

Peggy

Spreading the News

Sharing the Stories of Early Childhood Education

Worthy Work

Providing for Meaningful Work

Early childhood teachers understand that young children love to be involved with real work—helping to carry, fix, cook, build, wash, plan and organize things. They know that children develop a strong sense of self and interdependence when they participate in activities that contribute to their family and classroom community. Effective teachers know that providing for this kind of involvement is a critical part of working with children.

Setting the table, serving the food, and cleaning up after a meal are all valuable tasks. Rather than just an occasional cooking project, skilled child care teachers plan and provide ways for children to help plan and regularly prepare food.



Children use real tools for cutting and cooking. They develop skills in using the tools as well as honing their small muscle control.



Margie Carter & Deb Curtis

Peggy Naack

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**Sharing the Stories
of Early Childhood
Education**

**Margie Carter
Deborah Curtis**



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a division of
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Child Care

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Why Spread the News?



To take one's observations and images seriously is to take one's life seriously. To write them down is to offer them respect. Like dreams which respond when recognized by offering more dreams, these hunches, seed-ideas, internal pictures, and novel metaphors will respond in kind when they are given life. They will give life in return.

— Connie Zweig in
The Awakened Warrior

An Answer to Sticky Questions

Any qualified early childhood educator will tell you we are not baby-sitters! There is a professional knowledge base and a good deal of skill in our work. We juggle enough responsibility and stress to rival any CEO. Why, then, do we receive so little recognition and respect in our communities? What can we do to educate others about the value of this worthy work and to transform our worthless wages?

Other questions plague us as we go about our jobs. What can we do to counter the misguided pressure for earlier and earlier academic lessons for young

children? How can we convey the importance and meaning of a play-based curriculum to parents and those who are convincing them to the contrary? Is there a way we can be guardians of childhood in our programs, despite their institutional nature, our fears of litigation, and the constraints of regulatory guidelines?

How do we quickly train new staff members who come to us with minimal qualifications in early childhood education? Is there a way to develop a sense of history and community in our child care programs, honoring

diversity while documenting the learning process and engagement we have with each other?

Spreading the News represents one answer that addresses these many concerns. In an age of fast-paced electronic media and print overload, visual images supported by briefly written

narratives can capture attention and raise awareness. "Documentation panels" is the term coming into favor to describe this method for communication, and *Spreading the News* is designed to show you the many uses these can be put to, the skills and tools you will need, and the results you can expect.

Imagine

Imagine a society where young college students vie to get into the early childhood program,

where a manly aspiration is to be a head teacher in a child care center,

where a family provider is the center of all eyes at a party when she says what her job is,

where a Head Start teacher's family displays her CDA diploma on their living room wall,

where a school aged teacher is sought out by a child's sixth-grade teacher for advice,

where family members proudly say that teaching in early childhood has been in their family for generations.

Imagine commercials with child care professionals selling products (like doctors and dentists seem to do so often),

Imagine how much a society like that must value its young children

when those who care for them and educate them are so revered.

(—Beth Menninga, Minnesota Worthy Wage Campaign)

Worthy Work

CREATING ENVIRONMENTS FOR CARE AND LEARNING



This inviting hallway to the toddler and three-year-olds, "COME IN, YOU'RE WELCOME HERE!" It was a shared project among the teachers and older children. Since two and three-year-olds experience anxiety when separating from their parents, this warm hallway is especially helpful as the time they've dropped off on the morning.

One of the most important skills childcare teachers demonstrate in these photos is an understanding of the value and impact of their surroundings on young children.

SKILLFUL teachers

- design rooms that are friendly to the child's size and age.
- use color, light, and space to affect children's moods and behavior in a positive way.
- see the environment as a tool of teaching and caregiving.



A teacher has converted a tiny basement space into a fun room for three-year-olds. Through attention to color, softness, and scale. By keeping things small and close together, she has built an "play house" feeling. As a result the children are very helpful with clean up and feel a great deal of ownership in their little room. This teacher made the very best of a less than ideal space. (We wonder what teachers could do if they had excellent spaces to begin with.)



In this meeting area for toddlers, the teacher has displayed a simple collage the children have made by sticking together. Toddlers often find it difficult to be in a group. Here, they see in a concrete way that they have played a game together happily. The teacher is using the environment to demonstrate their accomplishments in cooperation, inviting them into an early concept of autonomy within their small group.



This master teacher of toddlers has worked with the children to create a large mural. Each time they find something that matches one of the colors nearby, they are invited to tape it to the paper. This project combines color recognition, a language hunt to change to use new vocabulary, and a demonstration how things change over several days. When it's done, they will all help take it apart together. The environment says "PLEASE TOUCH THIS IS YOUR ROOM".



Halfway down the stairs,
It's a rule
Where I sit,
There can't any
Other cutie
Come. Bye
Bye.
... A.A. Milne



This room designed by a teacher for five-year-olds shows a skillful use of color to create a focal point in the circle area where daily meetings take place. Notice the large alphabet which reflects five-year-olds' growing, spontaneous interest in letters and writing.



This teacher has created a very clever alphabet cut from photographs of land and sky scenes. The design gives children an additional clue in recognizing letters and generates many conversations about the letters. Two children were "sight word" reading.

"Which one is the 'W'?"
"It's the lightning bolt!"

This detailed interest in possibility because the teacher has placed it at the children's eye level instead of high above their heads.

Evolution of an idea

Bulletin boards have always been central to school culture, and early childhood programs have been no exception. Teachers use bulletin boards for their own creative outlets, for commercial displays related to curriculum themes, and for showing off art activities planned for children. Some programs even have regulations about the use of bulletin boards, thinking this will ensure their use as an effective communication medium.

Traditionally our favorite bulletin boards have always been focused on children's self-selected work. We've seen teachers create beautiful boards with children's individual or collaborative work displayed in ways that rival any professional art gallery's. Sometimes displays include samples of children's writing or dictated stories. There are classrooms where certain bulletin boards are devoted to postings initiated by the children themselves.

It was Elizabeth (Betty) Jones who first got us to reconsider the use of bulletin boards and to deepen our thinking about the role of representing one's experience in literacy development.

Betty began writing and talking about "the teacher as scribe" and about documenting "master players" among children in early childhood programs. *The Play's the Thing: Teachers' Roles in Children's Play* (Teacher's College Press, 1992), coauthored by Elizabeth Jones and Gretchen Reynolds, inspired us to become scribes documenting children's play as we coached teachers in their child care programs. We saw this as a strategy to help them become more attentive to and curious about children's play, a disposition and skill we see as central to effective teaching.

Then came the tremendous interest in and body of literature about the schools of Reggio Emilia, which have influenced our work. Though we have yet to go to Italy, we had the opportunity to see the traveling exhibit from these Reggio schools, which gave us firsthand experience with the power of documentation panels. We began incorporating the documentation display idea into our work with college students as well as with providers in child care programs, documenting with our pens and camera the learning process of children and adults. (For a fuller description of the

role of documentation panels in the Reggio approach, see *Panels. A description of the meaning and process underlying the oversize displays of work by children.* (Unpublished paper, Ann W. Lewin, Model Early Learning Center, 800 Third St NE, Washington, DC 20002, (202) 657-4148, and Carlina Rinaldi, *Projected Curriculum and Documentation in the Hundred Languages of Children. The Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education*, ed. Carolyn Edwards, Lella Gandini and George Forman. Revised edition. (Abex Publishing, in press.)

As a training strategy to heighten interest and skills in providing for children's learning through play, documentation displays are enormously effective. Within a short time of introducing and modeling the idea in programs, we found that teachers became much more interested in observing children and building curriculum plans around their discoveries. They began creating displays themselves, not just ones with cute pictures from a field trip, but displays that documented the growth of a curriculum idea and the evolution of thinking, understanding, and skill development among the children.

Soon we realized that these displays were also an effective communication tool with parents. As teachers dedicated their parent bulletin board space and newsletter energy to visual displays that told the story of the life evolving in their classrooms, their relationships with parents improved, as did family involvement and support for their programs. One teacher told us of further adapting this idea into open house for families. Parents were given a short description of a stage of play or a child development theme and sent off to study the displays for examples reflecting the descriptions. This is a wonderful example of how work with documentation panels generates its own ideas.

Our most recent work with creating display panels has been in the public education arena. Because we are concerned about the devaluation of both childhood and those who work with children, we began developing portable displays to be used in places like libraries, banks, and shopping malls. People are immediately drawn to the visual images and photographs and then become curious about the briefly written text. We add a supply of brochures related to

the displays so that people can contact someone for further information.

