Module 5: Looking Deeper at Pedagogical Narrations

This section provides you with a more detailed understanding of the technical and philosophical underpinnings of pedagogical narrations. ‘Pedagogical narrations’ refers to the process of observing, recording, and, individually and collectively, interpreting a series of related ordinary moments in your practice. The process is ongoing and cyclical and based on the art of critical reflection on the part of a community of learners (educators, children, family). This process is called pedagogical documentation in Reggio Emilia and Sweden, learning stories in New Zealand, action research in parts of Australia (as the text outlines) and in BC we use the term pedagogical narrations. We have been introduced to the process of pedagogical narrations in the workshop and will deeply engage in this process beginning in this module.

The “What” of pedagogical narrations

‘Pedagogical narration’ is the process of observing, recording, and, individually and collectively, interpreting a series of related ordinary moments in your practice. (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999)

The “Why” of pedagogical narrations

‘Pedagogical narration’ makes children’s learning visible and helps us reflect upon the educator’s practices.

The term “Pedagogical Narrations”

BC has adopted the term ‘Pedagogical narration’ A similar tool is called ‘pedagogical documentation’ in Saskatchewan, Reggio Emilia, Italy and Sweden; ‘learning stories’ in New Brunswick and New Zealand; and ‘action research’ in Australia.

The “How” of Pedagogical Narrations

Pedagogical narrations involves observing and recording ordinary moments, reflecting on what you have observed, sharing your description with others, collectively building new meanings from what you have learned so as to make children’s learning visible, and linking what you have learned to the framework, and incorporating your learning into your planning process.
Now let’s explore...

The Process of Pedagogical Narrations to enrich your practice

**Step 1: Be Curious about how the Framework relates to your practice.**

**Step 2: Begin with Observations of Ordinary Moments.**

**Observation**

Child observation has played an integral part in early childhood training and practice. It can be understood as a means to assess children’s psychological development in accordance to predetermined definitions and stages of a ‘normal’ child. Therefore, the goal of child observation is mainly about assessing a child’s development in relation to developmental standards. The pedagogical narrations approach, on the other hand, is contextual and involves children in a process of co-construction with teachers (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999).

**Observation of Ordinary Moments in Your Setting**

Observation of ordinary moments provides an opportunity for us to wonder at what we are seeing. Checklists and developmental domains are sometimes used to organize observations, but they can narrow our vision. Observation is the starting point for thinking about children, considering our own roles with children, and questioning what we see.

In observing, you will spend time with the child and family and notice and listen to what is happening with children. Observation is a subjective activity; you should strive to refrain from having protocols/instruments that will limit/set boundaries on your observations.

Listen carefully, pay attention to what is happening. Pay attention to the child’s strengths. Begin with the assumption that the child and his or her family are capable. Listen and look for evidence of the child’s strengths.

Here are a few starting points for your observations:

- Notice the child making sense of the world or exploring an issue or idea
- Notice the child’s approach to the world
- Be attentive to the child’s interests and understandings of the world
- Notice the child at play, at a mealtime, or at a transition point.
What is an Ordinary Moment?

An ordinary moment is a common occurrence or habitual instance that is observed, recorded and/or analyzed.

Best practice research has found that documenting the ordinary moments is a very useful learning tool.

Consider this:

An ordinary moment may be an anecdotal observation, children’s work, photographs that illustrate a process, audio and video tape recordings, children’s voiced ideas.

Step 3: Record and Describe an Ordinary Moment

Observe, Record and Describe

Observe and Record some Ordinary Moments - in more than one media if possible.

The formats you may select:

- Written field notes
- Digital audio-recording of the conversations you have followed by transcripts of the audio-recordings
- Still Digital Photographs
- Short Video clips
- Materials created by the children such as drawings, paintings, constructions

Step 4: Reflect and Interpret Ordinary Moments

Reflect on the ordinary moments...

Write a reflective piece about the ordinary moment. Think about the areas of learning and the learning goals related to each area.

Using Different Lenses

When you interpret your own documentation and ordinary moments and the documentation and ordinary moments of your group members, it is important that you think about lenses. Often, the developmental theories relied on in early childhood are the ones we use first because we are accustomed to using those theories and familiar with them. They are often the basis for our assumptions about children. Remember that each person will provide new perspectives that you can incorporate into your interpretations of ordinary moments. Your interpretations/ reflections should reveal multiple lenses and not only rely on the familiar and comfortable.
Your interpretation should show the processes you are following, the questions you have, and the links you are making between the theoretical ideas and your observations. As you interpret your ordinary moment, you will reach deeper levels of understanding of the child.

**Reflections: Making Learning Visible**

The educator asks “do we observe”?

- Children developing theories
- Children acting on their theories
- Children developing their narratives of meaning
- Children making observations
- Children finding joy in movement, noise, touch,
- Children using their senses/their bodies
- Children exploring, building, inventing
- Children exploring power, drama, excitement
- Children forming relationships and learning to negotiate within them
- Children’s connections with families
- Children wondering about and exploring representation and literacy
- Children re-visiting/remembering an action, a theory

**Enriching your Understanding**

Wondering beyond your initial thoughts opens new interpretations and working with a team enables us to consider the perspectives of others and thereby enrich our understanding of children. Thinking with others helps us ask different questions and consider multiple perspectives on what we are observing. This information can provide directions and ideas for furthering our thinking and our planning and work with children. Some of the most interesting work in the early years is done collaboratively.

