Students Learn about Documentation throughout Their Teacher Education Program

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Abstract

Study groups and learning circles can offer a systematic way for early childhood teachers to interact about their work and create a culture of professional development. This paper describes how faculty systematically followed a collaborative co-inquiry process in order to improve a new early childhood interdisciplinary teacher preparation program. The team met on a regular basis throughout one academic year, with the stated objective of infusing observation/documentation knowledge and skills in a coherent and systematic way throughout the students' program of studies. The group created a template of the *cycle of inquiry,* which could apply to all courses, and analyzed the documentation process along a series of *skill dimensions*: (1) *level* that students are expected to achieve (awareness, application, refinement/integration); (2) *focus* of the students' observations (who, what, where, when, how); (3) width of the *lens* of observation (e.g., focused narrowly on one dimension of behavior or widely on a whole classroom environment); (4) *intended audience* of the completed documentation (e.g., children, parents, professional colleagues); and (5) *finished product* of documentation (e.g., project panel, memory book, slide presentation). The co-inquiry process allowed the faculty to improve the ways that the program helps students move from an awareness level toward a practitioner level in using observation and documentation. The students' reflections and finished work suggest how they learned to promote children's learning, partner with parents, and come to think of themselves as "professionals" in their field.

Introduction

Learning circles and study groups offer an organized way for early childhood teachers to discuss their work and create a culture of professional development (Project Zero, 2003; Rinaldi, 1994; Shoptaugh, Frasier, Miller, Bardwell, & Bersani, 2006). The Making Learning Visible Project at Harvard Project Zero has developed protocols and other resources for teachers to use in creating and looking at documentation (http://www.pz.harvard.edu/mlv/). Shareen Abramson (2006) has described a process developed at the Huggins Child Development Center at California State University at Fresno. At staff meetings, the teachers follow a three-part procedure to share educational documentation that they call collaborative inquiry—or "co-inquiry." First, one teacher shares pieces of unfinished documentation (e.g., photos, video, transcripts, work specimens) that present a problem or situation arising from work with children in the teacher's classroom. Second, other teachers take turns offering comments and questions. Third, everyone joins in open dialogue and brainstorming on what the teacher could do next so that the children's learning could continue to develop. The teachers support one another over time by systematically studying one another's work, sharing resources, and reflecting on next steps.

This paper describes how a group of early childhood education faculty from three departments at the University of Nebraska used a collaborative inquiry process to improve a newly approved teacher preparation program, titled Inclusive Early Childhood Education: Birth to Grade 3. In retrospect, it is clear that a co-inquiry process was essential to success in creating a pathway for preservice students to become competent in using what Carlina Rinaldi and other educators in the Reggio Emilia tradition call pedagogical documentation as a tool for becoming reflective practitioners (Fleet, Patterson, & Robertson, 2006; Rinaldi, 2006).

Background

The Inclusive Early Childhood Education (IECE) Program at the University of Nebraska opened its door to undergraduate students in the fall of 2004. It is a blended, interdisciplinary, preprofessional program that involves teaching faculty from three Departments in the College of Education and Human Sciences: (1) Child, Youth and Family Studies; (2) Teaching, Learning and Teacher Preparation; and (3) Special Education and Communication Disorders. Many of the

faculty began to work closely together several years earlier as part of a Stakeholders Committee composed of faculty, parent, and community stakeholders who met regularly to plan and implement the new program. With three years of grant support from the Nebraska State Department of Education, the stakeholders engaged in a series of planning activities. In 2002, this committee formulated a vision statement that opened with a statement of belief about the central role of observation and documentation in early childhood teacher education (see Appendix 1):

> The guiding theme of *child and parent observation and documentation as a way of working together with children and families* will run through all elements of our program, so that students and faculty come to share a common core of values, knowledge, and skills.

The Stakeholders Committee formulated this vision statement as a result of collective work over time in which we completed the following activities:

- studied and discussed selected research and teaching literature
- gathered and reviewed needs assessments
- held institutes and consultations with national experts
- visited universities with exemplary early childhood teacher preparation programs and studied their documents
- created a library of books and media resources
- offered one-time scholarships to increase the diversity of the applicant pool
- collaborated with faculty and administrators from the neighboring community college to align course objectives and articulate courses between the 2- and 4-year institutions

Eventually the program faculty and department chairs received approval for a proposed course of study composed of revised and newly created courses and field experiences that would meet state standards for an initial teaching certificate (Birth to Grade 3). The program has been available since 2004 and has become a respected and rapidly growing undergraduate program in our college.

