

# Monitoring and Documenting Preschool Children's Fine Art Creation

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## Abstract

*In the developmental and process planning of fine art activities, which is framed by the idea of a competent and rich child, preschool teacher's primary role is careful observation, listening and collecting various types of documentation, which helps with understanding children's learning process. Continuous monitoring of children's activities, precise and systematic collection of the documentation material (using various documentation techniques), and its interpretation provide integral insight into the course of fine art creative process and represent an inexhaustible source of ideas for planning further art activities. Documentation gives children additional insight into what they have been doing and saying. It also gives them an opportunity to build new knowledge on the basis of critical review of their own work and communication with peers and adults. In this context, documentation is an important tool for informing the parents about children's development, interests and needs, and of preschool teachers' professional development. The research included 207 preschool teachers. It examined the ways in which the preschool teachers monitor and document children's visual art activities. The results of the research involve the frequencies and ways of documenting the course of fine art creative activities and children's fine art works. The research also aimed at determining statistically significant difference between the preschool teachers in the frequency of documenting the course of fine art creative activities, in view of their education degree and years of work experience.*

**Key words:** documenting; monitoring; observation; visual art activities for preschool-age children.

## Introduction

Modern theories about preschool children's learning process speak of active or integral learning which features the child as active participant in the process of

acquiring and constructing knowledge, the one who transforms the understanding of the world and changes personality. Spontaneous learning through play and arts in the kindergarten is realised via various social interactions with peers and adults (Bruner, 2000). Preschool teacher's principal role in such an approach to learning becomes: observation, monitoring and listening; and also gaining information about the child from different forms of documentation, which becomes the foundation for planning further educational work. In the "listening pedagogy" concept (Rinaldi, 2006), which makes possible for the child to express his/her own ideas about the observed reality, share them with peers and create common knowledge, documentation is a crucial tool for observing and understanding children's learning process (Slunjski, 2012). Through various techniques of documentation collection, preschool teacher tells the child that he/she is interested in the way he/she explores and solves problems. In such a way documentation helps the kindergarten teacher to recognise children's thought processes, their points of perspective and theories. All participants in the educational process (children, preschool teachers, professional associates, parents and others) are involved in the documentation, observation and interpretation of the documentation material. Exchange of experiences is a way of giving new values to the already founded interpretations, in which new ideas emerge and new questions are asked. Enriched collective knowledge about the way children learn gives preschool teachers the possibility to improve their future practice (Thornton & Bunton, 2007).

Principal intent of this work is to accentuate the significance of monitoring and documentation from the standpoint of process and developmental planning, and the possibility for deepening the understanding of children's knowledge formation. We were also interested in the existing practice in Croatian kindergartens, considering the frequency and ways of documenting the course of fine art creative activities and children's art works.

## **The Significance of Monitoring and Documenting Fine Arts Activities and Children's Development**

Observation, monitoring fine arts processes, making notes and collecting various documentation material helps the preschool teacher with understanding children's theories through which they analyse phenomena, and people and things that surround them. Vecchi (2010) thinks that art is a language which supports the listening process and children's artistic work gives opportunities for the preschool teacher to understand the inner logic of children's art language. The degree of child's relaxation and spontaneity depends on the preschool teacher's ability to observe and listen, respect the child's interpretation of the created art work and his/her art sensibility in general. Careful observation and monitoring children's art creation gives preschool teachers the possibility to create a relaxed and stimulating environment for children's creativity to develop. Preschool teacher motivates creativity development by offering various non-structured sources which a child can variously manipulate and develop different types of agilities. Various children's experiences activate more

