

A Student's View: Pedagogical Narrations as a Communication Tool

JOANNE GORDON AND MORGAN MYERS

Finding ways to meaningfully connect and communicate with families is an integral part of our work as early childhood educators. As students this is a skill that we are encouraged to practise as often as possible. However, it can be a bit overwhelming trying to connect with families when you are new to a program. As new educators we have found that using pedagogical narrations has become more than just a way to document the learning we are observing; for us, narrations are a key communication tool that we use to connect and communicate with families.

We are both recent graduates from the Early Learning and Care (ELC) program at Camosun College, located on the traditional territories of the Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ peoples (Victoria). Pedagogical narrations are part of our practice because they were the foundation

to the way we were both taught. The ELC program encouraged us to use narrations in a variety of ways: to think deeply about learning; to self-reflect; to locate ourselves in our practice and the community; and to engage in dialogue with children, families, and other educators. More importantly, we were taught to use narrations as living documents that are messy and dynamic and that ideally evoke and inspire conversations and questions.

We thought we would share some of our reflections on using narrations as communication tools with the hope that this will inspire others to find new and creative ways to connect with families.

How We Share Narrations with Families

We both share narrations in a variety of ways beyond just posting them in our centres, including emailing the document, posting it on our centres' websites, and including the narrations in a blog. Morgan's preschool is currently exploring using Instagram as a way to highlight explorations and moments throughout the day. We have found posting the narrations inside our centres to be really successful at engaging many families and children. Posting the narrations at the children's height and in a location that has high traffic (for example, near coat hooks) can often create opportunities for

the children and parents to have a dialogue around what has been documented. Providing markers, pens, and Post-it notes close to the printed narrations invites others to comment and collaborate on what they are observing.

Some of the Barriers We've Encountered

When we first started writing narrations, the biggest barrier was feeling confident enough to engage parents in dialogue with what we had written. Often we found that we needed to explain and advocate for our use of narrations with families so that they could better understand this tool. Additionally, when we were students, we had to seek feedback from families on our narrations for our assignments, and this was a great introduction and reminder about the limited face time we often have with families. There was also the challenge that it was not always the parents who were dropping off or picking up each day. However, these challenges pushed both of us to think creatively about how to engage families in dialogue while being strength-based and flexible in our practice. Other barriers to sharing narrations can be related to language or culture, or simply to the fact that more introverted educators or families may be less inclined to engage in face-to-face dialogue about what they have written. Another barrier is that sometimes

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we pick topics for our narrations that are of interest to us but that aren't necessarily interesting to families. That doesn't mean they aren't of value, but it may surprise you which narrations spark conversation. Don't give up if you don't get a big response; keep trying out new ways to engage families.

Advice for New Educators Who Are Working to Incorporate Narrations into their Practice

Narrations have the potential to bring you closer to the families, closer to your co-workers, and closer to yourself. They deepen your practice and invite critical thinking. The beauty and the challenge of narrations are that they can be done in a variety of ways. We encourage you to find ones that inspire you and try out that style. You do not have to be good at writing or have to write pages and pages. Narrations are meant to provoke conversations, and some of our richest conversations have come from photos with quotes that were recorded alongside the image. Our most simple way of thinking through the dynamic process of writing narrations is that we listen, document, share, and then move forward.

It is important to remember that narrations as a practice and tool are

still new to many families. When you share narrations with families, you are co-learning alongside them while also advocating for this tool as a valuable and enriching way to give parents a glimpse into their child's day. They show that we are thinking alongside the children and value feedback from children and families. This practice also provides a window into who we are as educators, how we practise, what our values are, and what the program's philosophies are. We have found that sharing narrations often makes the educator feel vulnerable, but we wonder if perhaps that is helping to make us more accessible to families.

We firmly believe that narrations show that we value the work, thoughts, and perspectives of children. Writing narrations pushes back against the narrative that children's thoughts are just "cute." Our image of the child invites and demands that parents come into that conversation and think alongside us. To us, this practice helps to professionalize our field and highlight the importance of the learning that is happening during the early years. We recognize that it is a privilege to be given time each week to write and reflect on our observations in our programs. We encourage educators to advocate

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for this time in their program, and for directors and managers to find creative ways to carve out this time. The benefits for your program are endless.

Morgan Myers is an ECE at Moss Rock Preschool in Victoria. She is part of a reconceptualist movement in early childhood and is interested in creating new ways of being. Her days at preschool are guided by more questions than answers, but this is what sustains her practice and why she is always ready to talk to everyone about everything.

JoAnne Gordon is an ECE at Carrot Seed Preschool in Saanich, and she is also the early years community engagement coordinator at Saanich Neighbourhood Place. She is honoured to learn alongside children and families, and is passionate about community development.

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