Scholarship of College Teaching

Once the IECE program was approved, the faculty realized that their work was not over—that they needed to begin continuous processes of student assessment and program improvement. One particularly valuable element of that process was the participation in one or more years in the university's peer review of teaching project. This faculty development initiative encourages faculty from any department to work in small peer groups, throughout an academic year, to analyze their teaching effectiveness, classroom practices, and evidence of students' learning, and then prepare and share course portfolios. Peer review promotes the "scholarship of teaching" at the college level through processes that parallel co-inquiry in that a group of peers meets regularly, over an academic year, to share and discuss the emerging portfolios of faculty members as a way to improve their teaching. The peer review process serves to structure a careful and systematic look at evidence of teaching practice and learning outcomes in specific courses chosen by the participating faculty. College faculty find this kind of reflection on teaching in a group of peers to be intellectually stimulating and energizing and well worth their university's "institutional investment" (Bernstein, Burnett, Goodburn, & Savory, 2006; Savory, Burnett, & Goodburn, 2007).

Participation in this formal peer review of teaching process helped set the stage for the work described in this article because it provided the faculty members who participated in it with a

shared background and approach for examining course syllabi, assignments, and assessments. It also set up positive expectations for coming together to critically examine college teaching in light of the skills and knowledge that instructors wanted students to learn and practice. The peer review process prepared faculty members to look systematically at the sequencing of courses and the meshing together across courses of objectives, activities, assignments, assessments, and outcomes.

As an example, Carolyn Edwards used the peer review project to examine *Introduction to Early Care and Education*, the first course in the IECE sequence. She participated in the project two different years to help tighten the fit between teaching goals and what students were learning. (Her inquiry portfolio is discussed in detail in Savory, Burnett, & Goodburn, 2007, Ch. 4.) The portfolios are text documents available for public review and sharing (~~http://www.unl.edu/peerrev/~~). Carolyn realized that she was not certain that she was helping students gain awareness of what pedagogical documentation is or how it works to help teachers make daily decisions and communicate with families, colleagues, and the public. She therefore expanded class time devoted to these topics and also increased the variety of graded and ungraded assessments she was using. To determine students' initial knowledge, she used a short ungraded quiz, followed by a week of class lectures, activities, and assignments, and then the same quiz as posttest. This procedure helped students grasp the concepts, as seen in Appendix 2. After the second quiz, the class reviewed the ideas a final time, and no one missed questions about documentation on the midterm exam.

The students' emerging awareness about the communication uses of documentation was assessed more fully through an integrative assignment completed near the end of the course. The assignment was to prepare a page that if enlarged to poster size would be considered worthy of display on the wall of a classroom or program serving young children. Each student, following an initial in-class activity and a one-on-one interaction with the instructor, turned in a single page of finished documentation displaying "My Image of the Child." Through pictures and a few simple sentences, the students communicated visually what they believed about young children's potential. Many of the results were conventional in their choice of words and images, but in their one-on-one meeting with the instructor between their initial and final versions, almost all of the students seemed genuinely engaged in finding a strong, clear way to crystallize and illustrate their essential concept about the potential of children and what attracted them to want to work with children. Two of the student products, along with the assignment instructions, are provided here.

Student Project: Image of a Child (PDF)

Digital Technologies

Besides the university's peer review project on the scholarship of teaching, another force that shaped the group's collaborative work was the increasing use of digital technologies as teaching and learning tools in preservice teacher education. Several members of the group were sharing proposals with faculty at other universities with laboratory schools in order to learn how technological advances offer new ways to share documentation among and between teachers in

university and community settings. Colleagues around the country were exploring uses of digital photography to make pedagogical documentation a regular part of college students' experience. (e.g., Bersani, Condit, & Frazier, 2003; Forman & Hall, 2005; http://www.videatives.com; Fu, Stremmel, & Hill, 2002; Hong & Trepanier-Smith, 2004; Moran, 2002; Moran & Tegano, 2005; Moran, Lamb, Demartino, Worthington, & Carow, 2007; Smith & Goldhaber, 2004). The work with technology hinted at the potential of digital documentation to improve students' observational and assessment skills, curriculum planning, and presentation/communication abilities. However, the UNL group members did not feel they had solved the problem of how to bring inexperienced preservice teachers to a true practitioner level or refinement level in utilizing the documentation process in appropriate and diverse ways to support their future work with young children. Fortunately, a grant from the National Center for Information Technology in Education (NCITE) at the University of Nebraska made it possible for the UNL co-inquiry group to tackle this problem with necessary materials, equipment, and staff support.

