processes of their action: interactions, dialogues, movements, interests, achievements, etc.. It is difficult for them to make descriptive records of the action of children and the group and this may happen due to a lack of time or lack of knowledge.

According to the OECD [7], the most appropriate way to monitor children's development process is through descriptive assessment using pedagogical documentation. According to Boehm and Weinberg [8], the pedagogical documentation differs from other assessment methods because it requires a negotiation between content and process. In other words, there is a concern to highlight the learning process and not only what children have learned [9]. It is also for this reason that it can be said that pedagogical documentation is a central point in participatory pedagogies [10]. Pinazza and Fochi [10], refer that this view of the participatory pedagogies for the assessment allows us to highlight the competencies of adults and children based on their authorial competence. They also point out that quality educational practices encourage learning that is increasingly expanded.

2 METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on an in-depth reading of scientific articles by different authors, aiming to understand the concept of assessment and the changes over time, as well as to strengthen pedagogical documentation as a means to assess. It also seeks to understand the role of the adult and the action of the child in the context of assessment through the processes of pedagogical documentation.

This study assumes a qualitative methodology, which seeks the authors' conceptions through heuristic and hermeneutic processes. In this sense, the investigative process followed the following steps: (i) research and systematisation of the relevant literature; (ii) organisation of relevant texts on pedagogical documentation, in a diachronic way, to analyse the evolution of the concept in early childhood education; (iii) collection of ideas for education, expressed by the authors, framing them historically; (iv) establishing relationships between the different designs.

The pedagogical documentation is analysed as a way of children's assessment and considered a dimension of the participatory pedagogies. This study analyses the policies in Europe but also alludes to the practices taking place in the Portuguese context.

3 ASSESSMENTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The form of evaluation has changed its performance as the world progresses and is closely related to human activity [11]. According to Barlow [12], evaluation emerges to respond to social demands and over time has played several functions. Studies show that the evaluation as it is known today has little more than a century and that the school environment has also undergone changes in conceptualization and practices over time [13]. According to Pinto's study, at first, the evaluation served the organization and management of educational systems. In a more current concept, the assessment is understood as a regulator of learning [13].

The topic of evaluation has appeared in the very recent past on education policy agendas, and, as an activity that falls within the social field, it is something with multiple dimensions [13]. Evaluation should be seen as revealing the truth and understanding that there is not only one form of evaluation, but several evaluations [13], [14]. It is understood that the different forms of perception of evaluation are more quickly spread at the theoretical level than in practice [15].

According to Vail [16], even though evaluation has increased social visibility and engages a central place in education, this visibility does not seem to be accompanied by a deep reflection of concepts and the way it is used. Understanding the functions of assessment and taking a close look at its contribution to education also allows us to keep up with developments in society [13].

Focusing attention on early childhood education in Portugal it is possible to see that the concept of assessment appears in the recent past. In the past, the evaluation processes were not looked at as it is observed today. There was no systematic evaluation and information was not shared with the children's families [17]. According to Zabalza, this event may have to do with the fact that the assessment at this level of education is still not understood by everybody [18].

Analysing briefly and diachronically the official documents in Portugal on the guidelines for pre-school education about assessment it can be seen that:

- The most distant record in official documents in Portugal appears in a Ministry of Education document from 1978. In this document, the importance of children's progress is highlighted, and it is described that this progress should be observed and analysed, as well as the pedagogical action according to the defined objectives. However, there is still no explicit approach to the word assessment [19];

- In 1979, with decree-law 542/79 (Statute of Kindergartens), a new responsibility arose for educators, that of organising a biographical register for each child [20];
- With the definition of the Basic Law of the Educational System of 1986 greater importance was given to the teaching and learning processes in early childhood education and the inherent assessment [21];
- In 1991, the first explicit reference to assessment appeared, appearing in the pedagogical guidelines and strategies for pre-school education, until then there was no reference to assessment [22];
- In 1997, with the creation of the Curricular Guidelines for Pre-School Education (OCEPE), the concept of assessment is already very present. In these guidelines it is possible to see that educators must put into practice a set of actions - observing, planning, acting, evaluating, communicating and articulating [23].
- With the most recent Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-School Education (OCEPE), from the year 2016, the concept of pedagogical documentation as a formative assessment emerges [24].

