

# Capacity Building Series

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## Realizing Ontario's Renewed Vision for Learning ...

"In our culture, we believe that every child is born with gifts. What will our schools do to uncover and develop the gifts of our children?"

– An Aboriginal leader  
*Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*

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## Pedagogical Documentation Revisited

### Looking at Assessment and Learning in New Ways

In the fall of 2013, the ministry consulted with thousands of individuals and organizations from across the province to discuss the needs of today's students. As a result of these consultations, a renewed vision for Ontario education was written and released – an ambitious plan to prepare all students for a world that is "more competitive, globally connected and technologically engaged than any other period in history." The vision, *Achieving Excellence*, is anchored in a commitment to develop awareness, understanding and respect for the needs and aspirations of today's students. It is a call to action to design educational experiences that will help them become "capable adults and fully engaged citizens, able to contribute to their families and communities."

This monograph explores how pedagogical documentation can contribute to realizing Ontario's renewed vision for education by bringing assessment *for* and *as* learning to life (*Growing Success*, 2013). Because pedagogical documentation is intended to uncover the student's thinking and learning processes, it has the potential to help us look at learning in new ways, to assess flexibly with particular needs in mind and to individualize and differentiate our response.

An earlier monograph in the *Capacity Building Series*, "[Pedagogical Documentation: Leading Learning in the Early Years and Beyond](#)" drew attention to this innovative classroom practice for early primary classrooms; this monograph invites you to consider the benefits of using pedagogical documentation to build understanding of student learning across the grades, Kindergarten to Grade 12.

Student Achievement Division

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support every child  
reach every student



## What makes documentation pedagogical?

Educators make important decisions regarding why, where and with whom they share their documentation, depending on its purpose. But what makes documentation *pedagogical*? In the words of educators participating in a ministry professional learning session for teaching in challenging circumstances, “[We] are using what has been recorded to reveal the learning within the documentation.” They suggest that what makes their team’s documentation *pedagogical* is “discussing the wonderings they have about the documentation, the inferences they are making from it and where they need to go next in the learning.” In essence, then, part of what makes documentation pedagogical is the careful, iterative process of examining and responding to the interplay between learning, the educator’s pedagogical decisions, and the student’s role and voice in the learning.

“We document the learning journey through student eyes,” reports another educator participating in an Ontario collaborative inquiry. When students are active participants in the documentation, they come to learn more about their own thinking. Through pedagogical documentation, they can develop and use metacognitive skills crucial for ongoing, lifelong learning. A teacher-researcher funded by the Ministry of Education, for example, used video documentation to share with students taking Grade 9 Applied mathematics the richness of their mathematical thinking – this enabled them to understand problem solving. In this way, the documentation helped them challenge their own assumptions about their limitations and to see their futures differently.

### Getting started tip # 1

Choose a documentation tool that you are comfortable with to get started. Many educators are comfortable with, and experienced in, taking observational notes. Taking verbatim notes of student learning is a good source of documentation. Some educators find mobile devices and tablets an excellent tool for capturing evidence of student learning.



### Exploring Terminology

Before you get started with pedagogical documentation in your school or classroom, you may wish to explore the following terminology with your team.

- “**Pedagogy** is the understanding of how learning takes place and the philosophy and practice that supports that understanding of learning.” (*How Does Learning Happen?*, 2004, p. 16)
- “We define **documentation** as the practice of observing, recording, interpreting, and sharing through a variety of media the processes and products of learning in order to deepen and extend learning ... These physical traces allow others to revisit, interpret, reinterpret, and even re-create an experience.” (Krechevsky, Mardell, Rivard, & Wilson, 2013, p. 74)
- “... **pedagogical documentation** is a process for making pedagogical (or other) work visible and subject to dialogue, interpretation, contestation and transformation.” (Dahlberg, 2007, p. 225)

*In what ways is pedagogy broader than teaching?*

*What makes documentation “pedagogical”?*

*How does pedagogical documentation result in greater responsiveness to student learning?*

## Are you ready to make some shifts?

### From teaching to learning ...

As Ontario educators dig more deeply into the work of pedagogical documentation, and wrestle with its challenges and opportunities, they experience moving from a “culture of teaching” to a “culture of learning.” In a recent review, Muijs et al. (2014) indicate that the role of students in their own learning has been understudied within the literature on effective classroom practices. The literature has focused on things that educators can do to impact student learning rather than the processes of thinking and metacognition that students engage in as they are learning. Pedagogical documentation allows educators to see how thinking, learning, curriculum and assessment are intertwined. It offers them the opportunity to contribute to a fuller understanding of learning and to advance the research on effective practice, both locally and internationally.