Deciding to “go public” with our displays caused us to give more attention to the aesthetic quality and professional look of our documentation. With money we received from a NAEYC MAG grant, we hired a graphic artist to conduct a couple of workshops where we practiced applying the elements of graphic design to the creation of the Worthy Work display panels. Early childhood educators certainly can’t afford high-end graphic tools, but we found that our profession is filled with artistic talent that can be tapped. In fact, we have also found that providing a more suitable place to channel this talent discourages teachers from their practice of providing pre-cut, product-oriented art projects for children, another positive outcome of this documentation display idea.

Benefiting from Spreading the News

The displays you see in *Spreading the News* represent a range of provider experience and skills. You’ll find ones we’ve used in our teacher education

work. There are examples made by family caregivers and child care teachers to document their curriculum projects and collective history, to convey the learning of individual children, and to improve communication with parents about the life of their children in the program. Also included are samples of displays created as advocacy and public awareness efforts, to document the skills and knowledge of early childhood education, and to illustrate the relationship between quality child care and violence prevention.

As we travel with these displays, people often request copies of the text to use in making their own displays. While we have been willing to provide these, we feel the process of developing a narration for the pictures is one of the most valuable aspects of creating the displays. Picture a group of child care providers coming together with photographs and stories of their daily work with children. As we discuss the thought process that goes into providing environments for children, developing curriculum, observing and setting goals for interventions and interactions, smiles and excitement erupt around the room. Yes! This is what quality child care looks like!



We know it when we see it. When we see it, we can describe it. In the process, we are becoming better and more articulate advocates for children and ourselves.

Spreading the News invites you to get involved in this process. Look over the samples provided here. As you study them, consider examples from your own experience. Is this part of the daily life of your classroom? Would you describe it like this or in a different way? Does it remind you of anything you have read or would like to find in literature on early childhood education? Are there other people to whom you would like

to show displays like these? Moving through the pages of this little book, you will find an overview of many possible uses and examples of documentation displays. We describe learning to observe and collect data and suggest ways to analyze and “broadcast” or spread the news of your documentation with visual displays. We offer suggestions about tools and graphic design tips, provide a sample release form for photographing children, and provide a sample press announcement on the availability of displays for public settings and use by organizations.

In our book *Training Teachers: A Harvest of Theory and Practice* (Redleaf Press, 1994), we open with a quotation from Forrest Carter that has influenced this publication as well: “Gramma said when you come on something good, first thing to do is share it with whoever you can find; that way, the good spreads out where no telling it will go. Which is right.” Our hope is that you will continue the evolution of this documentation display idea, sparking your creativity to spread the news far and wide about the importance of childhood and those who work in early childhood education.

Making the News: The Skill and Art of Observation

The documentation process serves to enhance and stimulate our collective memory as well as to validate on an emotional level the thoughts, feelings and experiences the group had. We found documentation to be strikingly beneficial in enhancing students' courage and pleasure in their learning.

—Carolyn Edwards, Doris Shallcross, and Julie Maloney,
authors and college instructors

The News in Early Childhood Education

At home and in group care and school settings, children reap the most benefits when we pay close attention to who they are, their interests, and developmental themes. We enhance their self-esteem by noticing and making visible their lives and accomplishments. All of this is possible through making and using documentation displays.

Teachers and parents benefit from the documentation process as well. Consider the following scenes:



Who Needs a Change Here?

Fourteen-month-old Marco has been exploring the small hinged boxes that his caregiver, Lenora, has put on the rug. He crawls to an open box, picks it up, looks at it, turns it over, and looks again. He rubs the box around his mouth and moves his tongue across the velvety fabric of its cover. Seeing another box,



Marco drops his and crawls to pick up the next one. He lingers at each box, immersing himself in the investigation with his eyes, hands, and mouth.

Lenora, busily checking the diapering and feeding charts, realizes that Marco hasn't been changed yet. Without noticing his engaged interest in the boxes, she swoops him up, puts him on the changing table, and absently takes a box from his hand. As Marco whines in protest, Lenora responds, "There's no need to cry, honey. It's time to change your pants."

No Afternoon Delight

Toward the end of the afternoon, teacher Jamie quickly reshelves the toys that are scattered throughout her toddler classroom. The children have been joyfully dumping everything out and then pushing the storage containers around the room. They like to scoot the containers close together, fill them with toys, and then squeeze in to sit with them. Jamie has tried to get the children to play with the toys as they were intended but has given up. She realizes they love to dump, push, and carry everything around the room. "It doesn't hurt anything," she says, but she worries that when the parents see such a mess, they'll think she has

no control and their children aren't learning anything. So each day, Jamie reorganizes the room before the parents arrive, leaving no trace of the children's delight for the parents to see.

Alphabets a Must

Four-year-old Zakiya has been building in the block area most of the morning. She and some friends are creating an elaborate block structure with rooms of different shapes and sizes. Some have tall pillars around them; others are long and zigzagged. They have carefully filled the series of rooms with plastic animals.

Miss Williams calls Zakiya over to the project table to finish her alphabet book. After two or three requests, Zakiya reluctantly complies, quickly cuts and pastes a few letters into the book, and then runs back to the blocks. Sighing at Zakiya's lack of interest, Miss Williams tidies up Zakiya's book, cutting the frayed edges of the letters and pasting down the corners. She interrupts Zakiya once again: "Zakiya, come on over here and put your name on this book and put it in your cubby. You need to have it ready to show your momma when she picks you up today."

These are typical stories in early childhood programs. Not the best of news. The developmental activities and interests of the young children went unnoticed and undervalued by the teachers. Children's play is often missed as a significant focus for adult attention. Play is considered childish behavior that must be outgrown. Documentation helps teachers and parents see the important work children are doing during play.

Busy parents, leaving and retrieving their children, look for a safe, clean environment and evidence of learning in things like daily charts, worksheets, and craft projects. They have the confused notion that if they have a paper to take home each day, their child must be involved in meaningful learning activities.

Thus, caregivers and teachers, responding to these expectations and larger societal pressures, spend the majority of their time planning and directing activities. Their days are filled with continuous paperwork, preparing crafts and school readiness activities, housekeeping, and efforts to communicate with parents. With all this, teachers have limited opportunity and

motivation to slow down and notice what's really going on with the children.

Changing the News

When we watch children closely, we see the excitement of scientists in the midst of new discoveries. We come to understand that while playing, children are investigating the properties of physics and mathematics, social interactions, and negotiations. As they pursue questions and hypotheses, trying out their ideas over and over again, they are mastering new understandings and skills.

Looking below the smears and clumps of paint and clay, we see budding artists, architects, engineers, and chemists, exploring how materials feel, look, move, combine, and transform. Children learn from and then use these sensory experiences to represent their ideas and feelings with designs, drawings, sculptures, and drama. Paying attention to, rather than always confining children's boisterous bodies and loud voices, we realize the skill, competence, self-esteem, and joy that come from running, jumping, climbing, and shouting.

Young children need to be noticed and their activities and interests valued and supported. As early childhood professionals, we have obligations to promote play and to counteract the pressures that stifle it. We must shift our focus from paperwork and regulations to children's needs and interests. Primary roles for caregivers and teachers should be observing and detailing what children do and then broadcasting to others why these activities should be taken seriously. More than anything, children need us to become advocates for play and guardians of childhood.

Collecting stories of children's activities and broadcasting them through documentation displays offers a method and a motivation to pay closer attention to the value of children's play. As we focus more on children and their activities, we better know and plan for each individual. We learn more about child development theory because we see it in action.

When parents see the visual stories of an early childhood program, they become delighted and confident in their child's development. Creating documentation displays provides

Compare these examples:

Less Helpful Language

The child worked at the easel.



Helpful Language

Alicia carefully dipped the long-handled paint brush into the container of gleaming yellow paint. Starting at the top, she confidently swished her brush back and forth from one end of the page to other. She continued to cover the entire page with paint until no white space remained.

Notice the specific, detailed descriptions from the *helpful language* column. The language here gives a fuller and more engaging picture of what is happening. When gathering data, think about using the following components of language to find the best words or phrases to enliven your descriptions:

Adjectives: These are words that define or qualify a noun. They add interest and detail to the description. From the example above, notice *long-handled* paintbrush; *gleaming, yellow* paint; *entire* page.

Verbs: These are action words that describe what is happening. You can almost feel the verbs above: *dipped, swished, cover*.

Adverbs: These are words that describe the quality of verbs. They give flair and movement to the description. Notice the adverbs above: *carefully* dipped, *confidently* swished.

If writing is a new venture for you or your co-workers, try working together to generate a list of adjectives, verbs, and adverbs to keep handy with your observation notepad and pen.

