Restoring Pedagogical Vitality: Restitching Documentation, Pedagogy, and Progettazione

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Pedagogical documentation has undoubtedly inspired novel and ethically responsive practices in early childhood education. However, it has also contributed to legitimizing logics that have lost their experimental vitality. This article addresses this paradox through two movements. First, the authors create a "conceptual stitch" by which to reconnect documentation, relationally and conceptually, with pedagogy and progettazione. Second, they propose four ideas for rethinking documentation through this conceptual stitch. In making these moves, the authors seek to restore documentation's relational integrity and open space for education's pedagogical possibilities beyond the obscure and the normative.

Key words: *pedagogical documentation, pedagogy, progettazione, Itinerant School*

A preoccupation that provokes our thinking and research when we consider documentation is that it seems to be a practice that detachedly fluctuates in the "curricular space," sometimes even obscurely in its reasons or purpose—or, if not obscured, it "lands," pushed by the heavy weight of normative sedimentation. This sedimentation is produced, in part, through the stratification of multiple discourses and contextual translations that stabilize certain "truths" about what the practice of documentation is for, how it should be done, and what it should produce. These discursive formations, even when emerging from progressive or ethical aims and intentions, can calcify into technologies of normalization (Braidotti, 2013; Deleuze, 1992; Foucault, 1995), governing practices by delimiting what is sayable, thinkable, doable, and made visible in early childhood spaces. What could be more normal, we might ask?

Many of such discourses on documentation—as a tool for formative assessment, as narrative, as a way of making learning visible, or as meaning making (see Cadwell, 1997; Edwards et al., 2012; Rinaldi, 2006; Wein, 2004) and their contextual translations (particularly from the Italian to the Canadian context, and then the many variations within the Canadian context)—have, over decades, undoubtedly inspired novel and perhaps more ethically responsive practices in early childhood education than previously existed. However, they also seem to have contributed to legitimizing logics that have, over time, lost their experimental vitality and thus risk and reinforce the very sedimentation they may have aimed to unsettle.

This paradox between a practice that is both obscured and normalized—and all the perplexity, puzzlement, and disorientation this might create—seems to be, in our experience, what too often characterizes the conversations

and experiences of documenting in the contexts in which we work and do research. Thus, in this article, we ask: Could it be that, in all this knowing and doing, we have, where documentation is concerned, lost the plot? How, then, are we to proceed?

Before our eyes, we are witnessing the success of a drive to simplify documentation—to make it more manageable, to put function before uncertainty, meaning and evidence before possibility. Its conceptual relations are often stripped away, leaving it to function as primarily a technical tool or instrument. We propose that, through obscurity or normative sedimentation, documentation appears to have become too readily disconnected from two of its key and most intimately vital dimensions: *pedagogy* and *progettazione*. In this disconnection, something seems to have gotten lost or buried, and in that loss, possibilities are denied, horizons closed.

In the remainder of this article, we make two movements. First, we create a "conceptual stitch" by which to reconnect documentation, relationally and conceptually, with pedagogy and progettazione. Second, we propose four ideas (out of many possible) for rethinking documentation through this conceptual stitch . This conceptual paper runs alongside our ongoing documentation praxis in our Ecuadorian projects (for a detailed account of our praxis, please see Vintimilla & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2025). This move is not an attempt to offer clarity or propose impossible solutions to the forces of normative sedimentation and all the inertia one both loves and decries. Instead, it is an effort to continue caring for a practice and a concept that, we argue, is disintegrating in our capitalist contexts under the weight of its instrumentalization.

Ours is a minor gesture (Manning, 2016) toward recovering documentation's shredding relations by restoring a sense of relational integrity so that new possibilities might emerge. We are thinking here about possibilities that take shape outside of the obscure and the normative that return documentation to its pedagogical and projectual vitality.

With this gesture, we wish to contribute to the ongoing conversation in early childhood education that in the past few years has advanced inventive research and critical engagements with documentation, particularly from poststructuralist and feminist new materialist perspectives (Dahlberg et al., 2019; Davies, 2014; Giamminuti et al., 2022; Lenz Taguchi, 2009; Rinaldi, 2006) where documentation is broadly conceptualized not as a neutral record of children's learning but as a relational, ethical, and political practice—a material-discursive apparatus that generates new possibilities for thinking, teaching, and living pedagogical relations.

