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Systematic documentation: structures and tools in a practice of communicative documentation

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Abstract

Swedish preschool teachers must systematically document activities in the preschool in order to evaluate the quality of these activities. Pedagogical documentation is one form of documentation that is proposed. The aim of this article is to discuss and create knowledge of structures and tools based on different communicative aspects of pedagogical documentation. The empirical data consists of statements from preschool teachers with many years of experience of using pedagogical documentation. Their statements have been analyzed based on Wartofsky's concept of primary, secondary and tertiary artifacts. The study points to the importance of various tools of organisation in providing direction and frames for documentation in order to enable structures of communication built on rhizomatic learning.
Keywords

Pedagogical documentation, mediating artifacts, systematic documentation, preschool

Introduction

In Sweden, 83% of all children aged one to five go to preschool (Skolverket, 2014). The state is responsible for the laws and regulations that govern preschool education, as Sweden strives as a nation to provide equivalent quality of preschool education throughout the country. The preschool curriculum states:

The quality of the preschool shall be regularly and systematically documented, followed up, evaluated and developed. Evaluating the quality of the preschool and creating good conditions for learning requires that the child’s learning and development be monitored, documented and analyzed (Skolverket, 2010, p.14)

Local authorities and others responsible for preschool provision such as private providers and non-governmental organisations are responsible for ensuring a place in preschool for each child from the age of one. The requirement to document learning and to follow up, evaluate and develop the preschool's activities has increased over the last few years in conjunction with the revision of the preschool curriculum.

In a recent study of three Swedish preschools Vallberg Roth (2015) found that teachers use multiple forms of documentation and, correspondingly, multiple forms of assessment. Vallberg Roth concluded that assessment in preschools is not purely formative or summative but rather, as she termed it, transformative assessment (ibid, p.69). This kind of assessment involves educators using various theoretical perspectives and forms of documentation. Consequently, Vallberg Roth observed that some teachers alternated between goal-oriented
assessments, based on pre-established learning outcomes, and ad-hoc assessments that were not based on predetermined criteria.

This article discusses an alternative approach to systematic documentation based on pedagogical documentation. It presents and discusses the practice of communicative documentation. This involves a reconceptualization of systematic documentation from a purely outcome-driven practice (Swedish Education Act, chapter 4, paragraph 5). Instead systematic documentation is reconceptualised as meaning making in terms of rhizomatic learning, that is non-linear, and takes unexpected routes (Dahlberg et al., 2001). In the practice of communicative documentation forms of organization among children and teachers are created to enable communication about pedagogical documentation as meaning making. Dahlberg et al. (2001) critically questioned, from a postmodern perspective, absolute knowledge, universal truth, and scientific neutrality. Specifically, they argued that meaning-making is a central concept based on the idea that there are multiple ways to describe reality; consequently, the entire logic of the “quality discourse” is questioned (Dahlberg et al., 2001).

Pedagogical documentation is often described as a fundamental way of making children's and adults' meaning-making processes visible. This kind of documentation provides opportunities to get closer to children’s own strategies for learning (Olsson 2013; 2012; 2009). Olsson (2009) argues that the traditional way of working with preset learning outcomes is to “tame” processes of learning. Alternatively, using pedagogical documentation opens up new routes in a project that may lead to other outcomes than those that have been predetermined. This means that continuous systematization in preschool activities guided by this meaning-making discourse needs to be arranged differently than in an activity guided by the quality discourse. If predefined quality indicators or objectives are not central to conducting systematic documentation work, what then creates systematization in a logic based on meaning making?

The aim of this article is to create knowledge about structures and tools for communication in
the work of pedagogical documentation and to thereby contribute to knowledge about how the organization of such a practice can be shaped based on what Dahlberg and others call the “meaning-making discourse.” I will begin by discussing pedagogical documentation as a tool with multiple purposes. I will then introduce Wartofsky's concept of primary, secondary and tertiary artifacts as a tool for analysis. Finally, the discussion is presented.

