# Children's Perspective in Play: Documenting the Educational Process

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## Abstract

*Our initial hypothesis is that documenting the educational process encompasses the entirety of the context in which children and adults in preschool institutions live, work and play. In this manner, documentation is approached as a means of changing and improving educational practice. By using a qualitative case study, we researched the role that social interaction plays in the learning processes of children of an early and preschool age. As a theoretical anchor for our perusal of the conversations and interaction between the children in a kindergarten group, we made use of sociocultural perspectives on learning and the socialisation of children. Exploring the discourse of children is valuable not only because it aids in appreciating individual and group learning experiences, but also because it assists us in gaining an understanding of children's actions and the active role they play in their own learning. Thus the research was rooted in an extensive examination and documentation of activities of learning and exploration within the stimulating environment of the kindergarten. Within this study, children are understood as creators of the meaning and active participants in their own learning processes. In addition to this, the relationships between children have become a context in which the co-construction of theories unfolds, as does the interpretation of different perceptions of reality.*

**Key words:** *a child; documentation; educators; exploration; stimulating environment.*

## Introduction

Though studies on ″the child″ are largely in the domain of developmental psychology, during the last few decades researchers from the field of the sociology of childhood – particularly those from Europe (Corsaro, 1997; James & Prout,

1997) – have expressed the opinion that some of the key premises of developmental psychology are lacking. This includes the existence of general laws concerning biological development, inherent ″passivity″ and the predilection towards interpreting abilities as mere functions of age, without considering the role of subjective experience (Green & Hogan 2005, as cited in Kim & Darling, 2009). Some of this criticism is rooted in the view that developmental psychology has not managed to adequately understand and describe the everyday lives of children and their active participation in the world. Due to this, Hogan (1998, as cited in Kim & Darling, 2009) claims, developmental psychology views the child as estranged from its context, a predictable being that develops according to a preset sequence and whose views are not worth mentioning. The point in which researchers of childhood, inspired by the tenets of social constructivism, differ from one another is the amount of attention they bestow upon the social construction of childhood. Recent sociological perspectives on the research of children introduce children as social actors and participants in their own lives, examining the ways in which children influence their social environment and how they are, in turn, shaped by it (Harcourt & Einarsdottir, 2011). Such a stance respects the autonomy of children and views children as direct and primary research subjects (Green & Hogan 2005, as cited in Kim & Darling, 2009). In other words, the new sociology of childhood stresses that children are subjects whose voices should be heard, not passive objects to be subjected to examination; that is, they view children as active subjects that possess a set of rights, experts of their own lives and active research participants (Pascal & Bertram, 2009).

Johansson (2011) takes this point of view further and discusses the ″discourse of the contextual child″, in which sociologists, psychologists and pedagogues stress the importance of researching the space in which children spend most of their time (Corsaro, 2005; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Sommer, 2005; Woodhead, 2005 as cited in Johansson, 2011). In other words, as a reaction to modernist approaches that view young people as research objects (Janzen, 2008), a need arose for studies that consider young people (children) subjects (e.g. Christensen & James, 2000; Cannella, 2002; Greene & Hill, 2005; Hatch, 2007) or social actors (Christensen & Prout, 2005), as did the need for including the voices of young people in studies on them (Cannella, 2002; Soto & Swadener, 2005; MacNaughton et al., 2007). To summarise, there is an increasing interest in the acquisition of knowledge on how children live, play and learn within the context of educational institutions. Many researchers today strive to conduct research in educational institutions by connecting their culture and their context. Such studies are focused on the living conditions of children, while paying attention and attaching importance to the voices of children (Berthelsen, Brownlee & Johansson, 2009; Halldén, 2003; Smith, Taylor & Gollop, 2000; Sommer, Pramling Samuelsson & Hundeide, 2010 as cited in Johansson, 2011). The child is viewed as a co-creator of knowledge, identity and culture (Dahlberg et al., 2007) within the research space itself: an institution of preschool care and education.