A conceptual stitching

Stitching documentation and pedagogy

We situate our pedagogical praxis (see Vintimilla & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2025) as a gesture toward what are increasingly known as nonrepresentational pedagogies. We do not think of education (formal and informal) as attempting to provide children with knowledge or facts about an objective and independently existing world. We view children as deeply embedded in a relational world "where knowledge is not a reflection of a static world but emerges from our engagement with the world" (Biesta & Osberg, 2007, p. 28). A strong connection here is also with our proposition of education and curricular encounters as life making. This idea is deeply attuned with nonrepresentational theories (Vaninni, 2015). This is why our efforts in our research are driven by an idea of pedagogy that proposes education as interested in staging situated aesthetic and pedagogical processes that are highly emergent and relational and that put forward different modes of engagement and relational thinking. If we want to undertake pedagogical work in this way, we cannot avoid a praxis of *different modes of engagement* and *relational thinking*, through which we have found that one becomes less interested in the representation and

repetition of established educational worlds and much more committed to and interested in what is latent and what could become the evental conditions for *otherwise* educational worlds. We are interested less in meaning making and more in the effects—especially the subjective ones—that may emerge and are produced in "relations of modification and reciprocity" (Anderson & Harrison, 2016, p. 9) and where all action is interaction taking place in multiple encounters within and with the world. We are interested in the "reverberation of effects" (Rolnik, 2024) and the latency of their transformative force. This is why the pedagogical processes we set in motion stitch and thread by tracing the signals of that latency. They stitch and thread into the present. Throughout, we remain mindful that, as Rolnik reminds us, **multiple politics are at play** in this onto-epistemological threading. It matters *how*, and with *what logics*, we engage in and orient this work of threading.

Grounded in our approach to pedagogy—as what projects and orients education— the pedagogies we have been working on challenge the cognitive-rational and predefined character of education's strong instrumentalism. To do so for us means working with nonrepresentational pedagogies that happen within and attend to the *field of emergence*—a dynamic space that exceeds the boundaries of curriculum and involves what Rolnik (2024) refers to as *transotredad* (trans-otherness), which is inherent in all educational contexts, even if not always recognized.

This means challenging a predominantly Western understanding of knowledge as preorganized and static. Instead, attending to emergence demands engaging with knowledge and subjective processes without fully knowing what is taking place but sensing that something is unfolding (Rolnik, 2024). Of "answering a call I have not even heard," as Badiou (2001) poetically puts it. Here, the field of emergence manifests in itself, and it then falls to participants to articulate what is coming into being. It represents the possibility to do things other ways (an idea that is intolerable to private-interest capitalism).

Thus, for example, in our project in Santana, an urban elementary school in Andean Ecuador that during the pandemic hosted an itinerant school, we describe this pedagogical practice as *haciendo escuela* (making school), a phrase that gestures toward a relational and aesthetic process that attends to what is latent: the forces, effects, affects, and potentials that call for pedagogical response. In this frame, attention is not directed *at* something but rather moves with and toward, in and around that which is emerging (Manning & Massumi, 2014). To create an aesthetical-pedagogical process (formal or informal) is to co-compose an experience *que se va haciendo*—an experience that is made in the unfolding processes of its latency, in the dialectic between presence and absence, seeking its cultural venues as it comes into being. At the same time, a field of emergence is not a space of sheer exploration where anything goes, and we do not only follow children's leads. We do not refer to this pedagogical work as that which follows individuals' interests (Nxumalo et al., 2018). Teachers and children in this pedagogical doing share attentiveness toward generative unfolding and what is taking place in the manifold and multiple encounters in which they participate, in the in-between space of these encounters.

For us, pedagogy focuses on the tangible and intangible *co-compositional dimension* (of space, temporalities, corporalities, materials, subjects, atmospheres, symbols, affects) that dynamically and often sympoetically *calls in* pedagogical attention to all these dimensions and not to the isolated child, not the teacher, the curriculum, the apparent educational authority, nor the more-than-human.

Stitching documentation and progettazione

For us, documentation is a pedagogical practice (one of many) that supports the processes of progettazione. We want to emphasize this point, because it invites us to consider that other practices beyond documentation are not only possible but necessary when thinking about progettazione. We will return to this point later on in the article. For now, we want to emphasize that although progettazione is a term borrowed from the Italian tradition,

we recognize that within this tradition are multiple lines of thought and different ways of understanding it—yes, progettazzione is not a Reggio Emilia invention. This variation arises because its conceptualization is closely tied to how one thinks about pedagogy and educational work. In other words, the way progettazione is understood is shaped by how one defines and elaborates their understanding of pedagogy.