Finding the Story Worth Telling

When you've gathered your data and made sense of it, it's time to develop the story. This involves analyzing what you've seen and what you find important. If you have been collecting specific descriptions as described earlier, you have a good resource to start with.

As you practice the art of interpretation, it's useful to keep focusing on the child's point of view. Incidentally, putting yourself in children's shoes is always a renewing and insightful activity for teachers. It increases your sensitivity, understanding, and enjoyment of children and their development. You come away with a new respect for the complexity and importance of most of their self-initiated activities. This is the basis for formulating the story for your documentation panels.

Questions for Interpreting Data and Developing Your Story

- ▲ What are the children doing with the material or objects provided?
- ▲ What seems to be fun and pleasurable about it?
- ▲ How do they talk about it and represent it in their play?

- ▲ What experiences, people, and other materials do they connect with it?
- ▲ What are the children inventing/investigating/understanding through this play?
- ▲ How are experiences building from one day to the next?
- ▲ What new ideas, solutions, and answers are the children coming up with as they play?
- ▲ How do the children's ideas and actions differ over time from their beginning ideas and actions?
- ▲ What can you conclude and summarize about how and what the children are learning?

Linking Your Story to Professional Resources

There are many useful early childhood professional resources to help you analyze and describe the developmental importance of children's behavior and activities and the skills involved in the child care profession. Draw on your favorites to build your story.

High/Scope Key Experiences and Child Observation Records

One of the greatest contributions we have from the High/

Look closely:

What do you see?

HELPING CHILDREN FEEL POWERFUL AND STRONG

Children have active, growing bodies that need space for movement and self-expression. Child care providers carefully plan ways for children to feel physically powerful, enhancing their self-esteem and sense of competence. They know that children need safe, well-planned environments and activities in order to try new things, take risks, and expand their self-confidence.



Climbing is a major developmental theme of childhood. It develops muscles, coordination and a sense of power in our bodies. Children can't get enough of it!



Teachers know that children need opportunities to develop upper body strength with things to pound, throw and catch.



Parachute play provides the chance to roll, jump, reach and stretch. It helps children explore what their bodies can do and develops coordination.



Scope Foundation is their description of key experiences—a codification of child development guideposts to help us recognize and understand a wide range of children’s emerging abilities in their play. These include key experiences in language and literacy, logical reasoning, music, and movement. Teachers in High/Scope classrooms do daily planning around key experiences, record observations and translate these notes into a very user-friendly and authentic assessment portfolio for children.

Even if you are not using the High/Scope curriculum, consider contacting them for a current listing of the key experiences and their Child Observation Record (C.O.R.) system. High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 600 N River St, Ypsilanti, MI 48198.

Emergent Curriculum

In addition to providing a wonderful window into how the staff of a child care program sorts through their understandings of emergent curriculum, Elizabeth Jones and John Nimmo’s book has many examples of webbing and other forms of documentation. The table of contents includes a list of highlighted

boxes for each chapter that are great to use in many different kinds of documentation panels.

Word Pictures or Developmental Profile Charts

There are many child development books and pamphlets that provide brief word pictures or developmental profiles of what children do at various ages and stages of development. Examples like the one below can be useful in helping formulate brief statements for documentation displays.

Social-Emotional Word Pictures for Five Year Olds

positive, self-confident,
self-contained
sensitive to ridicule
has to be right
has sense of self-identity
may get silly, high, wild
enjoys pointless riddles and jokes
enjoys group play, competitive games
aware of rules, defines them for others
chooses own friends, is sociable
gets involved with group decisions
insists on fair play
likes adult companionship
accepts, respects authority
asks permission
remains calm in emergencies

Caring for Infants and Toddlers Book Series

This set of training manuals from Teaching Strategies, Washington, DC, covering all ages and settings for young children, consistently offers useful charts that specifically describe children’s behavior and the learning behind it. The chart below is from volume 1 in the series.

▲ Things an Infant Might Do While Eating a Banana

Pick it up and eat it.
Spit it out.
Finish it and ask for more.
Squish it.
Drop it on the floor and watch it fall.

Try to feed some to a caregiver.

Hear a caregiver call it a banana.
Try to say *banana*.

▲ Things an Infant Might Learn While Eating a Banana

I can feed myself.
I don’t like bananas.
I love bananas.
I can change this. I am powerful.
When I drop something, it falls to the ground.
My caregiver really likes me.
My caregiver likes bananas too.
This thing has a name.
I can communicate.

Essentials of Child Development

Developed by the Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition, this manual has clear, simple descriptions of what children are like and how adults can respond to them. It is a good resource for developing documentation panels about child development, as well as for how adults learn to be skillful caregivers. Here is one such description:

▲ What Children Are Like

Toddlers scribble with markers or crayons.

Children at this age walk up and down stairs. They soon will jump off the lowest step.

Twos love to kick balls. They stand on one foot. Older twos stand and walk on their tiptoes.

▲ How Adults Can Help

Provide thick watercolor markers and wide crayons. Offer large blank sheets of paper.

Have a set of steps made for children to practice walking up and down.

Schedule plenty of time for children to work on these skills during play. Use a rubber ball. Play soft music for children to walk on tiptoes.

Worthy Work

QUALITY INFANT CARE PROVIDES A COMFORTABLE, SAFE, YET CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENT AND TEACHERS WHO ARE OBSERVANT, NURTURING, AND TRULY ENJOY INTERACTING WITH BABIES AS THEY DEVELOP.



BABIES NEED MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO OBSERVE AND PARTICIPATE IN SOCIAL INTERACTIONS. GOOD CAREGIVERS MAKE IT HAPPEN.

CUIDADO DE CALIDAD PARA INFANTES PROVE UN AMBIENTE COMODO, SEGURO, Y ALA VEZ DESAFIADA Y MAESTROS QUE ESTAN OBSERVANDO, DANDO AMOR, Y DISFRUTANDO VERDADERAMENTE CON LOS BEBES EN SES DESAROLLO.



LOS BEBES NECESITAN OPORTUNIDADES PARA OBSERVAR Y PARTICIPAR EN OCASIONES SOCIALES. CUIDADORAS BUENO LO HACEN POSIBLE.

Worthy Work: Bilingual Infant Care

Stages of Play

Piaget's and Erikson's characterizations of children's developmental stages provide useful references for interpreting children's play. These can be found in most books discussing their theories. We especially recommend the discussion of play in Elizabeth Jones and Gretchen Reynolds's, *The Play's the Thing* which includes a table outlining these stages. You can use the following summary to guide you in seeing what questions might motivate a child's behavior in different developmental play stages.

Exploratory Play

The child uses her or his senses to try things out, find out how things work, explore cause and effect.

- ▲ How does this feel, sound, taste, smell, move?
- ▲ What parts and properties does this have?
- ▲ What can I make this thing do?

Constructive Play

The child seems to have a definite plan, makes something, and gives it a name.

- ▲ How can I combine these different things?

- ▲ What can I build with these?

- ▲ Can I make this look like something I know?

Pretend Play

The child acts out ideas and feelings using props.

- ▲ What can I make this thing be?
- ▲ How can I use this to play a role?
- ▲ What can these other things and people become in my play?

Games

Children agree on a set of rules to follow while making up or playing a game.

- ▲ Can I turn these things into a game to play?
- ▲ What rules are needed for this game?
- ▲ How can we make this game more fun?

News with a Purpose

Whether you observe and gather documentation with a pre-planned focus or chart themes that emerge from the children and the life of your program, you can create attractive, effective visual stories to capture the attention of adults and children.

As you set about creating documentation panels, consider your audience and purpose so you can focus on the message of your story.

- ▲ Do you want the children and families in your program to benefit from a visual display documenting their lives together, thereby nurturing a sense of history and of belonging to a community?
- ▲ Are you trying to map the evolution of a curriculum project and thought process that children or adults are engaged in?
- ▲ Is the display intended to highlight the nature and needs of childhood and the knowledge and skills of those who care for children?

Choose the focus and representations that clearly convey a story your audience can benefit from knowing. Sometimes we ask providers and teachers to gather in staff meetings or workshop settings to review observation notes, pictures, and materials they have collected. We bring brief extracts from professional resources such as those suggested earlier. Spreading things out, we first hear what staff think is significant. People build the threads of stories collaboratively and then begin writing brief paragraphs with the chosen focus in mind.

On other occasions, we assign caregivers and teachers to work with a camera, pen, and paper, watching with a focus—for instance, finding examples of play stages, emerging curriculum themes, and program strategies related to violence prevention. It may take several observations to gather enough data to create a display panel. Observations extended over time are more likely to capture the complexity of children's development.