Johansson (2011) warns that, so far, there has been very little knowledge regarding the experiences of small children concerning their everyday lives and the influence of institutions on children's development. Despite the gradual rise in studies involving young children, it still appears that their voices are marginalised (Greve & Solheim, 2010; Johansson & Emilson, 2010, as cited in Johansson & White, 2011). Due to this, the following question posed by the same author becomes particularly intriguing: is the intersubjective, implied and embodied knowledge of newborns and young children valued in comparison with measurable academic knowledge expressed in words? In addition, this matter is a bone of contention in some political discussions around the world (Biesta, 2008; Greve & Solheim, 2010; Johansson, 2010). For these reasons, we shall present the following points by the same author, who believes that the "ontology, epistemology and methodology" of this approach view the child and the researcher as subjects intertwined in time, history and culture. Epistemological understanding is implied in expressions such as "data collection", while subjectivity and metaphors intertwine in expressions such as "the construction of lived experience" (see, for example, Greene & Hogan, 2006). The ontological questions contained within the idea of "child-focused" studies are substituted for research ″involving children″, stating that the conditions for listening to the voices of children and appreciating their participation in activities are constructed by both the researcher and the children within a sociocultural context (see, for example, Einarsdottir, 2007, pp. 3-4).

The theory of "a hundred languages" (Malaguzzi, 1998) stresses that, in order to understand children, "adults have to learn, or relearn, and revalue other languages, since a lot of issues in listening to children become much more interesting once we get beyond the idea that listening involves one person talking and the other person hearing them″ (Moss, 2006, p. 18). Or, as Rinaldi (2006) explains, listening is not only a didactic method and technique, but a mode of thinking and perceiving oneself in relation to others and the world. She also stresses that listening is not an easy job, for it requires casting aside our prejudice and requires an openness to change. As Moss (2006, p. 22) continues: "Listening is an 'active verb that involves interpretation' (…) It doesn't produce answers, it generates questions". Hearing, listening to and understanding a child means truly seeing what the child is doing, and what the child makes of these actions. When observing a child and listening to it, it is important for the educator to *see* what a child is doing, not just to *look* (for then she only sees what she wants to see), and to *hear* what the child has to say, not just to *listen* (for then sheusually does not hear a thing). When an educator knows how to listen to, hear and understand a child, then sheasks the child stimulating questions about his or her hypotheses, does not come to premature conclusions, explores instead of rushing, is open to more risk-laden ideas, is ready to take his chances and does not burden himself with a previously prepared plan. It is precisely within this kind of contextual deliberation that pedagogical documentation plays a key role, allowing for children's perspectives and learning to be documented in various ways (video, photographs,

transcripts, etc.) in order for researchers (in our case, educators) to be able to converse, discuss and interpret them together with the children. Rinaldi (2006) and Moss (2006) claim that documentation is a unique source of information and that is precious to educators, children, parents and any other individual desiring to conduct research into children's learning strategies and their way of thinking. Dahlberg, Moss & Pence (2003) define pedagogical documentation as a tool that is of vital importance for the creation of a reflective and democratic practice, which is something we advocate in this paper as well.

## Documentation

In an attempt to define the process of documentation, we can find a theoretical foothold in Reggio pedagogy. Documentation is a process that develops and stimulates the learning of both children and adults (as adults learn together with children), thus modifying the relationship between teaching and learning (Rinaldi, 2006). By carefully listening to the child and taking notes (and/or recording, photographing…), we can gain understanding of how children perceive the world, in what ways they think about it and how they create their strategies by interpreting their relationship with the world and the adults populating it. Usually, documentation is understood as adults' attempts at making visible the relatively invisible processes that occur within educational practice. In other words, children's learning strategies are redefined and are given an identity (purpose) in the learning matter itself through a reciprocal relationship. In this manner, documentation does not merely play the role of a teaching tool, but becomes an entire epistemological structure. Also, as it is inclined towards memorisation and reflection, it can modify the processes of learning and knowledge acquisition in children and educators. Also, there is another widely accepted definition of documentation which views documentation as ethnographic recordings of various phenomena researched in practice, i.e. one of the instruments for ensuring the quality of educational practice and an essential tool for discovering children's potentials and abilities. In the broadest sense of the term, pedagogical documentation is an organisational guide for creating an institutional context (Fortunati & Catarsi, 2012).

