Creating Shared Understanding Through Documentation:

A Case Study in the Concordia Observation Nursery

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ABSTRACT

Creating Shared Understanding Through Documentation:
A Case Study in the Concordia Observation Nursery

Shelley Thompson

The present study investigated the effectiveness of documentation panels in creating a sense of shared understanding and community among parents and teachers in the Concordia Observation Nursery. It is suggested, particularly by the educators of the municipal preschools in Reggio Emilia, Italy, that documentation informs parents and teachers about children's interests, competencies, and approaches to learning. For this case study five parents, whose preschool children attended the Nursery, were asked to view a series of four documentation panels over the course of four weeks. The parents were videotaped while viewing the panels and completed one questionnaire for each of the panels. Each participant also took part in a focus group and completed a pre- and post-study questionnaire. Some of the parents and the primary researcher also used journals to record their thoughts and comments regarding their experience during the course of the study. All of the data were coded and analysed for evidence of the extent to which documentation panels a) enhance communication, collaboration and shared understanding among parents and teachers, b) foster positive relationships between parents with each other and with teachers, and c) help parents to understand the pre-school experience as an interactive endeavour. The findings suggest that documentation panels are effective in promoting a sense of community and conveying to parents the teachers' intentions in guiding their children's learning experiences.

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Creating Shared Understanding Through Documentation: A Case Study in the Concordia Observation Nursery

Statement of the Problem

The following will present the findings of a case study designed to explore the effectiveness of documentation panels in creating a climate of collaboration and sense of community within a preschool environment. It was guided by the hypothesis that documentation panels provide a forum for parents to develop and share theories with each other and with teachers on how classroom experiences reflect their children's ideas, interests, and competencies. In this climate of collaboration, parents are then in a position to make meaningful contributions to the preschool program by offering their own interpretations of the children's work and suggesting ways to build upon children's learning experiences (Carter & Curtis, 1996; Fu, Stremmel, & Hill, 2002). In the current study, documentation panels were intended to serve as visual invitations for parents to become involved in their children's learning experiences and contribute to the classroom program to ensure that it remains meaningful and relevant to their children's lives.

Hong and Forman (2000) define documentation as "the process of recording and reporting on children's learning with the intent of communicating through multiple media" (p. 26). Using this method, teachers gather information about children's ideas by collecting authentic artifacts of their work and using a variety of tools to record their words and actions as they observe them engaged in the classroom. Documentation informs teachers about children's interests and guides program development so that classroom projects and activities are meaningful and engaging undertakings for children (Katz & Chard, 1996).

Goldhaber and Smith (1997) describe documentation as "the practice of representing children's experiences through the display of photographs, videotape, and/or video prints, accompanied by explanatory notes, samples of children's works and transcripts of children's comments and conversations" (p. 3). The purpose of the teacher as an observer "is to construct a shared understanding of children's ways of interacting with the environment, of entering into relationships with other adults and other children and of constructing their knowledge" (Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001, p. 125). In the context of this case study, the researcher in collaboration with her co-teacher used her observations and children's work samples to create documentation panels. The panels presented a complete story of what children had been doing in the classroom, how they had embraced the happenings in the environment and how this reflected their learning. Panels allowed parents to read the story about their children's undertakings and to get an intimate view of their children's learning experiences, as interpreted and conveyed by the teachers (Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001, Fraser & Gestwicki, 2001). Hence, parents were able to view their children's classroom experiences and have the opportunity to reflect upon children's interests, competencies, and thought processes as they were identified, described, and interpreted in the panels. It was intended that they would then share their insights with each other and the teachers, creating a sense of shared understanding and community.

An underlying premise of this research was that parents want to play an active and genuine role in their children's school experiences (Wilson, 1997; Briggs, Jalongo & Brown, 1997). For this to occur, it is vital that parents be aware of what is happening in the classroom and have opportunities to formulate their own interpretations and construct their own understanding of how their children learn. It also requires that parents feel

welcome in the classroom, view themselves as important members of the classroom community and have opportunities to share their interpretations of children's work with others.

A guiding principle for this study was that documentation panels provide a means for parents to develop an awareness and understanding of the thought processes and learning experiences in which their children engage as they actively participate in the classroom environment and engage in class projects. It was believed that through these panels, parents would come to understand the complexity of children's thought processes and see that their chilren's developing competencies were affected not only by their intellect, but also by their interactions with the people and materials within the classroom environment through hands-on learning experiences.

It was the belief of the educators in this preschool classroom that children learn not only as individuals, but as partners in a complex community of learners. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory influenced the teachers' approach in creating classroom activities and designing the classroom environment. That is, the educational philosophy reflected in the classroom was one in which children were constantly attempting to construct meaning through their interactions with the people and things in their immediate surroundings (Jaramillo, 1996). The teachers believed in the idea that "peer interaction helps individuals acknowledge and integrate a variety of perspectives on a problem, and that this process of coordination, in turn, produces superior intellectual results" (Forman & Cazden, 1985).

In keeping with this constructivist idea, projects based upon children's interests were developed as a means of building upon their competencies and promoting opportunities for shared learning. The teachers believed that "curriculum should occur in

the context of a caring community – a community that gives students a sense of physical and emotional safety and belonging, promotes cooperation and successes" (Helm & Beneke, 2003, p. 7). Thus, projects and classroom investigations were undertaken to support children's development in all learning domains and to create a sense of community. The teachers believed that, for projects to be successful in meeting these goals, children had to be viewed as co-constructors and collaborators with each other and the teachers, and that it was necessary for parents to understand and share these roles.

The idea of children being co-constructors and collaborators in their own learning experiences is brought forth by Bruner in the following statement from *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds.* He writes,

> I have come increasingly to recognize that most learning in most settings is a communal activity, a sharing of the culture. It is not just that the child must make knowledge his own, but that he must make it his own in a community of those who share his sense of belonging to a culture. It is this that leads me to emphasize not only discovery and invention but the importance of negotiating and sharing in a world, of joint culture creating as an object of schooling and as an appropriate step en route to becoming a member of the adult society in which one lives out one's life. (Bruner, 1987, p. 127)

This statement emphasizes the idea that children's education is comprised of more than the acquisition of skills and attainment of pre-determined learning goals. It suggests that children learn within the context of the social communities in which they exist and that learning outcomes are negotiated and reflective of the relationships they develop.

The current research investigated the effectiveness of using documentation panels as a means of fostering positive parent-parent and parent-teacher relationships. It

examined whether documentation panels create a climate of collaboration and shared understanding among parents, enabling them to recognize the role of social interaction and negotiation in learning experiences. The researcher sought to establish whether panels encouraged parents to view their preschool children's experience within the context of the classroom community and as a culmination of their children's social interactions and explorations in the classroom environment.

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of using documentation panels in a small nursery school setting to create a climate of shared understanding, open communication, and collaboration among teachers and parents. Accordingly, documentation panels were designed to assist parents in understanding how their own relationships with each other, their children, their children's peers and the teachers all played a role in the kinds of experiences their children had. It is believed that the more closely these relationships are explored and understood, the more valuable these early learning experiences will be for parents, teachers, and children.

Description

As teachers in the Concordia Observation Nursery, my partner and I use observational techniques, photographs, video- and audio-recordings as well as authentic work samples to document children's learning processes. The curriculum is an emergent one, where ideas for activities and projects emanate from the children's interests. Documentation panels are used to inform parents, student teachers, and the wider community about children's classroom experiences, particularly their project work. We intend to have the panels be an invitation for parents to become involved in children's learning experiences and serve as visual representations of children's learning.

Malaguzzi (1993) suggests that through documentation children "become even more curious, interested, and confident as they contemplate the meaning of what they have achieved" (p.63). That is, the panels provide opportunities for children to revisit projects and provoke ideas for further investigations. They enable children to share their work with an outside audience, leading to an enhanced sense of pride and accomplishment in their work (Katz & Chard, 1996) and develop a sense that their learning endeavours are respected and valued by their teachers (Helm, Beneke & Steinheimer, 1998). Initially, it was the possibilities for children's learning and heightened thinking processes that led us to document their experiences in our classroom; the implications for parent involvement have, however, become clear.

Literature Review

Using documentation, namely teacher observations and children's work samples, to inform teacher practice and as a means of assessing children's performance is a current trend in early education. Portfolio assessment in particular has become a common practice in many educational settings and indeed may provide a more comprehensive and reflective view of children's classroom performance (Helm, 1997; Meisels, 1996; & Stetson, 1996) than traditional methods for reporting on children's academic performance. Programs for evaluating children's classroom performance such as the Work Sampling System (Meisels & Bickel, 1998) have been proven effective and have been received positively by parents and teachers.

Portfolios provide an opportunity for students, parents and teachers to view children's performance from an individual perspective, showcasing children's best work. The focus is upon the child's competencies as evidenced in their work, highlighting strengths and progress rather than focusing upon weaknesses.

The implementation of documentation panels in a classroom might be seen as creating comprehensive portfolios that celebrate and showcase the work of members of the classroom community. There are elements of assessment built into documentation panels; however, the purpose of creating documentation panels is not assessment. The use of documentation panels allows teachers to create a visible history of the experiences of the learning group and is viewed as a "powerful means of communicating to all interested parties what has been learned in a significant experience" (Reggio Children, 2001, p. 27).

Documentation in Reggio Emilia

Much of the literature on the processes and purposes for creating documentation panels is offered by, or based upon the work of, the teachers and administrators of the

municipal preschools and infant-toddler centres in the town of Reggio Emilia, Italy and more recently by North American educators and researchers (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2001; Malaguzzi, 1998; Gandini & Pope Edwards, 2001; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998; Cadwell, 1997; Hendrick, 1997). It was during a study trip to this small town in Northern Italy that I also became very aware of how valuable documentation panels are for promoting a sense of community and shared understanding among teachers, parents, and children. While on this trip, I had the great pleasure of speaking with many parents whose children had attended "Reggio" schools. One conversation was particularly compelling and remains a guiding light in this research. The conversation began when I asked the mother of a child who was attending a Reggio school, "Why did you choose a Reggio school for your child?" The profundity of her answer is clear:

> When I visited the school I was overwhelmed by the things I could see and felt that I wanted her to be a part of this. In the beginning I did not see the communicative impact. I looked for panels to introduce me to something she produced. I selected those that gave me an image of my child when I wasn't with her. But my association with the other children could not be helped. I realized that she was part of a smaller community. She was a protagonist of something of her own and of others. The teachers were at my side and they invited me to more carefully observe. They always referred to what she did in relation to others. I found out that children have weapons, for example, the curiosity to know and life itself. They were ready to engage in processes of interaction, communication, and exchange. (Personal communication with Donna Supersassi Libero, February 13, 2002.)

