

Research methods:
potential for
pedagogical
documentation to
enhance children's
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Introduction

The problem to be addressed by this study is that despite the potential for pedagogical documentation to enhance children's participation, little is known about whether it is used for this purpose (Emilson & Pramling Samuelsson, 2014; Knauf, 2017; MacDonald & Hill, 2018; Pettersson, 2015; Rintakorpi, 2016). Specifically, it is unclear if, or how early childhood educators in the United States use pedagogical documentation to enhance children's meaningful participation.

In fact, researchers have found that early childhood educators have the power to give children voice but trivialize their meaningful involvement (Leinonen et al., 2014; Paananen & Lipponen, 2018; Pettersson, 2015). Therefore, research is needed to explore early childhood educators' perceptions on their use of pedagogical documentation to understand children's perspectives and enhance their participatory pedagogy. This knowledge can then be shared with other educators to facilitate their own practice of documentation to make children's perspectives visible and increase children's meaningful participation.

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research methodology for this qualitative study regarding early child educators' perceptions about their use of pedagogical documentation to enhance children's participation. Through a social constructivist lens, the application of a qualitative methodology using a case study design with a phenomenological approach will be discussed in detail in this chapter. The population and sample, materials and instruments, study procedures, data collection and analysis processes, assumptions,

limitations, delimitations, and ethical assurances will be discussed and supported with literature.

Research Methodology and Design

A social constructivist worldview allows researchers to understand the world in which we live (Creswell, 2013). Through social constructivism, researchers seek meaning through the complexity of views, rather than narrowly confine meaning to a few groupings or concepts (Creswell, 2013). Social constructivism is an appropriate paradigm for a qualitative methodology, which allows for an interpretive, subjective approach to research.

Qualitative research allows the researcher to explore a phenomenon in its natural setting to gain a deeper understanding of said phenomenon; it is not meant to be generalizable, as in quantitative studies (Denizen & Lincoln, 2011). Lincoln and Guba (2000) indicate that qualitative research begins with a broad question, which allows for the inductive process of data collection and analysis and facilitates an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. Merriam (2009) states, “ Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (p. 5). To understand another’s perspectives about their own experience with a phenomenon, it is critical to collect data that are rich and thick in content (Denizen & Lincoln, 2011; Moustakas, 1994).

Single case studies are used to investigate real-life phenomena that are contextually bound, as they occur in their natural context (Yin, 2003).

Additionally, case studies allow researchers to examine data on a smaller,

more personal level to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Through case studies, researchers develop an understanding of the participant's lived experiences as expressed in their own words (Merriam, 2009). In this way, case studies can give insight into the complexities that relate to the reader's real life, everyday experiences (Crawford, 2016). Yin (2003) further notes that the rationale for selecting a single case study is when one wants to capture the essence of a representative, or everyday situation.

According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological researchers explore the lived experiences of a group of people within a certain context, when it is important to understand the shared experience to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Asking broad, general, open-ended questions allows the researcher to understand the common experiences of the participants, while the interpretive and flexible nature of phenomenology allows the researcher to be prepared for anything unexpected or unplanned (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015; Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, phenomenological researchers strive to understand the essence of a phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants and rely as much as possible on the participants' own views, bracketing out their own experiences as much as possible (Creswell, 2013).

A qualitative, single case study using a phenomenological approach is well aligned to nature of this study which is to gain a deeper understanding of early childhood educators' perspectives on their use of pedagogical documentation. For this particular study, a phenomenological single case study was selected for its ability to provide a deeper understanding of early

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childhood educators' perspectives about their use of pedagogical documentation. In Reggio-inspired preschools, pedagogical documentation occurs on a daily basis; therefore, a single case study on Reggio inspired early childhood educators' use of pedagogical documentation to enhance children's participation can yield results that may be transferrable to other Reggio-inspired preschools (Bloomberg, 2017). Yin (2003) delineates between the case and the boundaries of the case. The cases in this study are the early childhood educators who use pedagogical documentation, bounded by the preschool setting and Reggio-inspired context.

Taking a phenomenological approach will help provide rich, thick descriptions of how early childhood educators experience and perceive pedagogical documentation. A phenomenological approach will also allow me to begin with broad, open ended questions and gradually narrow the focus to determine the common, shared experiences of the educators' use of pedagogical documentation (Moustakas, 1994). In this way, it will be possible to better understand if and how early childhood educators use pedagogical documentation to enhance children's participation.