**Pedagogical documentation creates new conceptual and communicative tools**

Gunilla Dahlberg, after a series of visits to the preschools in Reggio Emilia, was inspired by the documentation work she saw and collaborated with Hillevi Lenz Taguchi to developed a philosophy of pedagogical documentation. Dahlberg and Lenz Taguchi (1994) describe a vision of a transformed practice, where pedagogical documentation is a condition for the exploratory approach they want to initiate in Swedish preschool education. Dahlberg et al (2001) describe pedagogical documentation as a transformative force: the conversations with children, parents, and colleagues about the documentation material make the educational content as well as the meaning making processes themselves visible. This allows for changes in the way activities in the preschool are done. By adding the word “pedagogical [authors emphasis] could the relationship between documentation and the basic questions of curriculum theory “why, what, how” be made visible” (Dahlberg and Elfström, 2014: , p.272).

Initially research into pedagogical documentation, including discourses, language and actions, were based on social constructionist theories. More recently research has shifted towards posthumanist perspectives that include a focus on material and physical aspects (Palmer, 2012). Lenz Taguchi calls these posthumanist approaches to pedagogical documentation an intra-active pedagogy and argues that this creates movement in teaching processes that leads to new ways of doing and being (see for example, Lenz Taguchi, 2010). Thus pedagogical documentation is considered to be a performative agent with matter and artifacts (for example,
a written file) contributing to producing power and change. An observation, as an example, may change a person's way of thinking or being in the moment it is discussed. Created in the work with and research on pedagogical documentation are new philosophical and theoretical concepts—or conceptual and communicative tools (Munkhammar, 2001; Nilsson, 2003) for how preschool staff can relate to the pedagogic work. Concepts such as the meaning-making person (Dahlberg et al., 2001) or the fact that pedagogical documentation is described as motor, agent, force and knowledge apparatus (Palmer, 2012) suggest new ways of thinking and acting in the pedagogical work of the preschool. Lindgren (2015) describes examples of this kind of posthuman approach in a study of preschool teachers interested in posthumanist theories. In her observations, Lindgren describes these teachers, in their use of pedagogical documentation, as talking about the children interacting with something rather than interacting with someone.

**Pedagogical documentation stories of practice?**

Pedagogical documentation has been presented as an evaluation tool. Krechevsky and Mardell (2006) contended that when a preschool teacher decides to observe, she or he consequently begins to consider why the practice is designed as it is. Documentation work therefore starts out as a form of narrative self-assessment (Skolverket, 2003) because documentation is produced from something that the preschool staff member has chosen to observe and that will eventually become a document that is analyzed (ibid.). Processes and content are the focus (Dahlberg et al., 2001). What is observed is based on assumptions and concepts that the preschool teachers already holds (Elfström, 2013). This in turn results in knowledge being produced based on those same assumptions (ibid.). The content of these observations may be a predetermined area of knowledge in a project, which Elfström shows in her study. In this study Elfström presents conversations about children's and adults' meaning making concerning documentation. The study also shows meaning-making processes in a project over
time. Fennefoss, Jansen and Magnusson (2009) have also taken an interest in pedagogical documentation, but prefer to call stories from everyday life in the preschool *stories of practice* [in Swedish: *praktikberättelser*]. The stories are composed *after an event* has taken place and after it has been filtered through the eye and the focus of the intermediary. The intermediary knows the outcome and can look back on the event so that the most essential information is selected and constructed into a story (Fennefoss et al., 2009). The story perspective is central to the compilation of pedagogical documentation. Here, the narratives are not considered "true" but rather as contributing to meaning making (Dahlberg et al., 2001). The structure of the narrative shows how reality is interpreted by the preschool personnel and the way in which it is told: "The narrative's conventions and structure thus also have a bearing on how we construct reality" (Hedegaard Hansen, 2011: , p. 35). Stories of practice, which are produced in the process of pedagogical documentation, construct a worldview of what are considered meaningful acts in the specific preschool in which they are produced. From this perspective, the focus of evaluation should therefore be directed toward teachers' intentions and what they do and how they do it, in order to obtain knowledge about how preschool personnel construct pedagogy and what consequences this has for children (ibid.).