Again we gather, look over the evidence, and begin telling and writing our story. To spread the news, we know our message must be concise and visually appealing. We work together sharing the tools and tips of visual literacy, developing aesthetic preference. As the documentation panels come together, so does the excitement, sense of appreciation, and pride. We understand that we are creators of culture and makers of history. The future is in our hands.



Children's Experiences: Seeing Themselves as Newsworthy



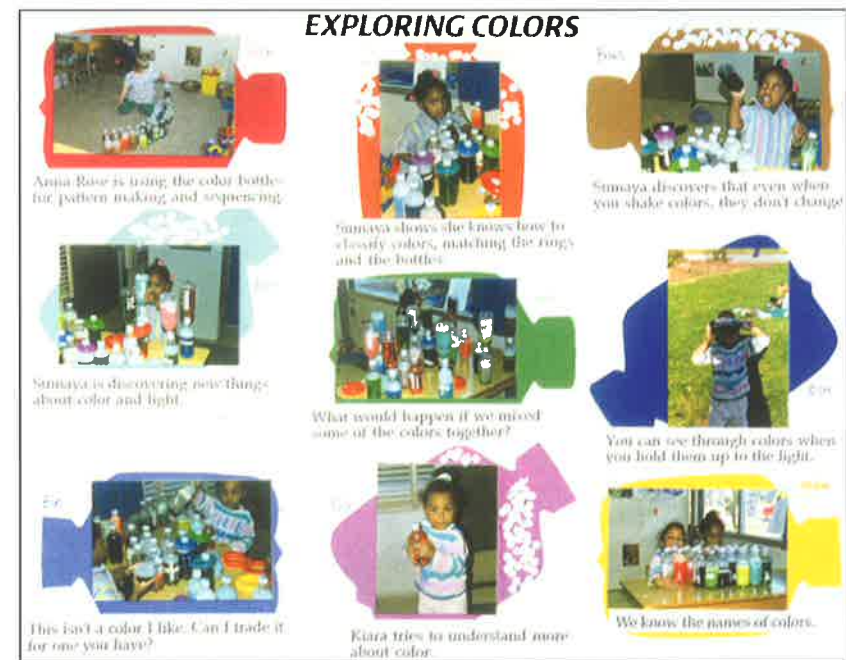
What panels provide to children is the opportunity to see themselves in action, to experience the pleasure of seeing their photos on public display, to study their own thought processes in these mirrors of their minds, and to revisit—and thus rethink, consolidate and extend—their own joyous process of learning.

—Ann W. Lewin

Inspiration from Reggio Emilia

The most sophisticated and impressive use of documentation panels to represent the learning and ideas of children is found in the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy. Those visiting Reggio Emilia or seeing the traveling exhibit from their schools have been inspired to create parallels here in the United States. The time, resources and attention to both complexity and beauty lavished on the panels illustrate the profound respect and value placed on children and teachers and their activities together. This is in stark contrast to the dominant cultural values of North America.

In most early childhood programs in the United States, wages are low, turnover is high, and teacher training, both preservice and inservice, is less than optimal. Teachers have limited resources to work with and rarely have paid planning time. There is seldom the equivalent of the professional support staff of a *pedagogista* or *alterista* to assist with observation, analysis, and documentation of children's activities—as there is in the Reggio schools. Childhood is valued more highly by the entertainment industry and consumer interests than by the public policies and economic priorities of our culture.



In spite of this, many teachers are inspired by the Reggio model, taking the time to observe, collect data, and document their work with children. The ones we know who do this have renewed excitement and interest in their work. They are focused on children's play and development as never before. These teachers also report much greater success with parent interest and involvement in the daily life of their program.

Here's a report from one of our students, Ginny Baum, who works as a teacher in a mixed-age child care program. She

used inexpensive materials such as poster board, construction paper, and markers to create her documentation panels.

I did a lot of observation of individual children to study their emerging themes. I tried to sustain their play by adding simple props. Whenever possible, I took pictures and recorded their words to serve as captions and small stories for the photographs. The children loved having their pictures taken.

I put the panels up in the learning centers that the photos were taken in. When I hung the first panels, the children were so excited. They stood and looked at them for a long time, telling

and retelling what they were doing in the pictures. They wanted to know what the words said and why I put certain pictures or letters on the panels. They really liked them!

After studying the panels, they went back to replaying the activity represented in the photos. Each time they did this, they added something new and more complex to their play. The documentation seemed to help them keep building from their previous activities and understandings.

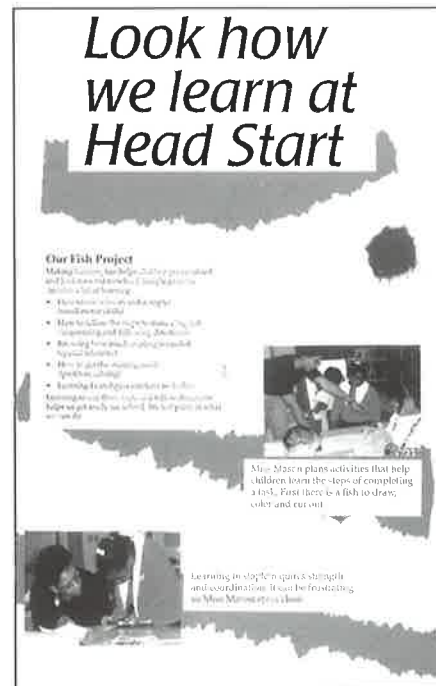
The children go back to the panels often. It's great to see their appreciation. Interestingly, they haven't tried to destroy or pull them down. Other things posted aren't treated with the same respect.

Now, when they are working on something they think is important, they say, "Go get your camera. I made something" or "Will you take a picture of me doing this?" Having the camera and other ways to document has served to spur them on to a new awareness of their own ideas and abilities.

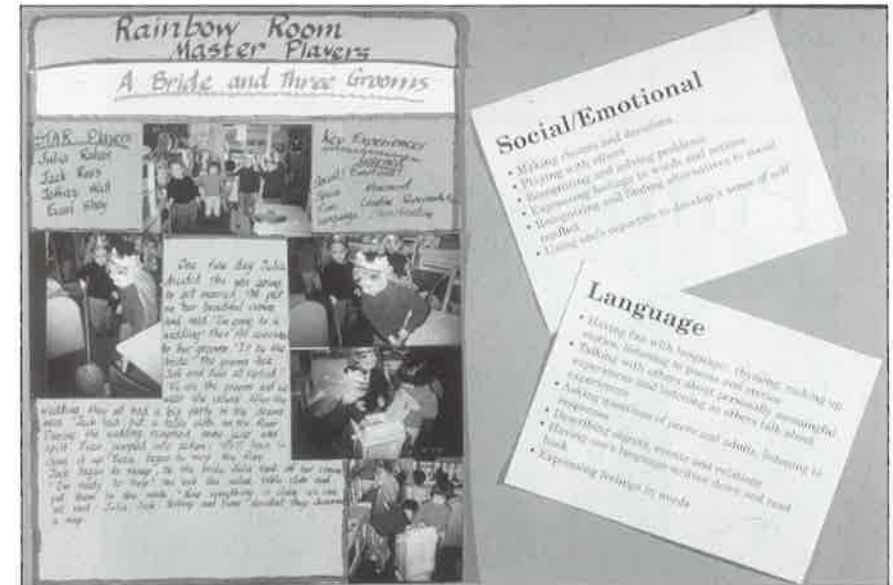
When I took the panels down to turn in as my school assignment, the children wanted to make sure I would bring them right back. Since the panels have been gone, the children's interest in the places and materials

represented in the pictures has altered significantly. They spend less time playing in those areas and they don't seem to play with the same kind of intent.

When I get the panels back, I'll laminate them and hang them book style, like posters sold in the stores. That way the children can revisit any of them at their discretion, and we'll have a wonderful collection of what happened in our classroom throughout this year. I can't wait to see what this will all lead to!



Teachers are educating parents about children's learning by using documentation panels. Miss Mason's fish project is a perfect example.



Myrna Cannon, a child care teacher of three year olds, was initially quite taken with creating "master player" bulletin board displays, an idea she learned in a training where we introduced the book, *The Play's the Thing, Teachers' Roles in Children's Play*. She has consistently done this ever since.



This year, Teacher Myrna has started creating documentation panels to discuss with children and parents alike. The bulk of her teaching time is spent documenting what children are doing, and representing it back to them during her circle review time. Extra photos and documentation go into individual children's portfolios and journals for developmental assessments and parent conferences.

Pumpkin Patch



In October

Around Halloween we started seeing lots of pumpkins everywhere. Some of them had faces. Did they grow that way? We needed to find out.

In our neighborhood there was a garden to explore. We asked if we could make a visit. Everybody got ready. Teacher Myrna brought her camera.