It was intriguing to hear this mother speak with such conviction about the power of documentation panels in demonstrating to her the role of social interaction in her child's learning. I became very interested in looking at documentation panels as a means of creating an impetus for dialogue and communication and also as a building block in creating a sense of community and shared understanding among the parents in my setting.

Parent Involvement

The idea of parent involvement in early childhood education is a familiar one. Generally, it refers to activities such as volunteering, arranging class conferences and home visits, and organizing special events (Berger, 1987; Logan, 1974; McBride, 1999; Nedler & McAfee, 1979). These kinds of activities focus on the parents as a helpful resource in an administrative sense. That is, parents can play helpful roles by assuming particular duties, thereby freeing up teachers to spend more time on important tasks such as program planning. Undoubtedly, this is important, yet it does not acknowledge that parents are, in fact, the primary teachers in children's lives. Having parents assist on a fundraising drive does not provide them with the knowledge or means to become truly engaged in their children's learning experiences.

Parents as Collaborative Members of the Classroom Community

Gauvain (2001) suggests that children's cognitive development is highly influenced by the social context in which they live. She proposes that the family is the "dominant social context in young children's lives," and therefore "a powerful and unique context for cognitive development" (p. 55). She also points out that parents "determine and monitor children's activities at home, and thereby influence *what* children play and *how* children play. They also help arrange children's social activities outside the home, through the activities they encourage for their children and through the

neighbourhood in which they choose to live" (p.56). She suggests that factors such as these play a major role in the way children learn and in the kinds of ideas and approaches they bring to learning situations. With this in mind, it seems unquestionable that parental insight into children's learning experiences within the school context would be an invaluable resource for teachers and substantially enhance children's learning experiences within the classroom context. Thus, in order to be genuinely helpful and contribute to making the school a successful context for children to learn in, parent participation must reach beyond the notion that parents may be used as administrative and support staff. They must be encouraged to take on active roles in the classroom and to see themselves as competent contributors to the curriculum and expert interpreters of their children's actions and ways of being in the class.

The importance of connecting families and schools is emphasized in much of the literature on developing positive educational environments for young children. Hurt (2000) suggests that, unless teachers take the time to connect with parents, they will never truly understand the children's developmental abilities and effectively provide opportunities for strengthening their competencies. She writes,

> By knowing the ways of the home, I can help children gradually add the way of the school, which to an extent is the way of the larger society. I can better plan appropriate instructional content and use instruction techniques that build on the strengths and experiences of the children. I believe that teachers truly respond flexibly and creatively to individual and group differences only by knowing the significant adults, those constant "someones" in a child's life. (Hurt, 2000, p. 88)

In the current research, documentation panels are used as means of making the connections between parents and teachers. It is proposed that the panels may become

invitations for the parents and teachers to get to know each other as experts on their children's learning and that an exchange of ideas will flow as a result, enhancing the relationship between teachers and parents.

The idea of the importance of fostering genuine connections between home and school is reiterated in the work of Keiff and Wellhousen (2000). They propose that

> No matter how well intentioned the teacher, family involvement strategies will not be effective until they create true connections between the child's home and the classroom. ...It is important for children to be comfortable in both their home and school settings and able to trust that what goes on in each setting is valued in the other. When this connection is made, true continuity between home and school results, for a psychological safety net is created for the child. (p. 20)

In keeping with the idea of connecting home and school, it is proposed here that documentation panels will serve to communicate with parents what happens at school, thereby creating an atmosphere where a sense of continuity between home and school can be established.

Jones and Nimmo (1999) write about the importance of collaboration among members of an educational community and creating the kinds of connections described above. They suggest that

> It's important for teachers to discuss and negotiate. Hopefully, we're alike enough to get along; we share basic values and assumptions. But we're different enough to provoke and surprise each other into new ways of looking at our experiences. Emotion and raised voices are okay. (p. 6)

Jones and Nimmo also suggest that children must discuss and negotiate as a way of recognizing each other's perspectives and engaging in higher levels of thinking. In the

current research, the aim is to use documentation as a means for encouraging parents to engage in the kind of dialogue discussed above. It is hoped that the panels will encourage parents to contemplate their children's learning from the intimate perspective of a parent looking into his or her child's world but also as a collaborative member of a community. That is, it can be assumed that the parents have some basic shared values, one of which would be the desire to provide their children with a quality early education. It is hoped that panels will provide a basis from which these shared interests may be shared and where even those values that may not be shared may be at least explored and contribute to a sense of shared community.

Fostering Positive Relationships Through Documentation

Loris Malaguzzi (1993), founder of the Reggio Emilia Schools in Italy, and a strong proponent of documentation, suggested that a documentation-based curriculum provides a natural link between home and school. Malaguzzi submitted that documentation "introduces parents to a quality of knowing that tangibly changes their expectations. They re-examine their assumptions about their parenting roles and their views about the experience their children are living, and take a new and more inquisitive approach toward the whole school experience" (1993, p. 64). He also suggested that documentation helps parents understand the teacher's objectives and view their children's learning experiences within the context of the classroom environment. Through documentation panels, parents may see that their children's learning does not occur on an isolated plane but through their interactions with peers and the materials in the environment. Parents will also be able to make the links between their own understanding of the child and the way the child operates in the classroom. When parents share their insights and interpretations, it then enables teachers to build upon their own objectives

and to make the school experience meaningful and reflective of the children's learning styles, interests, and life experiences.

Thus, it is postulated that documentation panels can invite parents to become co-constructors in the classroom curriculum as they share their insights into the meaning of their children's participation in activities and how it reflects their child's experiences outside of the school context. It has been suggested that these panels provide an impetus for parents to suggest ways of expanding upon the learning experiences and provide opportunities for families to share their insights and engage in developing a shared understanding of their roles in the learning experiences of their children (Fu, Stremmel, & Hill, 2002; Brown-Dupall, Keyes, & Segatti, 2001). Parents can be extraordinarily helpful in interpreting documentation and can support evolving ideas around the material. Gandini (1993) proposed that in a classroom where documentation guides the curriculum,

> Parent participation is considered essential and takes many forms: day-to-day interaction during work in the schools; discussions of educational and psychological issues; and special events, excursions, and celebrations. Parents are an active part of their children's learning experience and, at the same time, help ensure the welfare of all children in the school. (p.6)

The focus of the current research was to investigate the notion that documentation encourages parents to become actively engaged in learning about and participating in their children's school experiences. Goldhaber (as cited in Fraser & Gestwicki, 2001) suggested that reading documentation panels is about "creating a culture. Parents see that the culture is to read the boards, to get involved in an exchange of information and reflection together – it's just what happens. Parents are engaged in the intellectual lives of their children" (p.159).

Claims about the power and effectiveness of documentation are plentiful. As previously mentioned, much of the literature on documentation and using panels to communicate with parents is based on the schools of Reggio Emilia or on particular projects that have been inspired by the Reggio approach (Malaguzzi, 1998; Vecchi, 1998; Carter & Curtis, 1996; Gerst, 1997; Helm, Beneke & Steinheimer, 1998). There is a wealth of literature explaining how to document and how to create panels and elaborating why documentation is a valuable goal for teachers, leading to fulfilling experiences for children (Hong & Forman, 2000; Helm, Beneke & Steinheimer, 1998; Goldhaber & Smith, 1997; Katz & Chard, 1996). Much of this literature discusses the meaning of documentation for families and suggests that it creates a direct link between home and school (Gandini & Goldhaber, 2001), yet direct reflections from the parent perspectives are somewhat limited. Perhaps most notable are two parent reflections presented by Abbott and Nutbrown (2001). In this volume, the authors include two essays written by parents of children who attended Reggio Emilia infant-toddler centres and preschools. The essays are compelling and each parent makes specific reference to the impact of the documentation panels in the centres. Leask (2001) writes,

> Examples of children's work are up on the walls together with written explanations of the starting point, fragments of dialogue, photos of the children at work and their own explanations of what they are doing. As a parent, I find that all these various types of documentation provide a vivid, clear, exciting and at times very moving understanding of, and access to, Sam's life in school, as well as opening my eyes to the idea of children as navigators in their own learning. (p. 46)

Leask continues to share her personal view of how documentation changes parents' perceptions about learning and the roles of teachers, parents, and children in the following excerpt from her essay:

> I think that our experiences as parents at Arcobaleno (infant-toddler centre) and Anna Frank (preschool) have profoundly changed our ideas and expectations regarding children, adults, and parents learning together in the community of school. The school's approach to children as competent, capable individuals seems to result in a genuine sense of collectivity between the adults in the school, the children, and the parents. I think it was this which really confounded our own expectations of school as being a place where children went to be taught, teachers worked alone, and parents waited at the gate" (p.47).

Without question, this parent's involvement in the Reggio schools and exposure to documentation made an indelible impression on her notions of how children learn and the interconnected roles of the teachers, parents, and children in early education. The current research seeks to focus on the process of how documentation panels affect parent's perceptions of these interconnected roles.

This research has two main purposes. Firstly, it seeks to establish the effectiveness of using documentation panels to communicate with parents about their children's learning experiences. Secondly, it aims to examine whether providing parents with the opportunity to read about and reflect upon the information presented in documentation panels, influences their thoughts and perceptions about children's learning, thereby promoting a sense of shared understanding and collaboration within the classroom community.

Research Questions

Several specific objectives guided this research in its investigation of the extent to which documentation panels:

- enhance communication among parents and teachers;
- foster parent collaboration in the classroom community;
- successfully convey to parents the cognitive processes that children engage in during investigative project work;
- provide opportunities for parents to offer their own interpretations of and insight into how their children learn; and
- create an atmosphere where parents develop a shared understanding of their children's learning as it occurs within the context of the classroom environment and peer interactions.