Therefore, documentation does not exist for the mere purpose of producing documents, but to become an approach that allows for a better understanding of the relationship between children and adults, and as the means by which adults can approximate children. Or, as Rinaldi (2006) stresses, it leads us beyond knowledge on what children know and towards an understanding of how children see themselves, thus giving us a better understanding of them. Documentation does not seek answers, but creates questions. This is a sort of paradox because it gives us new knowledge on children and how to progress with them, but does not supply the final answer – instead, it opens new doors and asks new questions about children and the teaching to come (Kroeger & Cardy, 2006, p. 391). We wish to stress the importance of understanding documentation, and knowing what and how to document and for

what purpose. Documentation makes pedagogical work visible and tangible as a procedure that supports teaching and learning and makes them reciprocal (Rinaldi, 2006). Documentation also represents the means of communication as it publicly depicts children's learning processes, promotes communication and cooperation between children, educators and families, and creates harmonious and meaningful dialogues (Rinaldi, 2001).

When an educator understands the importance of documentation, she is able to see himself as a person who can understand and comprehend the true essence of a child. With documentation, the educator monitors the communication between children, as one of his most important duties is to create learning situations that allow children to discuss things together and understand each others' opinions. Through this kind of communication, the educator learns the ways in which children learn, modifies his own views and alters his practice through reflection, which means she also learns from the aforementioned situations. By carefully noting children's statements, the educator implicitly gives children the message that their work is valued and appreciated. In other words, we can use documentation to constantly refer back to experience and seek new paths and questions that were previously not visible to us (Turner & Wilson, 2010, p. 10).

By systematically perusing documentation, the educator discovers what kind of "picture" she has about a child, and what kind of theory, i.e. implicit pedagogy she implements in his work. Documentation allows the educator an insight into the quality and quantity of his interventions in a child's learning processes, which gives him a realistic image regarding what it means to be an educator, and what it means to be a child. "Documentation is the best tool for making the teachers aware of their own theories" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 182). Thus documentation should always be stored in a visible place so that the educator can continuously re-examine and analyse the children's discussions and learning, and thus alter his theories and his impressions of a certain child through discourse with him or her. In its ideal form and in the manner in which we have described it, documentation ought to be much more than the mere collection of material. It should also include discussion on the material gathered, as well as deliberation on further actions. Such a manner of defining documentation encompasses a continuous dialogue with children and colleagues, through which a mutual selection of activities further stimulates the intellectual development of children.

In other words, documentation allows the educator to deliberate on the further course of action with the children and his colleagues through critical discourse, while also respecting the interests and needs of every child. With time, the educator becomes aware of how to create learning situations that are stimulating for the child.

The educator is expected to value every child as an individual, which means that every child should be approached as if (s)he were a reasonable adult (Bruner, 2000; Miljak, 2009). This kind of approach facilitates direct insight into the undiscovered

potential of every child, and supports the use of various educational strategies that create and promote quality learning situations. In creating efficient learning situations, the educator should pay attention to: creating a stimulating material environment, stimulating self-evaluation in children through insight into the activities in which they were involved and creating and supporting negotiation, agreement and appreciation and in this manner enabling children to enter the cognitive conflicts that initiate the mutual construction of new knowledge. As Barth elaborates: "The transmission of knowledge is viewed as a means of negotiating purpose in which it is important for the communicators to listen to and appreciate each other while departing from a common starting point" (Barth, 2004, p. 44). Therefore, in his work an educator should utilise various learning strategies with which she will ensure that the children are the authors of their own learning processes.