Starting from the most recent official document in Portugal it is perceived that to evaluate is a central point in the educational intentionality. According to the authors, to evaluate "consists of comparing each one with themselves to situate the evolution of their learning over time" [24, p. 15]. For the authors, the pedagogical documentation "is intended to understand and give meaning to the learning carried out by the children and to the pedagogical daily life". [24, p. 106].

Assessment should be viewed according to different ethical principles and should be consistent with everyday practice. It is argued that these principles should be understood by all participants and that it arises from a holistic assessment perspective. Based on what Oliveira-Formosinho et al. [25] the principles set out in Table 1 were adapted and defined.

Evaluation in early childhood education. Given the above, it is understood that evaluation and pedagogical documentation are key points in early childhood education. It is believed that assessment based on children's learning processes leads to substantially richer qualitative approaches [26]. In other words, it is possible to understand what is learned in greater depth through what is narrated descriptively than what is only selected through an evaluation grid.

Studies in Europe show that there is still a way to go regarding the participation of children and families in assessment. In the study by Blaisdell et al. [27] the authors point out that there is still a way to go between what is standardised as being an assessment and the emergence of an assessment based on play and on what children do. They report that there is a great deal of pressure to analyse the documents produced and to assess them based on standardised criteria [27].

According to Gandini and Edwards [28], documentation can appear as a research cycle, composed of different stages. The cycle starts with the clear formulation of the question, goes through the observation and collection of information, followed by the organization and analysis of the data, reformulation of the questions according to the analysis and will allow planning and answering the study objective. Figure 1 shows the adaptation of the pedagogical documentation cycle.

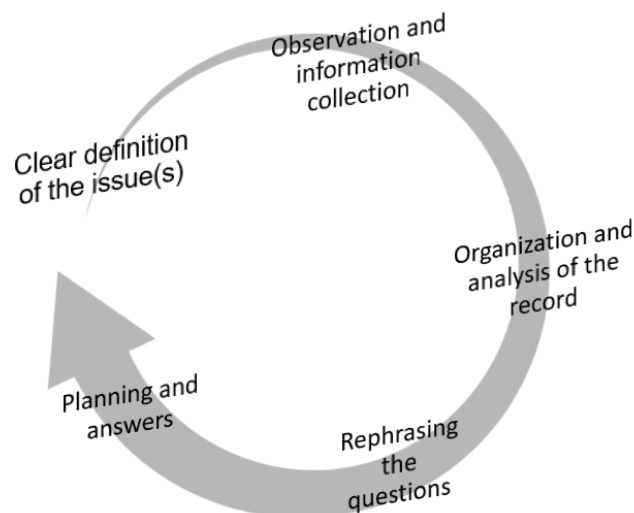


Figure 1. Pedagogical documentation cycle. Adapted from Gandini and Edwards.

The continuous learning of children and adults, the questioning and reflection on everyday life and educational practice, creation of meanings for what is happening, makes this cycle happen in an upward spiral [10], [28].

3.1 Pedagogical documentation as a means of evaluation

In a chronological analysis, and in the light of what has been previously mentioned, throughout Europe, pedagogical documentation to evaluate processes began to be studied in the 1990s. The literature reveals that pedagogical documentation can only be considered pedagogical if and when there is a reflection on it [9].

Pedagogical documentation leads to an understanding of children as unique and individual beings, contrary to the pattern, as was the case in the past, of treating everyone as the same [29]. According to Dahlberg et al. pedagogical documentation reveals itself as a tool for researching the teaching and learning process [30].