The specific research questions for this project were:

- Are documentation panels successful in fostering positive parent-parent and parent-teacher relationships?
- How do documentation panels create a climate of collaboration and shared understanding?
- Do documentation panels successfully convey to parents that their children's preschool experiences are best understood not in isolation, but as a reflection of their hands-on explorations of the materials in their environment, their interactions with their peers and teachers and, ultimately, their own life experiences?

Method

The Setting

The case under investigation in this study was the Observation Nursery at Concordia University. The Observation Nursery offers a preschool experience for children between three and five years of age. The Nursery affords parents the opportunity to observe their children in the classroom through a one-way mirror. Parents also participate with students in the Education Department in a weekly two-hour seminar class led by a university instructor. Because the purpose of the research was to engage in an in-depth study on the effectiveness of documentation in a particular preschool setting, a case study methodology was most appropriate and a variety of data collection instruments were employed (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The Observation Nursery was chosen as the setting for this study for several reasons. Firstly, it was the workplace of the primary researcher and therefore yielded easy access to the participants, making data collection convenient. Secondly, documentation was a principle that both teachers in the Nursery had been applying in their practice but they had yet to formally assess the effects of documentation on parents' perceptions of the classroom and sense of belonging. Thirdly, it was anticipated that the results of this study would increase teacher knowledge about the effectiveness of documentation and enable us, as teachers and researchers, to share this information with pre-service teachers and the wider early childhood education community, thereby enhancing the quality of education for young children.

In addition to the reasons listed above, both nursery teachers believed that this research would inform their practice about how best to create a classroom community where parents would recognize and embrace the strengths and competencies of all of the

children in the class, not only their own. More specifically, it had been noted that parents had been consistently sharing observations that focused on what their children were not doing in the class rather than what they were doing. For example, parents approached us with concerns that their children were always playing in the same area and with the same children. We, the teachers, often noticed that these observations were not accurate and that the view from behind the observation mirror only presented one side of the story of what the children were doing. That is, parents could see actions, but they often could not adequately hear the discussions that the children had. Also, parents often did not view activities from beginning to end. The Nursery is located in a large university building and parents frequently took walks in the halls and visited the library, coffee shop and bookstore. Therefore, assumptions about what the children were doing were based on fragments of information rather than the full story. Thus, the idea of using documentation panels to improve this situation was intriguing and worthy of investigation to see how effective they would be.

Participants

At the time of this study there were seven children in the class, two of whom were siblings. The ages of the seven children ranged from 3 to 5 years of age with the mean age being 4 years and 6 months. Of the six parents who observed their children and attended the seminar class on a regular basis, five chose to be a part of this study. It is necessary to point out that all agreed to be videotaped while viewing the panels and to take part in the focus group; however, only five chose to fill out the questionnaires. The parent who chose not to engage in the study cited time as an issue and the probability that she would be out of town during part of the time that the study was to take place.

Of the five participants, three were stay-at-home mothers. The fourth participant was a mother who took one morning off each week to view the panels and fill in the questionnaires. The fifth participant, a father, chose to work in the evenings so that he would be able to attend the Nursery with his child. For this father and the three stay-at-home mothers, the project was particularly well received because they observed their children regularly and would have been on the premises regardless.

The five participants held undergraduate degrees in various disciplines. All spoke English as a first language except for one whose first language was Tamil, although her command of English was excellent. Four of the participants came from single income homes. The wage earners in these homes held professional positions that included two university professors, an engineer and an elementary school teacher. The fifth came from a dual income home where both parents worked in psychological counseling, one at a college and the other at a group home for mentally challenged adults. Thus, the participants could be classified as coming from varied socioeconomic backgrounds although all considered themselves to be financially secure. It should be noted that the four single income families chose this arrangement and the stay-at-home parents had each put their own careers on hold to care for their children. Of these four, there were two teachers, a pharmacist, and a butcher.

The participants had varying ancestral backgrounds, including Asian, Central and Eastern European, and Canadian. The ages of the participants ranged from 35 to 44 years of age with the mean age being 42. Participants 1 and 3 were returning parents and this was their second year with a child at the Nursery. Participant 1, whose child was attending for a second year, had chosen the Nursery for her child specifically because of her desire to be included in her child's first school experience. She had spent the first

three years of her child's life at home with him and made it clear that she wanted to be in an early childhood environment where she would not be "forced" to completely separate from her child as he embarked on his first early education experience.

Participant 3 was a returning parent of an older child who had attended the Nursery six years earlier. She had come back to the Nursery because of the very positive experience she had with her first child. She pointed out factors such as the parenting seminar class and the individual attention given to the children as well as the companionship of other parents as primary reasons for choosing the Nursery.

Of the remaining three, Participant 2 had two children in the program for whom it was their first formal preschool experience. This parent chose the Nursery specifically as she believed it would be a setting where she would be able to ensure a positive transition from home to school for her children. She had previously enrolled both children in another preschool but withdrew them after one week because they all had suffered extreme difficulties with separation. She was particularly positive about the opportunity to observe her children as she believed it would be reassuring for her, enabling her to leave her children in the classroom but remain close by. She also wanted to be involved in her children's experiences and believed that observing them would give her excellent insight into their classroom lives.

For both Participants 4 and 5, this was the first preschool experience with their first child. Both parents were expecting their second child at the time of the study. Participant 4 had chosen the Nursery as she had completed her graduate degree in the Education Department and had, since her student days, been intrigued by the Nursery program. She cited the emergent curriculum approach to program planning and the emphasis of using children's interests and capabilities to develop engaging activities as

main reasons for choosing the Nursery over other programs. She believed that the Nursery would be a place where her child could develop in all developmental areas but was most interested in ensuring that he had a positive social experience. She also wanted a program where both she and her husband would be invited to become involved in the Nursery and develop relationships with other parents.

Participant 5 chose the Nursery for reasons similar to those of Participant 4. He and his partner wanted a program where their child would be encouraged to express his own creativity and personality. They described their child as rambunctious, energetic, and loving, and wanted a program that would respect these qualities. Their child had been enrolled in a full-time daycare program for a few weeks in the previous year but this had not been a positive experience for either the parents or the child. Participant 5 described this previous experience as a disaster during which the child spent many extended periods in "time-out" for behaviour that was not acceptable at the daycare. He found that in this situation the child was very unhappy and, although only 2 years old, was developing a negative attitude toward teachers and school. For this reason, the child was withdrawn from the daycare and enrolled in the Nursery. Participant 5 also chose the Nursery because of the opportunity to observe the children, meet other parents, and attend the parent seminar class.

Procedure

The idea for completing this case study was first introduced informally during casual conversations with parents about the classroom program and plans for the future. Such casual conversations were the norm in our setting; one of the mandates of the Nursery is to develop warm interpersonal relationships with parents. For these reasons, I believed parents would be interested in this project. Prior to beginning the study, the

parents were given consent forms (Appendix A), which also provided a brief explanation of the project and gave parents the option to participate in the project. I was not surprised when I received signed consent forms within minutes of handing them out. From this point on the case study became to known to the parents as "The Project."

Originally, it was intended that each of the four panels would be introduced at two-week intervals, over a period of eight weeks. However, once the project started, it was apparent that one-week intervals would be sufficient to allow parents to view the panels and complete the panel questionnaires. The parents were diligent in completing all questionnaires and, by the end of the study, all participants had completed each of the questionnaires. The project culminated with a focus group led by the university supervisor overseeing this study.

In the initial stage of the project, before the panels were introduced, pre-study questionnaires were administered to parents to determine their existing understanding of the meaning and purposes of documentation. To gauge how this understanding evolved over the course of the term, participants were given a post-study questionnaire at the end of the study. After this the documentation panels were introduced over a period of four weeks. The first set of panels was displayed for the participants in a seminar room equipped with one-way mirror so that the parents could be observed from an adjoining room but they could not see into the room. Two video cameras were set up behind the mirror in order to record the parents as they viewed the panels. At the far end of the panel room, a sitting area was created and a set of questionnaires pertaining to each panel was left out for the parents to complete.

The parents were given very little preliminary information before filling out the pre-study questionnaires and viewing the panels. As mentioned earlier, the idea was first

introduced informally and parents were simply invited to participate in a project that would allow the classroom teachers to learn more about the effectiveness of documentation panels. It was explained that the documentation panels would give them an overview of the projects that had been taking place in the class since the beginning of the school year.

The Nursery operates three days a week from Tuesday to Thursday and the panels were always introduced at the beginning of the week on Tuesday. The panels were available for the parents to view for the duration of the project so that by the fourth week all of the panels were on display. The Language of Clay series of panels was introduced on the first viewing day. On Day 3, Construction: The Sky's the Limit was displayed for the participants and later on Day 6 Let's Make a Pizza was introduced. Shadows in the Sun was the last panel to be introduced and was displayed for the first time on Day 8 of the project. For each panel the parents also received a questionnaire to respond to. The questionnaires were made available to the parents for the duration of the study so that they could fill them out at their convenience. In addition, the primary researcher used a journal to keep track of parent comments made in reference to the panels and to record all instances of direct parent involvement in the classroom and as well as discussion regarding the project.

Instruments

Pre- and Post-Study Questionnaires

The pre-study questionnaire was designed to investigate parents' understanding of what it means to document children's learning and why documentation might be beneficial to parents, teachers, and children. An example of the kinds of questions posed in this questionnaire is, "In your opinion, what does the term documentation mean?" The post-study questionnaire was used in order to determine whether parents felt that the documentation panels enhanced their own and their children's experience at the Nursery and the extent to which they found the panels to be thought-provoking. For example, the first question asked on the post-study questionnaire is, "As a parent, do you believe that the documentation panels enhance your own or your child's experience at our school? Why or why not?" It was also designed to determine whether documentation would be a technique that parents would appreciate in other educational communities and why. For example, the third question posed is, " Do you believe that documentation panels have a place in elementary schools? Why or why not?" Using coding schemes developed from themes that emerged in the parents' responses, the questions from each of the questionnaires were analyzed. Complete copies of the questionnaires and the coding schemes are included in Appendix B.