Peer learning tool Possibilities and ethical issues

While pedagogical documentation can be regarded as a narrative self-assessment tool that creates stories about practice, it is also presented as tool for use among colleagues (Kocher, 2008; Buldu, 2010; Lenz Taguchi, 2000; Åberg and Lenz Taguchi, 2005; SOU, 1997:157; Dahlberg et al., 2001; Palmer, 2012; MacDonald, 2007; Goldhaber, 2007; Bjervås, 2011). Buldu (2010) points out that work on pedagogical documentation "creates a professional learning community" (ibid, p.1445). Teachers change and develop their work when they get feedback from their colleagues about what they perceived in the documentations. This can be described as a formative assessment and evaluation of both the individual and the settings
activities (Bjervås, 2011; Elfström, 2013). Lindgren (2012b) argues that using pedagogical documentation allows for increased participation of staff but she questions if it really increases children’s participation. This is often used as an argument among those who advocate for pedagogical documentation. Lenz Taguchi (2012) raises similar concerns. She argues that using pedagogical documentation is a force for emancipation for preschool teachers. Today her concern is that the analytic work that she then proposed becomes too focused on the teacher’s learning, and that it may detract from the important task of engaging with the children (Lenz Taguchi, 2012). Svenning (2011) discusses children’s level of participation and ability to agree or disagree to being documented and what is being documented. Sparrman and Lindgren (2003; 2010) on the other hand discuss ethical issues when using pedagogical documentation and observation materials becomes “visual documentation” (2010). This they argue is described as entirely positive in governing documents as well as elsewhere in literature.

Dilemmas and problems in the use of pedagogical documentation

Several studies describe how preschool teachers search for “the right thing to do” (Patterson, 2012; Lindgren Eneflo, 2014; Holmberg, 2015). In other words, the teachers feel unsure how to interpret the documentation. Teachers are also affected by uncertainty about whether observations should be spontaneous or planned (Lindgren Eneflo, 2014). Buldu (2010) shows similar difficulties based on teachers not knowing what to document and which material to use for reflections. Bjervås (2011) on the other hand shows that preschool teachers are unsure of how much to document. Furthermore, Lindgren Eneflo (2014), in a focus group study, describes participant discussions concerning whether pedagogical documentation should focus on the result of the learning, predetermined learning, or if the learning processes, non-predefined learning, should be the focus in relation to the challenges children were offered.

Pedagogical documentation is based on an ideology that is contrary to predefined learning outcomes. Systematic documentation, therefore, cannot be based on this logic. Instead
another logic has to be developed for structuring the use of pedagogical documentation. Enabling systematic and long-term documentation built upon the use of pedagogical documentation requires the kind of organization and structuring of activities that will allow for this (Elfström, 2013; Alnervik, 2013). The study described herein examines the application of conceptual tools that can create the conditions for organizing a systematization of the use of pedagogical documentation.

Research Study

The data presented here is based on a qualitative study of four preschool units that jointly worked on a three year project (Ljuspunktprojektet), initiated by the Reggio Emilia Institute in Stockholm. The Institute's objective is to stimulate discussion on pedagogical matters through expanding knowledge about the pedagogical philosophy of Reggio Emilia's municipal preschools and to examine how the philosophy can inspire Swedish educators in their work in the Swedish tradition. In the project, preschool staff from different preschools explored, with the support of pedagogical documentation, children's play and learning concerning the scientific phenomenon of light. All participating staff had used pedagogical documentation for a period of 10-15 years.

The data consists of field notes and transcripts of interviews and conversations that took place during the first year of the project, where the participants discussed change and organization of their schools. Most of the participants did not know each other because they came from different schools. During the initial meetings they described the change and how they organized work to enable pedagogical documentation in a common project. The study was exploratory, and was driven by a general interest in how teachers work with pedagogical documentation. The nature of the empirical material was consequently diverse: from a few short notes taken after a meeting with the preschools’ staff and material from the participants' notes from their networking meetings; to transcriptions of interviews and conversations from
visits to the preschools and meetings with participating groups. Out of this material four concrete ways to organize and structure the use of pedagogical documentation emerged.

Systematizing the work of pedagogical documentation

The use of systematic pedagogical documentation has created in these preschools an organization that enables continuous follow-up of the work that is described in this article in terms of the following four headings:

1. Choosing tools for observation
2. Structuring to enable pedagogical documentation
3. Organizing to visualize the documentations
4. Organizing for conversations among colleagues about the content of the pedagogical documentation

The headings indicate the systematizing that takes place on different levels. With the help of Wartofsky's concept of artifacts as primary, secondary and tertiary, I show that systematic pedagogical documentation is complex and dynamic.