sensory perceptions and, in doing so, make emotional experiences possible providing enough time to think through and realise ideas. Preschool teacher's role is to organise the insight to certain problems in the form which will be interesting and challenging for children, to let children solve problems independently and to intervene with new challenges on the basis of observation when a child asks for it. Documentation gives preschool teachers a possibility to monitor the process of learning and art-shaping strategies in a high quality manner (Duh, 2009). What is important is that the preschool teacher is an active observer in various phases of art creative processes; the one who documents what is interesting to children, how they seek information in order to solve certain problems, how they react to questions and answers of other children, how they function in pairs or groups. Quality gathered information by various techniques of documentation is meant for planning further activities (Katz, 1998). The goal is to support the development of children's abilities in the fine arts area. The most frequently used ways of documenting in the fine arts area are children's art works (drawings, paintings, three-dimensional works), children's notes on posters and boards, photographs and video recordings of the art process, project folders. Carefully gathered and presented documentation implies stimulating metacognitive processes in the form of understanding one's own thinking and learning. By looking at the documentation children can easily tell a story of their own learning. Documenting children's work processes, as well as their final works, consequent reflexion and evaluation of the gathered documentation, gives preschool teachers the opportunity to monitor and explore their own personal and professional development (Rinaldi, 2006).

## **Methodology**

### **Research Goal**

The main goal of the research was to examine the frequencies and ways of documenting the course of fine art creative activities and children's art works. The narrower goal was to find the existence of statistically significant difference in the frequency of documenting the course of fine art creative activities between preschool teachers in view of their education degree and years in service.

Considering the goal of the research, the following research questions were set:

- 1<sup>st</sup> How often do Croatian preschool teachers document children's fine art creative process and their art works?
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Which are the most frequent techniques of documenting fine art creative process and children's art works?
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Are there any differences between preschool teachers in the frequency of documenting the course of fine art creative activities in view of their education degree and years in service?

### **Sample Description**

The research included 207 preschool teachers from 17 kindergartens in Sisak-Moslavina County and Primorsko-Goranska County in Croatia. A total of 260

questionnaires were given out, and 230 were returned. Data processing included 207 (%) regularly filled questionnaires.

Table 1  
*Sample structure considering the type of education and years in service*

Type of education	N	%	Work experience	N	%
Secondary school for preschool teachers	19	9.2	0-5 years	39	18.8
Two-year pre-Bologna vocational studies	132	67.8	5-10 years	51	24.6
Three-year Bologna university studies	36	17.4	10-20 years	32	15.5
Four-year college and university undergraduate studies	20	9.7	20-30 years	54	26.1
			Over 30 years	31	15.0
Total			207		

Somewhat more than half of the preschool teachers (63.8%) graduated from two-year vocational preschool studies, 17.4% graduated from three-year Bologna university studies, whereas the smallest number of the preschool teachers graduated from four-year college or university undergraduate faculty (9.7%) and from secondary school (9.2%). The biggest percentage of the preschool teachers have between 21 and 30 years in service (26.1%), followed by preschool teachers with 6 to 10 years in service (24.6%), whereas 18.8% have five years of work experience. Nearly equal number of preschool teachers have 11 to 20 years in service (15.5%), and over 30 years of work experience (15.0%).

### ***Data Gathering and Processing***

For the needs of the research, a questionnaire was designed about the attitudes and experience in the field of fine art and realising fine art activities in the frame of preschool integrated curriculum. The questionnaire was designed on the basis of studying foreign and scientific works from which we extracted the most relevant areas and topics (Blašković, & Novaković, 2013; Devjak et al., 2011), and also experiences from practice. The questionnaire consists of closed and open type questions, assessment scales and five point attitudes scales of Likert type. The first part of the questionnaire comprises the questions about the influence of art on the development of children's personalities and questions about self-assessments of knowledge about fine art. The second part contains questions about the preschool teacher's role in fine art activities, didactic approach to planning fine art activities and the process of the realisation of fine art activities, monitoring and documenting art creative processes and children's works, and about the role of space as a factor in stimulating children's creation. The third part of the questionnaire contains general data about the subjects. Considering the presented research problem, the questions connected with the frequency and ways of documenting the progress of fine art creative activities and children's art works were taken out from the questionnaire. The instrument's reliability was established via internal consistency method through calculating the Cronbach

alpha coefficient ( $\alpha$ ), which is 0.794. Questionnaire's objectivity was ensured with predominantly closed type questions and with simple and objective instructions. In data processing, basic methods of descriptive statistics were used (medium values measures, standard deviation, frequency data distribution and percentages), as well as Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for checking the normal distribution of the variables. The answers to the open type questions were categorised as content independent items, which were then joined in content sets. Appearance of certain categories was established and percentages calculated, considering the number of subjects. For calculating the differences between preschool teachers in view of education degree and years in service, the nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test was used.