Co-Inquiry Process

The seven faculty members of the UNL co-inquiry group came together in 2- to 3-hour monthly meetings throughout the academic year, 2003-2004, in order to

- discuss the knowledge and skills that IECE students needed to learn and practice,
- decide how to imbed these skills into courses in a systematic way so that students could build skills gradually and progressively,
- plan how to include a range of experiences with technology across courses so students could produce different kinds of finished products of documentation to make visible children's learning and their own growth as teachers, and
- prepare pages for a student handbook for IECE students that would orient students to documentation as a teaching tool or strategy that they would be using throughout their program of study.

In the first two months, the group studied and discussed Gandini and Goldhaber's (2001) and Forman and Fyfe's (1998) articles on the documentation process as a tool for educators. While not intentionally following a protocol in conducting meetings, the group seemed to fall naturally into a routine in which members first offered reactions to one faculty member's sample of documentation and then raised questions, offered interpretations, shared experiences, and suggested implications and possible next steps. Two notable accomplishments emerged from the group's first two discussions that guided subsequent meetings. These were the identification of the elements of an observation and documentation process and a template for a cycle of inquiry across courses.

Elements of an Observation and Documentation Process

The Reggio Emilia educators who transformed the theory and practice of pedagogical documentation usually describe it in a holistic way. Rinaldi (2006) speaks of documentation as a "visible trace and a procedure that supports learning and teaching, making them reciprocal because they are visible and sharable" (p. 100). Rinaldi (1994) discusses how this approach serves the learning needs of young children:

> Their desires become apparent when the children ask the adults to listen to, observe, and support them and to render them visible. To render them visible means that their processes should be carefully recorded, transcribed, reflected upon, and respected and sustained. (p. 58)

As the co-inquiry group responded to the available literature on documentation, raised

questions, and made interpretations about what skills in observation and documentation are important and feasible for undergraduate students to attain in a teacher preparation program, group members realized that it would help to dissect Gandini and Goldhaber's (2001) documentation cycle of inquiry into its components. The group analyzed the separate skills of documentation as involving

- framing/reframing questions about the learning process
- observing; gathering data and artifacts
- selecting/organizing observations, data, and artifacts
- reflecting/interpreting observations, data, and artifacts
- planning/projecting and making decisions
- communicating/reporting artistically or elegantly

As the group discussed these various skills, members agreed that the first skill, framing questions about the learning process, is actually one of the hardest but most important aspects of becoming an early childhood educator, and that framing questions needed to be a focal point for the group's monthly discussions.

Following the discussion, Chris Marvin summarized what she had heard into a chart, which she presented as a provocation at the beginning of the next meeting. This chart, "Elements of an Observation and Documentation Process" (see Table 1), proved to be pivotal to the group's work. The chart breaks down the skills of documentation process along a series of dimensions that would apply to what the preservice students would be learning and practicing in a particular course:

- *level* of skills and knowledge that students are expected to achieve (awareness, application, refinement/integration)
- *focus* of the students' observations (who, what, where, when, how)
- *lens* (narrow, i.e., focused on one child or one dimension of child behavior, or wide, i.e., focused on a group of individuals or a whole classroom environment)
- *intended audience(s)* of the finished product of documentation (e.g., children, parents, professional colleagues)
- *finished product* of documentation (e.g., portfolio page, project panel, memory book, slide presentation).

Table 1
Elements of the Documentation Process

Level	Skills	Focus	Lens	Audiences	Finished Products
Novice or Awareness Apprentice or Application Practitioner or Refinement & Integration	Framing (and reframing) questions Observing; gathering data & artifacts Selecting/organizing observations, data & artifacts Reflecting/interpreting observations, data, &	Who (e.g., child, children, teacher, self, family) What (e.g., classroom, materials, program, learning activity, subject area, child behaviors, thought	MACRO View MICRO View	Children Parents Self Colleagues & Classmates Supervisors & Instructors	Portfolio page Panel display Project booklet Reflective journal Child portfolio Memory book

	artifacts Planning/projecting & making decisions Documenting artistically and effectively	process, or growth) Where (e.g., inside, outside classroom or home) When (e.g., beginning, end, midstage, before X, after X) How (e.g., what methods of data collection and kinds of artifacts will be collected)		Interdisciplinary team Public (school, professional, & local communities)	Narrative Poster Slide presentation Videotape or DVD

The group decided to examine courses in the IECE program to see how the various key learning activities distributed themselves across the cells of the table. For example, were faculty teaching students to observe and document using different kinds of tools? To produce different kinds of finished documentation products? To communicate with different audiences, such as children, families, and professional colleagues?

