Embracing Transformation: Ethical Practices in Pedagogical Documentation

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This article explores pedagogical documentation as a situated and speculative practice in early childhood education. Drawing on philosophical concepts including Heidegger's Dasein, Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-minoritarian, and the idea of decentering the child, the paper examines how documentation shapes educators' pedagogical thinking and relational ethics. Rather than focusing on how documentation shifts public views of early education, the article centers transformation as a lived, ethical, and pedagogical process. Through the Fishpond curriculum project, we attune to moments of pedagogical intra-action where documentation participates in the material-discursive reconfiguring of relations, generating speculative possibilities for thinking-with children, educators, and a pedagogist. The article positions documentation as a generative site of struggle that unsettles normative representational logics and sustains pedagogical matterings as ongoing processes of becoming.

Key words: *pedagogical documentation, early childhood education, transformative experience, ethical implications, relational engagements*

This article begins with a pedagogical question: What might documentation become when it is approached, not as a method of capture or representation, but as a practice entangled in the ongoing collective labour of education? This question does not arise in abstraction. It is grounded in lived engagements with pedagogical documentation in early childhood education and emerges specifically through a curriculum inquiry I refer to as the Fishpond inquiry. In this context, documentation is not positioned as a tool for evaluation or evidence but as a speculative and generative mode of participation that invites educators to revisit pedagogical moments, remain with what is unsettled, and respond to what is not yet fully formed.

Drawing from scholarship that conceptualizes documentation as a narration of trajectories rather than the closure of completed events (Albin-Clark, 2021; Giamminuti, 2013; Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Rinaldi, 2001), I approach documentation as a situated collective practice that shapes pedagogical relations. The figure of stitching offered by Vintimilla and Pacini-Ketchabaw (2021), in which lines of inquiry, memory, and shared orientation are woven together, animates this inquiry into how educators might document in ways that do not foreclose meaning but instead invite invention, attentiveness, and what Rinaldi (2006) called response-ability.

To sustain this inquiry, I engage two distinct theoretical orientations. First, drawing on Heidegger's (1962) concept of *Dasein* (being there), I consider documentation as an ontological practice: an attunement to *being with* that

emerges through temporality, presence, and pedagogical involvement. Second, I take up Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of *becoming minoritarian*, as interpreted by Lenz Taguchi (2010), to think about documentation as a force of ethical and political rupture, an opening that resists sedimented habits of interpretation and reconfigures relations. These thinkers are held in generative relation rather than being synthesized into a single framework. Each offers a distinct texture for imagining how documentation might shift, disrupt, or recompose pedagogical life.

The aim here is not to present a model or prescribe a best practice. Rather, the work traces the speculative rhythms of documentation as they emerge in the contingencies of lived pedagogical encounters. Through the Fishpond inquiry that follows, I consider how documentation might carry pedagogical force, interrupting linear narratives, creating space for hesitation and dwelling, and gesturing toward other ways of living and thinking education.

To deepen this inquiry, I now turn to the conceptual and pedagogical orientations that sustain this work. These orientations are not abstract frameworks imposed on practice but ways of thinking inseparable from the lived realities of pedagogical life. They move with documentation, shaping how educators respond to what emerges, how meaning takes shape in the midst of daily encounters, and how attention remains open to what is still forming. In this light, documentation becomes more than a retrospective glance backward; it becomes a practice of composing with the present and the possible, grounded in relational, ethical, and temporal engagements that make education a shared and situated endeavour.

To attend to documentation in this way also requires asking what it may need to loosen itself from in order to move differently. This includes examining the conditions and assumptions that have settled around documentation practices, particularly those shaped by developmentalist logics and child-centered discourses that locate the child as the origin and sole author of meaning. Such orientations, while often rooted in a desire to honour children's voices, can narrow the scope of pedagogical engagement, positioning educators as facilitators or passive observers and reducing documentation to a form of validation.

Here I turn to a more sustained critique of developmentalism and the certainties of child-centered pedagogy, not to dismiss the significance of the child's presence, but to unsettle narratives that bind documentation to predetermined roles. By holding open the possibility of documentation as a shared, situated, and ethically charged practice, we can see how it might reorient both what is noticed and how educators and children come to think, act, and respond together.