Mediation and mediating artifacts

Leontiev (1978) uses the concept of mediating artifact to refer to the various cultural tools that function to mediate the relationship between a person and his/her environment (Engeström, 2005; Leontiev, 1978). Contemporary scholars emphasize the idea that mediating artifacts have both physical and an intellectual/mental dimensions (Cole, 1996). Wartofsky (1979) further develops the idea of mediating artifacts and describes artifacts as primary, secondary and tertiary. As such, we can understand an artifact’s role in human activities based on various perspectives and uses. The terms primary, secondary and tertiary place the focus on how the artifact is used, so one and the same thing can act as primary, secondary and tertiary artifact.
Primary artifacts are the tools that facilitate work. Primary artifacts—such as a pen or a computer—accompany the user and can be understood in the social context in which they are used. Secondary artifacts are representation of human ideas and knowledge of how primary artifacts can be used or understood. They indicate how to think and act in order to solve specific problems. A secondary artifact recreates or represents concepts and skills that are carried out with the help of primary artifacts (Säljö, 2005; Cole, 1996). A book that describes how to work with pedagogical documentation can be understood in this context as a secondary artifact. Tertiary artifacts can be derived from primary and secondary artifacts but are instead abstractions. Creative expression in aesthetic works or scientific reasoning that creates understanding are examples of tertiary artifacts (Säljö, 2005). Tertiary artifacts can mean visions of "possible worlds":

Such possible worlds may indeed reflect the limits of the perceptual practice in a given "actual" world—i.e., a world in which direct outward and necessary productive practice takes place, in accordance with rules, and ontologies evolved through this practice. (Wartofsky, 1979: s.209)

Wartofsky says that tertiary artifacts provide room for the imagination so that new/possible worlds can come into view, which may also reveal limitations in the actual world.

Abductive process
As someone with years of experience in preschool as a teacher, facilitator, and pedagogical leader, my work was grounded in the assumption that pedagogical documentation was a way of thinking more than it was a strict method; however, when I used Wartofsky’s concepts, pedagogical documentation came to have a different meaning. Of course, my own conscious and unconscious assumptions and experiences of pedagogical documentation affected the analysis. Starrin (1994) likens this type of analysis to an "abductive process," which can be understood as a movement that goes back and forth between ideas and observations and
between parts and the whole. Qvarsell (1994) reasons similarly, describing the movement in
the work of analysis:

In abduction one starts from conceptions about the investigated object and
uses theoretical concepts to 'zoom in' on relevant parts and aspects of the field
investigated. One does not investigate hypotheses; rather, it can happen that
one finds something such that it is possible to cobble together tentative
answers in the form of hypotheses, but it always involves a great deal of
movement between theoretical concepts as aids and empirical findings (ibid,
p. 9).

Alvesson and Sköldberg (1994) believe that abduction involves finding "theoretical patterns
or deep structures" with the help of "existing knowledge and frames of reference" (ibid, p. 44).
When I looked at documentation as a tool from the perspective of various aspects of its use,
other components stood out which could explain how pedagogical documentation can be
understood and described as a systematic documentation tool.

Choosing tools for observation

Primary artifacts must be considered within the social context of which they are a part (Cole,
1996; Säljö, 2005). In this study, for example, computers, cameras, notebooks, and
conversations about documentations are understood as primary artifacts because they
facilitate the documentation work and because the participants in the study had become
accustomed to using them.

A preschool teacher describes that, for her, a camera and a notebook are the most important
tools for observation:

I work mostly with the camera, actually. I feel that I'm not very verbal. I don't
like to write. So when I'm going to do something quickly, I'm not there with
the pen, writing. Rather, I put aside my memory and choose with the camera mostly, and then I complement that with notes. I always have a notebook and camera with me. Often I jot down a few words, but it's the images that are somehow the entry point for me. (Interview, 07-02-22)

Cameras and notebooks are part of the social practice of which documentation is a part. These tools facilitate preschool teachers’ documentation, and simultaneously, the photographs and notes that are produced constitute the practice of documentation. The reflections the preschool teacher had during the photo-observation described in the quote above are written down for memory. In this example, the camera is a primary artifact in that it is experienced as the most effective way to quickly produce a piece of documentation. The additional notes can operate both as a primary and as a secondary artifact because they can clarify the purpose of photographs or the reflection during the observation so that the preschool teacher can later have access to the thoughts that occurred when the observation was made.