A constructivist approach to grounded theory, as explained by Charmaz (2006) was considered for this study, however, due to the exploratory nature of this study, it would be presumptuous to attempt to develop a theory regarding early childhood educators' use of pedagogical documentation to enhance children's meaningful participation at this early stage of research. Grounded theorists move beyond describing a phenomenon, as is the purpose of this study, and seek to generate a theory based on participants' experiences (Charmaz, 2006).

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Neither the narrative approach nor an ethnography was considered appropriate for this study, for the former focuses on the life of an individual, while the latter focuses on a long-term study of a shared culture (Creswell, 2013). The central purpose of a phenomenological case study is to study a concept or phenomenon as experienced by the individuals in a specific case (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the specific case is early childhood educators bounded by a Reggio-inspired preschool and the phenomenon under study is their use of pedagogical documentation to enhance children's meaningful participation.

Population and Sample

The target population for this study are early childhood educators who use pedagogical documentation in their everyday practice. Purposive sampling will be used to collect data from early childhood educators to better understand their perceptions on their use of pedagogical documentation to enhance children's participation. Purposive sampling is a method whereby participants are deliberately chosen for their ability to provide the necessary data to better understand the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013). Data will be collected from a purposive sample of 12 early childhood educators from a Reggio-inspired preschool in Southern California. This site was selected for its self-proclaimed social constructivist, Reggio-inspired philosophy.

The educators at the selected site embrace the Reggio notion of the hundred languages of children and understand that educators have a significant role in the process of children's learning. At this site, educators create environments, activities, and opportunities for children through the process

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of talking, listening, and observing young children. In this way, these educators collaborate with children in the co-construction of their learning. Additionally, the educators at this center had previously traveled to Reggio Emilia, Italy where they participated in an International Student and Professor Study Group. At this conference, these educators toured the Infant/Toddler and Preschools of Reggio Emilia, spent time with the teachers and children, participated in discussion groups, and viewed documentations at the Loris Malaguzzi Center. It is expected that this sample of educators and administrators will provide useful information about their perceptions about the use of pedagogical documentation to enhance children's participation.

In qualitative research, data saturation “relates to the degree to which new data repeat what was expressed in previous data” (Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1897). It is a criterion for knowing when enough data has been collected until no new data emerges. In phenomenological research, data saturation can be understood in relation to information provided by an individual participant in the course of an interview or through questionnaires (Saunders et al., 2018). Legard, Keegan, and Ward (2003) state that data saturation occurs when “the researcher feels they have reached saturation, a full understanding of the participant's perspectives” (p. 152). Differing from the deductive approach of theoretical saturation, data saturation is an inductive approach which occurs during data collection, rather than the process of analysis (Legard et al., 2003). Van Manen, Higgins, and van der Reit (2016) suggest that saturation is not associated with interpretative phenomenological analysis, however, judgments of data saturation will be made during this

study by the researcher based on each participant's responses and the notion of *informational redundancy*, meaning, when no new information is forthcoming.

Materials/Instrumentation

An open-ended survey using the online software tool Qualtrics will be used to collect the data for this study. For the participants, an online survey is convenient, for they can answer questions at their own chosen time and place. For the researcher, an online survey is inexpensive to use, saves time, and reduces potential errors in data transcription (Ponto, 2015). The questionnaire will be developed by the researcher using an open-ended format which will allow each of the educators to answer honestly and candidly, and so that educators may clarify their answers if they desire.

Questions will be developed based on literature previously reviewed, including Hart's ladder of participation and Shier's pathways toward participation, and will be aligned to answer the research questions involving educators' perceptions about their image of the child, children's perspectives, children's participation, and pedagogical documentation (see Appendix B; Bloomberg, 2017a). The answers to the questionnaire will be manually evaluated for emerging themes throughout the survey responses. It is understood that themes originate from the review of the literature, from common sense constructs, and from the researcher's own values, theoretical orientation, and personal and professional experience (Bloomberg, 2017b). However, Bloomberg (2017b) does caution against too much prior theorizing, which can hinder the construction of new ideas and the ability to make unexpected associations.