*Due to these reasons, for the needs of this work we wish to particularly underline the importance of the environment for the active learning process of children.*

## A Stimulating Environment

From a social constructivist perspective, educational processes within an institutional context give a child the opportunity to produce various hypotheses or theories which it then may test in an environment that we define as stimulating, precisely due to the possibilities it creates. The child is then able to contrast them with other theories, create his or her own meanings and make his or her own choices. "This is understood to be a learning process not only for the child but also for the pedagogue, if he or she is able to encounter the child's ideas, theories and hypotheses with respect, curiosity and wonder" (Dahlberg et al., 2003, p. 55). Not only do advocates of Reggio pedagogy give importance to the sociocultural context in which a child lives and learns every day, but they also stress the significance of the fine and subtle interaction between children and adults within this context and the development of cooperative knowledge (Dahlberg et al., 2003, p. 270), as knowledge is developed precisely through the cooperation with other people in the resolution of intellectual conflicts that necessarily arise between them. These conflicts also influence the mutual co-construction of knowledge and of understanding the world, social rules and guidelines. This is why the most important principle of their approach to educational work is the participation of all members (including parents) in all everyday events in the institution and social community, and also in the creation of the social constructivist theory, as it is based on practical research.

In other words, through the environment the educator informs the children of his opinion of them, their learning and his expectations of them, thus making visible the theory she is implementing in practice. Space plays an important role in children's learning, since upon it depends whether and how a child will communicate and construct its knowledge (Fortunati & Catarsi, 2012). A child is not able to determine in advance what and how it shall play, thus the environment ought to suggest the

things it can explore and play through their functionality, materials and aesthetics. Quality learning stimuli and materials, together with the indirect support of the educator, give the child a high degree of independence within the learning process and thus influence its development and education as a whole. An offer of diverse materials enables children to explore their ideas, satisfy their interests and develop their creativity, thus stimulating active learning. "In badly conceived circumstances, children often do not possess the opportunity to demonstrate their real abilities, on the grounds of which adults may mistakenly conclude that certain abilities do not even exist" (Slunjski, 2008[1], p. 79). Due to these reasons, a well-conceived space is "the space of scientists, planners, urban planners, technocratic subdividers and social engineers (…) the conception of space strives (…) towards a system of verbal (and therefore intellectually worked out) signs" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 38-39, as cited in Rutanen, 2011). The role of the educator is to create a context in which the curiosity of children and their theories can be tested, noted, listened to and heard; a context in which children will feel trust, freedom, motivation and respect for their existential and cognitive processes. An educator's trust in a child, and a child's trust in an educator is a reciprocal relationship that is attained through a long process of deliberating on and brining to awareness one's ideas and theories on children.

The educator's views and expectations from a child influence the formation of the environment and communication with children, i.e. his entire approach to education. With his organisation and offer of materials within a certain environment, the educator informs the child on what she expects of it and what image she has of its personality and its learning. The more an educator understands a child, its actions and the sense they make to the child, the better she can organise the environment for the continued and improved exploration and learning. An important role of the educator is also to introduce changes into the environment, which means she must not allow the environment and the stimuli within it to constantly remain the same for "as you vary the type of environment, the brain varies the way it develops"(Jensen, 2005, p. 39).

## Methodological Approach

By using a qualitative case study which was a part of an M.A. thesis at the graduate university study of Early and Preschool Education at the Faculty of Teacher Education in Rijeka, for the needs of this work we have extracted the part pertaining to the observation and documentation of the discussions between children in one kindergarten group during the solving of a task that they assigned to themselves. Therefore, the focus of our research was educational practice, the environment in which children live and the role of the educator in the process of solving the problem the children were attempting to deal with.