Another one of the teacher teams studied used notepads placed strategically in different rooms of the preschool. Having the notebooks in these locations allowed the teachers the possibility of jotting down notes or write down their observations whenever they felt the need. This allows one to see that something of interest for the project is documented. These preschool teachers have structured the notebooks in such a way that they know where to look when they want to refresh their memories later on. I remember a visit to these preschool teachers when we discussed a child's learning process. They went back to one of notebooks in which a similar situation that occurred six months earlier was written down. The structure of the notebooks enabled them to quickly locate the occurrence so they could compare and discuss the change they had noticed. The notebooks therefore came to act as primary artifacts in the daily routine of the preschool in that the teachers could quickly write down their observations or notes according to the specific system they had developed for
the books. In addition, the notebooks functioned as secondary artifacts during times of reflection when the teachers could go back and be "guided" by their notes in the book and in this way get support for how the continuing work should be planned.

Structuring tools to enable pedagogical documentation

As primary artifacts, the tool can also be regarded as produced in the use of pedagogical documentation based on the specific intentions that have been developed at the preschool over time. In order to streamline the organization of the pedagogical documentation, a few teachers use PowerPoint presentations that contain templates with prompts to help them reflect on specific issues. The teachers input the week's documentation work into the PowerPoint file and then the team holds a meeting to reflect on and discuss the documentation based on the prompts contained in the template. These questions aid the preschool teachers in the analysis of and reflection on the documentation. The questions also direct the focus of reflection toward children's meaning making. In this way, the questions in the template are a way to continually, and in a systematic way, reflecting on and compiling the pedagogical documentations. The reflection template thus binds together the project work over time. This can be understood as systematization of pedagogical documentation.

The PowerPoint and the reflection template function as primary artifacts in that they streamline and function as structuring tools for the preschool teachers' work.

From a different level, the PowerPoint presentations, which connect the documentation and the work of reflection over time through the template, can also be understood as secondary artifacts. A secondary artifact recreates or represents concepts and skills that are carried out with the help of primary artifacts (Säljö, 2005; Cole, 1996). In this way, they direct the way we interpret the world. The template that was previously described as a primary artifact can be
described, from this aspect, as a secondary artifact. One of the teacher teams described the template as restricting their ability to describe the learning process in the project. Their perception was that the PowerPoint presentation's way of organizing the documentation material led to a linear presentation of the learning process. The tool used to systematize the documentation thus seems limiting for what the preschool teachers felt they wanted to make visible through the documentation. In this way, a tool can hinder rather than enable the development of the teacher’s work including the development of the template as tertiary artifact that could support the teacher’s imagination of their collective work.

Organize to visualize the documentations

The work in the collective project on light was presented on the walls of the preschools in different ways. On the so called “project walls” the preschool teachers visualized both children and adult ideas and thoughts about as well as events of the project. In one of the preschools the wall was full of children’s drawings and visual art. Children in this preschool group were reflecting on ‘how plants know that they are supposed to grow’ and what role sunlight played in this process. One could argue that the children’s use of the drawings functioned as a support for the development of their ideas regarding their hypothesis about ‘how plants know when they are supposed to grow’. These ideas, their hypotheses, function as a kind of tertiary artifact. We also have to consider the fact that Wartofsky’s classification of artifacts theorizes the artifacts as interrelated. That is, secondary artifacts are representations of primary artifacts, and tertiary artifacts offer ways of organizing our experiences of secondary and primary artifacts.

During one of my visits to the preschool I observed that the project wall was empty and that all the materials from the wall were on the floor. When I asked the teachers what had happened one teacher explained that some children had not been happy with the way the material had been presented on the project wall. The children wanted to rearrange the material on the wall
because they felt that the project was not being visualized in the way they wished. This lead to children and preschool teachers together creating a project wall. The comment by the preschool teachers was that the next time they were putting together a project wall the children would have to be part of it during the whole process.