Disrupting developmentalism and child-centered certainties

Pedagogical documentation encounters particular constraints when tightly bound to child-centered pedagogy. While such approaches are often guided by the intent to value children's perspectives, they can position educators at the periphery of pedagogical life as observers or facilitators whose role is to follow rather than to engage, provoke, or think with. This framing reinforces modernist separations between adult and child, teacher and learner and risks reducing documentation to curated fragments, photographs, quotes, or brief narratives offered as evidence of competence rather than as invitations to engage with the complex social, material, and conceptual processes in which educators and children are already entangled (Olsson, 2009).

In this configuration, children's actions are sometimes romanticized, where all traces of their activity are assumed to be inherently meaningful. This can leave little space for sustained pedagogical inquiry into the conditions that gave rise to these actions or for educators to introduce ideas, materials, or provocations that might unsettle, deepen, or reconfigure an investigation. Without such pedagogical movement, documentation risks bypassing the ethical

and political questions that shape educational work: What is brought forward? Who determines what matters? Which possibilities remain absent or unthought?

Olsson (2009) reframes documentation as a performative practice that reflects and enacts the reciprocal relationship between educators and children. From this perspective, documentation moves beyond the act of recording. It becomes a space of pedagogical encounter, a way of reflecting on practice, crafting response, and affecting broader educational contexts.

Extending this critique, Land et al. (2020) connect child-centered pedagogies to developmentalist and neoliberal discourses that frame children as future investments and emphasize individual achievement, measurable progress, and predetermined outcomes. Within these logics, learning is positioned on linear, mastery-oriented paths that obscure the unpredictable, relational, and collective nature of pedagogical life. Responding to the otherwise involves turning attention toward the more-than-individual composition of meaning as it unfolds among children, educators, materials, places, and concepts over time.

When understood in this way, documentation shifts from a showcase of individual accomplishment to an ongoing, situated conversation that holds space for uncertainty, difference, and emergent thought. It becomes a generative practice that notices how meaning takes shape through entangled movements, resists the pull toward closure, and remains attentive to the ethical and political textures of educational encounters.

This orientation brings documentation into proximity with listening as an ethical practice, where presence, attentiveness, and responsiveness to plurality become conditions for pedagogical life. The next section takes up this orientation, considering how documentation, when grounded in listening, can sustain relations that are open, situated, and continually in the making.

Listening as ethical practice: Pedagogical documentation and relational engagements

When documentation is situated within a relational pedagogy, it shapes what is noticed and how educators and children come to know themselves in relation to others, materials, and place. These engagements move beyond exchange. They are transformative processes that continually reconfigure meaning and subjectivity. Understanding does not move from one person to another. It emerges through relational processes that remain open, dynamic, and ongoing. In this view, education is not a system of delivery. It is a generative space of shared becoming.

Rinaldi's (2006) pedagogy of listening offers an orientation for such work. Listening, as she presented it, is grounded in attentiveness, respect for difference, and responsiveness to plurality (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). It is not a method or strategy. It is an ethical orientation. Listening requires educators to meet others in their fullness, to be present with complexity, and to remain attentive to the layered and sometimes contradictory perspectives that animate pedagogical life. It calls for humility and an openness to being affected. Listening turns educators toward the relational dimensions of practice, asking for engagement that is thoughtful and responsive.

As Lenz Taguchi (2010) reminds us, these encounters unfold through intra-actions rather than exchanges between preexisting subjects. Meaning takes shape through entanglement. Listening, in this sense, moves beyond what is already intelligible, inviting educators to question what has been taken for granted and to remain receptive to uncertainty and transformation (Davies, 2014). Rinaldi (2001, as cited in Dahlberg & Moss, 2005), spoke of listening as both pedagogical and existential. Every encounter carries ethical weight and the possibility of reorientation, an opening toward what might yet take form.

Todd (2023) describes such encounters as transformative interruptions. They disturb dominant logics and create conditions for different ways of being with others. Through such moments, listening reveals the political and ethical dimensions of education, holding space for difference without rushing toward consensus or resolution.