We spent all morning walking through the garden, stopping, looking and talking about what we saw. We were surprised at how many different kinds of pumpkins we saw. Some of them were so small they were hiding under the leaves.

We brought big ones and small ones back to Hilltop. This was our harvest. Do you remember what we did with them?



Trip



"There are many different kinds of pumpkins growing in this garden. Here's a Jack-be-Little and here's a Sugar Pumpkin." Myrna explains.

"There's lots of pumpkins, big and small. We have to wear gloves to protect our hands from the prickles."



"I got my pumpkin and it's not heavy!"



Read All About It: Sharing the News with Parents

In all cultures, people who share experiences create metaphor—stories, songs, dances, and visual images—in order to remember their experiences, give them new meaning, and build community through their sharing.

—Elizabeth Jones and Gretchen Reynolds, in
The Play's the Thing: Teacher's Roles in Children's Play

Whither the Parent-Provider Partnership

Everywhere we go, we see early childhood programs struggling to find more effective means of communication and involvement with parents. Though everyone believes this is a critical component of quality, hardly anyone is satisfied with what is happening. There is a longing for something more, something different.

The longing we feel is about some deeper issues in our lives—lack of time, lack of extended family and community. Instead, tight schedules, traffic congestion, stresses of single and shared parenting, low wages, precarious health, and financial instability plague both workers and families in our child

care programs. It seems as if we could be mutual supports for each other, but instead we typically have complaints about each other and genuine dissatisfaction with the level of communication between us.

To be sure, there are exceptions to this state of affairs, but that's what they are—exceptions. Caregivers long for the kind of respect, support, and community involvement they hear about from their Italian counterparts in the schools of Reggio Emilia. Most families in the United States don't know about Reggio, but they have their own ideas about what they want from their child's program, their worries about school readiness, and the

pressures placed on them. They don't have time to read a newsletter or bulletin, help with a field trip, or attend a meeting.

Teachers and parents alike are unsettled by the expectations they have of each other.

When I ask Robert what he did in school, he says he just played. Aren't you teaching him anything?

When we had our parent meeting, only four people showed up. Don't these parents even care about what their children are doing?

In programs with a growing practice of creating children's portfolios and documentation displays, these kinds of comments are disappearing. Instead, there is a growing sense of excitement and a smoother flow of communication. In *The Hundred Languages of Children*, Loris Malaguzzi writes about what is needed to make an alliance between schools and families succeed:

Teachers must leave behind an isolated mode of working that leaves no traces. Instead, they must discover ways to communicate and document the children's evolving experiences at school. They must prepare a steady flow of quality informa-

tion targeted to parents but appreciated also by children and teachers. This flow of documentation, we believe, introduces parents to a quality of knowing that tangibly changes their expectations.

With regard to the children, the flow of documentation creates a second, and equally pleasing, scenario. They become even more curious, interested, and confident as they contemplate the meaning of what they have achieved. They learn that their parents feel at home in the school, at ease with the teachers, and informed about what has happened and is about to happen (pp. 63–64).

The idea of "introducing parents to a quality of knowing that tangibly changes their expectations" is a powerful one and not something that can happen overnight. First, the providers and teachers have to have that quality of knowing. As discussed in our earlier chapter on teacher education and training, we think documentation displays contribute a great deal to that *quality of knowing*. Second, as Malaguzzi says, teachers must prepare a steady flow of information targeted at parents.

For the quality of knowing to deepen among both teachers

Worthy Work

Providing for Meaningful Work

Early childhood teachers understand that young children love to be involved with real work—helping to carry, fix, cook, build, wash, plan and organize things. They know that children develop a strong sense of self and interdependence when they participate in activities that contribute to their family and classroom community. Effective teachers know that providing for this kind of involvement is a critical part of working with children.

Setting the table, serving the food, and cleaning up after a meal are all valuable tasks. Rather than just an occasional cooking project, skilled child care teachers plan and provide ways for children to help plan and regularly prepare food.



Children use real tools for cutting and cooking. They develop skills in using the tools as well as having their small arms in control.



Worthy Work: Providing for Meaningful Work



Myrica arranges for elaborate meal preparation, serving and dining with her group.

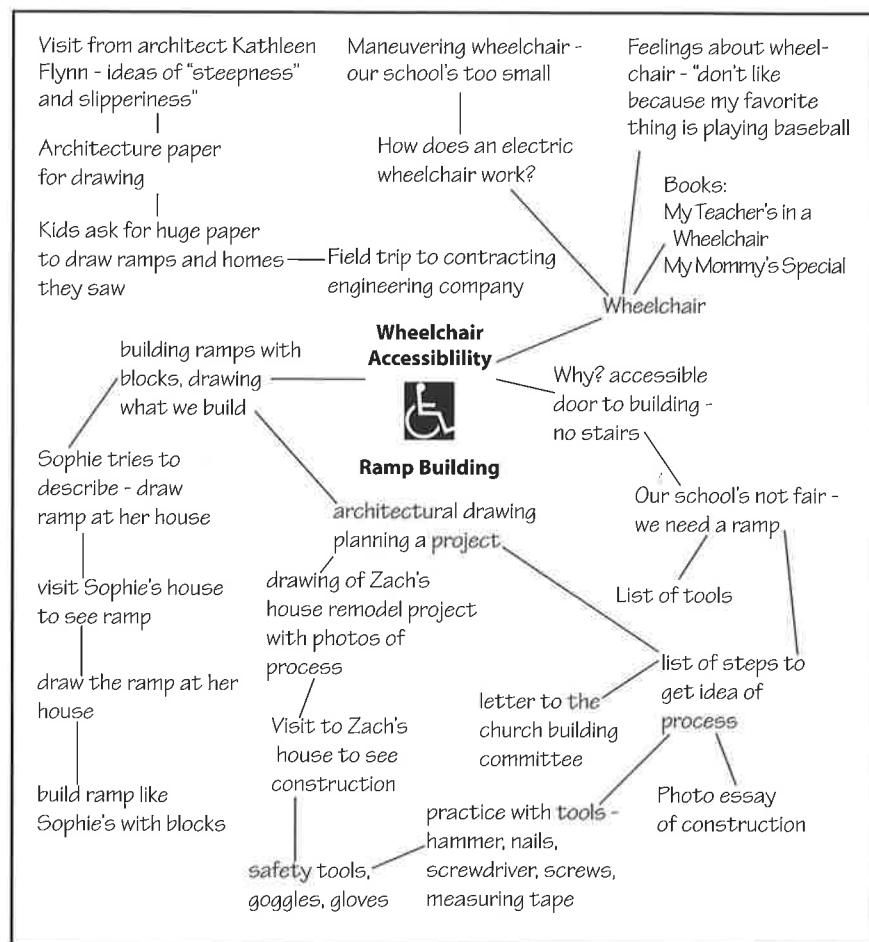


Myrica knows the value and power of the group working together from start to finish.

Time to eat this yummy food. We made it ourselves!

and parents, we must move away from superficial reports about lunches, birthdays, and craft projects in our communication to parents. These are akin to idle chatter when it comes to the real meaning of what might be happening in our programs. Observant teachers building on children's interests, experiences, and relationships in curriculum

planning have a wealth of significant classroom events to re-represent to both children and their families. The sense of history and community that grows from this shared documentation is the stuff dreams are made of. It has little to do with the generic boxes in a typical lesson plan or write-up posted for parents.



Ann's curriculum grows into a web that shows the evolution of a learning process rather than prescribed recipes. This is only a small portion of the final curriculum web.

This display (pg. 40), the full story of which is described by teacher Ann Pelo in our book *Guardian of Childhood: A Teacher's Hand-book for Planning Curriculum*. [Working title] (Redleaf Press, forthcoming):

Picking up on the children's interest in the WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE sign we noticed on our neighborhood walk, I returned to sketch a curriculum web with "wheelchair accessibility/ramp building" in the center. This was not intended to be the curriculum plan for the month, but rather a guidepost for traveling with emergent curriculum. I also wanted to begin a record of our project, our classroom history, as it developed.

In the weeks that followed, I took many photos, made and kept copies of the children's letters and drawings, and transcribed tape-recorded conversations among the children. These were displayed for parents as a map of our growing curriculum. The children used the documentation as a common frame of reference and would often take out the "Ramp Book" (a display album) and tell each other the stories of the photos and letters in it.

In another program across town, (a Head Start program) Miss Mason made a visual display that enhances the quality of knowing of Tionna and her family. With a visual documentation of Tionna's disposition toward sticking with a project from start to finish, along with the ways an adult can coach her to learn the process and skills she needs, everyone can tell the story, thereby confirming individual understandings with each telling. From this grows pride, appreciation, and a desire to be involved.