Organizing for conversations with colleagues about the content of the pedagogical documentation

As a tertiary artifact the pedagogical documentation tool, the purpose of which is to aid in the search for meaning making processes in a project, can lead to the opening up of "new worlds," i.e., new ways of seeing, understanding and reconstituting the world—in this case, the preschool. The principals of the preschools had different ways of organizing meetings among the four preschools to give the preschool personnel opportunities to discuss their pedagogical documentation. The meetings became a force for continuity in the documentation work. The preschool teachers presented their documentations and together they discussed the documentation material and how the continuing work could be shaped and implemented for the children. The next meeting functioned as a form of follow-up on this, and so on. The different preschools organized this in different ways: some preschool teachers were given the opportunity to meet weekly, others monthly. By presenting their own documentations and having the chance to reflect on them, the teachers had the opportunity to interpret a situation in different ways. One of the participants said "Yes, that's another way to see it" (I, 08-01-25). Speaking with others about a situation that was documented created a picture for this participant of how situations could be interpreted differently.

At one network meeting I attended, we worked closely with a particular piece of documentation. One of the preschool teachers had documented a one-and-a-half-year-old child's movements in front of the light from an overhead projector. It was a series of images that she first described based on an understanding that the child was watching the motion of
the shadow when she moved her arms and legs in different ways. We decided to try to carefully
study the images, one by one, and in that manner describe the shadow in the room rather than
the child's movement. This thorough review of the shadows in each image meant that the
teacher who had taken the pictures sat and listened to her colleague's descriptions. Slowly, her
understanding of the child's meaning making began to change. When she listened to
everyone's descriptions, she thought about whether the child might have had different
intentions than she had thought when recording the documentation. She started thinking that
the girl might have actually had the intention to pretend that she was riding on an elephant.
The girl had placed the elephant on the glass of the overhead projector, and although the
teacher had noticed this, she had not thought any more about it. But when the documentation
was presented in a different way, i.e., by describing the shadows in the room, what she
regarded as the child's meaning making was given another possible meaning. This, she told
me later, was a powerful experience for her. This event can be regarded as the observation's
emergence as a tertiary artifact, and so the work with pedagogical documentation can be
implicitly understood as another teacher expressed it:

Everyone is together—we are fellow researchers and really have that social
community. We can learn from each other—not just the children from us but
even we [can learn] from the children. (Interview, 07-02-22)

My interpretation is that she hopes that the discussions about the pedagogical documentation
inspire curiosity and interest in children's as well as colleagues' thoughts and ideas. Pedagogical
documentation, in other words, can help the staff become more interested in the children, and
can learn from them. Furthermore, pedagogical documentation supports a way of interpreting
events that promotes their description and understanding from many different perspectives.
Thus, the preschool teachers and the preschool stand out as a democratic meeting place
(Dahlberg et al., 2001; Dahlberg and Moss, 2005), where children and adults have exchanges
with one another and where they can share their understanding of life. Lenz-Taguchi (2013) argues that children who explore based on their own experiences and verbalise this can create knowledge and alternative hypotheses before they encounter scientific truths. Referring to Kirsti Hakkola in Wallin (1993) Lenz Taguchi argues that the explorations are about children having access to their Thoughts and learn to reflect by talking to each other about their experiences and thoughts, which potentially can provide power to act and feel empowering (ibid.).

Discussion

Pedagogical documentation represents a critique of the kind of administrative, quality discourse that dominated early childhood education in the 1990s. Instead meaning making was introduced where the process is the focus. How can a discourse that sprung out of postmodern theories where learning is described as rhizomatic and that has developed into different poststructural/post humanist theories relate to a discourse that focuses on results and goals, with a view of knowledge as neutral, objective and universal? The preschool teachers are caught in the middle of these two discourses having to \textit{do} an everyday practice of documentation to meet requirements related to systematic quality work, while at the same time experiencing pedagogical documentation qualitatively as a representation of the meaning making processes that the teachers and children engage in.

In this paper I have problematized this tension between systematic documentation and traditional systematizing by problematizing what we mean by “systematic.” I have argued that to be able to continually work with pedagogical documentation demands a structuring of practice (Alnervik, 2013; Elfström, 2013; Palmer, 2012). That is, the practice of pedagogical documentation – both the actual day-to-day production of the documentation and the reflective discussions that teachers have based on this documentation - involves routines and structures that allow for systematic consideration of preschool activities. In the
examples discussed above, the participating preschool principals actively worked to create activities that promoted collegial reflection and conversations among the teachers about pedagogical issues and didactical choices. In these arrangements, the pedagogical documentation drove the pedagogical work. The concept of systematization has in this study been transformed to focus on structure and organization based on different aspects of communication and arenas for continuous meaning making.