Documentation Panels

In total, four sets of documentation panels were created for this study. The panels represented the children's learning experiences over the course of four projects they had undertaken since the beginning of the school year.

The Language of Clay, Clay Revisited, 9/11 and Visiting the Church. This set of panels was the first to be presented to the participants. It was created in a series of

installments and conveyed the story of how the children directed their own learning, from simple exploration of clay to close examination of the local church. Along the way, the children engaged in several conversations, essentially sharing their knowledge about the world and constructing understanding together, not only in terms of the skills involved in shaping clay, but through the sharing of ideas about the world and the people in it. Of note is a conversation that ensued between two young children about the events of September 11, 2001.

In total, this series is comprised of four main panels and two smaller ones. The first in the series, The Language of Clay, includes 4 photographs of two children, five written components and a poem that reflects the kind of learning through exploration that took place. The written components explain the origins of the project and tell the story of how an exploration of the neighboring church unfolded. Attached to this main panel are two smaller ones that show some of the ideas the children came up with for using the clay. The first of the smaller panels consists of three photos of one child and a written explanation of how he chose to mold several smaller churches from the clay. The second of the small panels shows fours photographs of the children's creations and presents a written narrative to explain the process the children went through in molding the clay.

The second main panel in this series consists of one photo and a lengthy written explanation of the significance of the photo and how it triggered two of the children to share their reactions to the tragic world events of September 11, 2001. The third main panel, Visiting the Church: A New Perspective, consists of five photographs, three of which show all of the children exploring the physical properties of the church. Two of the photos feature the stained glass that became a topic of conversation and inspiration for some of the children in their artwork. The photos are interspersed with written

explanations of how the visit to the church unfolded. The last of the main panels, Clay Revisited, consists of nine photographs of children working with clay and seven written segments explaining how, a few months later, the children revisited their clay explorations and applied their previous experiences in developing new ways to use the clay. To view this series of panels, see Appendix C.

Construction: The Sky's the Limit. The clay exploration, the visit to the church and world events at the time seemed to play a determining factor in where the children took their learning. They became very interested in construction and buildings. This panel presents the story of what ensued after the visit to the church. Inspired by some photos of a construction site shared with the class by a parent and her children, the project depicted in this panel emerged with the support of a local furniture maker who donated some wood. This panel contains 11 photos, three of which show a real construction site that two of the children visited with their mother. Five written segments explain how these three photos became the catalyst for the children's own constructions. The remaining photos show the children engaged in exploring the properties of wood and constructing their own buildings with wood and other materials. A copy of this panel may be found in Appendix D.

Let's Make a Pizza. This panel was created as a shared effort by two student teachers and the Nursery teachers. For course requirements, the students were asked to carry out an activity directly based upon their observations of the children and their interests. Making pizza came about as an extension to the children's interest in a particular story. The pizza-making activity actually became an impetus for the children to investigate an area of technology, namely how to use a video camera. The foray into technology was an interesting direction for this activity to take and led to some keen

investigations by the children. Nine photographs, accompanied by seven written segments, were used in this panel to show the children engaged in making the pizza and how this led to an exploration of the video camera. A copy of this panel is included in Appendix E.

Shadows in the Sun. This panel documents the children's exploration of shadows as they embarked on one of the first walks of Spring. It presents some of the children's observations about shadows and how they are made and also shows the value of providing children with opportunities to share ideas and to freely explore the properties of naturally occurring phenomena. This panel is comprised of 12 large photographs and written documentation to explain how the children delighted in playing with shadows on their own. The photographs were enlarged in part to convey how the shadows themselves became the "teachers" as they naturally engaged the children's interest and spurred the natural investigation of the properties of shadows. A copy of this panel is included in Appendix F.

Weekly Panel Questionnaires

Participants completed a questionnaire for each panel or set of panels that they viewed. The questions were the same, which allowed comparisons to be made from week to week. The questionnaires were analyzed and codes for each question were developed from the themes that emerged in the raw data. The initial guidelines used in analyzing the questionnaires were (a) whether the participant focused solely upon his or her own child, (b) whether the participant focused upon his or her own child within the context of group and (c) whether the participant focused upon the experience of the group in general. The first questionnaire was used as an impetus for refining these codes and developing examples for the codes from the data.

The questionnaire data were also used to determine the extent to which the panels were effective in helping parents to view their children's classroom experiences within the context of their classroom interactions and as reflective of the prior knowledge and experience that they brought into the classroom. Please see Appendix G for an example of the weekly questionnaire and a list of the codes used in the analysis.

Video Recordings

The participants were videotaped while they viewed the panels. Initially, the videos were analyzed using event sampling to identify the number of times parents interacted while viewing the panels. Event sampling was chosen as it provided an appropriate method for establishing whether parents interacted and how often. This facilitated the analysis of the panels' effectiveness in creating a sense of community among parents, giving them a sense of shared understanding about their children's classroom experiences and, thus, some common ground on which to build a relationship.

The event samplings showed that the participants viewed the panels in three ways, each of which is discussed below. This early categorization was used as a basis for developing a coding scheme that would allow for a more detailed analysis of the videos. Subsequent to the event samplings, the videotapes were examined in more detail, looking at three main factors:

1. Whether panel viewing was (a) individual, (b) group, or (c) interactive.
2. The amount of time spent viewing a panel.
3. The frequency with which each panel was viewed.

Viewing Styles. It was observed in the first instance that participants viewed the panels alone. That is, parents viewed the panels for varying lengths of time by themselves without interacting with anybody else. If other people were in the room, they neither

spoke with the participant viewing the panels nor did they view the panels themselves. The code used to describe this kind of viewing was *individual*. In the second instance, parents viewed the panels with at least one other person, but without any verbal or nonverbal interaction. In this case, parents viewed the panels at the same time, often standing side-by-side, but not speaking or interacting in any way. For coding purposes, this was called *group* viewing. Lastly, participants viewed the panels interactively with at least one other person, communicating both verbally and non-verbally. Video segments showing participants viewing the panels in this way were coded as *interactive*.

Frequency and Time Spent Viewing Each Panel. Looking at the videos within this framework allowed for comparisons to be made between the amount of time participants spent looking at particular panels and the number of times their child was in these panels. This information relates directly to the question of whether panels engage parents in reading about their own and other children's classroom experiences. It also speaks to the effectiveness of documentation panels in creating a climate of shared understanding and the extent to which panels foster positive parent-parent relationships. That is, parents viewing the panels together would be taken to signify the development of positive relationships and exchanges. Unfortunately, the audio quality for some of the videos was weak and transcriptions of some of the discussion could not be done. Consequently, the videos served as visual evidence of parents' interactions and the time spent viewing the panels.

Focus Group

At the end of the study, the participants were asked to attend a focus group and take part in a discussion regarding the place of documentation panels in the early childhood classroom. The focus group was designed to garner information about several

issues. One of its purposes was to probe the parents further regarding their perspective on the reasons for using documentation panels and the influence of panels on parents' understandings of their children's learning. It was also a way to gather insight into whether parents felt the panels led to in-depth conversations with each other. Another intention in carrying out the focus group was to provide an opportunity to openly discuss the usefulness of panels in other educational settings, particularly the public school classroom. Lastly, it provided an opportunity to clarify the focus of some of the conversations that could be seen on the videos but for which the audio quality had been poor. The questions for the focus group were based largely upon a selection of segments from the videos (see Appendix H for a list of the questions). The open-ended questions were intended to bring about parent reflections on the clips they saw and to elicit discussion about the project and how it affected their experience in the Nursery.

The focus group was recorded on both video- and audio-tape and later transcribed. These data addressed the ways in which the panels affected parental perceptions about the roles of teachers, parents, and children in preschool education. The information collected from the focus group was compared with the weekly and pre/post-study questionnaires in addressing the questions of whether and how panels encouraged parents to view children's learning within the context of their classroom interactions and the extent to which they created a climate of collaboration and shared understanding among parents and teachers.

Research Journal

As the primary researcher on this project, I also kept a journal for the duration of the study. This was used to record personal thoughts on the project from both a teacher and researcher point of view. The journal contained many informal and anecdotal

observations of the parents' reactions to the implementation of the documentation panels and to the project itself. Personal reflections on the meaning and relevance of the project in helping myself as a researcher understand the parents' interest in and reaction to it were also recorded in the journal. The information from this journal was instrumental in the analysis, providing links to accurately piece together the various types of data and present a complete history of the project.

Findings

Pre- and Post-Study Questionnaires

Presented below is a summary of findings from both the pre- and post-study questionnaires. In general, the questionnaires evoked many similar kinds of responses from parents, thus enabling many parallels among the codes used to analyze the participant's responses. Tables 1 and 2 provide examples of the responses to Question 1 on the pre-study questionnaire (i.e., In your opinion, what does the term documentation mean?) and Question 1 on the post-study questionnaire (i.e., As a parent, do you believe that documentation panels enhance your own or your child's experience at our school? Why or why not?). These questions have been chosen as they show clear evidence of the thematic parallels in the participants' responses. Tables 1 and 2 also allow for a comparison of individual responses to each of the questions and to note changes in their responses over the course of the project.

Table 1

Examples of Responses to Question 1 on Pre-Study Questionnaire

Question: In your opinion, what does the term documentation mean?	
Participant	**Response**
	Documentation means …
1	keeping a *record* of the activities the children are involved in.
2	some sort of *record* that can be revisited over and over.
3	*recording* events, happenings and interactions between children.
4	to *record* observations about the children's behaviors, interests, learning styles.
5	to *write down* what has happened in the class.

It was evident from the pre-study questionnaires that all five of the participants had a general understanding of what documentation meant and why it would be important to children. For example, on Question 1, all parents indicated that documentation involved recording what happened in the classroom. Table 1 gives examples of the emphasis parents put on "recording." All four questions contained parallels among the participants' responses such as these (complete responses to the pre-study questionnaire are included in Appendix I). Thus, although the panels had yet to be introduced, it was established that the parents had a general understanding of what it meant to document children's learning and the purpose for doing so.