## Results and Interpretation

### *Frequency and Ways of Documenting the Fine Art-Creative Process and Children's Art Works*

The research examined how often preschool teachers document the fine art creative process and how often they do the same with children's fine art works. The results of the arithmetic means show that preschool teachers document children's fine art works somewhat more frequently ( $M=3.33$ ) than the fine art creative process itself ( $M = 2.96$ ), which indicates that they are more oriented toward the final product, and less toward the process itself.

Table 2  
*Frequency of documenting fine art creative process*

Documentation frequency	N Preschool teachers	%
Never	4	1.9
Rarely	43	20.8
Often	117	56.5
Always	43	20.8
Total	207	100.0

Table 2 shows that most preschool teachers document the course of fine art creative process often (56.5%) or always (20.8%), while the percentage of those who do it rarely (20.8%) is smaller. The data indicating that only 4 preschool teachers never document the fine art creative process is satisfactory. Given results lead to the conclusion that preschool teachers continuously follow and document children's learning process, which makes it possible for them to understand children's learning strategies in the field of fine art, evaluate the performed activities more easily and present the initial point of planning future activities. Early and preschool-age children's expression in fine art presents a form of self-reflection which helps the child with understanding reality which surrounds him/her (Kroflić, 2011). In the early phases of children's art development, manipulating materials and means is important as well as discovering

their practical possibilities while the final art product is less important. That is why the preschool teacher's careful monitoring and observing children's activity, as well as listening to its interpretation of the created art product, is important. Preschool teacher collects different documentation on the basis of which he/she carefully plans children's further experiences.

Table 3  
*Frequency of documenting children's fine art works*

Documentation frequency	N preschool teachers	%
Never	1	0.5
Rarely	15	7.2
Often	106	51.2
Always	85	41.1
Total	207	100.0

Research results presented in Table 3 indicate that more than half of the preschool teachers (51.2%) often document children's art works, and 41.1% do it always. Only lesser percentage of preschool teachers rarely document children's art works, while only one preschool teacher does not. The research by Devjak et al. (2012) yielded similar results which say that 93.4% of preschool teachers and their assistants in Slovenian kindergartens state they often collect, i.e. document selected children's art works.

Answers to the open type questions, 'How do you document the course of fine art-creative activities?' and 'How do you document children's art works?', were processed by extracting/abstracting key words which were consequently united in meaningful categories. Subjects had the possibility to choose multiple answers.

Table 4  
*Ways of documenting fine art creative process*

Ways of documenting the process	N preschool teachers	%
Photographs	114	55.1
Notes	108	52.2
Video recordings	19	9.2

In documenting the course of fine art creative activities, preschool teachers use different techniques: taking photographs, making notes and video recording. Most preschool teachers, 114 of them (55.1%), document fine art-creative process by taking photographs, 52.2% of them use notes in pedagogic documentation alongside photography, and 14.0% combine photographs and video recordings. Second most frequently used way of documenting the course of fine art activities is making notes

in pedagogic documentation (52.1%), and 57.4% of those notes were made during evaluation after the implemented activity. Preschool teachers note children's motivation during activities, ways of using art materials and techniques, children's answers to preschool teachers' and other children's questions and statements about their own work. Children's thoughts and ideas which are written down during activities are an important reminder that we are not interested only in the final products, but in all the phases of the process. Preschool teachers use video recording least frequently in documenting the course of fine art activities (9.2%). The research by Devjak et al. (2012) indicated that 94% of Slovenian preschool teachers photograph the course of the activities often or very often, quarter of the preschool teachers use video cameras to record the flow of the activities from time to time, and 35% of them do it often or very often.