Seen within this orientation, pedagogical documentation moves away from functioning as a mirror of past events and becomes a practice of staying with disruption, attending to what is still in formation, and keeping the not-yet-known in play (Dahlberg et al., 2013; Kim, 2021; Nxumalo et al., 2018). As Ruitenberg (2015) and Todd (2020) suggest, the practice does not aim for control or certainty; it instead composes conditions in which transformation may become possible. It involves curating pedagogical moments that stay open to return and reengagement, allowing the work of education to remain in motion.

From here, the discussion turns toward the ontological dimensions of documentation understood as a mode of existing with children, materials, and the unfolding life of pedagogy.

Revisiting, relating, resisting: Documentation in pedagogical life

If listening is an ethical orientation that stays with difference, then revisiting is an ontological gesture that returns to what has been lived, not to determine its meaning, but to encounter it again in the altered light of what has since emerged. In pedagogical documentation, this return is never an act of retrieval. It is a renewed encounter shaped by the educator's sustained presence within the pedagogical event, by the materials and ideas still in motion, and by the temporal currents through which understanding remains provisional.

Drawing on Heidegger's (1962) notion of Dasein, documentation can be approached as a mode of dwelling with and moving within pedagogical events rather than as a subsequent act of capture. Dasein insists that existence is already relational; we are situated within and entangled with the world's unfolding. From this orientation, documentation does not stand apart from the event it attends to. It is woven into the same relational fabric as the event itself. It is less a static record than a generative practice through which educators participate in the ongoing becoming of a moment.

Such an orientation unsettles the subject–object division that casts the child as the one observed and the educator as the one observing. Documentation is implicated in the encounter. When an educator attends to a child's engagement with water, for instance, they are not simply gathering evidence of skill or development. They are joining an event where gestures, flows, reflections, and the possibilities they stir co-compose meaning.

Temporality runs through this practice. For Heidegger, human existence is stretched across past, present, and what is yet to come. Documentation bears this same structure. A documented event carries the traces of its initial conditions—material, conceptual, cultural—yet when returned to, it is never the same. Each reencounter is refracted through new contexts, altered questions, and the educator's own transformation. Revisiting is therefore an act of renewal that opens the lived moment to new possibilities.

Heidegger's distinction between being ready-to-hand and present-at-hand offers another way of thinking about this movement. In the immediacy of an inquiry, tools such as cameras or notebooks may be taken up fluidly, integrated into perception and gesture so that attention stays with what is unfolding. Later, these same traces can be approached with deliberate attentiveness, inviting reconfigured perspectives and speculative possibilities. Even in this reflective mode, understanding remains situated, bound to the relationalities, places, and conditions that gave rise to it.

What documentation gathers is never limited to observable actions or predetermined outcomes. It holds the

residues and resonances of lived experience: embodied gestures, material encounters, spatial arrangements, and affective textures through which learning takes form. To revisit these traces is to open them toward uncertainty, complexity, and meanings still forming. Jardine (2008) calls such moments "worthy of rest and repose" (p. 100), occasions when something thoughtful gathers and calls for sustained presence. Reflection here is not extraction but participation: a slower, more attentive mode of thought responsive to what persists and continues to call.

To revisit documentation is to inhabit an ontological stance, remaining with the understanding that meaning is continually composed within relations among children, materials, ideas, and more-than-human presences, never possessed or completed. Such work affirms that teaching and learning unfold through relationality and the educator's willingness to be altered, carried forward by the shifting conditions of pedagogical life. Revisiting documentation in this way keeps meaning in motion. It resists the pull toward closure, inviting pedagogical events to be perceived anew, to be unsettled, and to go on shaping thought and practice. From this orientation, education is not a closed sequence of tasks but a living pedagogical conversation that keeps open the possibility of transformation.

This ontological account of documentation, grounded in Heidegger's temporality and relational being, extends the ethical work of listening into the temporal and relational depths of pedagogical life. If listening is an orientation that stays with difference, revisiting is its temporal companion, returning to the lived moment in ways that keep meaning provisional, unsettled, and capable of being re-formed. Documentation here works as co-constitutive practice woven into the relational and temporal textures of pedagogical events, shaped by the materials, ideas, and presences that circulate through them. Yet, while Heidegger's account draws our attention to the conditions of being and our entanglement within them, it offers a more limited vocabulary for thinking about how documentation can also work as a site of ethical and political intervention. If Dasein attunes us to documentation as a practice of dwelling with, returning to, and renewing pedagogical encounters, we might also ask how it participates in unsettling dominant logics, redistributing authority, and generating alternative ways of being together in education.