### From telling to listening ...

As highlighted in the earlier monograph on [pedagogical documentation](#), Rinaldi (2001) describes the process as “visible listening” – using notes, slides, videos and so on – to reconstruct students’ learning progression and processes. An Ontario educator, participating in a ministry inquiry, similarly describes pedagogical documentation as a way of listening to students. “Instead of telling students what I was going to teach and then teaching it,” she reports, “I decided to make a concerted effort to listen closely and carefully to what students are saying and how they are saying it in order to respond appropriately, involve them authentically in the process and truly honour their voice.”

### From gaps to assets ...

In Ontario’s renewed vision for education, equity is not just about closing gaps and raising test scores, but about ensuring equity of opportunity and outcomes. Educators experimenting with pedagogical documentation find that it supports this view of equity, affirming a view of all students, in Dahlberg’s (2007) terms, as “competent, capable of complex thinking, curious and rich in potential.” Embracing this view, they find that pedagogical documentation helps them plan with students, and co-construct experiences that build on individual student strengths and abilities. Early years educators have increasingly recognized the sophisticated capabilities of young children when given opportunities to learn challenging concepts. Secondary educators have similarly witnessed the impressive capabilities of young people by opening up opportunities for them to explore issues that matter to them.

### Getting started tip # 2

One simple way to get started with pedagogical documentation is to plan to document some learning for about two minutes a day. You may just want to write observational notes for those two minutes or video-record student learning on a mobile device, describing what you have learned without judgment or interpretation. Plan time to consider what the documentation suggests about the learner’s thinking and record any questions and wonderings you might have.



### Shifting Mindsets

What mindset do you bring to your process of pedagogical documentation ...

- Student-focused?
- Listening vs telling?
- Asset-oriented?

### Getting started tip # 3

Engaging in analysis of the documentation with students can help them become more metacognitive about their learning and assist them in setting goals for furthering their learning (assessment as learning). Student-captured pedagogical documentation can provide you with a different perspective when making decisions about the next action for learning, for students and for yourself as an educator.

## The Phases of Pedagogical Documentation

An earlier monograph, “*Collaborative Inquiry in Ontario: What We Have Learned and Where We Are Now*” identifies the components of CI work that need to be present if professional learning is to have an impact on student learning. These components – focusing on student experience, engaging in professional discourse and pedagogy, and contributing to a culture of inquiry and collaboration – frame the exploration of the key phases of pedagogical documentation, described in the next couple of pages.

### Phase 1: Observing and Recording Student Experience

*“The emotions in the classroom – joy, excitement, confusion, and even conflict – are important indicators of the quality of the learning experience.”* (Krechevsky, Mardell Rivard & Wilson, 2013, p. 77).

Over many years, observation has been used as an assessment tool to gauge student learning. As an assessment tool in pedagogical documentation, it includes “visible listening” and takes on an expanded meaning. Further, as Pat Tarr (2010) suggests, in pedagogical documentation we observe students not only to assess a particular learning or skill, but through a “lens of curiosity” so that we keep the possibilities open for “seeing” student learning and uncover strengths and ways of thinking and problem-solving that inform our understanding and action. Observation becomes an integral part of the learning and teaching process as well as a way to assess student learning. Both approaches to observation are relevant to bringing insight into learning, depending upon the purpose and context.