Although, we do not intend to provide an in-depth analysis of the deep Italian traditions around pedagogy, we find it appropriate to thread back the important connections between documentation and progettazione. While interpretations of progettazione may differ, one point of agreement is that progettazione is neither planning nor programming. Where planning tends toward determination, progettazione calls for a future that resists closure—a future that remains open and undetermined (Bianchi, 2022; Ferrante, 2017; Guerra, 2013). This openness does not mean randomness or chance. Progettazione is what sets up the educational scene rather than forcing it into this or that particular form. As Massa (2001) writes: "Progettazione arranges and organizes the educational scene, creating the conditions for experience and relationships" (p. 45). In other words, progettazione is about creating conditions, and its "arrangements" are embedded in pedagogical attentionality (Ingold, 2023b) and its different forms of nondeterministic and relational ideation. Pedagogical attentionality translates into a deep attunement, a decision to notice what happens within an educational experience: what effects arise and what they produce, what interpretations might emerge, and what they could allow—or not. In our research, we think of this attunement as a kind of dialogic act of corresponding Andean cosmologies with the multiple agents and forces that co-compose an educational situation (Vintimilla, 2023). This is a correspondence that is not interested in accumulating information (evidence), but in responding via ideation; that is, putting ideas in motion as a response to bring a difference into the educational situation (Vintimilla, 2023; Vintimilla & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2025).

For us, progettazione and its processes of pedagogical ideation are nondeterministic and therefore not predefined. As there are traditions of necessity to govern the world, so there are those of contingency to open it up again. And, if this may be allowed to be the case, then progettazione conceived in this way aligns with and supports an understanding of pedagogy—and its articulation through a variety of pedagogies—that emphasizes education as a set of processes and experiences not necessarily aimed at presenting or reproducing a world already "out there," nor at managing educational spaces to produce predetermined behaviours, goals, or expectations. This distinction invites us to be particularly attentive to the experimental and to the potential and the ideating force of the educational worlds we participate in—without, of course, being oblivious to its inherited normative constraints. This is what the instrumentalization of education cannot allow: education as an ethical space, as an unfolding cultural work in history.

As we mentioned before, for us, pedagogical work—and its processes of progettazione—requires multiple practices to support and enable this pedagogical attentiveness and attunement. Documentation is only one among many. To create educational experiences within a field of emergence requires more than a single practice; progettazione cannot be sustained exclusively through documentation. Thus—and ironically—relationally stitching documentation to pedagogy and progettazione also involves unsettling the primacy that documentation has often held. It invites us to consider that it is through the response to what emerges that we must invent and enact other practices. It is in the interplay of context, response, and practice that the search for methods and pedagogical gestures can begin to take form.

Four ideas for documentation

In what follows we share a few ideas that have emerged for us in our doing of documentation as a practice, and our stitching of the specificity of its relation to pedagogy and progettazione.

From meaning making to world making

Having said this, and none the less, the common practice across all our projects in Ecuador remains documentation. Yet, in doing it, we also interrupt it, recreate it, and intensify our thinking and doing. In our work, documentation does not mean or imply *making meaning* of children's ideas. Although we appreciate pedagogical documentation's widely accepted definition as a practice that makes children's learning and meaning making visible (Bombino, 2010; Edwards et al., 2011; Krechevsky et al, 2013; Wien, 2013), we approach documentation less as a practice of making meaning and more as one (among many possible pedagogical practices) for world making. In our attempt to resist representational logics (and the harsh glare of "en*light*enment"), this distinction matters. We make this shift so that we can participate in and emphasize pedagogical work that engages with knowledge as implicated, entangled, imperfect, and messy rather than detached, graspable, and consumable. We do documentation as a pedagogical practice of world making because we do not conceptualize the world as an object for our understanding and meaning making. We carefully attend to encounters in a relational space, to the different ways in which we are addressed (historically, politically, ethically) in these encounters by/with others and to the multiple (often indiscernible) makings that we slowly co-compose and assign collective significance to. These makings are world making because they attempt to insert *a difference that makes a difference* and not just repeat the educational worlds we are given. Manning (2016) writes that "what a child asks is not that we define experience in advance, but that we make it" (p. 8). We agree! We further propose that we do so, not only because the child asks, but because that is actually what pedagogical work is about: an ethical practice of world making.