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The choice to create original questions for the survey instead of previously formulated questions was due to this newly emerging area of research. Before implementation, the survey questions will be appraised by two experts in the field of early childhood education to ensure that the questionnaire will elicit the necessary information to answer the research questions.

Study Procedures

Institutional Review Board (IRB) will be sought from Northcentral University prior to any data collection. Once approval is received, the researcher will send an email to the center director informing her of IRB approval and asking permission to send a letter of recruitment (see Appendix C) and Northcentral University's informed consent form (see Appendix D) via email to recruit potential participants at the site. After reading the letter of informed consent, those who wish to participate will sign and return the form, then click the link to the Qualtrics survey provided in the body of the email.

To ensure confidentiality, no demographic data will be collected from the participants, and no distinguishing characteristics of the site will be disclosed. Although the researcher will know which participant filled out which survey, participants will be assigned a letter (A, B, C, etcetera) to identify their individual responses. Physical data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office and online data will be stored on a password protected computer that is accessed only by the researcher (Creswell, 2013). According to NCU's IRB policy, data will be kept for a period of seven years after the close of the study.

Additionally, participants will be assured that they may skip any question they do not wish to answer, as well as opt out of the study at any time with no adverse consequences. Participants will have two weeks to complete the survey. An email reminder will be sent to those participants who have not yet completed the survey one week after the initial email, and then again one day before the survey closes. Data will be analyzed from those that responded to the survey.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data will be collected from a sample of 12 early childhood educators from a Reggio-inspired preschool in Southern California via Qualtrics, an online survey tool, and analyzed using a variety of techniques to ensure that all themes are identified (Bloomberg, 2017b). Data analysis will begin with line by line coding and a thorough exploration of the text via word-based and tactile approaches.

Survey responses will be read line by line to identify key words in context (KWIC), color-code clearly visible themes, and re-read to search for themes that remain unmarked (Bloomberg, 2017b). Bloomberg (2017b) recommends that researchers *live with the data*, therefore, tactile approaches, such as pawing the data and cutting and sorting will also be utilized. Pawing the data consists of proofreading the material and underlining key phrases so the researcher can *get a feel for the text* by handling the data multiple times and waiting for patterns to emerge (Bloomberg, 2017b). Cutting and pasting is a more sophisticated form of pawing, whereby the researcher cuts and pastes quotations in context and physically sorts and organizes these quotes into piles. These piles then become themes. Bloomberg states that cutting and

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pasting “ systematically describes how themes are distributed across participants” (slide 18). Bloomberg (2017b) cautions novice researchers against *overfitting* the data, meaning, finding only what they are looking for. To avoid this, Bloomberg suggests that researchers search for missing information within the data as well.

In qualitative studies, it is imperative that issues of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability be addressed (Bloomberg, 2017c).

Credibility will be established through the process of triangulation through verifying sources via literature as well as member checking (Bloomberg, 2017c). Additionally, after reflecting on her own personal expectations and assumptions about early childhood education and pedagogical documentation, the researcher will strive to read and analyze the data with transparency of any personal biases. Keeping a journal about any thoughts and ideas that occur during the analytic process will further ensure reflection and transparency on the part of the researcher. These field notes may also be used as an audit trail to address any concerns regarding dependability and confirmability (Bloomberg, 2017c). Finally, readers will determine whether results will be transferable to their specific sites through the descriptions that were provided regarding the purposive sample and the rich, thick descriptions that will be provided in the results and discussion sections of this study (Bloomberg, 2017c).

Assumptions

Assumptions in research are what one presumes to be true, without which the study would become irrelevant (Simon, 2011). One assumption for this study is that the participants have some experience with the process of <https://assignbuster.com/research-methods-potential-for-pedagogical-documentation-to-enhance-childrens-participation/>

pedagogical documentation. This was determined by their status as a Reggio-inspired preschool where pedagogical documentation is a daily practice. Additionally, because confidentiality will be assured, it is assumed the participants will be honest and accurate in their responses to the questions asked (Simon, 2011).

Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses in a study, and as such, the researcher must be transparent in their acknowledgement of a study's limitations and attempts to mitigate them (Simon, 2011). One limitation to this study is the inclusion of educators from only one early childhood center. It is acknowledged that including educators from other Reggio-inspired preschools might yield a more information about phenomenon of pedagogical documentation; however, in qualitative research, it is understood that to achieve thick, rich descriptions, quality is preferred over quantity of responses. Another limitation is the use of a survey questionnaire. While this means of data collection is convenient for the researcher and participants, it is acknowledged that there may be a low response rate. Furthermore, an online survey does not afford the researcher an opportunity to clarify participant responses (Roberts & Allen, 2015). However, a benefit of this method of data collection is that it limits any undue influence on the part of the researcher and saves valuable time in the process of data transcription (Simon, 2011).

Delimitations

Delimitations in research are boundaries set by the researcher to ensure the goals of the study will be reached (Simon, 2011). For this study, early

childhood educators from one Reggio-inspired early childcare center in Southern California were selected as participants of this study. The choice of limiting the number of childcare centers to one was due to the phenomenological nature of this study. An online survey questionnaire was selected for the ease and convenience of data collection.

Ethical Assurances

According to the Belmont Report (United States, 1978), there are three ethical principles when conducting research with human subjects: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. In the proposed study, respect of persons is ensured by participants signing an informed consent document assuring that their participation is voluntary, that they can choose to not answer certain questions, and that they may withdraw from the study at any point.

Beneficence is achieved by promoting the benefits and minimizing the risks when conducting research. In this study, there are no inherent risks from the survey process. It is the belief of the researcher that a better understanding of teachers' experiences with pedagogical documentation will help provide professional development opportunities to early childhood educators in pedagogical documentation practices. It is also believed that this study will lead to further studies that acknowledge the competence and capabilities of young children.

Lastly, the Belmont Report states that justice, meaning, what is fair and who should receive the benefits of the research, must be assured. In this study, every educator at this school site will have an equal opportunity to participate if they choose. It is the researcher's belief that the benefits of the

study will help all early childhood educators in their practice of pedagogical documentation, not just those who participate. International Review Board (IRB) approval will be sought prior to any data collection, which assures the proposed study will meet all the ethical requirements of research with human subjects.

Summary

In this chapter, the methodology of conducting a qualitative case study with a phenomenological approach was discussed in detail. Through a social-constructivist lens, the perceptions of 12 early childhood educators from a Reggio-inspired preschool will be collected via an open-ended, online questionnaire. Once data has been collected, the researcher will analyze the data using multiple approaches, including KWIC, line by line coding, identifying themes across participants, and looking for missing information. The researcher will live with the data through the process of pawing and cutting and pasting to ensure enough time is given for all patterns and themes to emerge. Issues of credibility, dependability, and confirmability will be addressed through triangulation of the data, journaling the researcher's thoughts and research process, and providing an audit trail to be evaluated by an independent party. Assumptions, limitations, and delimitations were discussed, as were the ethical assurances of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, as outlined in the Belmont Report.

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Appendix A

I am writing to request site permission to conduct a research study at Cerritos College's Child Development Center. I am currently enrolled in the Early Childhood School of Education at Northcentral University in San Diego, CA, and I am in the process of authoring my doctoral dissertation. The study

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is entitled Early Childhood Educators' Perceptions on the Use of Pedagogical Documentation to Enhance Children's Meaningful Participation.

I visited the CDC last October 2018 for an educator's tour and again for the Voices of Children exhibit in April 2019. I truly feel your educators can provide valuable information regarding their pedagogical documentation practices. I am awaiting Northcentral University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for this study and gaining site permission is the first step in this process; therefore, your permission to conduct this study at your site would be very much appreciated.

If IRB approval is granted, participants will be asked to complete an anonymous online questionnaire this fall (August/September 2019). The survey results will be pooled for the research project and individual results of this study will remain absolutely confidential and anonymous. Should this study be published, only pooled results will be documented, and no costs will be incurred by either your school or the individual participants.

Appendix B

Survey Questionnaire

Thank you so much for your time in filling out this questionnaire. As you are aware, I am interested in understanding the role pedagogical documentation has on young children's participation. Please note that there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers; I am interested in your authentic use of pedagogical documentation to better understand how it is applied in everyday settings and your honest and thorough answers are very much appreciated. Your

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answers will provide valuable insight into how pedagogical documentation is used in practice by Reggio-inspired educators. Again, I am grateful for your willingness to take the time to answer the following questions as thoroughly and honestly as possible.