The group became eager to examine what members did in their courses, and so each subsequent meeting of the group became an opportunity to examine closely one or two of the required courses in the program. Faculty members took turns describing a course in the program that they frequently taught and describing in detail one or two of the key integrative assignments that were done by students. The presenter shared evidence in the form of the course syllabus/outline and showed how the assignments mapped onto the chart of "Elements of an Observation and Documentation Process."

Mary Gabriel, for example, described how the course *Preschool Prepracticum* includes a series of assignments to help students (usually freshmen and sophomores) ask the framing question "What do children display about their stages of development as they play?" She related how students used worksheets that list "widely held expectations" (learning standards) for behavior of children ages 3-5 years, derived directly from Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines for Ages 3-5. These worksheets gave students a common frame of reference for examining the developmental domains of physical, language/literacy, social/emotional, creative/aesthetic, cognitive: mathematics, and cognitive: science. For each worksheet/domain, students selected a specific behavior and then wrote anecdotal notes about a target child. They also took photos about what they saw and developed their notes and photos into a more complete observation, which had three parts (notes, photograph, and interpretation). Their lens for documenting was "micro," with a "who" of an individual child, a "what" of a behavioral domain, a "where" of the classroom, a "when" of week X of class, and a "how" of the worksheet process. The activity encouraged students to become competent in labeling and analyzing child behavior according to the learning categories laid out in the state learning guidelines, as well as helping them to internalize reasonable expectations for child development during the preschool years.

Later, the students compiled their observation pages into a Child Notebook—a piece of finished documentation that was used in classroom planning and parent/teacher conferences. Meanwhile, the worksheet pages were also put into the classroom, where they started out as a blank book for each child but soon became embellished by the students. They added observational information on their target children or any other children throughout the semester by recording snippets of speech and behavior on sticky notes attached to the appropriate widely held

expectation (giving them additional practice in analyzing and labeling behavior). Often, the students gathered these notes by watching more advanced students from the course *Curriculum Methods in Early Childhood Education* implement their lesson plans drawn up for the content domains (e.g., Language/Literacy, Math, Science, etc.). By the end of the semester, all of the worksheet pages and informal notes for each child were put together into a Child Development Assessment Report, so that parents and teachers alike could benefit from the accumulated evidence of the child's growing competencies across the developmental domains in the Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines.

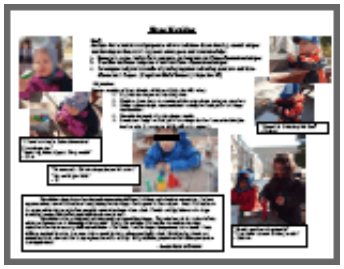
Michelle Rupiper described how the course *Curriculum Methods in Early Childhood Education* took students one step further. The students wrote and implemented detailed activity plans around identified curricular goals. After the implementation of a planned activity, students created a one-page Activity Documentation piece that was to communicate the goal and objectives for the activity as well the children's response to the activity. Their lens for documenting was narrow, or "micro," because they focused on only one child and one domain, but their documentations were completed toward the end of the semester when students had had an opportunity to develop relationships with the children and experience success in planning and implementing activities. By waiting until further into the semester, students were able to step back and view the activity through a broader lens than they were able to do at the start of the semester. Their focus of documentation had a "who" of a child, a "what" of an activity, a "where" of the classroom, a "when" of the last few weeks of the semester, and a "how" of the assignment format. Students asked themselves framing questions such as, "How do I know children are interested in this topic?" and "What did I observe that shows children benefited from the activity?"

Through all these various activities, the level of reflection of students in both courses (*Preschool Prepracticum*and *Curriculum Methods*) advanced considerably beyond the awareness level seen in their "Image of the Child" work for *Introduction to Early Care and Education*. Students were using and applying the skills of observation and documentation to go *inside* the learning process and analyze the thinking and behavior of children (instead of remaining outside and simply portraying the child holistically). This change is illustrated by the sample products from both courses linked below. From *Preschool Prepracticum*, there are blank worksheet pages, sample observations by one student, and two examples of filled-out pages for the Child Development Assessment Report. From *Curriculum Methods,* there is a sample Activity Documentation. These products suggest how the students were gaining application-level skills in taking observations and action photos, designing attractive layouts, and describing and interpreting the meaning of children's behavior and speech in the classroom.