In other words, we attempted to answer the questions – in what manner does documentation assist the educator in understanding a child's learning and how does

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[1] The quotes of the Croatian original are translations made for the purpose of this paper, unless otherwise indicated.

it facilitate a child's understanding of its own learning? In what manner does the educator acknowledge the children's perspectives through documentation, and how does she use it to understand and plan new learning strategies in his immediate work with children? In accordance with this, we focused our research aim on documenting the exploration and learning strategies that children use to solve problems. The research task was to create and form a rich and stimulating material environment that would spur further exploration, interaction and discussion among children.

## Context

The research was conducted in the ″Bubamara″ kindergarten in Kneginec Gornji near Varaždin with a group of children up to the age of six, with whom one of the authors of this paper works. This is a non-purpose-built kindergarten, i.e. an old primary school whose adaptation and conversion was completed in 1997, which was also the year in which the kindergarten began operating. The kindergarten is the day home of 150 children, who are divided into five educational groups. The ″Bubamara″ has many times presented its achievements when it comes to creating a stimulating material environment and has opened its doors to many groups of students, but also eminent professors from various faculties. In 2006, research on the various methods of documenting children's learning processes began in the kindergarten. Several educators occupied themselves with the questions – what is documentation? When and how to document children's learning processes, and how does documentation help children, parents and educators to understand these same processes?

The research began with an intensive collection of various documentation to serve as a foundation for the discussion on the quality of space and its influence on children's learning, their actions and their dialogues, the quality of cooperation between children and the role of the educators (particularly when it comes to their monitoring of children and involvement in their activities). On the grounds of the analysis and discussion that emanated from these questions, new proposals were brought forward. The educators were stimulated towards self-evaluation, i.e. spotting, accepting and gradually changing those parts of their work that were not desirable in an effort to correct mistakes. Also evident were the efforts of all the educator teams to make the documentation created available to all interested parties, from children to parents, so that everyone may have a daily insight into what goes on in kindergarten.

Efforts were made to indirectly support children's learning processes – every child was appreciated as an individual, and they were asked about their opinions through various media. Through such methods of documentation, the children were given the opportunity to remember their initial ideas (theories) and bring to awareness the process of their own learning, i.e. to enter the metazone. Supporting the learning metazone during the research proved to be an important precondition for the entirety of a child's learning, and also for the professional development of educators. During group deliberations, every new step a certain educator took towards altering the

existing condition was analysed (how to listen to and hear a child, how to document children's learning processes, how to build upon children's knowledge, when and how to interfere in their activities or play), and new ideas for improving the living and learning of children in the kindergarten were created through teamwork.

For the needs of this paper, only the aspect of documenting children's learning processes on the example of a group of children up to the age of six has been extracted. By presenting an example in which the children independently set themselves a task and then proceeded to solve it we shall also, among other things, present the role of the educator. More precisely, we shall present the ways in which an educator includes the perspective of children in the creation of a curriculum for his group. *The children set the following problem – how to throw a ball through a tunnel so that it again returns to the beginning of the tunnel.*

## Description of the Situation

The educator departed from the fact that, in order to understand a child well, it is important to see, hear and understand his or her games and activities. After the educator realised what the children were doing and what sense this activity makes for them, she began to rearrange the space in a manner that will allow the children to explore the problem that they had presented as important and expressed the wish to solve. While observing the children, the educator attempted to discover how much the children already knew about the given problem by asking stimulating questions (she avoided suggestive questions to the best of his abilities).

EDUCATOR: "What does the ball have that allows it to return to the beginning of the tunnel?

L. H. (6): "It has rubber inside, and these are the only balls we should throw because they bounce back real well."

K. Š. (5.5): "We also have to swing real hard when we throw it into the tunnel, and the tunnel has to be sloped."

EDUCATOR: "In what way must the tunnel be sloped and why?

K. Š. (5.5): "We'll try to figure that out for as long as we need to."

L. H. (6): "It must be sloped enough for the ball to fall and hit the wood harder."

EDUCATOR: "What would happen if the ball were to hit another object?