To practice documentation as world making is not easy. It is an inventive, creative practice, never a formula. This is because, for us, progettazione calls for the creation of practices that allow us to risk our modern attachments to mastery, control, and predictability and to approach pedagogical work as imaginative and speculative.

Documentation as a pedagogical practice of emergent ideation

Documentation as world making is linked to an understanding of pedagogy as living knowledge (Vintimilla et al., 2023, 2025) that emerges in the thinking and creating of educational situations and projects. Thus, for us, documentation is a pedagogical practice for ideating on the basis of what emerges within the *specificity* of educational situations and projects. This is why, for example, in the Itinerant School, we approach pedagogical documentation as a practice that attends to the multiple encounters that take place in each garden. Each garden—in this case—is understood as a relational field of emergence.

We use the concept of a *field* inspired by Eco (1962/1989), who writes: "the notion of field is provided by physics and implies a revised vision of the classic relationship posited between cause and effect as a rigid one-directional system: now a complex interplay of motive forces is envisaged, a configuration of possible events, a complete dynamism of structure" (p. 9). We are particularly interested in educational spaces as this dynamic space of co-composition and encounter. For us, this is a participatory mediatic space where documentation is approached as a driving interpretative practice that begins in not knowing and that follows and attunes to what is emerging in movement, its tensions, its impasses, and its revelations.

Documentation as work in movement

Documentation as a practice for world making is work in movement. The different educational fields of emergence where we work are not neutral or ahistorical. They reflect often multiple and contradictory onto-epistemologies that are sometimes hard to reconcile. It is within these uneven fields, however, that we create movement and dynamism as a necessary condition for possible onto-epistemological reconfigurations to emerge within the encounters.

Throughout each project, we have created spaces for tracing temporary ideas, ideas in movement, and propositions. We carefully document thinkings, affects, and doings while introducing modifications and interferences into them. We curate provisional pedagogical descriptions to propel further thinking and doings. Here, it is important to clarify that we do not understand documentation as merely the creation of descriptions or representations of what was significant, even though it has a descriptive character. Instead, we understand documentation as a pedagogical practice that answers or responds to what was significant.

Understanding documentation as a work in movement highlights this *provisional character* as necessary and as a demand that comes from the emergent *indiscernible* and *indefinite* articulations typical of relational spaces in the making. These articulations permeate moments that are outside the realm of clarity, of knowing exactly what we are doing and where we are going within the relational and emergent field (that state of latency) Yet, these opaque articulations require pedagogical care, attention, and intention. *Indefiniteness* and *indiscernibility* are not easy expressions to work with in education, especially in a representational world where teachers are expected to know and effortlessly predict the aims of their work.

Amid this difficulty, we find a profound generative force in indefiniteness (Manning & Massumi, 2014) and indiscernibility. They are charged with the momentum and pedagogical energy of *suggestiveness*, or what Eco (1962/1989) refers to as a "poetic of suggestiveness" that exists at the heart of articulations of the present. Suggestiveness is what stimulates pedagogical work to *project* and lean toward the future because it asks us to think *what if* and to consider what *might be*. Suggestiveness is a generative force that projects us into further interpretation and creation, indicating the pedagogical vitality of a project. Thus, suggestiveness calls on our ability to respond and to define some intentions that will continue giving form to the pedagogical work. These intentions are pedagogical, thus they offer us an orientation or direction rather than setting an end goal. They involve an ability to envision, which is different from prediction. They open up pathways.

Suggestiveness sets up intentions that are more about stimulation and anticipation than predetermination. Suggestiveness stimulates and, at the same time, depends on teachers' and researchers' imaginative and affective interpretative resources (rather than persistent literalism) as it incites processes of ideation.

Documentation as a practice of attention and projecting ideation

As a practice, pedagogical documentation calls for attentiveness and attunement to the ongoing, generative interplay between the traces of what we recognize as pedagogically significant in a process (Rinaldi, 2021) and the evolving propositions that emerge in response to those insights. In other words, engaging in documentation means being moved by a constellation of pedagogical questions, concerns, and orientations that not only help us discern and give value to what has taken place but also propel us toward cultivating new ways of knowing, acting, and living. This unfolds through processes such as questioning, fabulating, figuring out, enacting, inventing, trying out, daring, and even stumbling—just to name a few.