Sample Student Products (PDF)

Student Products Worksheet (PDF)

Worksheets adapted from NE Early Learning Guidelines (PDF)



Student Product (PDF)

Template for Cycle of Inquiry and Course Experiences

Each faculty member of the co-inquiry group thus elaborated on how her course assignments addressed the acquisition of documentation skills. Julie Jones-Branch, in presenting to the group, added an important perspective when she described how she had created a template of

the documentation cycle of inquiry for use with her students in *Preschool Student Teaching*, the culminating preschool practicum in the IECE teacher education program. To show the faculty group, she brought along a diagram (Jones-Branch, 2006). On the visual representation of the cycle of inquiry, Julie had superimposed, next to *framing questions*, "How can children show me what they know about their world?" She described how the students were each assigned a target child in the lab school classroom to observe, informally assess, and plan for throughout the semester. Superimposed on *observing, recording, and collecting artifacts*, Julie had placed, "What do I see the children doing? What information do I need to gather? What pictures can I capture to help me tell the meaning?" She told how the students conducted home visits with their target child's family to gather input for developmental goals. Each week, the students filled out two observation/reflection sheets on their target children that they discussed in small groups. This activity led the students into planning that supported what each child was interested in or trying to figure out. Superimposed on *analyzing/interpreting observations and artifacts*, Julie had placed, "What does the observation and reflection sheet tell me about children's learning? What does it mean? Where can we go from here?"

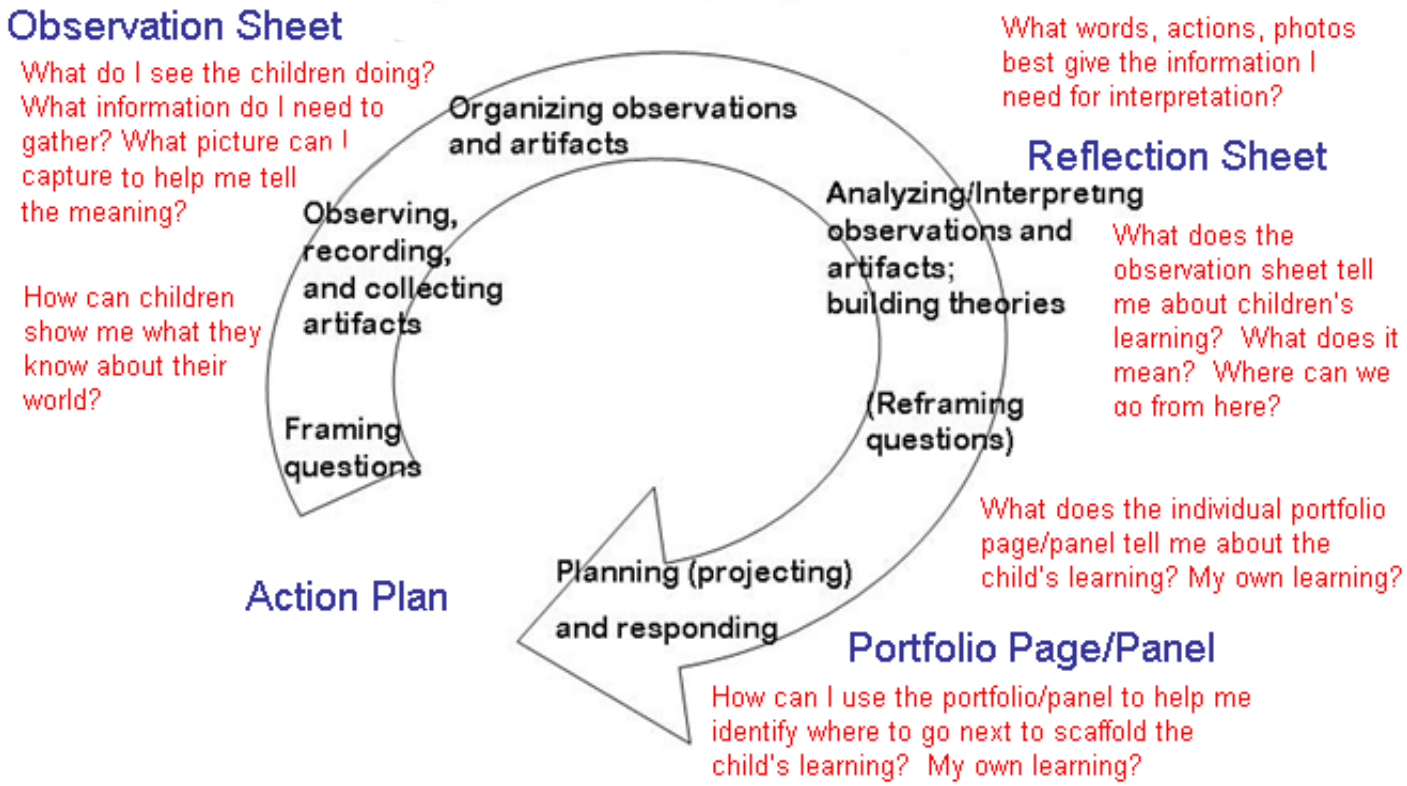
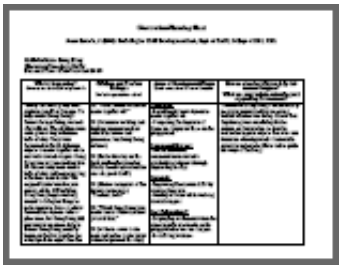


Figure 2. The documentation process as a cycle of inquiry.