Wrestling with what to do about diverse and divisive perspectives on holiday practices among the families of children at her center, Director Julie Bisson invited each family to take home an empty display board to fill up with representations of its favorite winter holiday practices. As these were returned, teachers, students, and families discovered common values as well as unique ways of celebrating.

Emergent Curriculum

'Our school's not fair



Hilltop Children's Center
Sunlight Too Room
Ann Peto, teacher

Dear building people in the church,
Our school's not fair. Sophie says "My step-dad who uses an electric cart because his legs don't work, he can't get up the stairs." Sam says "It's like my mom's friend Grace. She can't walk, she has a wheelchair." We want to build a ramp on the stairs that lead from outside into the Big Kids room. We want people with wheelchairs to come to our school. Can we please meet with you to talk about our plans?



Emergent Curriculum: Our school's not fair

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From the Sunlight Too class -

From the Ordinary to the Extraordinary: Adult Learners in the News



There I was in the pictures—just doing what I had done. I was excited to see them. Now the experience had a new richness for me. The photographs shouted out, “You did this! You were here!” What had been ordinary was now for me extraordinary. I realized how important the documenting of the experience was for me.

—Ron Baer,
adult student

An Effective Teacher Education Strategy

Whether working as college teachers, education coordinators, or program directors, we have found that representing our adult learners in documentation displays is one of our most effective training strategies. We used to go to teachers’ classrooms, observe, and give them feedback. Then we realized that if we wanted them to be paying more attention to children’s play, we needed to be modeling this ourselves.

Searching for ways to involve teachers in a dialogue about child development and the life of their classroom, we began

taking notes on children’s activities and conversations, and then discussing these with the teachers. Sometimes we would post our notes on the door, wall, or bulletin board of their classroom, bravely adding stick sketches to go with them.

When our documentation began to focus on the children and their activities, our discussions with teachers changed. Rather than feeling cautious and nervous, they became engaged, excited, and open to looking at their work in new ways. They were more interested in the professional literature we recom-



Collaborative Documentation

mended to them. Soon these caregivers and teachers began creating their own documentation, redirecting their creativity from crafts for children to imitate to displays that allowed children to see themselves at work.

It’s most fun to document a collaborative effort when training teachers. We agree upon a particular focus that both caregivers and supervisors can share in the documentation process, discuss their observation notes, analyze what they reveal, and then together create a visual display for the children, other staff members, and parents. These displays

alert everyone to the learning and life of the program. They teach us more and more about child development and about appropriate practices. Directors tell us that when they introduce and model the use of documentation displays, they often see a significant rise in the literacy skills of staff members who have been struggling with these issues. The overall result is one of increased communication, pride, and confidence.

Documentation doesn’t always have to involve photography, nor should it be limited to special events. The point is to get



an Early Childhood Education Course

Building Creative Expression

Creative Expression Activities

Objectives

1. The student will be able to identify and describe the components of creative expression.

2. The student will be able to demonstrate the use of creative expression in the classroom.

3. The student will be able to evaluate the effectiveness of creative expression activities.

4. The student will be able to create and implement a creative expression activity.

5. The student will be able to reflect on the experience and evaluate the impact of creative expression on the children.

6. The student will be able to collaborate with colleagues to share and learn from each other's experiences.

7. The student will be able to communicate the importance of creative expression to parents and the community.

8. The student will be able to assess the needs of the children and design appropriate creative expression activities.

9. The student will be able to create a safe and supportive environment for creative expression.

10. The student will be able to encourage and support the children's creative expression.

11. The student will be able to provide feedback and encouragement to the children.

12. The student will be able to document the children's creative expression.

13. The student will be able to share the children's creative expression with others.



Encouraging children to express their thoughts and feelings through art is an important part of their education. Teachers should provide a safe and supportive environment for children to explore their creativity.



Children learn to express their thoughts and feelings through art. Teachers should provide a safe and supportive environment for children to explore their creativity.



Children learn to express their thoughts and feelings through art. Teachers should provide a safe and supportive environment for children to explore their creativity.



Creative expression involves:

- exploring with your senses
- naming what you recognize
- representing a feeling, experience or idea you have
- developing skills to accomplish self-expression



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Until teachers reclaim their sense of wonder and creativity, they can't recognize or provide it for children.



To build creative expression in children, teachers need to cultivate in themselves dispositions of:

- delighting in their senses
- experiencing things as if for the very first time
- focusing intensely on the here & now
- finding joy, wonder, marvel and excitement in new discoveries
- exploring with a willingness to take time

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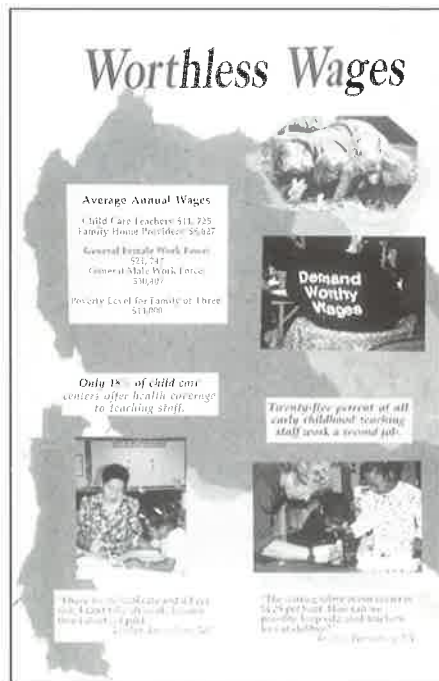
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Teacher education must include training in advocacy skills and strategies.



involved in observing and describing significant daily activities and presenting them in a way that captures attention.

When the caregivers in a toddler program approached us, frustrated by the amount of time it took to get children diapered, fed, and cleaned up, we realized that they didn't understand the children's developmental stage. Not seeing these activities as part of their curriculum, they wanted to get the children involved in the *real* learning of block building and art and circle time. We developed a documentation chart with a focus on "toddler self-help curriculum." Using Post-it notes, we began taking notes on the numerous ways we saw this curriculum embedded in the very activities they thought were detracting from the teaching that needed to happen.

We are increasingly using display panels in our college teaching. We make notes of discussions, draw quotations from students' journal writing, and take photographs as they engage in class activities. Like children, adult students eagerly look for themselves and their ideas in the panels.

Toddler Self-Help Curriculum

Child Initiated	Teacher Support	Environmental Factors
Casey put shoes on wrong feet.	Melanie stayed behind with Sam and Janice who were trying to zip.	Steps to the diaper changing table so kids can get up by themselves.
Jerome insisted on carrying own plate to sink.	BJ said, "I'll wait while you pull up your pants."	Children help clean with sponges.
		Mirror by sink so children can see when their nose needs wiping.

Creating documentation displays is an excellent assignment to give adult learners. It not only heightens their observation skills and excitement about children but also provides them with additional ways to address their own and students' learning styles. Adult students tell us

that the actual process of analyzing their data and creating displays consolidates their thinking. Thus, making documentation panels isn't only useful in representing their learning and thinking—it actually contributes to the construction of their knowledge.





Once upon a time

an group of adults were talking about teaching and learning.

They were talking about how to get a better understanding of the children's experiences and how to use that to help them learn and grow.

It was a very interesting conversation and they were all very engaged.

They were talking about how to use the children's experiences to help them learn and grow.

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They were talking about how to use the children's experiences to help them learn and grow.

Spreading the News : Strategies for Advocacy and Public Awareness

*The good news
they do not print.
The good news
we do print.
We have a special edition every moment,
and we need you to read it.*



*They only print what is wrong.
Look at each of our special editions.
We want you to benefit from them
and help protect them.*

*The latest good news
is that you can do it.*

—Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Good News*, in
Call Me By My True Names: The Collected Poems of Thich Nhat Hanh

Enhancing Our Organizing Work

As beneficial as all our work in early childhood is, we can't really make the progress we need in preserving childhood and play for children, improving the quality of early childhood programs, and securing respect, compensation, and adequate working conditions for providers and teachers, until some broader changes

occur in the social and economic structures and the values that drive our public policy and everyday actions.

Strategies are needed on a number of fronts, and documentation panels can be useful tools in most of these areas. Whether attending a focus group, meeting, or conference, visiting or

testifying before legislators, or holding news conferences and rallies, we can use visual displays to help get our messages across. The process of coming together to create documentation displays is empowering. As an organizing tool, the displays constitute a concrete project to gather around, one which builds on what we know best. We share stories, highlights of our work, frustration, and problem-solving strategies. Then we leave a three-hour workshop or meeting with beautiful displays that can be put to immediate use.