Table 5  
*Ways of documenting children's art works*

Ways of documenting children's art works	N	
	Preschool teachers	%
Filing in folders	122	58.9
Notes	75	36.2
Exhibiting on boards	58	28.0
Photo documentation	48	23.2

The most frequent way of documenting children's art works is filing in folders (58.9%). Individual art folders are used most frequently (59%). In somewhat lesser percentage (32.8%), preschool teachers talk of filing children's art works in their own personal developmental folders, and 19.7% of the preschool teachers use joint project maps. The preschool teachers state making notes as the second most frequent way of documenting children's art works (child's name, age, motive, date, children's statements and work's name), while a small number of preschool teachers (10.6%) mentions noting children's progress in the art field in their own personal or developmental folders. In the third place, preschool teachers mention exhibitions on boards in the kindergarten and/or children's playrooms space as a way of documenting children's art works (28%). Setting up children's exhibitions in the kindergarten space, which show children's art works, ethnographic writings and photos which present the process of children's exploration and creation, gives the children a repeated insight into what they have been doing and saying and builds new knowledge on the basis of critical observation of one's own work and communication with peers and adults. In this context, documentation is an important tool for informing parents about the way children explore and learn (Slunjski, 2001). Finally, photo documentation is used as a way of documenting children's art works (23.2%) and mostly for documenting art works which children take away for their parents.

The research examined the existence of the statistically significant difference between preschool teachers in the frequency of documenting the course of fine art

creative activities, in view of education degree and years in service. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (Table 6) is at the level of statistical significance for both items ( $p \leq 0.05$ ), which implies the absence of distribution normality.

Table 6  
*Documenting the fine art creative process and children's art works*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Documenting art creative process	0.295	207	0.000	0.821	207	0.000
Documenting children's art works	0.288	207	0.000	0.761	207	0.000

Considering the distribution abnormality and the disproportion of the subsample, which are compared on a dependent variable, non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was used to examine the differences.

Table 7  
*Differences in the frequency of documenting the fine art creative process in view of education degree*

	Degree of Education	N	$M_{rank}$	$\chi^2$	g	P
Frequency of documenting the course of fine art creative activity	Secondary school	19	106.00	0.586	3	0.900
	Two-year pre-Bologna vocational studies	132	102.44			
	Three-year Bologna university studies	36	109.79			
	Four-year college and university undergraduate studies	20	102.00			
	Total	207				

\*  $p \leq 0.05$

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test (Table 7) show no statistically significant difference between preschool teachers in documenting the course of fine art creative activities in view of education degree. The height of the ranks indicates that preschool teachers who graduated from a two-year pre-Bologna faculty document the course of fine art creative activities most frequently ( $M_{rank} = 109.79$ ), and the ones who graduated from a four-year college do it the least ( $M_{rank} = 102.00$ ). Despite the small sample, we presumed that preschool teachers with four-year college education document the art creative process more frequently than preschool teachers with lower education degree, which is not visible from the height of the ranks.

One of the goals was to examine the existence of a statistically significant difference between preschool teachers in the frequency of documenting the course of fine art creative activities, in view of work experience.

Results presented in Table 8 indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between preschool teachers in the frequency of documenting the course of fine art creative activities with regards to years in service. The results show ( $M_{rank} = 108.22$ ) that preschool teachers with fewer years of work experience (5-10 years) document the course of fine art creative activity most frequently, and preschool teachers with 10-20



Table 8

*Differences in the frequency of documenting fine art creative process considering years in service*

	Work experience/years in service	N	M <sub>rank</sub>	$\chi^2$	g	P
Frequency of documenting the flow of fine art creative activity	0-5	39	101.90	1.604	4	0.808
	5-10	51	108.22			
	10-20	32	94.53			
	20-30	54	107.48			
	above 30	31	103.42			
	Total	207				

\*  $p \leq 0.05$ 

years in service do it the least ( $M_{\text{rank}} = 94.53$ ). Since there is no statistically significant difference in the frequency of documenting the course of fine art creative activities, the conclusion can be made that, considering the years in service, the preschool teachers in the present research are equally aware of the need for documenting fine art creative process of early and preschool-age children, whether their awareness is a consequence of their university education founded on modern pedagogic strategies (preschool teachers with less years in service) or whether it is the result of experience gained through many years of practice.