It is at this point that the discussion turns to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of becoming-minoritarian, as taken up by Lenz Taguchi (2010). If Heidegger helps us think documentation as accompaniment, staying with what is unfolding, becoming-minoritarian foregrounds its capacity for generative disturbance: multiplying differences, amplifying the minor, and cultivating conditions that resist absorption into the majoritarian logics of developmentalism, standardization, and closure. In this expanded frame, the ontological and the political intertwine as interdependent rhythms, holding documentation as both a living-with and a working-against an active, relational tension where its ethical and political potentialities remain in motion.

Becoming-minoritarian: Documentation as ethical and political act

Building on the ontological grounding offered by Heidegger, Lenz Taguchi's (2010) engagement with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-minoritarian offers a way of approaching pedagogical documentation as both attunement and disturbance, an active movement that unsettles the majoritarian logics shaping how educational life is observed, interpreted, and enacted. It opens spaces where multiplicity can be sustained, difference can be amplified, and new relational forms of engagement can take shape.

In pedagogical documentation, this orientation invites educators to return to events, not as detached interpreters, but as implicated co-participants, reentering the moment as material, as affect, as co-actor in the unfolding encounter. Such reentry is not figurative but embodied, affective, and ethically responsive. It entails a willingness to let interpretive frameworks be unsettled, to allow meaning making to be interrupted, and to shift from the position of authoritative knower to one who is also learning.

Within a minoritarian orientation, documentation does not seek to stabilize what is seen. It attends instead to what hovers at the threshold of perception: singularities too fleeting or delicate to be absorbed into developmentalist grids. These remain in their difference, resisting assimilation into prefigured narratives and functioning as openings through which alternative pedagogical possibilities can emerge. Documentation, then, becomes a site of ethical responsiveness where transformation is possible for both children and educators. Each revisiting is a reconfiguration, a relational recomposition through which teaching and learning are co-formed. This is a continual process of becoming, shaped by entanglements with material textures, affective intensities, spatial arrangements, and discursive currents that contour pedagogical life (Lenz Taguchi, 2010).

To document, in this sense, involves participation rather than capture, movement rather than conclusion. It is a way of intervening while staying in motion with what remains unresolved. It is to amplify the minor, to let difference exert pressure on the familiar, and to create conditions in which the coordinates of educational practice can be rearranged. Each return to documentation is a molecular shift, small, relational, and generative, through which the conditions of teaching and learning are subtly altered. The work is rhizomatic, without origin or predetermined end, moving instead through altered proximities, unexpected connections, and shifting configurations. Such a practice refuses closure. It keeps meaning in motion, allowing alternative trajectories to take root and sustaining the possibility that education might be otherwise. It is from within this orientation that I turn to the Fishpond inquiry project as a pedagogical event where these movements are already at work: where documentation unsettles the given, sustains difference, and opens space for what education might yet become.

Documentation in motion: The Fishpond inquiry project as minoritarian practice

The Fishpond inquiry project emerged within this minoritarian orientation, not as a discrete project bounded in time, but as an unfolding pedagogical encounter in which documentation was already at work as an ontological, ethical, and political practice. Situated within a university-based childcare centre on the unceded ancestral and traditional territories of the Səlílwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), xʷməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), and kʷikʷəƛ̓əm (Kwikwetlem) Nations, the Fishpond inquiry was composed with this place, not as a static backdrop, but as an active and shaping presence in the pedagogical encounter. The inquiry was shaped by the entanglement of children, educators, pond, seasonal shifts, and the discursive currents that circulated through our conversations and traces.

Documentation moved within this living inquiry, attuned to the pond's shifting rhythms, to the contingent relations among its human and more-than-human participants, and to gestures, configurations, and absences that resisted developmentalist containment. Each return to the traces was less an effort to compose a singular, coherent account than an occasion to remain with the multiplicities that had taken shape: differences that refused resolution, intensities that reoriented pedagogical attention, and openings that unsettled the coordinates of what might be taken as curriculum.