As we've suggested in our discussion of documentation panels for other purposes, it's important to choose a focus for your public education and advocacy work. If your community is concerned about violence, create a display that shows how the

everyday work of quality early childhood programs and skilled teachers is also violence prevention work. If your state legislature or local school board is considering mandates for stronger academic programs for preschoolers, create displays to represent the way different kinds of play build bridges to academic learning.

The Worthy Wage Campaign has adopted the slogan, "Worthy Work, Worthless Wages," and there is much data available on high staff turnover and its relationship to quality programs in child care. People are more likely to wake up to this crisis when they can visualize what it means. Documentation displays can complement a wide range of self-advocacy and public education strategies for those in our profession.



Violence Prevention

Creating Classroom Culture with Adventure and Storytelling

Children are drawn to the violent actions of television, toys and video games because they need to feel powerful and invincible. Skilled child care teachers reclaim power and adventure for children by offering creative experiences with drama and storytelling away from these commercial interests and the violence entertainment industry.

Role playing activities encourage children to set out their fears, gain control over their vulnerability and helplessness, and feel powerful. Role plays provide constructive expressions for feelings that might otherwise parallel violent responses.

When America joins the children as they act out the rules of the game, doctors and nurses. The boys were confident that when scary things happen, there are ways to get help. When children take on the "helpful" roles they learn a concrete way to address their fears and dangers their understandings.

"How do you feel about this game? Can you help me?"
"I'll show you how to do it and we'll be playing."



Preschool teachers, Ann and Sarah, borrow large, colorful masks from the children's collection of their local art museum. All that the children are cautious. They look, then touch the masks. When Ann and Sarah wear the masks the excitement grows.



All at the same time, a group of preschool kids take a walk on the beach.



Violence Prevention

Measuring Women

As children were playing in her preschool class, Liz noticed a conflict brewing when Alex started yelling at Cameron to get his big feet out of the way.

Seeing this as a "teachable moment" she called them across the room, "Here comes Measuring Women!" Quite dramatically, Liz then assigns the girls with paper and paper and innocuously set up a measuring and comparing activity.

With some initial coaching on how to treat around their shoes the children get busy making paper nets of feet to compare and separate from the biggest to the smallest.



PAVE

Violence Prevention

Violence

Nurturing Empathy, Caretaking, and A Sense of Responsibility

Children need time and encouragement to explore the natural world. These experiences give them a sense of wonder and respect for life—the heart of violence prevention.

As part of her family child care program, Nancy provides abundant opportunities for the children to experience the joy and exhilaration of being outdoors. Places for hiding, bugs and plants to explore, and time for soaking up the sun. These seemingly simple activities are the essence of childhood, creating dreams and a zest for life.



A big to a mother from given children a concrete look at how things grow, how food, and the other part of which we are all a part.



PAVE

Prevention in Early Childhood Programs

Child Care Providers Working to Prevent Violence

Good child care programs help children develop social dispositions and skills to resolve violence.

Elements of violence prevention may go unnoticed by those less familiar with child development. But skilled early childhood teachers plan for it daily with careful attention to the learning environment, daily routines, activities and on-going relationships that nurture a safe and wonderful childhood.



Children in her classroom, Mr. East provides a large, open space with many toys from the local museum.



By using an old baby, children learn from the time of their own lives, and learning help to create a peaceful world.



By going to outside given children a sense of responsibility and more to their being observed and growth with their things. Children experience the great feeling that come from making the world. This space to be responsible to the world.

PAVE

Hot Off the Press: Tools, Tips, and Technology



*Images are used to construct other images—
passing through sensations, feelings, interactions, problems,
and exchanges of ideas.*

—A Reggio Emilia educator quoted by
Lella Gandini and Carolyn Edwards, authors, college instructors

Cameras, Film, and Color Photocopying

As we've discussed earlier, the first tools needed to create effective documentation displays are an observant eye, pen, and paper. Next, we advocate use of a camera and film as essential equipment for every early childhood classroom. Once parents begin to see their children regularly featured in displays, they are usually eager to donate film and even to contribute to the developing of it.

Appealing as they initially seem, Polaroid cameras prove disappointing for capturing the details of children's play. You need at least a low-end 35mm camera, ideally one with telephoto capacity. Use 400 ASA film if possible, because its speed is a better match than slower film for children's active bodies.

Shop around for low-cost film developing. When there are specials for double prints, get them; these can be used for several purposes—for instance, in documenting curriculum projects, creating individual portfolios for children, and creating displays for public education.

Color photocopying is often an economical way to enlarge and reproduce your photographs for displays. Most of the photos featured in the displays in this book use these. Again, the photocopy business is extremely competitive, and you can often get color photocopy enlargements for as low as sixty-nine cents, if you shop around.

Collecting Pictures

Taking good pictures for your display panels requires you to train your eyes. You must learn to see what the lens of your camera can capture. Your goal is not just cute shots or posed pictures of children. Instead, you want to photograph spontaneous, natural moments that represent the mood, action, and purpose of the story you want to tell.

Use a telephoto lens or get as close as possible without distracting the child or adults so that you can capture details and clear expressions. To tell a story, your photos should have continuity and show a sequence with a beginning, middle, and end. It is helpful to take several shots of each stage to ensure that you have some quality choices for your display. Photos you don't end up using can be added to the art area for the children's use.

Remember to collect or make photocopies of children's artwork or writing, along with sketches and notes you've made. Covers, quotations from relevant books, and charts you've made as part of other projects are all useful media to tell your visual story.

Paper, Print, and Signage

Depending on the purpose and technology you are working with, displays can be as simple or sophisticated as you want. For everyday displays in your program, the handiest supplies are Post-it notes, fresh markers, and colored paper. Placing these strategically around your classroom ensures that you will always have tools available to document the unfolding events of your classroom.

A simple, quick sketch (stick figures are fine) and a brief anecdotal story with children's quotations provides a good starting place for documentation. For some excellent examples of this form, thumb through the two books Elizabeth Jones has co-authored, *The Play's the Thing: Teachers' Roles in Children's Play* (Teachers College Press) and *Emergent Curriculum* (NAEYC). As these documentations show, even without camera and computer, displays of the learning and spirit of your program can be pulled together attractively and almost instantaneously.

Teachers are usually shorter on time than on talent. Once you master the art of recording observations, you may find it is not necessary to recopy or transcribe your notes. If you are documenting the growth of a project or emergent curriculum, try establishing one color or geometric shape to represent what the children initiate and another for what the teachers offer in the way of materials, questions, or guidance. With paper of these colors or shapes readily available around the room and playground, you can document the growing web of your curriculum as it occurs, avoiding the need for extra time to create a display.

Children's representations are always good to include in displays. You can add anecdotal information to samples of children's work by writing on Post-it notes. We recommend exercising great caution in writing directly on a child's work, even to record a name. Always ask if this is desired, and if so, where the child would like you to put the writing. Showing respect for children's creations in this way fosters self-respect and pride. Encourage children to make their own marks as signatures to their work, even if they don't yet write their names.

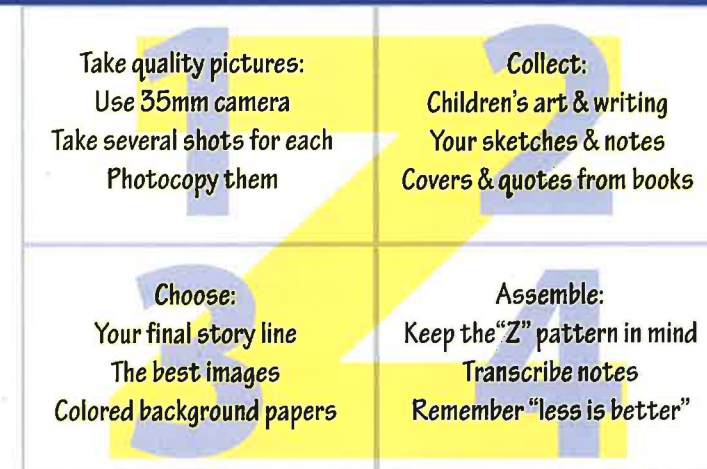
Post-it notes can also be used for brief captions with your photographs. When the pictures are developed, you may then choose to transcribe your notes in larger print or on a computer. Computer-generated type adds a professional quality to displays, but this is not always necessary or desirable.

Our workshops with a graphic artist helped us understand the principle of "less is better" in creating displays. When you choose to use computer-generated type, avoid adding too many fonts or typefaces within one display. We found that headers work fine in bold or caps but that these are distracting when used in the main text of a display with photos. For a very professional look, you can get large vinyl letters cut at a signage shop.