#### Assessment for Learning

- Conversations/Saying
- Observations/Doing
- Products/Representing

*Do we observe with a pedagogy of listening?*

*What, how, why and when should we document?*

*When do we document with a lens of curiosity?*

*When do we observe and document with a specific focus in mind?*

### Phase 2: Interpreting Learning in Service of Pedagogy

*“How do we decide whether an interpretation is credible and truthful and whether one interpretation is better than another?”* (Schwandt, Lincoln & Guba, 2007)

When educators interpret and analyze student learning in cross-grade/department professional learning teams or in collaborative inquiries (CIs) – they develop a greater understanding of how students at various ages can be supported in their learning, academically as well as socially and emotionally. When students are included in these

discussions, the learning is even more powerful and can lead to great strides in understanding and development. Further, parents and community members offer unique perspectives and strengths to extend the learning experiences outside the school to make connections with the student's life in other contexts. The school's education and career/life planning program encourages parents and community members to support students in exploring learning opportunities that inform their career development. Students learn to embrace these opportunities and consider where in all aspects of their lives they can engage their interests, skills and passions.



### Assessment as Learning

- Students represent, record and reflect on their own learning

#### Questions for Students

*What does this documentation tell you about yourself as a learner?*

*What are your next steps?*

*Have you been informed about how the documentation of your learning might be used for professional learning and reflection?*

*Have you agreed to the documentation?*

*How does what you are learning about yourself support your pathways and career planning?*

### Getting started tip # 4

Learning is complex. Find a partner to help you get started. Having another set of eyes will provide you with a different perspective when describing the student learning you have documented. As well, when you begin to interpret the documentation and consider implications for student and professional learning, having a partner will help you challenge biases, confirm new learnings and offer support in responding to new understandings in the classroom.

### Some Criteria for Interpretations

The interpretation phase in pedagogical documentation can be very challenging because of the inherent subjectivity of all interpretations. Participants should look to program and curriculum documents and the professional literature to help ground, connect, confirm or question the interpretations emerging from their dialogue. They also need to look to other criteria to assess their value. Educators participating in the ministry's K to 12 Student Work Study Teacher (SWST) have found it useful to use the criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity developed by Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba (2007). These criteria have been adapted below to help you reflect on the robustness of your own interpretations.

#### Criteria for Trustworthiness

- **Credibility**

How does our documentation of student learning compare with other observations and assessments? Have we debriefed our interpretations with colleagues?

- **Applicability**

Are you sharing enough information about your context so that others can see how your interpretations might apply to their context?

- **Reliability**

Have we shared our interpretations with others not involved in our classroom practice for evaluation and confirmation?

## Criteria for Authenticity

- **Fairness**  
Do our interpretations present a balanced view of the student and his or her learning?
- **New Learning**  
Did our interpretations provoke learning in others? Did we come to appreciate/ apprehend/discern/understand – not necessarily like or agree with – the constructions that are made by others?
- **Action Focused**  
Did our interpretations move us to take action?
- **Make a Difference**  
Did our actions result in a desired change (or any change at all)?

## Getting started tip # 5

Be intentional with your pedagogical documentation plans. Think about whose learning you have documented over time and those students you might have missed. Having a system in place for collecting and organizing your documentation allows you to ensure that all students are represented in the documentation you are gathering.

## Phase 3: Responding, Sharing and Building a Culture of Inquiry and Collaboration

*“Learning does not end with presentation but rather with reflection, reflexivity, and action. As a function of learning, learners need to position themselves differently in the world: business ought not to go on as usual.”*  
(Harste, 2001, p. 15)

Conversations about pedagogical documentation are powerful professional learning opportunities. They are also raising many questions about student agency in learning. *Creating Pathways to Success* (2013), for example, establishes the importance of engaging students in a metacognitive process to discover who they are, explore opportunities, pursue their passions and design personal pathways to success in education, career and life. Pedagogical documentation supports this process by fostering a respectful intellectual partnership with students as they work their way to future goals.



### Fostering Reciprocal Relationships

Reciprocal relationships are cultivated through collaborative conversations using pedagogical documentation. Perspectives of children and youth, their parents and guardians, educators and the broader community can be brought into these conversations for the purpose of furthering learning and connecting learners to their world.



Note: The graphic draws from Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of development as well as more recent work by Susan Fraser (2012) in *Authentic Childhood*.

## Ethical Considerations in Pedagogical Documentation

Ontario secondary students working with the ministry's "Students as Researchers" initiative have begun to explore the ethical dimensions of capturing student thinking as a part of improving schooling. Using the "Tri-Council Policy Statement," a research ethics framework developed by Canadian scientists and academics, they are finding exciting new opportunities for partnering with educators, students and others to transform learning and teaching.