Table 2

Examples of Responses to Question 1 on Post-Questionnaire

Question: As a parent, do you believe that the documentation panels enhance your own or your child's experience at our school? Why or why not?	
Participant	**Response**
	Documentation panels …
1	*enhance* my experience as a parent at this school. They give me a *better understanding* of the activities that take place in class – the "hows" and the "whys."
2	*enhance* my experience here. I take great satisfaction in the fact that their efforts have been so beautifully *recorded.*
3	*enhanced* my/our experience at school. It made me *more aware* of what my child and other children are interested in, their experiences, their likes, what captivates them etc.
4	are a wonderful way to depict the children's learning at school. Visual documentation *makes experiences seem more tangible*. Parents have use of yet *another way of learning about their children's learning.*
5	*have enhanced* my experience at school. It lets me see some of the activities that happened when I wasn't around. It also *focuses my attention* on things that I wouldn't normally notice.

In the post-study questionnaires, the participants all indicated that the panels enhanced their experience at the Nursery. They gave various reasons for this, which are presented in Table 2. In comparing the answers to the pre- and post-study questionnaires, it can be seen that the participants' answers to the post-study questionnaire are seemingly more detailed and reflective than their responses to the pre-study questionnaire. The complete set of responses to the post-study questionnaire is included in Appendix J.

Clearly, the comments presented in Table 2 show that the parents found the documentation panels to be beneficial and informative. The twin themes here of panels enhancing parents' experiences and providing them with an insider's perspective on their children's experiences and interests, would suggest that the panels were indeed effective in communicating to parents by engaging them in reading about what happens in the classroom and why. Participant 4 added a note to the end of her questionnaire. With respect to the value of documentation she wrote, "I think it may even be a way to further enhance and develop communication between home and school, making parents less leery about what is going on at school and making teachers better able to explain what they are doing." From this comment, it is clear that she was beginning to view documentation as a means of fostering a positive relationship between parents and teachers.

The final question on the post-study questionnaire (i.e., Which of the panels was the most thought-provoking for you? Why?) was designed to elicit parent views on the panels themselves. Specifically, it was posed to determine if parents tended to favour those panels in which they could view their own children. Interestingly, the results indicate that, in fact, the parents did not prefer panels with their own children. Table 3 presents their responses to this question.

Table 3

Responses to Question 4 on Post-Questionnaire

Question: Which of the panels was the most thought-provoking for you? Why?			
Partici-pant	**Own Child in Panel**	**Other Children in Panel**	**Response**
1	√	√	I think the "shadows" panel was the most thought provoking panel for me. It left me with a warm, fuzzy feeling. It's amazing how much can be learned from a walk in the warm spring sunshine.
2	√	√	The planes-bumping-into-buildings panel was a shock because I had tried to minimize my son's exposure to this event and the media coverage. I think the topic was handled perfectly by Cathy. Very thought-provoking was the teachers' observation that children make connections between past and present experiences in ways that I might miss. For example, clay in a workshop in a church led to making clay churches while at school.
3	√	√	Almost all the panels were thought-provoking to me. Some of the comments by the children are so endearing and their experiences are so moving. I liked the Shadows in the Sun a lot because just a walk around the block created so much interest, talk and thought provoking experiences for the children.
4	N/A*	N/A*	There was not really one that stands out more than another. I obviously enjoyed seeing my own son depicted in a variety of panels.* * Does not choose a specific panel
5	√	√	I thought the reflection of Billy's* face in the mirror was very interesting. I thought that it was a great photo. From what was written next to the photo I think that Billy thought it was very interesting also. I thought that all of the photos in the series were pretty neat. * Billy is not her child.

Table 3 illustrates how the participants' focus here was upon the content of the panels, including the images presented in the photos and the narratives. Participant 5 commented about a photo of a particular child who was not her own. Participants 1 and 3 also noted the Shadows in the Sun panel as being of particular interest. Although both of their children were in this panel, they did not indicate this as a reason for choosing it as the most thought-provoking. Rather, they cited the possibilities for learning that can come out of such a simple activity. It must also be mentioned here that Participant 2 cited two panels as being especially thought-provoking and, in fact, the focus of each panel was largely on her child. Interestingly, however, her comments are focused not only on her child, but on the role played by the teacher who supported the child in his learning experiences.

Documentation Panels

The video recordings showed that the participants viewed each of the panels for varying amounts of times and often revisited the first set of panels, particularly The Language of Clay. Below, Table 4 shows the proportion of the total time participants spent viewing panels which was devoted to each individual panel. Not surprisingly, the Language of Clay, which was the first to be introduced, was also the most frequently viewed. That the participants often revisited the Language of Clay panel even after others had been introduced, and despite the fact that only two children are featured in this panel, speaks to the idea that panels evoke interest among parents in children other than their own. Shadows in the Sun, which was the last panel to be introduced, was also the least viewed. This brief amount of viewing time might be directly related to the fact that it was only on display for the final three days of the project or may be attributed to the fact that it contained less written documentation than some of the other panels.

Table 4

Total and Proportional Time Spent Viewing Panels

Panel	The Language of Clay	Clay Revisited	Visiting the Church: A New Perspective	9/11	Construction The Sky's the Limit	Let's Make a Pizza	Shadows in the Sun	Total View Time
Total Time Viewed (Min/sec)	80.36	42.42	22.22	24.40	45.27	57.45	18.57	**292.29**
Proportion Time Viewed	27.56%	14.60%	7.65%	8.43 %	15.54%	19.74 %	6.48%	**100%**

Video Recordings

There was a total of 567 minutes and 43 seconds of videotape from a period of 10 days. Parents could be seen viewing the panels for a total of 292 minutes and 29 seconds. Within this block of time, parents viewed the panels either alone, in small groups with no interaction, or interactively within small groups.

Table 5 presents the overall amount of time spent viewing the panels individually and together. This table shows that 59% of the time viewing the panels was spent individually. This may be attributed to the fact that several participants viewed panels alone while they were filling in questionnaires. The exact figures for the amount of time spent viewing the panels alone while filling out the questionnaires were not determined as not all of the participants filled

Table 5

Total Panel Viewing Time by Viewing Style

	Total Time (Min/Sec)	Total Time (%)
Individual	171.20	58.58%
Group	9.46	3.34%
Interactive	111.23	38.08%
Total	292.29	100%

out their questionnaires in the panel room. Interestingly, parents viewed the panels together for a total of 121 minutes and 9 seconds, or 41.42% of the total time viewed. Out of this group viewing time, 111 minutes and 23 seconds, or 91.94 % of the total group viewing time, consisted of parents viewing the panels interactively.

The amount of time spent each day viewing the panels in groups versus individually is represented in Table 5. Table 5 reveals that on Days 1 and 2 parents spent more time viewing panels individually than together. Interestingly, by as early as Day 3, parents had begun to view the panels either individually or interactively with at least one other person. That is, they rarely looked at panels at the same time without interacting.

As demonstrated in Tables 4 and 5, the video recordings indicated that parents spent varying amounts of time viewing the panels individually and together. The videos also indicated that parents revisited the same panels on several occasions both alone and together. Table 6 shows that the amount of time parents spent looking at the panels interactively increased early on and at the mid-point of the project, Day 6, the parents only viewed the panels interactively, yet, this pattern was not consistent. Although parents continued to view the panels interactively on Days 7 and 8, they also engaged in individual viewing. This might be attributed to the introduction of a new panel on Day 6. That is, parents may have engaged in more interactive viewing after reading panels for the first time on their own and then discussing them with each other. By Days 9 and 10, parents viewed the panels predominately on their own. Again, parents may have been taking time to absorb the information presented in the new panel introduced on Day 8. This rise in the amount of individual viewing might also be attributed to the fact that one of the parents spent extended periods of time viewing panels as she completed the last weekly and final questionnaires. This parent came in specifically to catch up on her panel

viewing and complete the questionnaires as, due to work commitments, she was not always able to attend each day.

Table 6

Percentage of Time Spent in Various Viewing Styles

DAY	PANEL(S) INTRODUCED	INDIVIDUAL VIEWING (%)	GROUP VIEWING (%)	INTERACTIVE VIEWING (%)
1	(Language of Clay, Clay Revisited, Visiting the Church, 9/11)	56.71	13.31	29.99
2		90.39	9.61	0
3	(Construction: The Sky's the Limit)	42.68	5.63	51.68
4		48.50	7.5	43.90
5		53.19	0	46.81
6	(Let's Make a Pizza)	0	0	100
7		37.24	0	67.26
8	(Shadows in the Sun)	41.05	0	58.95
9		94.39	0	5.60
10		89.88	0	10.12

Weekly Panel Questionnaires

The weekly questionnaires provided insight into how the panels conveyed to parents the cognitive processes their children engaged in during investigative work. Parents often highlighted the value of hands-on experiences, learning by doing and learning from each other. In the questionnaires on Shadows in the Sun, several parents specifically mentioned the value of leaving the classroom and how such a simple activity can help children to explore a scientific concept. In response to Question 1, "What does

the panel tell you about the children's experience in the class?" Participant 5 wrote: "Some of their experiences are outside the class. They seem to enjoy themselves. Even the simplest thing like this, like a shadow, can be seen as very interesting." On Question 3 (i.e., What did you learn about your child or other children from this panel?) he continues, "They were trying to figure out exactly whose shadow belonged to whom. I like how they tried to make a logical connection. I thought that it was creative to make shadows part of the learning experience."

Participant 2 also wrote about the value of children having opportunities to get out and explore the world around them. On the weekly questionnaire for Let's Make a Pizza she shared her understanding of how children learn. In her response to Question 3 she wrote,

> Children are careful observers – gathering information all the time and working hard to make connections. I learned that my child is capable of using a video camera; he has not been allowed to use ours at home. He had mentioned to me more than once that he wanted to make movies with his brother and me when he grows up. Now I see that we shouldn't put this off any longer.