Design Tips

Whether for use internally or as public education tools, documentation displays are most effective when they are eye-catching and aesthetically pleasing. There is an infinite variety of individual and cultural aesthetic preferences, but keeping some basic design principles in mind will enhance your displays. Remember that in the age of

Four steps to making documentation panels



information and electronic media, people's attention span is very short. Whether aimed at children or adults, your panels should attract potential viewers so that they will be interested enough to ask questions, read captions, and consider the text. One large sketch, photograph, or work sample from a child can be strategically placed to "hook" the viewers' attention.

In the United States, we are acculturated to a scanning motion that reads from left to right and top to bottom, whether on paper, display board, or electronic screen. Typically we are told that an effective design will keep in mind the "Z" pattern that the viewer's eye naturally

seeks and will arrange display components accordingly. Thus, a title or headline is best displayed at the top, centered or to the left, followed by a picture that represents its story. Using the "Z" pattern, the thing you want the viewer to remember most is best placed at the bottom right.

As we have become more familiar with notions of mind mapping and webbing and increasingly more influenced by full-motion computer graphics, other design alternatives suggest themselves. We can create a center to first attract the viewer's eye and then place other display components arbitrarily, in the expectation that these will be scanned randomly. In this case, there is a subtle

distinction between clutter and clarity, so we follow the rule of thumb that "less is more."

If you have the time and desire to give your documentation display an artistic quality, you may first want to sketch out different ideas and layouts on small pieces of paper proportioned to the size of the final display. Cut shapes out of a variety of colored papers, then cut rectangles to represent the photos or sketches. Move all the elements around until you feel you have reached a successful design. Ask yourself, "How does my eye travel in this design? Are there things competing for my attention or not holding my attention so that I drift off? Are any important aspects getting lost?"

Torn or cut colored papers can be used to add some background movement or define targets for photos or text. Rice paper is multitextured and almost always calls forth the designer's creativity and the viewer's interest. To add variety and to tie the display elements together, choose an object or shape from the photos or story and represent it in an enlarged form with a background or accent paper.

Attention to Details

Most of the documentation displays featured here were made by family providers, teachers, and students, not professional artists. When you look closely, you see inconsistent use of typefaces, smudges, and text and pictures that aren't always cut or glued evenly. In most early childhood settings, these don't present a problem.

However, if you are seeking to refine your skills as an artist or to create a display for a public place with high professional standards, careful attention must be given to each detail of your display. For instance, pictures and text should be cut with a straight edge using an X-acto knife rather than scissors. Spray mount adhesive (used only with ventilation) should replace tape, glue sticks, or rubber cement as adhesives. Everything should be carefully measured and mounted evenly and smoothly. Removable tape (for instance, drafting tape) allows you to temporarily hold things in place while you measure and adjust. Kneaded erasers, rubber cement thinner, and fine sandpaper help eliminate imperfections, smudges, and dings.

Boards and Hinges for Displays

If you are creating portable displays, there are several types of boards to consider. Quarter-inch foamcore, 20 x 30 in., is the most standard and inexpensive. You get the best deal when you buy a case of it at a warehouse office supply store. Foamcore works well but begins to look ragged after a short time, so you may want to consider Gatorfoam, which is more expensive but considerably more durable. Gatorfoam is available in art and display stores and typically comes in 4 x 8 ft. sheets that can be cut to create six 20 x 30 in. boards.

The low-budget way to attach panels together is to use packing or duct tape on the back. This does the trick but looks a bit tacky. There are several kinds of easy-to-use hinges, but these tend to be more pricey (anywhere from three to five dollars each). They are available at stores carrying display supplies. Hinges create a significantly more professional look if you want to accordion-display four to six panels together for a particular topic. You can also experiment with scrap Gatorfoam or

foamcore to create stands with slits for holding the display boards at the bottom or headers for the tops.

Arranging and Transporting Displays

If your displays are for public education, work with your local professional associations, resource and referral agencies, libraries, and community organizations to find display opportunities. Consider public hearings and events, legislative sessions, conferences and meetings, as well as traditional settings like banks, galleries, store windows, and malls.

Transporting display panels is best done in a large, vinyl portfolio case, available through art stores and office supply stores. There are also less expensive corrugated cardboard cases that provide less durable shipping and storage. For years we have used large plastic garbage bags and bungee cords when transporting panels in our car and sometimes when carrying them as luggage on airplanes. The portfolio case is essential, however, if you are shipping displays as airplane baggage or through the postal service.

Imagine: The News of a Growing Movement



I think we all put our boats out on a current, set our little sails, and when we hit something that impassions us, and our little boat begins to go there, the wind whistles through our hair, and we know we're onto something... You become alive as you're doing it, and you begin to develop gifts you just didn't know you had.

—Sister Helen Prejean, in
The Progressive, January 1996

More Than a Book About Bulletin Boards

Spreading the News offers concrete ideas about using visual displays to enhance early childhood programs. We've offered multiple examples and tips, and we hope you will be inspired to use them.

But the intent of this little book goes far beyond the idea of documentation itself. It is really a vision of childhood and a growing movement of people committed to preserving its future. It is a call to a quality of life for adults and children to become enlivened, mindful, playful, passionate, and not afraid to be awake and to live fully in our bodies. Never underestimate what this might do for our spirits and our ability to create change. Living with courage and uplifted

hearts, we can turn the ordinary into the extraordinary.

There are more than 90,000 members of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and tens of thousands more working in programs and organizations on behalf of children and families. There is a growing Worthy Wage movement fueling creativity and commitment to challenge our current economic system, values, and policies with regard to child care work. Imagine! Imagine what we can collectively do to challenge and change the injustices we have been living with!

Our special thanks to those who have contributed panels, photographs, sketches, time, energy,

and financial resources to make this book possible. We have received technical advice and a large dose of patience and encouragement from our families and friends. We are especially grateful to the following folks who made the displays in this book possible: Nancy Gerber, Mick Heltsley, Myrna Cannon, Sarah Felsteiner, Melissa Parson, Ann Pelo, Liz Kennedy, Ginny Baum, Kathy Therriault, Joan Newcomb, Maralyn Thomas-Schier, Louise Vlasic, Mary Anne Deuyour, Sally Bergquist, Sharon Potter, Jennifer Henrickson, Maria Campos, Talena Alston, John Nimmo, Julie Bisson, Frances Jones-Baker, Florence

Johnson, Christopher Watson, Kathy Kolb, Jamie McNett, Ronna Hammer, and the PAVE Project NAEYC MAG Grant Committee, Jeanne Hunt and Lonnie Bloom. This book is dedicated to our mothers, Jessie Nolen Bitner and Diane Curtis, whose hell-raising spirits are still with us, and to Joy Conley, one of the most articulate spokespeople we know for this worthy work.

Above all, we continue to be inspired by the dedicated work of so many. Spread the news. The latest good news is that you can do it!

Sample Press Release

For Immediate Release
Contact:

Date:

Worthy Work Display Panels

Are you planning a meeting, conference, or event that would be enhanced by display panels featuring the work of early childhood educators? Created by teachers and caregivers themselves, each display features eye-catching pictures of children playing, learning, and working in a variety of early childhood program settings. A brief narrative accompanies the photographs, detailing the skill and knowledge of the teachers who do this worthy work.

The displays are fully portable and can be taken to public hearings, lobbies, libraries, and conference halls. With many to choose from, they are suitable for large or small group events and are easily assembled for tabletop or easel-stand viewing.

Contact us for an attractive way to educate your group about the Worthy Work of caring for children.



Sample Photograph Release Form

I hereby grant permission for photographs of my child's activities in child care or Head Start for the use of training teachers and the public about early childhood care and education. I understand that these photos may appear in forms such as display panels, videos, books, or brochures, and I agree that I am to receive no compensation for my child's appearance. I also understand that my child's participation confers on me no ownership rights to the photographs or negatives whatsoever.

Child's name _____

Parent or guardian _____

Address _____ City _____ Zip _____

Day phone _____ Evening phone _____

Signature _____



*I will surely spread the news about Spreading the News.
An innovative and useful book for teachers and administrators.*

Carolyn Edwards
Faculty, University of Kentucky
Editor, *The Hundred Languages of Children*

The most exciting aspect of this book is the idea of using the documentation process as a professional development tool. Documentation enhances teachers' learning by providing a meaningful and concrete vehicle for them to see children learning. Teachers come to understand children's development and also see their own learning process as adults.

Carol Brunson Phillips
Executive Director
Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition

Since we started documenting and representing our emergent curriculum, parents are commenting on and excited about the literacy that is popping up everywhere. I, too, am astonished at the increase in literacy that is coming out of this practice.

Barbara McPherson
Child Development Services
Fort Lewis, Washington



**Early Childhood
Education/ Training**



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