You may find these guidelines, adapted from the student toolkit, helpful as you get started with pedagogical documentation at your school or board.

1. **Respect for human dignity.** Co-learning with pedagogical documentation respects all persons, regardless of gender, race, class, sexual orientation or other factors.
2. **Free and informed consent.** Everyone represented in the documentation must be informed about how the documentation will be used. Children and youth, and parents of children under 16, are informed and provided opportunity to agree to its use without being pressured or coerced in any way. Jointly discussing and determining the goals and benefits of using documentation as well as any potential harm in sharing documentation is a part of free and informed consent.
3. **Respect for privacy and confidentiality.** Educators (and documenters) are responsible for respecting the right to privacy and keeping personal information confidential. When sharing documentation, consider when and how students' privacy and confidentiality are respected and put in place a plan for how material will be stored/destroyed over time.
4. **Respect for vulnerable persons.** Educators inherently have an ethic of care to treat students' fairly, with respect and with dignity. Vulnerable groups require additional consideration, including those who are socially, economically or politically marginalized, including the elderly, children, those with disabilities or mental health considerations. When sharing documentation, special attention should be paid to ensure that vulnerable people are not negatively represented and/or impacted.
5. **Minimizing harm and maximizing benefits to the community.** Ensure that there is no harm done to any participant as a result of sharing documentation. The goal is to use documentation to make positive change and maximize benefits for students, educators and communities.

Canadian researcher Pat Tarr says, "Both educators and researchers must negotiate their way amongst the continually flickering shadows of the ethical dilemmas that arise when we work with visual images intended to bring visibility to the lives of children in ways that include their voices in a collaborative endeavor" (Tarr, 2011). We end with some reflective questions from her work to help you explore the ethical implications of pedagogical documentation with your school team:

- *How do we represent students in ways that are ethical and respectful?*
- *Why choose this one (e.g., image or video clip) over that to represent learning?*
- *What should I do when images are selected that may show one child [youth] in less than a positive light?*
- *If I represent this student's struggle to solve a problem (and this student often has difficulties), does this place him or her in a position as "other" or does it bring him or her into the group?*

### Getting started tip # 6

Technology is changing all the time. If you are using a digital tool to document learning in your classroom, make sure you read the licensing agreement and check for:

- age of user
- ownership of information
- where it's stored
- other restrictions and requirements for use



## Adding Rigour to Your Curiosity

### Getting started tip # 7

Think about how you are going to communicate the learning that is captured in pedagogical documentation. How will you collaborate with students, families and colleagues in the communication of the learning in the documentation?

Here is the pedagogical documentation process in brief and some reflective questions for your school team:

- **Introduction** *What do we need to know to understand the context of this documentation? What is our purpose in reviewing this documentation together?*
- **Description** *What did we see/hear/feel? It is vital not to skip or shorten this step, nor to include interpretations at this stage.*
- **Interpretation** *What does the documentation suggest about the learner's thinking? What are our questions and wonderings? What lens are we using to interpret this documentation (e.g., curriculum, learning skills, research/professional reading)? How do we decide whether an interpretation is credible and truthful and whether one interpretation is better than another?*
- **Implications** *What are the implications for deepening the learning? What additional information is needed? What actions will be taken as a result, for the learner, educators, the school and/or the community? How will we differentiate teaching and learning based on this new learning? If we are adjusting our teaching for a small group of students we know well, how will this impact our teaching for the whole class?*
- **Reflection** *What have we learned about the process of pedagogical documentation? What are the applications to other aspects of classroom practice? How are we capturing our professional learning?*

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### Ontario Ministry of Education

*Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario* (2013)

*Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario's Schools, First Edition Covering Grades 1 to 12* (2011)

*How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years*. (2014)

*Creating Pathways to Success: An Education and Career/Life Planning Program for Ontario Schools* (2013)

### Capacity Building Series

*Pedagogical Documentation: Leading Learning in the Early Years and Beyond* (2012)

*Student Identity and Engagement in Elementary Schools* (2013)