In this sense, the Fishpond inquiry was not the object of documentation but one of its sites of movement. Each return to an image, a fragment of dialogue, the remembered feel of the air was also a reconfiguration of relations. The documentation and the event were entangled, shaping and reshaping one another, generating new pedagogical possibilities that had not existed before. The work moved in molecular and rhizomatic ways, through shifts too subtle to quantify yet transformative in their layered force, altering proximities among children, materials, educators, place, and ideas.

Through these ongoing returns, the pond became less an object of study and more a participant in a shared process of becoming. Its surfaces and depths, its seasonal transformations, its quiet and turbulent moments all pressed

against the familiar coordinates of our pedagogical life. In staying with these pressures, documentation kept the inquiry open and alive, sustaining its capacity to generate further thought, relation, and curriculum.

From this perspective, the Fishpond inquiry is inseparable from the theoretical movements that inform it. It is not an illustration of becoming-minoritarian but a place where the minor is amplified, where difference shapes the pedagogical present, and where the work of documentation continues to rearrange the possibilities of what education might yet be.

The movements of the Fishpond inquiry unfolded as acts of relational presence. Educators did not remain outside the inquiry as distant interpreters but were drawn into the shifting life of the pond: its murky depths, seasonal transformations, and the unsettling absence of the fish. Documentation was an intra-active participation through which pedagogical life was lived, reoriented, and continually composed. It did not stabilize the event as complete or resolved; it kept space open for what was still forming, for interruptions and ambiguities that exceeded interpretation.

This orientation resisted majoritarian logics that seek closure, legibility, and resolution. The absence of the fish, for instance, was not approached as a problem to be solved but as an opening that altered the trajectory of the inquiry. It invited lingering, hesitation, and repeated return. Questions emerged that did not seek definitive answers: *What does it mean to respond to absence without filling it? How might care take form through what remains unresolved?* In these moments, documentation lingered with what surfaced only faintly. Within this minoritarian orientation, educators allowed their interpretive frameworks to be unsettled, their roles to shift from authoritative knowers to co-participants in an unfolding encounter.

Holding open: Documentation in the presence of absence

The noticing of the fish's absence did not inaugurate a "topic" but opened a rupture in pedagogical time, a pause in which the familiar coordinates of the inquiry were unsettled. Relations, materials, temporalities, and seasonal rhythms all participated in its pedagogical composition.

Within this orientation, documentation was not an act of solving or explaining but a practice of remaining with what the absence called forth. It refused premature closure, holding the event open to further thought, relation, and response. Each return—to the pond, to the children's speculative gestures, to the ethical question of what it means to notice without knowing—became an occasion for reconfiguring relations. The inquiry was not an ecological study or a set of predetermined objectives but a pedagogical presence attuned to the shared conditions of living, where thought, care, and responsibility emerged with human and more-than-human relations.

Documentation moved with the event, attending to gestures, silences, and intensities that kept curriculum in motion as an emergent composition shaped by the contingencies of relation. It performed as an ontological, ethical, and political practice: speculative in its openness, relational in its commitments, and resistant to closure. Uncertainty was held as a generative condition, sustaining the inquiry as an open composition in which pedagogical life was continually re-formed through the shifting entanglements of place, beings, and events.

The absence that called us: A beginning at the pond

The approach to the pond was familiar, but the moment was not.

"The fish are gone," a child said.

Stillness followed. The absence was not a void but a presence that thickened the air around us. The pond's surface, heavy with reflection, seemed wider, quieter, holding something unspeakable.

Speculation percolated among the children.

"Maybe they're under the mud."

"Maybe they're sleeping."

"They swam through a secret door," Ryan proposed.

The pond had shifted from being an object of observation to a question in itself. Absence became a generative condition, unsettling the familiar coordinates of relation and attention.

Gesture as question

The moment turned toward speculation, not as a flight from reality, but as a way of inhabiting it differently. Sam bent down, lifted a stone, and released it into the water. The ripples widened, intersecting, as though the pond were listening.

"If we make a big ripple," he said, "maybe it'll open a portal."

Portal. Opening. Passage.

This was not pretend. It was a proposal, a moment of belief held open through gesture.

Ryan stepped forward, Alison behind him, each with a rock in hand. Their movements were unhurried, attentive. Larger stones now, heavier. Dropped deliberately.