This is an interesting statement, as it conveys the idea that the parent may have dismissed her son's genuine interest in technology. In the same questionnaire, Participant 2 again expresses how the pizza-making panel led her to challenge some of her beliefs about the place of technology in children's lives. She expresses her dilemma in the following response to Question 4 (i.e., Did you know this (about your child) before?):

> The panels reveal things I know on a certain level but they push me to acknowledge and act on this knowledge. I knew that my son liked "gadgets" but I didn't give it any thought. I even have a prejudice against technology. Recent

> reading (Rudolf Steiner, David Elkind, Neil Postman) has led me to seriously question technology, its influence and its value during children's imaginative and imitative years (B – 7). I am considering eliminating TV and computers or very carefully monitoring their use/consumption until my children are older. So I suppose that my concerns and ambivalence have influenced my son and I need to continue to give this subject serious attention.

This statement is compelling as it conveys the complexity of thought that the panel has evoked within this parent.

The weekly questionnaires (Appendix G), designed to elicit parents' ideas and understandings of the purposes of documentation panels and to establish how panels helped parents in constructing their own understanding of the way their children learn in relation to their peers and their environment, provided invaluable evidence that documentation panels are effective in communicating with parents, enhancing their understanding of their children's educational experiences. Common themes arose in each of the sets of questionnaires and across the questions. To illustrate this, the answers to Question 1 (i.e., What does the panel tell you about the children's experience in the class?) for all four of the panels have been compiled in Appendix K and the answers to Question 3 (i.e., What did you learn about your child or other children from this panel?) for all four of the panels have been compiled in Appendix L. These two questions were chosen as they were designed to investigate two important and distinct, yet related ideas: a) what the children learned from the experience, and b) what the parents learned about the children's learning. The answers from these questions give insight into the primary objectives of the research, including the effectiveness of panels in communicating to parents about the children's classroom experiences and the extent to which panels help

parents to view their children's experience within the context of the classroom community and specifically the role of peer interactions and relationships.

The information presented in Appendix K clearly shows that the parents made the connection between children's past experiences and the way they learn. For example, in responding to The Language of Clay, Participant 1 wrote, "The children related the activity to what was going on in their lives." Participant 4 also referred to the role of past experience in her response: "Children's ideas and past experiences are respected; they are guided with open-ended questioning and never told how to do it." The parents also noted the value of hands-on learning experiences and peer interactions in helping children to develop their understanding of the phenomena they investigate in classroom activities. In her response to Shadows in the Sun, Participant 2 wrote, "It tells me that simply leaving the classroom caused an explosion of new ideas and connections with previous learning and experience. It illustrates how important the children are to each other – how much they can learn from one another." Here the focus on peer interaction, past experiences and the way that children learn are all key ideas in her answer.

Similar kinds of parallels were drawn between participants' answers to several questions across the four weeks. To demonstrate this, Appendix L presents the answers to Question 3 on the four weekly questionnaires. This question (i.e., What did you learn about your child or other children from this panel?) was designed to elicit parents' beliefs about the role of peer interactions and hands-on learning experiences in children's learning.

The data presented in Appendix L are interesting as they show that all of the parents referred to both their own and other children in the two panels. The answers make clear references to the value of children working and learning together as well the

importance of providing children with opportunities to approach tasks in their own ways. In reference to the construction panel, Participant 2 commented on a child's willingness to collaborate with another child and the value of this kind of collaboration in children's overall development (it is interesting to note that neither of the children to whom she referred were hers). She wrote,

> I learned how friendly and easy-going Jack is – to allow another child to help him paint the wooden structure that he so patiently built. I learned that children can learn a lot from each other (not just social skills, but actual content, work habits, concepts to explore).

Participant 1 referred to several children (again none of whom were her own) in her comment on the construction panel, identifying how children approach tasks in unique ways. She wrote,

> Jon showed a lot of creativity with his use of popsicle sticks. It was interesting that he studied the properties of wood, i.e., you can't see through it. Jack's patience in waiting for the glue to dry on each piece of wood was remarkable. His structure was quite high. Rob continued to pursue the math/science angle of things with his interest in measuring the structure. He awakened Jon's curiosity about measuring things.

This response presents a fairly detailed analysis of how the activity allowed children to explore the materials in different ways, leading to various kinds of discoveries for the children.

In their responses to Question 3 on the weekly questionnaires, the participants often (but not always) mentioned their own children, as well as other children, and

offered their reflections on what the panels conveyed to themselves as significant. An example of this is the response from Participant 5 to Let's Make a Pizza:

> I think they all really enjoy hands-on activities. I liked the fact that the teachers were okay with the use of the video camera (technology). The children really seem to know what they like when it comes to pizza toppings and they jumped right into the activity feet first. I didn't even see them tasting small samples before they made their pizza. They seemed to work on making the pizzas, cooking them and then eating.

This comment illustrates that Participant 5 has reflected upon the information presented in the panel and determined that the children have had a positive experience by being supported in their hands-on exploration of both the video camera and the pizza making ingredients. He refers to the children's competencies at being able to follow through on the cooking activity rather than just giving into what might be considered the natural impulse to simply eat the pizza toppings.

The information presented in Appendix L addresses the idea that panels are effective in getting parents to look at their children's learning within the context of their interactions with both the materials in the class and their peers.

Focus Group

The focus group provided a forum for the participants to openly discuss their thoughts on the project and the purpose of the documentation panels. It allowed the researcher to get further insight into the parents' perceptions of the documentation panels and whether they were of genuine value to the parents or whether they simply viewed them out of a sense of obligation to the project. Two of the participants indicated that the task of completing the questionnaires did affect how they viewed the panels. Participant 5

stated, "I would have looked at them anyways but I think that with the questionnaire you're making sure, not that you're getting tested on it, but you want to make sure you're looking at the right panel, answering the right set of questions at the time." Participant 1 added, "I was intent on answering the questionnaire properly and so I would get up and reread and make sure that I remembered who said what or who was doing what."

Gradually, the discussion came to center on the issue of whether parents would have viewed the panels if they had not had questionnaires to fill in. Below are some of the responses to this question as transcribed from the audiotape:

> Participant 1: "To answer your question, would I read these panels even if my child weren't in them? Sure, I'd read them whether he's in or not because, as B. (Participant 4) was saying, they're hanging there, so you're drawn to them."
>
> Participant 4: "The fact that they were up and displayed, I mean you would go and look anyways, because they were there. First of all, they are very attractive, you know, the way they were set up, and one would be introduced and then the second one would come but the first one was still there. You know, so you kind of had this gradual introduction and then over the course of time, to really go back and look at them because they were there. If they are just there and they are visible, then people are going to look."

A parent who attended the Nursery daily with his child but did not formally participate in the project added, "I read them all, I can remember them all, I just didn't fill in the questionnaires, I left that to my wife, she's the writer."

That the documentation panels would be interesting to people who were not participating in the project was reiterated by Participant 2, who explained how the panels became a topic of conversation between her and her mother who lived in another

province but happened to be visiting her grandchildren and invited to the Nursery while the project was taking place. In a conversation with the focus group leader she explained,

> My Mom came twice, she lives in Ontario. We talk about the panels. She's written about them, the contents, and things come up so they were very important to her. She's a photographer and she's an historian and she looks at old photographs too, so for her, she was touched. I have to confess, she took pictures of them and she has the stuff, the transcripts and everything because she was just amazed. But that's a grandmother at a distance, they meant so much to her. We use them as a way of talking to the kids. She'll say that she knows about the constructions, the spires and the shadows and all of those things.

These comments are testimony to the power of documentation panels to engage people in learning about children, acting as invitations for readers to enter the children's world and to become members of their classroom community.

In the following passage, Participant 2 eloquently states what the panels meant to her and how they spoke to her in a particular way:

> Documentation reminds me of journaling, in the idea that the parent can have an insight into the relationship between the child and the teacher. I was struck by how very loved the children are. There is really the choice of quotations. They are very touching and very (pause) to quote T.S. Eliot, in the shadow play of children, for me, is very moving and very appropriate and shocking in all the positive ways, like a very nice thing to do and so for me, it gives me a sense of rapport between the teacher and the children. I can imagine if I was away from here, it would be all that much more important to me to get that sense of how they feel about my kids and what they talk about and when they speak to each other. The dignity of

> the conversation, the way they are responded to, the questions that are asked, it's on such a respectful level and it always seems to assume that children are wise and have a point of view and things to say and the teacher isn't telling them "This is a shadow"; "This is this"; "Did you notice that." Instead it's "What do you think about this?" or "What can you see?" It's very broad and open so they can be fountains of knowledge. Very exciting. So I think a parent can learn an awful lot from them.

Here the parent expresses her feelings about the panels and why she values them. She pays particular attention to how the panels helped her to better understand the relationship between the teacher and the child. This, of course, is one of the aims of the current research – to see if panels help parents understand the relationship between the teacher and the children. The above quotation seems to provide support for this idea. Participant 4 also spoke about the way panels help parents get a glimpse into the teacher's approach. In discussing the usefulness of panels she explained, "They are not to make teachers accountable, but it helps teachers explain what it is that they are doing and it helps parents understand what is going on. In your regular formal setting, parents have no idea what's going on, so something like this could really, really help them a lot."

Thus, the discussion that emerged during the focus group provided invaluable insight into how the panels affected the parents' perceptions of the purpose of panels and the role of the teacher. From this discussion, the researcher was able to establish that documentation panels indeed enhanced communication with parents by informing them of the teachers' intentions and providing full pictures of children's learning experiences in the classroom. It also suggested that parents would appreciate seeing documentation panels in other educational settings.

Research Journal

My dual role as a teacher in the classroom and researcher has undoubtedly influenced the way I have interpreted and pieced together the results of this study. It is imperative to point out that, as a teacher in this classroom, much of my communication with the parents after the introduction of the panels came in the form of informal conversations. As I collected the data, I also kept a journal of my experience during the project, which reflects both of my roles as a teacher and researcher. Thus, I can say that this project enhanced teacher-parent communication but, admittedly, it is difficult to determine whether this may be directly attributed to my role in leading the project or to the effectiveness of the panels in promoting teacher-parent communication. Undoubtedly, it is related to both.