## Conclusion

Documenting the development in the fine arts area is the integral element of educational process. It requires systematic planning, taking into consideration the nature of learning in the fine arts area and careful choice of techniques and methods. Preschool teachers who participated in the research often document the course of fine art creative processes and children's art works by using different techniques of collecting documentation material. Documenting children's art works is somewhat more frequent than documenting art creative processes. It shows that preschool teachers are more oriented towards the finished product and less on the process itself. In early and preschool-age, exploration, experimenting with materials and discovering their possibilities of use spontaneously lead the child to manipulation and creation of products and art works, which represent the materialisation of a certain activity which he/she often utterly changes or upgrades in the course of the process. For that reason, continuous and systematic monitoring, observation and documentation of the fine art creative process through photography, video records or making notes about the responses of a certain child, his/her attention, ways of using art materials and tools, communication with peers and preschool teachers, as well as other specificities in solving problems which a child has set for himself/herself, is significantly more important than documenting the final children's works. The most frequent way of documenting the course of fine art creative process is photography followed by collecting documentation in the form of notes. The least used manner

of documentation is video recording. Lesser percentage of preschool teachers speak of using more various ways of documenting the course of fine art creative process. The most frequent form of documenting children's art works is filing in individual children's folders, followed by making notes, then presenting children's works on boards, while photo documentation is used the least. Individual children's art folders with notes help preschool teachers in monitoring the development of children's abilities in the fine art field and with familiarising parents with their children's progress.

The research results have shown no statistically significant differences between preschool teachers in the frequency of documenting the course of fine art creative activities considering the degree of education and years in service.

In the future, presented work could be expanded with the research about the extent to which parents and children engage in the interpretation of the documentation material which bears witness to children's art development.

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# Praćenje i dokumentiranje likovnog stvaralaštva djece predškolske dobi

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## Sažetak

*U razvojno-procesnom planiranju likovnih aktivnosti, kojem je okvir ideja o kompetentnom i bogatom djetetu, primarna uloga odgojitelja je pažljivo promatranje, slušanje i prikupljanje raznovrsne dokumentacije koja mu pomaže u razumijevanju procesa učenja djece. Kontinuirano praćenje dječjih aktivnosti, precizno i sustavno prikupljanje dokumentacijskog gradiva (korištenjem različitih tehnika dokumentiranja) te njegova interpretacija omogućuju cjelovit uvid u tijek likovno-kreativnog procesa i neiscrpiv su izvor ideja za daljnje planiranje likovnih aktivnosti. Dokumentacija djeci pruža ponovni uvid u ono što su radili i govorili, gradnju novih znanja na osnovi kritičkog osvrtu na vlastiti rad i komunikacije s vršnjacima i odraslima. U tom kontekstu dokumentacija je važno sredstvo informiranja roditelja o dječjem razvoju, interesima i potrebama, kao i profesionalnog razvoja odgojitelja. U istraživanju, u koje je bilo uključeno 207 odgojitelja, istraživalo se kako odgojitelji prate i dokumentiraju likovne aktivnosti djece. Rezultati istraživanja odnose se na učestalost i načine dokumentiranja tijekom likovno-kreativnih aktivnosti i dječjih likovnih radova. Cilj je bio i utvrditi postoje li statistički značajne razlike između odgojitelja u učestalosti dokumentiranja tijekom likovno-kreativnih aktivnosti s obzirom na stupanj obrazovanja i godine radnog iskustva.*

**Ključne riječi:** *dokumentiranje; likovne aktivnosti djece predškolske dobi; opažanje; praćenje.*