

Compositive Engaging Documentation: Verbatim and Reflective Practices

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DOCUMENTATION

Many schools share frequent documentation of children with families and the larger community. These photos and blurbs form the basis of parents' understanding of their children's day-to-day activities. They also support students as they articulate their experiences and learning.

At Compositive Primary, we are particularly interested in discovering ways in which this practice can expand beyond the scope of photographs and adult-written notes and into the voices and actions of young people. By sharing more complicated and engaging documentation of children's projects, relationships and interactions, we can more clearly identify growth and development in our young people academically, socially and emotionally.

In this way, we are looking toward engaging documentation as both a practice of deepening our own work with curating artifacts and as a way of creating more inviting, creative and interesting representations of children's thoughts and actions. These newly documented moments are useful for: educators as they prepare new material for their students, families as they discuss and develop the learning happening in the classroom at home, administrators as they look to evaluate teachers and students through meaningful measures, and schools and centers as they share the exciting work their children and educators are doing with the larger world.

This poster's engagement with documentation practices invites you to consider your own assessment and curation processes as multimodal ways of capturing student growth. By offering alternatives to quantitative assessment structures, this poster on documentation practices shares ways in which educators can reflect on students' work in order to impact students' futures in meaningful ways.

RE-IMAGINING DATA AND RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS

At Compositive Primary, our teachers are equal parts facilitators and researchers in the inquiry process. By inhabiting these roles, our teachers are challenged to create exciting, reflexive provocations that grow from documented data with an eye toward future challenges. We are particularly excited about qualifiable data, which captures complicated learning outside of quantifiable numbers. This data informs each step of an inquiry arc as well as everyday experiences in the classroom. Whether working toward a social/emotional goal or a deeper dive into an inquiry arc, teachers use verbatim and reflective techniques to document each student every day as they engage closely within Compositive's Capacities and Domains.

VERBATIM TECHNIQUES

These techniques represent first-hand accounts of students' thoughts and actions. The goal of capturing data in this way is to seize as much raw and unfiltered information as possible from each student. This data will form the basis of further reflection and action.

Video recordings

Grabbing quick video from playground interactions as well as inquiry exploration can provide organic understandings of children in action. Think about shooting lots of little clips rather than one long video of a lesson. This will facilitate easy organization of material as well as access without having to sift through a long video.

Audio recordings

Try leaving a recorder on a table during collaborative work time. While this audio can always be transcribed later, it can also become a useful playback for students to understand their own thinking and use of language.

Written transcripts

Grab a chair near a conversation or during a whole-class activity and type as fast as you can. Try writing dialogue like a play with characters speaking to each other. This will help you to pull out material later and to see moments of the conversation in context.

Physical artifacts

Think about capturing video and photos of physical artifacts as they are being constructed. These moments are just as crucial to understanding the way inquiry is working for a child as a 'final' product. Don't feel pressure to save everything each child creates. Your room will be a nightmare. Help your students to select artifacts that show their challenges and successes equally.

Observation notes

Jot down tiny moments you notice without additional commentary. Think about yourself as an outside observer of events. These notes will provide helpful context for other forms of documentation.

Narratives

A longer form version of notes comes as a narrative. Consider writing a paragraph or two about the unfolding of a provocation or a confrontation. Try to remove your voice from this piece in favor of a cut and dry accounting of events

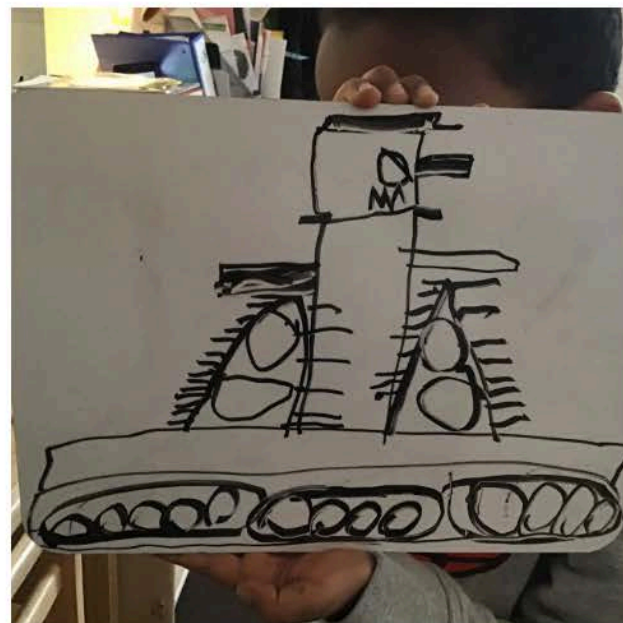
Photographs

With the availability of cameras for easy use in the classroom, still photography is still a critical documentation component. Try to capture multiple stages of a project rather than just the end piece. Try to photograph small moments of play and interaction — they are just as important for tracking growth as the big events.



Blocks

"I had so much fun building it, it's so big. It's a house-boat. It looked cool and we had to use a lot of blocks."



Whiteboard drawing

"I like it. It's a picture of a tank, it's the most strongest one in the whole wide world, it's a bad guy tank and it has black and yellow, and it's the strongest in the whole world. It looks scary but I can handle it."