Besides using their observation/reflection sheets to support planning, students also used them as they created finished products of documentation. Julie described how the students used their information to summarize what they had found and to document their findings in the form of a Portfolio Page, which included an introduction to the child's interests, what he was doing, what it meant (the teacher's interpretation), area of development the child was working on, and something about what the teacher would do next to scaffold the child's thinking. The Portfolio Page also included either photos of the child in action or an artifact of some kind (e.g., artwork, writing sample, cutting sample). Julie described how the students learned to listen closely to children and to discuss their interpretations of the meaning behind children's words and actions. She also helped them to improve the aesthetic appearance and organization of their Portfolio Pages. The students placed their Portfolio Pages in the classroom so that children, teachers, supervisors, and parents all had daily access to them. At the end of the semester, they put together the many Portfolio Pages and met with their target child's parents and reviewed the pages, identifying areas of growth and potential concerns based on the information in the

cumulative portfolio. Parents were given the portfolios as keepsakes, and students photocopied them to add to their own professional teaching portfolios. (Parents "shared" their child's portfolio with the next teacher who took over their child's observations the following semester.) Late in the semester, a similar type of inquiry process led students to use observation and reflection sheets, together with Portfolio Pages, as raw material for creating a Project Panel to display on the walls of the school and a Project Book to give to each family as a parting gift.



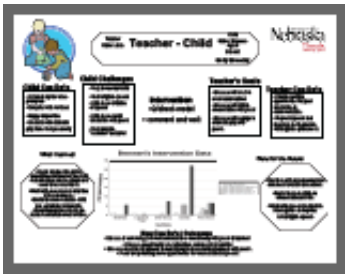
Observation/Planning Sheet (PDF)

Julie Jones-Branch explained that she used the cycle of inquiry diagrams with her preservice teachers as a constant reference point to remind them how observing, interpreting, and planning are part of the same repeating cycle. Students typically were found to have an "a-ha" reaction about a third of the way through the course and then to demonstrate rapid improvement in their use of the observation and reflection sheets as tools for planning, as well as improvement in the quality of their finished documentation products. Over the course of the semester, the students came to focus on the children's thinking and learning through their documentation work versus procedural concerns about the classroom and children's behavior. John Dewey (1938) refers to development as a teacher's focus moving from an external (children's behaviors) focus to an internal (children's thinking and learning) focus. The majority of the adult's attention becomes focused on what the child needs in terms of motivation and learning and not on classroom management (which is often described as the most difficult and stressful part of a teacher's job). The Portfolio Pages and other documentation were a marvel to parents, who were drawn into detailed discussions with student teachers about the significance of the ordinary moments of preschoolers.

Through this and subsequent discussions, the faculty members began to make plans to inform students about how their courses would help students learn to ask questions about their teaching and engage in the cycle of inquiry. The group agreed that it was useful for students to have different courses emphasize various techniques of gathering observations and artifacts, for instance, through observation checklists; anecdotal notes; parent, child, or teacher interviews; or photography of classroom life. The group also preferred that different courses teach various strategies of teaming and collaborating, for example, requesting consultations from specialists, providing feedback to colleagues on observed teaching, and co-analyzing or co-planning activities and children's projects. Finally, the group agreed that different courses should offer students opportunities to master various formats for communicating, reporting, and displaying findings about teaching and learning, for instance, through child case study reports, child narratives, curriculum activity plans, literacy case studies, posters, and project panels. Some of the formats involve more use of visual tools for documentation than do others, but virtually all involve the use of digital technology or computers. Whether drawing on words, images, or graphs and diagrams, each integrative activity offers an organized and accumulating series of experiences for the students.