The water responded. Wider rings travelled out, intersecting one another. The pond's surface quivered, as though listening.

The children watched. No one spoke for a long while.

Speculation materialized.

A shared action. A shared rhythm. A collective act of thinking-with the unknown.

A pause, a warning, a redirection

The rhythm was interrupted.

"Don't throw rocks! They'll get sick!" Tina's words slowed the gestures, drawing attention elsewhere. A plastic wrapper drifted in the water, its glint catching the sun.

Ella stepped forward without prompting, using a stick to lift the plastic from the pond. "The fish aren't here because they choked on the garbage and had to go to the fish doctor," she said.

The tone shifted. Stillness returned, but with a different weight. Care began to contour the inquiry, drawing the speculative into relation with responsibility.

The educator, listening from within the moment, asked, "Where is the fish doctor?"

"Under the rock in the water," Ella replied. "That's why they're not swimming."

The story unfolded without seeking resolution. Each return, through photographs, sketches, and fragments of dialogue, was an opening. The work circled, revisited, recomposed. Documentation did not stabilize the event; it kept it in motion, sustaining the inquiry as something still forming.

Documentation as return

Conversations circled back to pollution.

"Maybe the fish got sick from the plastic," Ella repeated, pointing to a photograph of herself holding the stick. The image, once a record, now acted as a provocation, an artifact that continued to ask something of them.

This recursive movement of returning to earlier gestures—reseeing them, composing with them again—positioned documentation not as a retrospective summary but as an act of ongoing composition. Each return became recompositional, holding space for meanings to emerge through repetition, memory, and relational response.

Sam revisited his earlier idea: "If we play music, maybe they'll feel better. Music helps them sleep."

This was not framed as entertainment but as a form of care.

Children arrived with ukuleles and tambourines. Small fingers moved across strings, sometimes in tune, sometimes not, carrying quiet intent. The tambourines trembled in the breeze, their sound folding into the atmosphere without demanding attention. The pond remained present, unmoved yet listening, part of the encounter.

Later that week, a banana peel was thrown into the water.

"That will make the fish sick!" the children said, not as correction but as a call to attention, an interruption in the morning's flow.

Through such moments, documentation emerged as a practice of incubation and generation, a way of dwelling in the midst of pedagogical life, responsive to what emerged. It kept the present open while making space for what might still arrive. This was not about confirming what was already known but about attuning to what called for response, working with children in crafting possibilities. The fish's absence was never resolved. Instead, it became a companion, an ongoing participant that drew thinking toward care, speculation, and ethical action. In this unfolding, the pond did not simply host the inquiry; it coshaped its pedagogical and ethical force.

Extending the encounter: Revisits and new compositions

Back from the pond, the educators and pedagogist gathered around a table scattered with drawings, field notes, photographs, traces of thought still alive with the question: *Where did the fish go?* The question hovered, unresolved, its presence felt in the air around them.

Some children imagined the fish sleeping beneath the silt. Others believed ripples might wake them. A few worried that stones might cause harm. The "fish doctor" remained, not as whimsical detail but as a way of thinking-with illness, care, and possibility. Pollution emerged as another thread. Responsibility took shape as an affective current moving through the group.

Educators did not seek to resolve the question but to open it further: *What else might wake the fish? Where does the fish doctor work? What does that place feel like?*

Speculation here was not a distraction from the world; it was tethered to it, rooted in the children's gestures and attunements. Ukuleles and bells were proposed as gestures of care. A melody might be healing.

One morning, a crumpled piece of plastic floated across the water.

"They ate it," a child said quietly. "Now they won't get better."

An educator responded, "Can we stop more garbage?"

Without hesitation, Jeffrey replied, "We can make a sign."

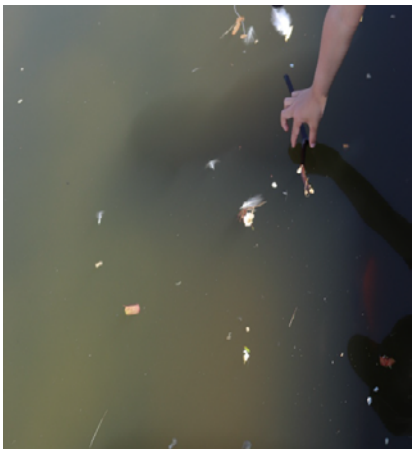
Signs emerged: drawings of fish wrapped in debris, sketches of clear water, handwritten messages: *Please don't throw trash. The fish are healing.*

These collective responses were carried on a wooden board back to the pond. They arrived as offerings.