B. M. (6): "It can't be anything else, it can be only wood because it's hard and bounces the ball back."

L. H. (6): "We've already tried this out before" (the boy had explored sounds by bouncing the ball)."

Here it is important to mention that the educator estimated very well the moment in which to get involved in the activity and how to do so, which is confirmed by the fact that the activity was not disrupted – on the contrary, the children were stimulated towards further deliberation. After the educator listened to and acknowledged every opinion, she proposed the creation of a schema for those suggestions she did

not understand well. The schema, i.e. drawing in this case did not merely serve as decoration, but had the purpose of getting to understand the children's activities better.



Creating the schema



The educator acknowledges the opinion of the child and notes its explanation



A boy explains his initial theory to another boy
B. (6): ″The tunnel has to be almost as tall as us 'cause the ball will bounce better if it falls harder.″
L. (6): ″I think the same thing, you just tell me how high to put it.″
K. does not agree with the boy:



K. (5.5): "It doesn't need to be that high, this is enough.″
K.'s theory on the height of the cylinder



The boy L. does not agree with K. and tries to explain to him that the tunnel is not sloped enough by attempting to put a rocket into the tunnel.

As the rocket does not reach the floor, K. changes his opinion and agrees with L.

**Figure 1.** *Ascertaining claims*

These situations demonstrate the manner in which the educator stimulated the discussion, i.e. created and supported situations of negotiation, discussion and acknowledgment during the entire activity (entering cognitive conflicts). After they had agreed that the tunnel has to be very sloped, the boys embarked on solving the problem.

The problem situation



The ball is released into the tunnel, but it does not bounce back – why?
K. (5.5): ″We have to put a spring so it bounces back.″
L. (6): ″But we first have to check if it really bounces back from it.″

Throwing the ball into the tunnel. The ball does not bounce back – why?



K. (5.5): ″We need a bigger rubber ball.″

The boys find another solution



K. (5.5): "We need to make another straight tunnel so that it can roll even faster.″
B. (6): "Yeah, then it will have a longer path and it will hit harder."
D. does not agree with the boys, but observes with great interest.

A boy tests the theory of another boy



B. (6): "See how hard it bounces!"
E: "What does a spring have that makes it bounce back the ball so hard?
B. (6): "Well it has the same thing that gives a see-saw the strength to bounce stuff back.″

Putting in a bigger rubber ball.
*The ball once again fails to bounce back – why?*



L. (6): ″Maybe there's something in the tunnel?

The boys implement their second theory



The ball fails to bounce back again
D. (6.5): "I told you it can't be like that cause it's too long now.″

Placing a spring in the tunnel



K. (5.5): "This is a piece of metal that has a lot of power and can do everything″.

A boy checks whether the tunnel is passable



He concludes that the tunnel is passable by pushing another thinner cylinder into it.

The boys did not visit the research centre for several days. However, the photographs were available.
After the third day, the boy K. began to think differently thanks to the insight into the documentation. Now his theory is as follows – we should put planks on the cylinders so that the ball can bounce back, because it cannot do so through the tunnel. Here it is evident that the constant availability of documentation assists children in seeing how their knowledge and opinions change with time under the influence of their own learning.

**Figure 2**. *Starting to solve the problem*

This situation clearly demonstrates that children know how to use the documentation that is at their disposal, and that it can make them revise their initial theories. The educator did not insist or encourage the children to return to their initial problem, but enabled them instead to search for new problems and solutions.

## Discussion

Such a work method strengthens the role of the educator and his or her importance in co-constructing the curriculum for both the group and for one's own learning. Cooperative learning and involving peers in interaction and communication is at the centre of this approach, which points towards the need for a different approach to planning and conducting educational processes with children.

While she was listening to the children and observing them, the educator recorded their ideas and modes of thinking with their help and cooperation, thus discovering new learning styles. With the aid of carefully formulated questions, she stimulated the children to argument, present, contrast and compare their opinions, to negotiate, to listen to others, to respect their peers' opinions and to formulate and revise their initial hypotheses. It is precisely this stimulation of cognitive conflicts that leads to the acceleration of the children's all round development, while also initiating a mutual construction of knowledge.