The students also learned to apply their documentation skills in addressing the learning of children across the range of abilities. For example, Chris Marvin described how in the course *Methods in Early Childhood Special Education,* students learned how to promote the goals of inclusion for children with developmental delays or disabilities and to increase the children's access to classroom activities, engagement with learning materials, and social interaction. Students observed a child in an inclusive environment over time, interviewed the teacher for

desired expectations of all children, sought consultation from specialists by sharing what they knew and had tried to adapt the environment or teaching before writing instruction plans that brought about greater participation and engagement for the child. As products, students prepared an Embedded Learning Opportunity Plan that they and the classroom teacher used to guide their everyday actions; a graphed or tabled summary of one child's behavioral changes over time to inform decisions for continuance or adjustments needed in the plan; and both a narrative progress report and Powerpoint poster to summarize the plan, the process, and the outcomes. The report was shared with the classroom teacher and used for evaluating student learning in the course; the poster (30 x 22 inches) was used for the student's teaching portfolio (printed 8.5 x 11 inches) to communicate their semester-long efforts with classmates and colleagues. One student was asked to share her poster in the school's main office, while another used it to explain what she knew about adapting curriculum for children with disabilities during a subsequent job interview. An example of such a poster is presented below and like the Portfolio Pages and Posters produced in *Preschool Student Teaching* approaches a level of quality appropriate for sharing with a public forum beyond the university (for example, at a professional workshop or conference).



Student Poster (PDF)

Documentation for a Student Handbook

To summarize what the group had learned through a year of co-inquiry, the faculty members decided to prepare some pages to be included in the IECE student handbook that Susan Churchill was beginning to prepare for all current and prospective students. Susan wanted the handbook to answer students' basic and practical questions about such things as the program application process and the prescribed sequence of courses for the IECE program of study, but she also wanted it to inform the students about the philosophical and pedagogical foundations of the IECE program. In one of the group's final meetings, then, the faculty members decided to advance the handbook endeavor by joining together to describe the process of documentation and titled the section *Becoming a Reflective Educator.* The sentences proposed by each faculty member fell together in a surprisingly effortless way to create a page that describes the faculty's intentions in teaching students about the documentation process. This page begins as follows:

> As part of becoming a reflective educator, you are going to learn a new tool called *documentation.* Documentation is a process for "making learning visible" so that together with others you can study the evidence of children's efforts and their learning. You will learn to collect and organize concrete evidence in many forms, including audio/video recordings, digital photos, text, observational field notes and samples of children's work. The documentation process is more than gathering observations; it also includes reflecting, collaborating, planning, and communicating. The documentation process is part of a *cycle of inquiry*.

The description goes on to show a diagram of the cycle of inquiry and to name the skills and formats of documentation that students would be learning. The description can be found on pages 11–12 of thecurrent student handbook (~~http://cehs.unl.edu/fcs/docs/ieceHandbook2006.pdf~~).

Last, the co-inquiry group concluded the year of reflection by summarizing what had been

learned about the teaching of the skills of documentation throughout the IECE teacher education program. The group constructed a chart titled *The Skills of Documentation: What Students Learn to Do in the IECE Program*. In reviewing this chart (pp. 13-14 of the student handbook), the group discovered that the concepts that members had developed together about reflective practice would apply as well to the elementary education courses in the program as to the preschool courses. Ruth Heaton (2000), for example, described how the course *Teaching Mathematics in the Elementary School* helped students to frame questions around the issue "How do young children learn mathematics? What kind of mathematical learners are they?" To gather evidence of children's learning, students videotaped a teacher working with a child, took notes, and collected a child's work. They sifted and organized their evidence by analyzing their videotape and comparing their observations and notes with evidence on other children. They also reflected on their child's work on the mathematical problem and on their own teaching process with the child. They planned steps to support the child's learning of mathematics. To perfect their skills in professional communication, they made narrative and oral presentations to their college classmates and instructors. This particular course did not focus on formal methods of documentation, yet it strongly promoted students becoming reflective teachers who used evidence about the child's thinking and behavior to figure out the child's mathematical thinking process and then used that evidence in planning.

The faculty co-inquiry group contemplated the chart *The Skills of Documentation: What Students Learn to Do in the IECE Program* and discussed how the IECE program was making progress toward becoming an organized and coherent preparation for "becoming a reflective educator." The group noticed, for instance, that across the IECE course, students were provided opportunities to produce finished documentation intended for different audiences such as children, parents, colleagues, and themselves. Students were experimenting with many different products of documentation that ranged from simple to complex and shifted between a focus on narrow problems and broad ones. Looked at in this systematic way, it seemed clear that the Inclusive ECE program was providing a pathway for students to move from the novice (awareness) level in using the tools of observation and documentation toward a practitioner level, where they were refining and integrating their skills. Students were mastering the skills of documentation as a means to promote children's learning, partner with parents, inform their teaching efforts, and develop their own professional identity.