That afternoon, a banana peel was tossed into the water.

"No!" a child's voice cut through, urgent and immediate. "That will make the fish sick!"

The child's imperative was a concern and an act of care: relational, embodied, and unprompted.



Returns as rhythm

Returning became a central rhythm of the inquiry. A large documentation panel, layered with drawings, notations, and photographs, stood as an open site of return. It kept the experience in motion. Children lingered before it, tracing lines with their fingers, adding marks, following images into new conversations.

Tina pointed to a drawing of a fish moving toward a musical note.

"He's coming back," she said. "He likes our song."

Her words gathered the room. A pencil was picked up. A ukulele appeared. New lyrics emerged: *Swim back soon / we're waiting here.*

The song was recorded and carried back to the pond.

"Now they'll know we didn't forget," Jeff observed.

In the days that followed, the panel called the children back. They circled drawings, flipped through printed photos, and wondered aloud.

"Do you think the fish saw the sign?"

"Maybe … or maybe they're reading it really slowly."

Returning was not repetition. It was renewal, an ongoing composition that allowed the inquiry to expand and shift with the children's growing attunement to one another, to the pond, and to the act of listening itself.

Staying close to what calls

The fish did not return.

Yet the inquiry remained alive as a practice of returning, of listening, of composing anew.

Sunlight scattered across the pond's surface. Children paused. Educators paused. Traces of thought remained in motion.

Documentation moved alongside, dwelling in the texture of the present, following what shimmered and what slipped away. This was not a project to be concluded but a pedagogical life unfolding, a way of working with time, attending to what appears and disappears, to what calls and withdraws.

Here, documentation was propositional. It sustained the speculative, circling back to what still asked to be thought.

The absence of the fish never closed the question. It kept it alive. Education's work did not end in knowing; it began again in listening, in composing-with, in returning again and again to what lingers.

Being with the pond: Documentation as an ethics of presence and response

The pond was not a backdrop. It pulsed with presence: quiet, insistent. The children did not arrive as outsiders. They were already within its rhythms, their feet pressing into the edge, their voices caught in the air moving across its surface. With Heidegger's sense of *being there*, their presence was not something to adopt but a condition already underway. They were not simply responding to a given world, but coshaping it with the pond's silences, movements, and absences. Dwelling with was visible in the ripple making, the listening, the singing. Documentation did not stand apart to observe; it moved as they moved, hesitated where they paused, and carried the traces of a pedagogy lived through an ethics of staying close.

In this sense, documentation was a living thread stretched across days, pauses, and returns. It circled back, not to repeat, but to remain with what had not yet settled, to hold the unfinished and the still forming. Its "projectual" force lay in its willingness to remain incomplete, to follow questions rather than resolve them. Documentation stayed in movement, in shared speculation, listening to the children, to the pond, to silence, to gestures, to what asked for response, and to what might still be coming.

As an aesthetic and relational practice, documentation reproposed experience. Drawings, quotes, gestures, and compositions were curated with care, giving shape to imaginative inquiries without containing them. Each panel of text and image formed a narrative mosaic, an evolving visual and discursive composition that kept interpretation open. Grounded in the idea that documentation is a shared, ethical encounter, the work foregrounded the entanglement of human and more-than-human, imagination and responsibility.

The fishpond was a participant in shaping the inquiry. Reducing it to evidence of environmental awareness would have overlooked the depth of the pedagogical work. Instead, educators stayed with the speculative momentum of the children's thinking, creating conditions for the inquiry to keep shifting. With documentation as companion, the process remained open, sustained by ongoing engagement, collective meaning making, and the fishpond's quiet call for attentiveness, response, and care.

Working with the unfinished: Pedagogical documentation otherwise

The Fishpond inquiry invites a rethinking of pedagogical documentation as a living co-compositional practice. Documentation is not an instrument of assessment or a repository for completed learning. It is a generative condition that sustains inquiry, circulates thought, and deepens relational engagement. It holds space for what has occurred while remaining attuned to what is still in formation.