I have also argued that by using Wartofsky’s (1979) ideas about primary, secondary and tertiary artefacts, we can see the ways in which the teachers and principals themselves created new tools and practices to help them work with the pedagogical documentation in a systematic and dynamic fashion. These tools essentially function to promote more and deeper communication among teachers within the preschools as well as throughout the network of preschools. That is, they are creating what I term “communicative documentation”

Let us revisit the example discussed above. In this study the preschool teachers decided on a topic that focused on an exploration of light. This means that the preschool teachers know which content or activities needed to be documented. The process of producing pedagogical documentation can be described in terms of “phases” where the first “phase” begins when the participants decide on the content. Pedagogical documentation contains other phases that needs to be discussed, negotiated and decided upon. The preschool teachers in the study also show that they have decided when they are to observe and how to produce the material.

In the next “phase” the observation materials are worked through by using a key form of communicative documentation: the reflection template that contains questions used to reflect on the material. As a primary artifact the reflection template makes the work effective since the team knows which questions to use in their conversation. At the same time it can be understood as a secondary artefact because the questions becomes a “manual” for, for
example, newly employed staff or for staff unsure of how to ask questions about the documentation that can lead to reflections and conversations about the content. This basis for reflection acts as a tertiary artefact when the questions require reflections, that is, when the template functions to support a collective imagination about the teacher’s pedagogical work both within and between preschools. The documentation becomes pedagogical when the preschool teachers talk about how the children explore, or what they learn, how they interpret children’s intentions and what the consequences the interpretations have for the preschool teachers – that is when the teachers share, as one of the teachers noted, a “social community” through which they collectively imagine ways of interpreting the activities in the school. The preschool teachers can also discover new aspects of the documentation materials when they have the time to pause and rigorously try to understand what is going on. As a third phase in the process of producing the pedagogical documentation which has been focused on in the conversations are given “answers” in the reflection template with written stories and reflections based on the conversations they have had. In this way stories of practice are continuously structured.

The teachers reported that for them, what tends to emerge with the “slide presentation” format of these pedagogical documentations is a linear story. Storytelling that has been configured about the work during the term is then retold, compiled and made communicable in the slides. The reflection template responds to the need to systematize material over time. This creates a dialogical visualizing process that communicates learning about how children and adults together explore. This form of configuration (Fennefoss et al., 2009) “tames” (see Olsson, 2009) the stories. The risk is that when structures are created pedagogical documentation can become instrumental rather than a living practice.

The networks created by the principles, like the reflection template, also function as another form of communicative documentation. In networks’ preschool teachers have the opportunity
to encounter the documentation materials and practices of teachers in other schools. Meaning making in conversations with other colleagues about their local practices allows the conversation about the materials to change. It is in this collective process of creating a shared culture that we see pedagogical documentation functioning as a tertiary artefact. For example of this is when one of the preschool teachers say “Yes, that's another way to see it.” When colleagues from different preschools communicate with each other on documentations from their different settings a communicative environment is created where the person speaking influences the others thinking as well as being influenced herself when hearing the word said in a new context. This is another examples of artifacts being, primary, secondary and tertiary at the same time.

During the last couple of years some critiques have been raised against pedagogical documentation because it is a form of communicative documentation, and as such impacts on issues of children’s agency and privacy. The critiques center on ethical issues about how the child experiences being documented, how s/he is portrayed in documentation materials and talked about (Svenning and Lindelöf, 2011). There has also been critique concerning the extent to which children actually participate in the documentation work (Lindgren, 2012a). This study has not dealt with these issues since the focus has been the structuring of pedagogical documentation has been the focus. The example of the documentation wall does though show children’s wish to participate in the work. In the example the children did not show discontent with what was shown, rather how it was shown. This highlights the tertiary aspect of the project wall for children’s (and the adults) learning processes. Children’s view about part of the process of the project did not correlate with the preschool teachers, which meant that the children wanted to change the way the process was communicated visually.

Preschool teachers hold a position of power (Dahlberg et al., 2001) when documenting and that is why ethical discussions should always be part of the process. In the systematic use of
pedagogical documentation, communication about what happens in the preschool activities becomes a means for visualizing the preschool teachers part of and contribution to stories of practice. It is an ethical issue that I wish to emphasize here: if teachers are documenting and reflecting on the activities of the children, then they also have a responsibility to reflect on the work they do with the children, and on the work they do to document these activities.

References