Over the years pedagogical documentation has been understood as a process that records the learning of children, early childhood education professionals, children's families and institutions [10], [31]. It is reinforced that it is a process that gives voice to the child and puts the focus on the practices of professionals [32]–[35]. Pedagogical documentation is situated within participatory pedagogies since it is based on the perspective of giving meaning to a new vision of the image of the child and the adult [35], [36]. In participatory pedagogies, children's perspectives are expressed through different languages (conversations, artistic compositions, drawings, dramatic, musical or corporal representations, among others) [35], [37].

Photographs, texts, recordings, and concrete artefacts such as drawings reveal themselves to be the content of pedagogical documentation. These contents represent what children have done or said, and how the professional, who observes and records them, understands them in the teaching and learning context [29]. In this process of pedagogical documentation, which takes place in a collaborative way among all the intervening parties, the contents that emerge from it should be visited and revisited whenever one wishes or considers it necessary, to promote acts of reflection on what has happened [38].

The use of different methods and techniques, allows all children to record and document their actions, ideas, feelings and wishes and makes it follow an ethical pedagogical line of respect for the child [35]. For adults it allows them to improve their observation, always thinking about the important question of how to become a better observer [10]. Adults must be aware that they cannot observe everything because sometimes several things happen at the same time. Adults need to have the power of selectivity, thinking and analysing of what they feel is most relevant to record [10]. It is natural that these choices depend from individual to individual, on what catches their attention or interests them to observe and that changes with time [10].

In educational documentation, the procedures to be used in data collection should be deliberate and used systematically, always starting from a question or problem [10]. The definition of the question/problem gives meaning to the observation and will determine what is contained in the phases of observation (what, who, how, when and where is observed) [31].

3.1.1 *Contribution from Loris Malaguzzi in Reggio Emilia*

The Reggio Emilia approach, founded by Loris Malaguzzi, has made major contributions to issues of child assessment and, specifically, to pedagogical documentation [29]. This approach is based on a social constructivist perspective and therefore argues that through the critical context of the relationships that the child establishes, he/she acquires knowledge [39].

This methodology encourages the active collaboration of all stakeholders, seeks that conflict resolution and recognition of differences are always present and that there are different ways of knowing, demonstrating and interpreting knowledge in the context of early childhood education [39], [40]. It is emphasised that documentation is at the centre of this approach. The educators also use it to fulfil their role as researchers of their practice and the children's action. [40].

According to Edwards et al. [41], what early childhood educators in Reggio Emilia call "documentation" emerges as a form of communication [41]. The authors reveal that for educators, documenting systematically served the purpose of three crucial functions:

- "to offer children a concrete and visible 'memory' of what they have said and done, to serve as a starting point for the next steps in learning" [41, p. 25];

- "to offer educators a tool for research and a key for continuous improvement and renewal" [41, p. 25];
- "to offer parents and the public detailed information about what is happening in schools, as a means of getting their reactions and support" [41, p. 25].

According to Giamminuti et al. [42], in Reggio Emilia pedagogy the documentation claims subjectivity. This subjectivity allows "rowing against the tide" of decontextualised and the so-called democratic assessment tools that exist elsewhere in [42]. However, this is a collective subjectivity [42]. It is a collective subjectivity, which does not allow individual action to take place but allows a relationship, an awareness of what is happening. [43]. The pedagogical documentation is the place where different dogmas fit, from the children's interests, the assumed methodologies and even the adults' ways of acting. [42].

The roots of pedagogical documentation are supported by collaborative processes and are therefore not easily adopted by kindergartens where transmissive pedagogies reign [9], [29]. However, with the growing dissemination of the philosophy practised in Reggio Emilia schools around the world, pedagogical documentation has gained prominence in official documents from several countries, as is the case of Portugal, and, therefore, it is also part of the contents of teacher training and research in early childhood education [10].