In this inquiry, documentation acts as both temporal and ethical practice. It enables educators and children to return to shared moments without requiring resolution or closure. Early propositions, whether that the fish were sleeping, seeking medical care, or harmed by pollution, were not isolated ideas. They became entangled with gestures, materials, and conversations. Documentation preserved these entanglements so they could be revisited,

reinterpreted, and extended.

Projection emerged as a central pedagogical force. Questions like "Where is the fish doctor's office?" were not aimed at factual resolution. They opened conceptual ground where children could think otherwise through imagination, care, and narrative invention. Imagination is not opposed to the real; it is a legitimate mode of engaging with the world, deeply situated in material and ethical relationships. Through storytelling, children grappled with absence, loss, and environmental responsibility in ways meaningful to them.

This approach foregrounds a relational understanding of pedagogy. Documentation does not treat children's contributions as data to be categorized but as co-constructed meaning produced in encounter. The educators did not extract themes or distill thinking into illustrative examples; they listened, responded, and moved with the children's propositions, allowing differences, tensions, and questions to remain alive.

The educator's role is repositioned, from external observer interpreting events after the fact to co-participant whose listening and decisions about what to document, revisit, and amplify shape the inquiry's direction and texture. Documentation does not supplement pedagogy; rather, it is integral to its composition.

This conceptualization situates documentation as a practice of projectuality (Bertin & Contini, 2004, as cited in *Journal of Childhood Studies*, 2023), a way of keeping pedagogical conditions open and composing with what is emerging rather than closing it into outcomes. Curriculum is understood as relationally composed, shifting with the presences, materials, and questions that gather. In this frame, pedagogical documentation becomes a form of ethical attention: staying with uncertainty, making space for ideas and relations to evolve, and holding open potentialities of what might still come.

Concluding thoughts: Embracing complexity and uncertainty

This article opened with a pedagogical question: *What might documentation become when it is approached, not as a method of capture or representation, but as a practice entangled in the ongoing collective labour of education?* This question is not one to be resolved but one to be inhabited. Through the situated gestures of the Fishpond inquiry, this paper has lingered with documentation as a mode of pedagogical composition that does not finalize meaning but holds it open: provisional and in movement.

To document in this way is to be drawn into relation with that which remains unfinished, beyond what is immediately visible or known. It is to dwell with what is becoming, to revisit moments, not for affirmation, but for the possibility that something else may yet be thought. In this sense, documentation is not anchored in what has passed but oriented toward what might take shape. It gathers what has passed, not as artifact, but as a condition for ongoing pedagogical response.

This inquiry, grounded in the speculative textures of the Fishpond project, engages with philosophical orientations: Heidegger's notion of Dasein, Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-minoritarian, and pedagogical conversations that unsettle the child as the singular locus of meaning. These orientations do not function as explanatory tools. They are ways of being and thinking with the world. They shape how educators move through uncertainty, how they compose with tensions, and how they remain open to the ethical demands of pedagogical life.

What takes shape in this work is a conception of documentation, not as method or technique, but as the unfolding of pedagogical possibility, relational, ethical, and always in the midst of becoming (Lenz Taguchi, 2010). The gestures within the Fishpond inquiry, the careful removal of garbage, the composing of songs for unseen fish, the wondering about care, are not messages to be decoded or explained. They are propositions for thought, openings

into shared inquiry, into speculative modes of relation, into pedagogical life that resists finality. To engage with such gestures is to think with children, to respond to what emerges, and to reimagine what education might be and become.

Documentation, then, becomes a rhythm, a recursive and situated movement that resists closure. It renders time porous, allowing what has passed to reenter the present, not to resolve, but to provoke. It is a practice of staying with what continues to call for thought. It is pedagogical, not because it transmits content, but because it activates relation, interruption, and the capacity to respond.

This paper does not offer a conclusion in the form of synthesis. Rather, it extends an orientation to consider documentation as a mode of co-composing educational life. In this view (Vintimilla & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2020), the task of documentation is not to secure meaning but to hold it differently, to remain with the tensions of becoming, and to trace the movements through which pedagogical relation continually takes shape.

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