Outcomes

In the years following this project, we have increasingly noticed that visitors to the UNL Ruth Staples Child Development Laboratory tend to come away impressed and inspired by the quality of the students' finished products of documentation that adorn the school walls. The student panels and posters have a unique look to them—a particular touch—that we believe reflects not only our community identity but also the particular road we have traveled in trying to understand and master the documentation process. The members of the lab school faculty hope it opens up for all to see the inner processes and hidden strengths of children's learning, partnerships with parents, and teachers' professional growth. In addition, experienced teachers who have worked with our students in the public schools comment on the students' abilities to succinctly describe intervention/adaptation procedures for a child with delays/disabilities and share documentation of the intervention's efforts and outcomes. The special educators view these abilities as strengths for the future IECE teacher's role in inclusive early childhood settings.

In the time since 2003-2004, faculty and students in the IECE program have continued to make further improvements in learning environments and the educational programs for children and to create new documents such as a Lab School brochure and Web page and electronic Individualized Education Plan (IEP) Progress Reports. Faculty in the teacher education program have continued to invest energy to improve the interdisciplinary program and their ability to articulate theory and practice that represents the underlying program philosophy but respects individual faculty variations in training, experience, research agenda, and teaching styles.

Faculty members in the teacher education program have joined college- and university-wide conversations on accountability and specification of student learning outcomes. Continued co-inquiry and documentation discussions should assure the IECE program's integrity.

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Appendix 1
Guiding Theme for the Proposed Early Childhood Teacher Education Program
Prepared by the Stakeholders Committee, April 2000

The guiding theme of ***child and parent observation and documentation as a way of working together*** will run through all elements of our program, so that students and faculty come to share a common core of values, knowledge, and skills. Observation and documentation are reflective teaching practices that place each child's and family's well-being and development at the center of educational decision making. Teachers can approach work in any early childhood setting using the same strategies of observation and listening, recording and analyzing, planning and sharing. They can adapt to their setting, situation, age range and ability range of their children, or to the families' demographics and functioning styles. They shift their focus from categorizing children and families and from overly constraining formats, schedules, and lesson plans to understanding the needs of children and designing developmentally appropriate, culturally sensitive inclusionary experiences of teaching and learning.

This program will meet the Nebraska standards for the Early Childhood Birth to Grade 3 Unified Endorsement. It is a "unified endorsement" because it combines competencies from the current dual endorsement in elementary and early childhood education. In addition, it adds competencies in early childhood special education. In our view, a **unified** early childhood education program is based upon

- **A unified view of child and family**
  Young children and parents are active participants in family systems, peer groups, community networks, and cultural institutions and cannot be approached apart from context.
- **A unified view of how children and adults learn**
  Learning involves both active construction of knowledge and acquiring of skills, information, and behaviors—A unified view of what should be taught. Curriculum should be coherent, cohesive, and integrated and include play, exploration, and instruction.
- **A unified view of early childhood programs and services**
  Early childhood programs take place in a variety of settings that serve young children: child care, preschool, kindergarten, primary, early intervention, special education, gifted education, recreation.
- **A unified view of school and society**
  Schools function as part of society, reflect social processes, and contribute to them.
- **A unified view of teacher development**
  Professional development is a lifelong process with preservice and inservice phases. The teacher education program provides critical performances; field placements; experiences with student peers, parents, and community partners; teamwork; and collaboration that embody the principles taught in blended coursework.
- **A unified view of theory and practice**
  Discovery of new knowledge is fundamental, and the teaching profession requires reflective practitioners who engage in action research and communicate with the public.

Appendix 2
What Is Pedagogical Documentation?
(Ungraded Quiz)

1. What is "pedagogical documentation"? (Circle all that apply)
    a. Records of a child's background, test scores, absences, etc.
    b. Observational notes of child(ren) in the classroom
    c. Work samples, including such products as drawings, paintings
    d. Transcripts of conversations with child(ren)

2. Pedagogical documentation is intended for _____: (Circle all that apply)
    a. The child(ren)
    b. Parents
    c. Teachers
    d. The public

Findings: Students showed substantial improvement on both questions from pretest to posttest. Question 1 has the correct answer of **b**, **c**, and **d** (not **a**). On the pretest, only 9 students were correct and 35 were incorrect, but on the posttest, 35 were correct and 8 were incorrect. Question 2 has the correct answer of all four, **a**, **b**, **c**, and **d**. On the pretest, only 2 students were correct and 42 were incorrect, but on the posttest, 25 students were correct and 18 were incorrect.