3.2 The educator's shared assessment with the child

For participatory pedagogies evaluation is only meaningful when there is a clear sharing between educator and child, and whenever possible when families are involved. The teacher, as well as the child, has a central role when it comes to documenting the action. An educator committed to evaluation is one who investigates, asks and creates [44]. The strategy of documenting allows the educator to see, reflect, project and narrate daily life and, therefore, to transform pedagogically and construct meanings of his or her practice and the children's action [44].

For educators following a participatory methodology, documentation plays several roles: (i) assists in listening to and observing each child in their individuality; (ii) highlights what is done from the curriculum; (iii) promotes professional development; (iv) demonstrates the development of children's ideas, theories and learning [40], [45] [44].

The educator who is interested in the action of documenting is the one who observes the child and encourages him, makes notes of what the child does and proposes challenges to his development [44]. They should always play these roles from the perspective of a documentation cycle. Educators should have as a resource and aid notebooks, cameras or video cameras that allow them to capture the moments. No one observes everything at the same time, so the educator has the role of selecting what is important to observe, and often they end up being participant-observers [10]. It is stressed that the educator who documents assumes the posture of being present, in the most literal sense of the word, but which is based on the disposition and personality of the educator [46].

The process of documenting allows the educator to evaluate to adapt the activities he proposes to the group of children and each one, but it also allows him to manage the concepts learned in theory with the experiences of daily practice. In this way, the educators also have the opportunity to situate their practices and recognise themselves in their professional "I". [47]. In the study by Alaçam and Olgan [9], the authors reveal that most of the educators who did pedagogical documentation were satisfied with their practice [9].

In addition to the above, documenting allows the educator to give the child a voice, and to reveal to them how curious the child is [35]. For the child, documentation offers a broader view of her/his life [47]. For children, documentation can serve the purpose of supporting group reflections and even support the explanation of individual ideas. Documentation serves social and cognitive purposes [39].

According to the study by Fleck et al. [40] allowing children to follow the documentation process and the products that result from it has significantly increased their memory of specific facts about an event [40]. In a study by Rintakorpi and Reunamo [48], the authors found that teaching documentation was used more frequently with older groups of children than with younger groups. [48]. The authors also show that learning documentation can be a great ally in transitions, especially in the transition from family care to the school context, and that it greatly facilitates communication with families. [48]. The authors argue that pedagogical documentation makes communication possible and therefore it should be implemented even with younger children [48].

In this relationship, the potential that educational documentation has for children's families is also highlighted. It is through this that parents or relatives gain a deeper understanding of their children's learning and also acquire skills to communicate their children's learning to educators [29].

4 CONCLUSIONS

During the early years of life, for healthy child growth to occur, there must be responsive and rich interactions, combined with a stimulating and free [49]. Pedagogical documentation can become an ally in today's education, whether to consciously assess children, support educators in their actions or for parents and teachers to gain a deeper understanding of children's interests, leaving aside what is traditionally assessed [29].

Documenting is the act of narrating and reporting choices highlighting the identity and learning of children (individually or in groups), professionals and the institution [31]. According to Mesquita [35] when educators document they have the opportunity to build an image about themselves, the children and the pedagogy lived. The same author mentions that documentation becomes a lens to understand the way educators relate to children and rethink the environment offered to them [35].

The use of different techniques and strategies for documenting allows an opening for professionals, families, and children to document what they learn. In this way, the traditional ways of evaluating the pathways of each child are being broken by [35]. The pedagogical documentation does not fit in the transmissive pedagogies, on its side it allows the child to be listened to and his rights to be guaranteed [35].

In the past, the evaluation processes were not viewed in the same way as they are today. Currently, there are already qualitative leaps in evaluation processes. However, there is still some way to go before evaluating and documenting systematically and sharing among all stakeholders. It is reinforced that this is a path that can begin in initial teacher training, bringing together theoretical and practical knowledge. It is concluded that evaluation and pedagogical documentation are key points in early childhood education.

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