Light table

"I wish I could make this again because I worked hard on this because it is a pattern."



"I went to watch the fireworks"

"So we saw a lot of big fireworks."



"Last night my dad brought a lego rocketship and he also brought a sticker."



REFLECTIVE TECHNIQUES

These techniques are used to help students think more deeply into their experiences. Unlike the verbatim accounts, reflective techniques help students to document their own thinking, learning, and growth by stepping outside of it for a moment. These techniques should be sprinkled into each day as they provide the opportunity to develop and document metacognition in relationship with inquiry.

Continued questioning

Asking pointed questions to individual students involved in an inquiry can help them to press deeper into their learning. Jot down the questions you ask alongside their responses (verbal or physical).

Interviews

These could be peer or teacher led question and answer sessions about a project or moment along an inquiry arc. You could treat them as a sit down interview or man on the street quick comment. Either way, interviews can help kids think more deeply into their own work and decision making. Video them!

Multimodal reflections

Consider asking students to document a conversation with paper and charcoal or through a short dance. Push your students to think about capturing their work in complicated ways that are open to interpretation.

Re-enactments

Try having students recreate moments from their experience with their bodies. Consider creating them silently and then tapping students during their reenactment and asking what thoughts were in their heads during certain moments. Photograph or video these memories. Their kinesthetic documentation is an important reflection on their work and it will help you to sift through moments for the ones that stick out to your students.

Timelines

Invite students to create timelines documenting their own journey through an inquiry arc. These could be developed with artifacts each day.

Questionnaires

Create fun questionnaires that help students recall and reflect on their experience. Consider ways of guiding thinking through rich questions and a thoughtful progression of ideas.

Artists' statements

Help students learn how to talk about their work by challenging them to create brief artists' statements. You could transcribe their words and share the statements throughout the year as documentation of students' deeper understandings of their work and their own role as learners.

Storyboards

What if you gave each student a storyboard to fill out each day in which they identify their own challenges and successes during an inquiry? You could discuss these and add written language to their images.

Collages

Empower your students to create individual or whole class collages which document key moments and discoveries from an inquiry. The curation, organization and placement of artifacts becomes a way of deepening students' own documentation and reflection.

Maps

Help your students to create thought maps which show how their ideas grow, intersect and break off from the initial inquiry. Consider maps that might grow over weeks at a time along with smaller maps that are completed in an afternoon.

Writing

As students begin to use written language, develop prompts that challenge them to think deeply about their own learning. Invite them to create poems, wordscapes, plays, narratives, and more. What if you captured all of these elements in a journal that can be used throughout an inquiry?

Doodling

Consider introducing a lower-stakes way of documenting thoughts and reflections — doodling. This could come from loose parts sculptures or pen and paper jottings. Once you introduce this practice, challenge your students to deepen it through consistency and reflective processing.

MAKING LEARNING VISIBLE

Throughout the journey of documentation, it is critical to imagine just who you are documenting for. Will these artifacts become internal documents to support a responsive teaching practice? Are they meant to be shared with families? Do they primarily represent growth for students to investigate? Do you need to have outward facing images and remnants of engagement for a district or funder? It is equally important to identify just who is doing the act of documentation — parents, teachers, peers, and students themselves can become documentarians.

When finding ways to make your students' learning visible, also consider ways of making their thinking visible. That means showing failures and struggles throughout documentation with just as much weight as discoveries and introspective comments. These elements become baseline data that you can use to clearly measure growth over time. They are especially useful in navigating the development and deployment of social and emotional tools.

WHO WE ARE

Heather B Mock

An engaging and energetic leader, Heather Bushnell Mock is the founding head of school at Compositive Primary. In her 22 years as an educator, she has worked with students at all stages of the primary through secondary journey. Heather came to Compositive Primary from Dawson School where she was the Associate Head of School and K-8 Director. Prior to Dawson, Heather was an upper school class dean at Kent Denver School. Heather has also held teaching and/or administrative positions at The Maple Street School (Manchester, Vt.), The Head-Royce School (Oakland) and Sandia Preparatory School (Albuquerque). A graduate of The Spence School in New York, Heather earned a bachelor's degree in art history from Princeton University and a master's degree in elementary education from Teachers College at Columbia University.

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Dr Clare Hammoor

Clare is a playful educator whose practice is animated by inquiry and joy. Currently the Director of Inquiry and Instruction at Compositive Primary, he is fascinated by arts integration and collaboration. Clare has taught at Blue School, New York University, and University of Denver among other institutions. He has led classes and workshops internationally and his writing appears in articles, chapters, and journal editorships. He has also taught university courses and directed theatre in prisons for the past nine years. Clare's research focuses on the agencies of (young) people and things in play.

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ABOUT COMPOSITIVE PRIMARY



Compositive Primary is located on the Fitzsimons Innovation Campus, is a unique workplace-based and extended-year school for children ages three through fifth grade. The school's program is student driven and inquiry based, with multi-age groupings of children within a classroom, extended-day care, and enrichment programs during school breaks.

www.compositiveprimary.org

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