Background:

1. What is your role as an educator?
2. What is your image of the child?
3. How important is it for you to understand children's perspectives? Why?
4. How are children's perspectives taken into account in your classroom?

Participation:

5. What is your view of children's participation in the classroom?
6. How are children involved in the decision-making process in your classroom? Please provide examples.
7. How do children's interests influence their daily interactions?

Pedagogical Documentation:

8. What professional development or training have you had on pedagogical documentation?
9. How would you describe your practice of pedagogical documentation?

10. Does pedagogical documentation help you understand children's perspectives? If so, how?

11. Do you believe that your practice of pedagogical documentation supports children in making their own decisions throughout the day? If so, how?

12. Do you believe your practice of pedagogical documentation leads to children's shared power and responsibility in decision making? Please offer some specific examples from your classroom practice.

Appendix C

Letter of Recruitment

If you take part in this research, you will be asked to access an online survey link. The survey has twelve (12) open-ended questions. These questions are about your role as an educator and your documentation practice. This process should take 60 minutes of your time.

You may take part in this research if you:

1. Are an early childhood educator
2. Use documentation in your teaching practice.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me:

Appendix D

Letter of Informed Consent

Introduction:

I am conducting a research study on the use of pedagogical documentation to enhance young children's participation. I am completing this research as part of my doctoral degree. Your participation is completely voluntary. I am seeking your consent to involve you and your information in this study.

Reasons you might *not* want to participate in the study include not having the time to answer the survey questions. Reasons you might want to participate in the study include gaining a deeper understanding of the potential for pedagogical documentation to enhance young children's meaningful participation in making decisions about their own learning. An alternative to this study is simply not participating. I am here to address your questions or concerns during the informed consent process.

PRIVATE INFORMATION

Certain private information will not be collected about you in this study. I will not collect any personal or demographic information from you. Even with this effort, there is a chance that your private information may be accidentally released. The chance is small but does exist. You should consider this when deciding whether to participate.

Activities:

If you participate in this research, you will be asked to:

1. Access an online survey link to answer twelve (12) open-ended questions about your role as an educator, your teaching philosophy, and your

pedagogical documentation practice via an online survey questionnaire. This process should take approximately 60 minutes of your time.

Eligibility:

You are eligible to participate in this research if you:

1. Are a Reggio-inspired early childhood educator of children aged 3-5 years.
2. Use pedagogical documentation in your teaching practice.

You are not eligible to participate in this research if you:

1. Are not an early childhood educator (children ages 3-5).
2. Do not practice pedagogical documentation.

I hope to include twelve (12) people in this research.

Risks:

There are minimal risks in this study, such as the time it takes to answer all 12 questions.

To decrease the impact of these risks, you can skip any question, or stop participating at any time.

Benefits:

If you decide to participate, there are no direct benefits to you.

The potential benefits to others are a deeper understanding of how pedagogical documentation will aid in providing early childhood educators professional development opportunities in pedagogical documentation practices. It is also believed that this research will lead to further studies that acknowledge and make known the competence and capabilities of young children.

Confidentiality:

The information you provide will be kept confidential to the extent allowable by law. Some steps I will take to keep your identity confidential are not using your name; rather, I will identify your responses by randomly assigning a letter in place of your name. Additionally, no identifying characteristics of your school site will be discussed within the study.

The people who will have access to your information are: myself and my dissertation chair. The Institutional Review Board may also review my research and view your information.

I will secure your information with these steps: all manually coded data will be locked in a filing cabinet; data stored on a computer will be password protected.

I will keep your data for 7 years. Then, I will delete electronic data and destroy paper data.

If you contact us you will be giving us information like your phone number or email address. This information will not be linked to your responses if the study is anonymous.

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If you have questions about your rights in the research, or if a problem has occurred, please contact the Institutional Review Board at: irb@ncu.edu or 1-888-327-2877 ext. 8014.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation is voluntary. If you decide not to participate, or if you stop participation after you start, there will be no penalty to you. You will not lose any benefit to which you are otherwise entitled.

Future Research

Any information or specimens collected from you during this research may not be used for other research in the future, even if identifying information is removed .

Signature:

A signature indicates your understanding of this consent form. You will be given a copy of the form for your information.

Participant Signature Printed Name Date

Researcher Signature Printed Name Date