Hence, pedagogical documentation is a practice of pedagogical attention and creation that moves both retrospectively and prospectively. Here, it is interesting to notice that because it is retrospective, documentation has a descriptive character, yet, because it is prospective, it has a transformative force. For us, the prospective aspect of documentation engages the practice of *projecting via ideation*. The intention is to purposefully activate certain ideas/possibilities through material, interpretative, and speculative processes of curriculum making. Acts of ideation compose situations that weave something different into the curricular fabric (Vintimilla, 2023).

This weaving is far from a simple practice. It demands a collective intention to attentively follow what is emerging and, through that attention, offer a proposition capable of shifting our field of perception. In other words,

documentation as world making involves a *double movement*: it generates specific educational experiences while simultaneously acting on those experiences and their generative tensions. It is through this simultaneous move that we are able to knot a pedagogical thread—one that can introduce something different, however small, into our field of perception.

In the work we have been doing in Ecuador, we engage in the process of ideating with teachers, artists, and atelierista because we are *pedagogical projectists* (a translation of the Italian *progettisti*) who are interested (as ones who are in the midst of things) in education as that which enables new and alternative relational fields, ones that are less based in managerial logics, less humancentric, and less representational than is typically the case in education. As projectists we were inspired to "improvise a passage rather than to innovate with representations of the unforeseeable" (Gatt & Ingold, 2020, p. 145). In our case, we understand this inspiration as a desire for our ideations to provoke situated worlding stories that can be read as "epistemological metaphors" (Eco, 1962/1989, p. 3) and that can "constitute a new way of seeing, feeling, understanding and accepting the world, where [established/traditional] relations are broken and where—even though with difficulty—new relational possibilities are being delineated" (Eco, p. 3).

Documentation involves incompleteness and openness

Finally, and as a way of insisting, documentation, for us, enables and enriches our ability to envision pedagogically. That is, it is a practice that proposes inventive processes within an educational setting without fully knowing, without fully seeing, yet sensing that something that perhaps we can't even name yet is happening and within that we are moved by what we call *pedagogical prospectives*—which means pedagogically facing and engaging with a future we cannot predict and yet a future we dare to story. Thus, there is an openness and incompleteness in pedagogical documentation as world making.

This openness and incompleteness is reflected in the ongoing processes and trajectories of making curriculum: in nourishing ideas, in proposing situations, and in finding ways to cultivate emergence in a novel fashion. It also reflects the multiplicity of meanings, the plurality of intentions, the interrelations, and the different ways of being that could take place but may not, reminding us that educational spaces are always bursting with potentiality even as they are also constrained. Recognizing this incompleteness is also a resistance to representational epistemologies and the predictable manner with which they organize knowledge and our relations within educational spaces and with the world.

In these ways, documentation as world making "forces us to turn once again toward the world for what it has to teach us" (Gatt & Ingold, 2020, p. 148). In doing so in the itinerant school, our pedagogical prospectives enact what Gatt and Ingold (2020) refer to as "prospective correspondences" (p. 148) among the children, teachers, and inhabitants in each of the gardens. These correspondences are steeped in documentation's acts of attentiveness. In them, we do not "attend to things only so far as it is necessary to accommodate them within the compartments of thought, so that they can be ticked off, accounted for, understood, laid to rest" (Ingold, 2023a, p. 23) or to assess or to gather more information about the child or to collect "data." Rather, we are referring here to an attentiveness that attends "to bring[ing] things to presence: not to discover the truth about them, but to discover the truth that comes from them, in the experience" (p. 23).

Conclusion

As discussed in this paper, pedagogical work—and the processes that animate it—is sustained, not by a single praxis, but by interwoven practices of attentiveness and responsiveness. While documentation plays a significant

role, it is not sufficient on its own to support the complexity of educational experiences that arise within emergent contexts. Instead, progettazione calls for a broader repertoire: a willingness to invent and to enact practices in response to what unfolds.

Ironically, the act of conceptually stitching documentation to pedagogy and progettazione not only invites complexifying the ways one might consider documentation; it also requires us to unsettle documentation's taken-for-granted primacy. This shift invites us to consider that it is not documentation itself, but our response to emergence—our capacity to notice, ideate, and activate—that generates meaningful pedagogical gestures. In this way, this conceptual stitching invites us to unsettle the search for fixed procedures.

As a conclusion that wants to keep an ongoing conversation, we invite the reader to visit the Itinerant School's website (https://viraltimes.climateactionchildhood.net/). There we hope you will find an instance of the pedagogical and projectual vitality of our work, as it illustrates the educational and aesthetic possibilities that we are trying to gestate in stitching documentation to pedagogy and progettazione.

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