This situation has demonstrated the fact that, when a child receives the opportunity to freely express its opinion and think in one of the symbolic languages available (drawing, sculpting…), the educator is able to understand the child and its learning processes better. During the observation of children and the documentation of this process, an important matter that ought to be brought to awareness is – is it necessary to intervene in the play of children? Such an approach to education is in accordance with the opinions presented by Slunjski, who states that "one of the criteria for the involvement of educators in the activities of children is precisely the degree to which such action would stimulate their independence" (Slunjski, 2008, p. 93). We do not belittle the importance of the involvement of educators in children's activities, but wish to stress that their interventions depend on the level of understanding of children's activities they have achieved, and on their acknowledgement and appreciation of their perspectives. When an educator is involved in activities through too many direct interventions, this does not necessarily lead to a more quality relationship with the child. The better the educator understands a child, its actions and the sense they make to the child, the better she can organise an environment to improve learning and exploration, because "understanding the others requires the awareness of human complexity" (Morin, 2002, p. 111) and, as the same author continues, "in fact, incomprehension of oneself is an important source of incomprehension of others" (Morin, 2002, p. 107). In other words, one cannot truly understand a child by posing suggestive questions or through conversation – what is necessary is an intersubjective understanding that must include an acceptance of the child as it is, in its entirety. "If I see a child crying, I am not going to understand his tears by measuring their salt

content but by finding my own childish distress deep inside, by identifying him with me and me with him" (Morin, 2002, p. 104).

In this problem solving situation, the educator demonstrated a high level of competence in understanding the children. When it comes to understanding the children, what must be, above all, kept in mind is that an educator ought to be informed about all the things a pupil already knows so that she or he may create a stimulating environment, i.e. learning situation, for "the foremost task of an educator is to understand that which the pupil already understands" (Barth, 2004, p. 118). In the problem situation described above, the educator documented and explored various strategies aimed at understanding the children better, which she then used to stimulate them to interpret their own thoughts, ideas and knowledge. In other words, "by studying the children we study our own selves, and by observing their development we observe the processes through which we became what we are today" (Gopnik et al., 2003, p. 207). Due to these reasons, educators are expected to support the learning processes of the child by possessing developed listening and observation skills - which is, as has already been mentioned, within Reggio pedagogy known as the pedagogy of listening.

It is good to document the initial thoughts of the children well and position these documents in a visible place, as they then remind children of the process of their own learning. Also, children may with time use them to revise their initial opinions, which then allows them the access to a metalevel of learning. In this manner, children are given the opportunity to constantly check and discuss their views with other children, and thus documentation becomes a part of the learning process and development of both the children and the educator since "understanding is elaborated and supported through discussion and cooperation, with the child encouraged to express her own views better to achieve some meeting of the minds with others who may have other views" (Bruner, 2000, p. 68). In the context of such situations, an educator has the opportunity of getting to know himself better and becoming more aware of all his quality and not so quality models of behaviour that represent a significant influence on his relationship with the child, i.e. "an infant's relationship with its primary caretaker often determines whether the child develops learning problems" (Jensen, 2005, p. 25).

All of us who work in the field of education are aware that listening and understanding often requires a lot of time, effort and deliberation on the educational process in its entirety. In order for this observation to turn into a true and complete understanding of the child and its interests, let "the monitoring of children awaken in us our sense of wonder and discovery" (Gopnik et al., 2003, p. 212) and, together with it, new strategies for learning and exploring the documentation of the educational process.