The following example illustrates how the panels led to a conversation between myself, in the role of teacher, and a parent. In this case, the participant wanted to discuss a particular panel, leading me to conclude that panels do indeed provide parents with opportunities to offer their own insights and interpretation of their children's classroom experiences. In an excerpt from my journal I write: "Participant 5 pulled me aside and asked me if he had to write about the panels only on the questionnaires. He said, 'You know, because I'd really like to ask you something about the church visit'." He went on to explain how, after the visit to the church, his child talked about churches at home for several weeks and did some art collages of church windows. He later brought in an example of one of the collages, which we kept with the panel. This parent was making the connections for himself between how his child's interests at home were reflective of his school experiences and vice versa.

Individual Participant Results

As demonstrated in Table 7, most of the parents viewed the panels for approximately the same amount of time. The exception here is Participant 3 who viewed the panels for about half as long as the other parents. Admittedly, this individual difference is difficult to explain but may be connected to personal factors such as the participant's personality, professional background and approach to completing written tasks. It is interesting to note that her responses to each of the questionnaires and participation in the focus group was comparable to other parents and her shorter viewing time did not detract from the quality of her involvement in the project.

Table 7

Amount of Time Each Participant Viewed Panels

Participant	Participant View Time
1	64.16
2	65.17
3	32.20
4	64.13
5	63.23
Total Time Viewed	292.29 (Min/Sec)

The themes that occurred across each participant's questionnaires will be presented below.

Participant 1. This participant completed each of the questionnaires very thoughtfully and comprehensively. In the focus group she reported that she felt a great responsibility in filling out the questionnaires. Her responses are lengthy and clearly written. This parent made great efforts to include her thoughts on each of the panels. Her child was in three of the panels but she included comments about all of the children in

each of her responses. A recurring theme in her answers was the information she gleaned about how children learn. For example, about the Language of Clay panel she wrote, "I was impressed by Rob, he obviously knows what an avalanche is and applied this knowledge in another context." In responding to the questionnaire on the Construction: The Sky's the Limit panel she wrote, "they approached it differently and all learned something in the process." She describes what she believed each of the children learned from the classroom activities in all of her responses to the weekly questionnaires.

Participant 2. For Participant 2 the project became a spiritual experience. Her questionnaire answers tend to focus upon how the panels caused her to challenge some of her own beliefs and gave her insight into how competent children are. In the Language of Clay panel questionnaire she wrote, "Their words are fresh, enthusiastic, funny, revealing and intelligent. Reading what they say helps me to appreciate what they say." On the purpose of documentation panels she expressed her feelings eloquently in the following statement:

> The act of documenting a child's efforts or experience implies that the child's efforts or experiences are worth taking note, worth attention. My initial reaction is spiritual: fast-paced life lurches to a full stop and I observe, reflect, savor children's words and actions. It reminds me of meditation when the point is to pay attention, see how everything is related, connected, meaningful, significant. My reaction was also emotional. The panels recorded a lot about my sons and I was very thrilled and engrossed.

Similar kinds of responses were given in many of the questionnaires and shared during the focus group.

Participant 3. For Participant 3, the project appeared to be a means for her to gain insight into her child's way of approaching new tasks and of informing her own parenting practice. From The Language of Clay she explained that she discovered that her child learned through peer interactions and knew more than she realized. She wrote, "He had never played with clay by stomping on it. He learned by watching the other kids and was surprised to learn that it's sticky." She made a similar remark about the construction activity. She wrote, "I didn't know that my child was interested in wooden pieces and that he knew the word 'skyscraper.' He picked it up probably by observing the other kids. He was proud of making the skyscraper and painting it and that we have it in a corner of our living room."

Some of her responses to the questionnaires tended to focus largely on the academic or skill-oriented perspective on children's learning. For example in her response to Question 2 (i.e., What is the most captivating aspect of the panel for you? Why?) for the Shadows in the Sun panel she explained, "The kids discovering that shadows were made not only of people but also objects, that when they move their shadows move too, matching shadows with the person/object." This answer was in contrast to other participants' answers, which focused more on the idea that such a simple activity can become so meaningful for children. Interestingly, this participant was also the only one who suggested in the final questionnaire that panels would not be practical for elementary school as "parents don't come to school that often – only perhaps for parent/teacher meetings" (see Appendix J). Nevertheless, this participant also included many positive comments in the questionnaires and was often seen interacting with other parents.

Participant 4. This parent showed much interest in the panels as a way of enhancing teacher practice and children's classroom experiences. Her responses to the questionnaires were very positive and she expressed her beliefs in the effectiveness of panels as viable tools for connecting families and schools. On the final questionnaire she wrote, "I believe the panels are a wonderful way to depict the children's learning at school. Most often parents have to rely on verbal accounts of the children's experience and participation." Similar thoughts were expressed throughout other questionnaires and in the focus group. At one point during the focus group she actually took on the role of leading the group discussion in a detailed analysis of the Language of Clay panel. It is important to note here that this participant has a background in education and a work history of implementing programs for building relationships with parents in educational settings.

Participant 5. In the questionnaires and during informal discussions, this participant often remarked on the value of hands-on learning experiences and how the children learned by doing. The participant emphasized that they made a family effort to build upon what his child learned in school at home. On the questionnaire for Construction: The Sky's the Limit, the participant described his child's approach to the activity and explained, "We try to encourage this behavior at home by setting up art materials. I had never noticed his interest in geometric shapes, we'll think about this for the future." This participant's response to the project was very positive and he often made thoughtful and reflective comments to the classroom teachers and on the questionnaires. He can be seen on the videos frequently engaging in extended periods of both interactive and individual viewing.

Discussion

The data provide ample evidence to suggest that the panels met the objectives of the current research. Indeed, the project in itself, in addition to the implementation of documentation panels, was effective in enhancing communication among parents and teachers. An interpretation of the results from this study, including how the objectives were met and how the information gleaned may be applied in answering the research questions, is presented below.

Objectives and Research Questions

Communication, Collaboration, and Shared Understanding Among Parents and Teachers

The data show that the panels helped parents to inform themselves on personal levels about how their own children learn and how they view learning. The trends that emerged across the questionnaire responses for each participant showed that the project took on a different meaning for each parent and the panels signified something unique for each of them. Their responses to the project and the reasons for choosing to send their children to the Nursery were somewhat parallel. That is, Participant 1 noted how the panels gave her insight into each of the children and how they learn. She was very comprehensive in her response to all facets of the project just as she wanted to be completely involved in her child's educational experience. For Participant 2, choosing the Nursery was a deeply personal choice for her as she was struggling with severe separation issues. The project became a spiritual journey for her, enabling her to discover new things about herself and her children. For Participant 3, the project allowed her to learn about her child and her parenting style. There were similar goals for her choosing to attend the Nursery. For Participant 4, her philosophical leanings as an educator and her desire to be involved in her child's education as well as to develop relationships with

other parents were reflected in her response to the project. Participant 5 had chosen the Nursery as he hoped it would enable his child to freely express himself and develop his own personality. During the project this parent seemed to look for and find evidence of this in the panels. Thus, the documentation panels were meaningful for the parents and communicated information to them that was relevant and informative.

> Collaborators on Project Zero (Reggio Children, 2001) suggest that in today's society each individual can not only learn how to learn, but also become aware of the value of learning as a quality of life itself, in order to organize and multiply the learning opportunities as well as to enjoy them and find pleasure in learning together with others. (p.28)

The results of this research suggest that the documentation panels allowed the parents to learn about how their children learn and to learn themselves. The data are filled with examples of how the parents gained new ideas on how learning occurs and the value of peer interaction. There is also evidence that they inevitably developed relationships with each other through the process of learning about their children and the Nursery program through the panels.

The example of the conversation recorded in my research journal illustrates the enhanced communication and shared understanding between myself, in the role of teacher, and a parent. By discussing the child's inclination to build upon what he had been investigating at school through home art projects, we both learned something about the way children construct knowledge by building on previous learning experiences. These kinds of informal exchanges were common after the introduction of the panels. Parents often approached both my teaching partner and me to discuss particular aspects

of the panels, as well as the project in general. These informal discussions and shared ideas led to the sense of shared community that was the focus of this research.

Results from the focus group also demonstrate how the panels provide a means, or an invitation, for parents and even a wider audience to get an inside perspective on the children's classroom undertakings. An example of this is the grandmother who lived in another province and was able to learn about her grandchildren's school experiences by reading the panels.

The excerpt, taken from the transcript of the focus group, supports the notion that panels provide a means for creating dialogue among those who read them. They give insight into the children's lives, thereby creating links between home and school. For this grandmother, they provided a glimpse into her grandchild's classroom community and allowed her to create a place for herself in that community. It is also interesting to note that this grandmother requested copies of the panel questionnaires and filled them in during two visits to the class. This created an opportunity for the teachers to get to know her a little better and to discuss her grandchild's experiences in the class, thereby widening the classroom community.

One of the guiding objectives for this research was to investigate the extent to which documentation panels foster parent collaboration in the classroom community. This objective was met as parents collaborated with the researcher in completing the project by engaging in discussion and reflective thought on the children's classroom experiences. However, collaboration in terms of classroom involvement or, more specifically, participation in classroom activities was not a result of the project. Thus, this project suggests that documentation panels successfully inform parents about classroom projects and children's ways of engaging in them, but they do not necessarily act as an

impetus to get parents involved in the classroom in typical ways such as volunteering. Rather, the collaboration would be more adequately described as an exchanging of ideas. This finding is, however, significant as the kind of collaboration focused upon in this project is one in which ideas and understanding are shared, creating a sense of community.

Fostering Positive Relationships

The video recordings were useful tools in examining the extent to which the documentation panels were effective in creating positive parent-parent relationships. The analysis of the videos supports the idea that the panels are an invitation for parents to enhance their knowledge of classroom experiences and provide opportunities for parents to interact with each other. The findings show that when parents viewed the panels together they also engaged in discussions with each other. In fact, after Day 3 of the project, parents viewed the panels either individually or interactively. This provides support for the idea that panels enhance communication among parents. They appear to provide a good starting point for discussion and give parents some common ground from which to build relationships. That parents looked at the panels most often individually is undoubtedly explained by the fact that they often spent extended periods viewing panels alone while filling in the questionnaires. This does not come as a surprise because parents commented in the focus group that they wanted to be very thorough in their answers.

