

The Power of Documentation

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Documentation at the ALC

Types of documentation at the ALC are:

- Daily Journal
- Daily Journal Archive
- Diarios
- Classroom Documentation

The Daily Journal

The Daily Journal generally features three photos of the day as well as text explaining projects and/or activities. It is displayed at a child's eye level so that it is easily accessible to children. Here are some Daily Journal guidelines:

- Take photos of each area of the classroom giving a full picture of the day.
- Include dialogue from children that is relevant to the featured photo.
- Use text describing how and what children are learning.
- Be creative!

The Daily Journal Archive

At the end of a week, we take down the daily journals and put them into a large binder. It is kept in the book area and is always accessible to children, parents and teachers. Daily Journal Archive benefits include:

- It creates a beautiful record of the entire school year.
- It is a wonderful way for children to reflect on past learning.
- It can be used as a resource when revisiting an activity or project.
- It makes learning visible.

Diarios

Each child has an individual portfolio that we call "Diarios". We feature artwork, photos, quotes, projects and activities as well as information on development and other educational insights. Our Diario logistics are:

- Each teacher is responsible for about ten children's Diarios.
- We collect artwork and photos featuring the work and development of our assigned children.
- We strive to add one page a month to each Diario.
- Each teacher gets one day a month to work on Diarios.

Classroom Documentation

Each fall we begin posting a series of documentation with the aim of recording our entire school year upon our walls. Through text, photos and products of learning, we strive to make our classroom a reflection of the vast amounts of discovery and learning that takes place in a year's time. Documentation can include:

- Project Work
- Educational Value of Projects and Activities
- Storytelling
- Capturing Ordinary Moments
- Celebrations and Events

The Value of Documentation

Making Learning Visible

It is difficult as early childhood educators to make learning visible in the classroom. Preschool-aged children generally do not get grades or test scores, the traditional mark of achievement. It can be challenging to convey the many ways in which children learn everyday in a preschool program. Documentation can be a powerful tool in this regard through:

- Photos of children in action.
- Artwork or other products of learning.
- Children's words about their experiences.
- Teacher's commentary on an activity or experience.

Communication

Good documentation can create opportunities for communication on many levels. This includes:

- **Parent/Child** - parents can talk to their child more easily about their day by reading the Daily Journal.
- **Teacher/Parent** - teachers have the opportunity to convey to parents the educational value of projects and activities, our daily happenings and more.
- **Child/Child** - children can use resources such as the Daily Journal, Archives and Diarios to promote conversation about past experiences.

Tracking Development

Through a child's Diario, teachers are able to present evidence of development in the following areas:

- Drawing/Writing
- Development
- Block Development
- Social Development
- Literacy
- Science and Math
- Experiences

Reflection on Learning

We have several resources throughout the classroom that allow children to reflect on past projects and activities. This helps to reinforce learning experiences as well as giving children a sense of pride in revisiting their accomplishments. Resources include:

- Daily Journal
- Daily Journal Archive
- Diarios
- Classroom Documentation

Our Documentation Journey

Documentation was one of the last, and possibly most challenging aspects of the Reggio approach that we have undertaken. We struggled at first on what to say and also to attain the technology necessary to document in the ways that we wanted to.

We found that the more we documented, the better we became at writing meaningful text. It has also helped us to hone our observation skills. It is something that takes practice and, for us, it has been an educational journey in and of itself.

The Early Days

In the beginning of our documentation efforts, we did not have a computer. With the proceeds of a grant we purchased a digital camera and printer and used only these two items to create daily journals.

Our documentation panels featured the work of children and handwritten text. We didn't use as many photos because we didn't have the ease and convenience of digital technology.

Keep It Simple At First

These simple forms of documentation are a great place to start in recording the learning of children. We learned a lot from our early efforts and could not be where we are with documentation today if we hadn't gone through this process.

What to Say!??!

Documentation demands that teachers closely observe what children are doing. A single activity or project can have many angles in which to write about. When sitting down to chart a daily journal, think about such topics as:

- **Social Learning** - detail children's social interaction and what they are learning from it.
- **Cognitive Development** - discuss specific aspects such as seriation and classification, Piaget's conservation tasks, block and drawing and writing development, etc.
- **Tell the Story** - talk about how a group of boys were playing "Attack of the Aliens" in the block area telling the tale from their point of view.
- **Use Children's Dialogue** - record children's actual words on what they are doing, building, creating, etc.
- **Projects** - record the steps children use to complete a task or project.

For example, text pertaining to this photo might be:



- **Social Learning** - the boys not only worked well together but also skillfully collaborated on their building project.
- **Cognitive Development** - the boys used high-level thinking skills while planning and implementing this complex design.
- **Tell the Story** - the boys made an ice cream machine and served many children strawberry ice cream.
- **Use Children's Dialogue** - Samuel - We have an ice cream shop! Do you want chocolate or strawberry ice cream?
- **Projects** - the boys started their project of building and ice cream machine with the Brio Mac set and eventually got out dishes to serve ice cream

Conclusion

We have found our documentation to be a valuable tool in our teaching practice. Besides the value we have stated, one of the biggest benefits is that it is incredibly important to children. They are often seen looking at the documentation on the walls, the daily journal and their Diarios. The fact that children can easily review their accomplishments is one of our documentation's biggest rewards.