## Conclusion

A child's learning is not a linear process, which means it possesses no beginning or end but connects with previous knowledge and is constantly in creation, because, as Barth stresses, "knowledge is not linear. It is not constructed in the same manner

a building is, in which it is necessary to begin with the foundation and end with the roof. Knowledge exists in time (…) it exists in eternal creation and motion like an unfinished symphony" (Barth, 2004, p. 39). In other words, children arrive to new knowledge and experiences independently, and they do so by actively solving problems with the help of their intellectual capabilities. Children's learning is a dynamic process whose results cannot be predicted, but what we can do is to form a curriculum and conditions in which children will be able to generate new knowledge that makes sense to them. A child cannot ascertain his or her knowledge merely through listening and observation – the knowledge is constructed, i.e. co-constructed through conversation, dialogue and discussion, for it is precisely dynamic communication that incites cognitive conflicts which, in turn, initiate the mutual construction of the new knowledge. In research activities, children take responsibility for their own learning processes and their abilities to manage these processes, and this is connected with the development of metacognition, i.e. a child's ability to be aware of his or her own learning processes as ″children do indeed describe thinking as something that goes on 'inside their heads', though they cannot give much of an account what is taking place there″ (Bruner, 2000, p. 117).

In order for a child to be able to learn actively, we have shown that it is necessary to create a stimulating environment rich with potential, which must be then constantly revised, supplemented and built upon. Through the manipulation of objects and materials, children are given the opportunity to create their own theories and gain an insight that can be tested, questioned and revised time and time again. It is precisely these methods that allow for growth and development, i.e. the acquisition of knowledge, experiences and information through direct action. Children are often described as "sponges", i.e. absorbing and learning everything that surrounds them, and it is up to us adults to decide in what manner we shall support, develop and stimulate this learning. "Childhood is a special and magical time when, metaphorically speaking, the brain acts like a sponge and when learning new skills can be fun and easy″ (Diamond & Hopson, 2006, p. 4). Everyday situations, relationships between children and adults and a stimulating and interesting environment are all sources from which the child constantly learns. "The child is *not* merely ignorant or an empty vessel, but somebody able to reason, to make sense, both on his/her own and through discourse with others" (Bruner, 2000, p. 68). In order for an educator to be able to support and stimulate a child's learning, she should know how to hear, listen to and understand a child in order to create curriculum grounded in the needs of a child and its learning. In this, documentation plays a key role within the educational process.

To conclude, our work on the documentation of educational work and the discovery of the children's perspective in play and learning activities yielded two consequences: first, it shed a new light on understanding both children and our own selves and, secondly, presented a deeper understanding of what it exactly means for children to be the creators of meaning and active participants in their own learning processes.

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# Dječja perspektiva u igri: dokumentiranje odgojno-obrazovnog procesa

## Sažetak

*Naša polazna teza jest da dokumentiranje odgojno-obrazovnog procesa obuhvaća cjelokupni kontekst življenja djece i odraslih u instituciji ranog i predškolskog odgoja. Na taj način o dokumentaciji raspravljamo kao o sredstvu mijenjanja i unapređivanja odgojno-obrazovne prakse. Uz pomoć metodologije kvalitativne studije slučaja istražili smo koju ulogu ima društvena interakcija u procesu učenja djece rane i predškolske dobi. Istražili smo dječje rasprave i interakcije unutar vrtićke grupe oslanjajući se na sociokulturne perspektive o učenju i socijalizaciji djece. Proučavanje dječjeg diskursa vrijedno je ne samo zbog razumijevanja individualnih i grupnih iskustava učenja već nam pomaže u shvaćanju dječje poduzetnosti i njihove aktivne uloge u vlastitom učenju. Istraživanje je usredotočeno na iscrpno dokumentiranje i proučavanje istraživačko-spoznajnih aktivnosti u poticajnom okruženju vrtića. U ovom istraživanju djecu se smatra tvorcima značenja i aktivnim sudionicima u vlastitom procesu učenja. Uz to su dječji odnosi postali kontekst u kojemu se odvijala sukonstrukcija teorija i interpretacija raznih shvaćanja zbilje.*

**Ključne riječi:** *dijete; dokumentacija; istraživanje; odgajatelj; poticajno okruženje.*