**Continuing your Observations**

Continue to collect ordinary moments that build to your previous observations.
Step 5: Share your Description with your colleagues, with children and families

Sharing with Colleagues
- Present your description, including pictures, audio, etc. (the narrative only, not the reflective piece).
- Ask for comments, questions and interpretations.
- Try to elicit ideas about the implications of making children's learning visible (multiple readings).
- Do your colleagues have ideas about how you can work together to extend children's learning building on the "ordinary moment" you have described?
- Re-visit your own reflective piece and add your colleagues' ideas and suggestions.

Share your Narrative with Children and Families
- Share your narrative with families and with children in your setting.
- Ask each new audience for questions, ideas and assumptions.
- Document these.
- Integrate them into your reflective piece.

Add the comments of others to your interpretation

Community of Learners
Educators and children together form a community of learners. Our curiosity causes us to wonder about the children, examine our programs, and evaluate our own work with families and children. We are learners, as well as educators, and we must continually re-assess our work. Assessing our work and ourselves is part of learning and growing as individuals and as groups of colleagues.

Community of Learners (cont’d)
Sharing different interpretations of the documentation of children broadens our understanding and encourages us to ask more probing questions. Thinking with a group of classmates or colleagues provides alternative perspectives and engages each group member in a dynamic process of wondering and questioning. Re-visiting our documentation with children, parents, our colleagues and the community also extends this ability opening up our own thinking and that of others.

Using the wisdom of the group, we plan how to extend the observations we make of children. In collaboration with our colleagues, we can reflect on how our program meets our goals and vision. Our dialogue has the possibility of becoming richer and deeper with the
analysis of documentation that make the children’s growth and learning visible. Through our
documentation of what we are seeing with children and what we are experiencing ourselves in
the process we begin to plan differently and to think differently about what might be possible.

**Including multiple perspectives in your pedagogical narrations**

Once you have collected multiple perspectives, your work will be to organize them as part of
your pedagogical narrations. The multiple perspectives will enrich the understanding of how
children learn and make meanings of the world.

While interpreting ordinary moments with others, we construct theories and refer to theories
to explain what you observe. As Carlina Rinaldi says, “while we affirm the inseparability of
theory and practice, we prefer an open theory which is nourished by practice made visible,
contemplated, interpreted, and discussed using the documentation we produce” (Rinaldi,
2006, p. 56). This requires careful listening to the children and families, as well as listening to
co-workers.

To complete this reflective cycle, we can enter into our planning with ideas and thoughts of
our own that come from the pedagogical narrations that we have been developing, but we
must also continue in conversation with the children. This is what we mean in talking about
co-construction with children. In other words, planning from your pedagogical narrations can
include the child or children. Remembering the event or moment and retelling it and wondering
more about it engages the children in proposing and planning the next steps. You can present
information or materials that connect to the documentation and see if that intrigues or interests
the children or child, remaining open to other possibilities all the while.

**Step 6: Link the Pedagogical Narrations to the Framework**

**Making the Link**

- Review the Framework’s areas of learning and the goals.

- Consider your description of the ordinary moment and your reflective piece with its multiple
  readings from your colleagues, families and children.

- Think about the example and the educator’s thoughts in reviewing the ‘ordinary moment’
  through the lens of the framework.

- What areas of learning and what goals does your ‘ordinary moment’ raise?

- Analyze how are children making meaning in your ‘ordinary moment’.

- Think about how you can build on that learning to continue the cycle of learning with your
  colleagues, the children and their families?
Incorporate your Learning in a Planning Cycle

Ask yourself:

- What am I paying attention to?
- Am I providing experiences to children in all areas of learning and for all learning goals?
- What areas of early learning do I need to pay more attention to? Which ones have I not worked with?
- What goals do I need to pay more attention to?
- What goals have I not worked with?
- How can I use the tool of pedagogical narration to make the children’s learning visible to families? To the children?

To complete the reflective cycle, we can enter into our planning with ideas and thoughts of our own that come from the pedagogical narrations that we have been developing, but we must also continue in conversation with the children. This is what we mean in talking about co-construction with children.

Make time for research & planning

At its most basic, research is nothing more than asking questions and searching for possible answers.

Doing this regularly and collaboratively with the people with whom you work is useful; you can set aside space to reflect on what is working and what is not working. This allows time for self-assessment, as well as assessment and evaluation of a program or practice.

Shifting perspectives generate new understandings

Shifting your perspective and asking different questions can lead you to other understandings. Discussing these understandings with co-workers, families and children can have implications for our practice. In our research, we can apply frameworks of gender or race; we can ask what we are not hearing, whose voices are silent. We can look at our assumptions about children and their families and consider their validity, relevance, and usefulness in our work.
Reflection, Action, Planning for Change: Pedagogical Narrations

Please provide an example of an ordinary moment from your early learning/childcare setting. Here are a few starting points for your observations:

- Notice the child making sense of the world or exploring an issue or idea
- Notice the child’s approach to the world
- Be attentive to the child’s interests and understandings of the world
- Notice the child at play, at a mealtime, or at a transition point.

Record what happened in the questionnaire to follow.

Finished Module 5

Next, please complete the questionnaire for Module 5. In the questionnaire you will be asked to describe the results of your observations... Please provide an example of an ordinary moment from your early learning/childcare setting. Here are a few starting points for your observations:

- Notice the child making sense of the world or exploring an issue or idea
- Notice the child’s approach to the world
- Be attentive to the child’s interests and understandings of the world
- Notice the child at play, at a mealtime, or at a transition point.

In the following questionnaire, record what happened.

Please complete the Questionnaire before proceeding to Module 6.