

Documenting

Stand aside for a while and leave room for learning, observe carefully what children do and then, if you have understood well, perhaps teaching will be different from before. – Loris Malaguzzi

Questions to consider:

- What is the purpose of documenting?
- What are the criteria that indicate high quality documentation?
- What is involved in the process?
- What are the challenges?
- What might be some solutions?



Guiding Principles for the Design of Documentation Panels

Quality panels are reliant on quality experiences and quality thinking. Panel creation as part of the process of documentation offers the opportunity to learn about children and ourselves as teachers, and to develop stronger relationships among children, families and teachers.

The questions can be used as a guide to help construct panels so that they more accurately reflect the values and learning which are part of projects and experiences. These are only some of many aspects we can consider. Based on your experiences, makes changes to this list, and add to it over time...

(Do not think of this as the final answer - rather, suggestions for consideration that can be modified depending on your own situation)

General principles

- Form follows intention
- Consider design elements based on the point you wish to make
- Elements should be used to further communication, not for the sake of elements themselves (i.e. 'cute' decoration)

Scope

- Have you valued the idea by giving it space?
- What values do your panel(s) reflect? What significant aspect(s) are you wanting to communicate?
- Does your choice of focus invite depth of thought?

Title

- Does the title reflect the essence of the experience or the perspective you wish to make visible?
- How do you know which piece of text is the title?
- Where is the title placed?

Teacher's Context Statements

- Does the statements help you understand more fully what led up to the experience reflected on the panel, the experiences that cannot be seen in the documentation of this investigation / project?
- Does the statement contain observations and reflections on this experience that cannot be captured succinctly through other means?
- Does the content of the statement provide a context and set the stage for the story told in the panel?

- Does the layout enable you to place the statement close to the title, or in a place that makes sense visually and cognitively?

Children's Conversation

- Do the quotations you have selected have a purpose in advancing the story of the panel?
- Do the quotations contain key "questions" asked by the children or key moments during the experience?
- Do the quotations contain the children's observations and reflections on the experience?
- Do the quotations make the presence of the children felt on the panel?
- What image of children do the quotes convey?

Children's Work

- Can you explain why you have selected particular pieces of work?
- Will fewer pieces tell the story just as effectively?
- Can you explain how any work you have selected relates to the title? To other pieces of work selected for the panel? To the text? To your hypothesis for the panel?
- What image(s) of children do the artifacts convey?
- How can you integrate the artifacts into the organization of the layout and design so that all the elements on the panel relate?

Photographs

- How is the quality of the photos? Both in terms of composition, and how you printed it out?
- Do the photos show key moments in the project?
- Does each photo provide a particular perspective, for example, what a child sees from her vantage point?
- Why is the subject in the frame? What is the purpose of the photograph?
- Is there clutter in the background of the photo that distracts from the visual clarity and powerfulness of the photo?
- If you have text under a photo, does it offer something that the photo doesn't communicate already? How does the text offer depth to the photo?

Layout and Design

- Have you thought about where the panel is going to be placed in your classroom so that you know the size and orientation of your documentation?
- Is there a logical flow of information, from left to right and up to down?
- Is there adequate spacing? Does the spacing communicate with the same clarity as periods, commas and semi – colons?
- Is it clear why certain items are grouped together?
- Have you used subtitles to help provide clarity of message when needed?
- Is there balance in the overall composition?

- Is placement intentional in areas like alignment of pictures and justification of text so that the story is not interrupted by extraneous information?
- Is the panel free of irrelevant information, verbal and visual?
- Are the lines cut straight?

Text

- Is your use of font consistent? Or do you change fonts with intention?
- If the size changes, is it for a reason that is apparent?
- If you highlighted the text in any way, is it apparent why?
- If you underlined the text, is it apparent why?
- If you made the text irregular in any way, would the meaning have been as clear without the irregularity?

Color

Cautionary note: Color is such a strong design element that it should not be used unless there is a clear reason for doing so. If all your panels contain color without a clear reason for its use, the panels could become a cacophonous element in the classroom.

- Is color used to make the reason behind the documentation apparent?
- Does the color highlight a key idea?
- Does the color tie together a number of panels about the same project?
- Does your use of color distract from the children's use of color?

Visibility of Learning

- Is the panel *more than* a chronicle of events? (Try to go beyond "we did this, then we did this...")
- Does the panel help you understand something about children, their learning, their thoughts, their strategies? What?
- What research of the children is made evident?
- How are the observations and thoughts of teachers, their research, used to inform the creation of the panel?

Placement of Panels

Where you place the panels in the classroom is important.

- How does the placement relate to the context of the environment?
- In their placement, how do the panels relate to each other?

Use of Panels

- How do you use the panels? Are they "alive" or "dead"?
- Do you go on tours with the children to revisit the panels?
- Do you go on tours with the parents to share the experiences?
- Do you tour with colleagues to discuss experiences?

- During projects, do you bring children back to panels to build on prior experiences?
- When do you move panels? Why?
- When do you remake panels?
- Where do you archive panels you want to keep?