The individual viewing might also be explained by the need to absorb information before engaging in discussions about it. Table 5 shows that the interactive viewing peaked at Day 6. This could be attributed to the fact that at this point the first set of panels (i.e., The Language of Clay, Clay Revisited, Visiting the Church and 9/11) had been on view for 6 days and that the parents had time to think about the panels and were

beginning to share their ideas and thoughts on them. It may be that parents need a certain amount of time to read the panels and absorb the information presented in them before engaging in discussion about them.

The information from the questionnaires and the focus group, as well as journal notes kept by the researcher, also helped to establish that the panels were effective in building upon the parent-teacher relationship. Evidence of this is provided in comments made by Participant 1 in her response to Question 1 on the final questionnaire. She wrote,

> The panels do enhance my experience as a parent at this school. They give me a better understanding of the activities that take place in class – the "hows" and "whys." The underlying objectives of some of the activities are not always clear to me and this is where the panels come in handy. They're also useful in that they give me a whole picture of what went on. I don't always view a given activity from start to finish (only bits and pieces) so the panels kind of tie everything together.

This participant's response draws on the idea that panels are a way for teachers to communicate with parents so that parents have an accurate picture of their children's in-class experiences. A comment made by Participant 4 on Question 3 of the final questionnaire gives further credence to this notion. She writes, "(Documentation panels) may actually facilitate the (teachers') ability to explain the how and what of their teaching as well as the outcome." These kinds of sentiments are also echoed in the examples of parent responses listed in Table 2 and attest to the fact that the panels help to foster positive parent-teacher relationships.

Understanding the Preschool Experience as an Interactive Endeavor

Another objective guiding this research (and reflected in the third research question) was the notion that children's learning experiences are best understood within the context of their peer interactions and exploration of the classroom environment and the world around them. That the parents came to value the role of these peer interactions became apparent as the questionnaire data were analyzed. Support for this is presented in Appendix L and also in several other responses to the weekly questionnaires. On Question 1 (i.e., What does the panel tell you about the children's experience in the class?) for the questionnaire on Shadows in the Sun, Participant 2 wrote, "Simply leaving the classroom caused an explosion of new ideas and connections with previous learning and experience. It illustrates how important the children are to each other – how much they learn from one another." In keeping with this idea, Participant 1 described what she learned about the children from viewing the Shadows in the Sun panel. She wrote:

> The methods the children used to determine which shadow belonged to who was interesting. They thought about it, i.e. Jack jumped; Sam stood sideways; Kit used her hands; Billy said his shadow was big etc. Each had a unique way of solving the problem. Kit showed Billy how to make shadows with his hands. She took the role of helper.

Here the parent was thinking about each child in the group and not focusing upon her own child. She recognized that one child played a specific role for another. This kind of analysis by a parent supports the notion that panels are effective in guiding parents to look at children's ways of learning within context. She noted that each had a method and approached the task individually. Yet, she noted, there was still an element of interaction

and exploration. These kinds of observations might be difficult for a parent to make without the visual evidence of the children's experience that is offered by a panel.

In her explanation of what she found most captivating about Construction: The Sky's the Limit, Participant 3 wrote:

> The kids made a connection between skyscrapers and building similar tall pieces with the blocks of wood was fascinating to me. Gluing the pieces of wood, painting them, trying to see through the glued pieces, gluing pieces, measuring them – were all ideas that the kids came up. The teachers let them discover many things by letting them experiment by themselves.

Clearly, the parent here is recognizing the role of interaction in guiding children's learning and the value of providing engaging, hands-on learning opportunities for children. In responding to Questions 1 and 2 on the final questionnaire this same parent conveyed how reading the panels and reflecting on the children's experience affected her own parenting style. To the question, "As a parent, do you believe that the documentation panels enhance your own or your child's experience at our school?" she responded:

> Definitely, the panels enhanced my/our experience at school. It made me more aware of what my child and other children are interested in, their experiences, their likes, what captivates them, etc. I listen more to what my child says and try to answer his questions in a way that is appropriate and enriching to him. The little theoretical notes about early childhood development (and) comments the educators give in the panel made me more aware of children and their feelings, thoughts and expressions. From reading the panels, I realized how significant the apparently insignificant is.

This sentiment was further supported in her response to the question, "Has reading the panels affected your conversations and interactions with your child at home?" Here she wrote,

> Yes, I listen more to my children and I'm reading more books and articles on parenting. This has surely affected my conversations and interactions (for the better) with my kids at home. I am beginning to see that there are effective ways of handling difficult situations which occur at home. My husband has also shown interest in the books I bring home and is trying to understand and implement effective ways of handling the kids and situations affecting the children.

This comment is extremely compelling as it exemplifies the effect that panels can have in providing a means for helping parents to reflect critically upon their children's learning. In this case it seems that reflecting upon things such as how her child approaches learning tasks and the role of peer interaction as well as hands on exploration of the materials in the environment has inspired her to learn how to support his endeavours and foster his growing sense of self.

Limitations of the Study

The documentation panels set in motion many opportunities for parents and teachers to learn about each other and from each other, thereby making the preschool classroom a better, more supportive place for children to naturally construct their own possibilities for learning. However, one cannot overlook the fact that this study took place in a small preschool, uniquely located in a university Education Department, and therefore cannot be taken to be representative of a typical preschool.

Powell (1998) suggests that parents often choose programs for their children based upon their own beliefs about what they deem to be appropriate practice for working with young children. In the case of the Observation Nursery, parents are given a very thorough introduction to the Nursery even before they enroll their children. That is, before entering their children in the program, parents are asked to visit the Nursery and spend at least one full morning observing the classroom in action and speaking with other parents. They often visit several times both alone and with their child before finally enrolling in the program. Parents are encouraged to do this so that they may develop a sound understanding of the approach to program planning and the educational philosophy in place at the Nursery. Parents also receive written information regarding the university courses associated with the Nursery and meet the instructors for these courses before they make their final decision. In this way, parents are well informed and often choose the Nursery because they want to be in an environment where they can be involved in working with each other, university instructors and the Nursery teachers. Thus, the implementation of the current research project was very well received, whereas in a regular setting such a project may not have been implemented so seamlessly.

Parents tend to choose the Nursery because they want to be involved in their children's education. Therefore, a positive response to the project and their reflective answers to the questionnaires were to be expected. However, because the parents observed on a regular basis and had frequent contact with the teachers, one might also have expected the panels to have little impact. Taking these factors into consideration, it seems plausible to propose that documentation panels would be of interest to parents in most situations, particularly when they cannot be present to observe their children's activities. Granted, a more extensive investigation, in a variety of early childhood settings, would be required in order to determine this. The results of the current research do suggest that such an investigation would be a worthwhile endeavor as in this case the project was entirely meaningful and insightful for myself both as a researcher and teacher, my teaching partner, and the parents.

All of the data sources yielded many positive findings for this study. Perhaps most notable are the pre- and post-study questionnaires as well as the weekly questionnaires. The data from these questionnaires provided extremely compelling information regarding the effectiveness of documentation panels in creating a community of shared understanding and collaboration. However, it cannot be overlooked that the questionnaires were designed to elicit certain kinds of information that directly addressed the research problem. In particular, the weekly questionnaires were invaluable as the questions evoked responses that directly addressed the main objectives of the research, resulting in positive findings for this study.

It is plausible that the questionnaires acted in many ways as a guide for parents to use in their viewing. That is, after Week 1 it is possible that the parents began to view the panels with the weekly questions in mind. Thus, one could question whether parents

would have made the connections between things such as the value of hands-on learning and peer interactions in children's learning if they had not been directly asked to reflect upon the content of the panels in the weekly questionnaires. A subsequent study might investigate this notion by comparing parents' perceptions of documentation panels when they view them with some kind of guidelines such as the questionnaires and when they view them without any such guidelines.

Another limitation in this study was the weak audio quality of the videotapes. Because the conversations could not easily be deciphered, the extent to which the parents interacted and collaborated with each other was largely determined through evidence of their viewing habits. That is, the videos were analyzed for evidence of parents viewing panels together and engaging in conversation. However, this section of the findings would undoubtedly be more convincing and rich had the content of their conversations been included in the analysis.

Conclusion

The results from this study are promising and provide support for the hypothesis that documentation panels are effective in creating a climate of collaboration and sense of community within a preschool environment. The panels became an ongoing topic of conversation and led to many thought-provoking conversations between my teaching partner, the parents and me. Many of the parents commented that although they had been observing on a daily basis, they had not realized the depth of the investigations carried out by the children. Through discussions with the parents, further insight was gained into some of the projects and their feedback helped us in re-evaluating some of the documenting we had done for the panels.

This study is important as it uncovered ways of making the curriculum more meaningful for parents and children. It guided the teachers in determining whether their method for communicating with parents - namely, documentation panels – was effective as a means of inviting parents to become collaborators in the classroom and to share their insight into their children's learning experiences.

As presented in the findings and discussion sections of this thesis, the parent responses to the panels were overwhelmingly positive. They expressed their gratitude to the teachers for portraying their children's experiences in this very readable and visually appealing way. The idea that it helped parents to better understand teacher goals and the way children learn was clear. For example, on the final questionnaire, Participant 3 wrote, "From reading the panels, I realized how significant the apparently insignificant was/is." This is a compelling statement, as it speaks to the idea that panels are an effective way to communicate with parents by letting them know the value and depth of the work their children undertake. Also on the final questionnaire was a particularly

thought-provoking comment from Participant 2. She wrote, "I believe you are on to something very powerful and positive. The panels are very precious. I just wanted to grab some of them and run." These comments from parents are invaluable as they unequivocally support the notion that documentation is a powerful means of creating a classroom community based on collaboration and, most importantly, shared understanding.

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Appendix A

Consent Form

Dear Parents,

This semester a study will be conducted to examine the role of documentation in fostering parent and student involvement in the Observation Nursery School curriculum. This information should allow the teachers to better inform their own teaching practice and provide them with insight into how teachers and parents can ensure that their children have a positive, meaningful and developmentally appropriate early learning experience.

To complete this study, you will be required to view a series of four documentation panels that will be set up in the seminar room adjacent to the Nursery. Two video cameras and an audio recorder will be used to record the conversations that you have with your child, other parents and other children regarding the panels. In addition to this, we will ask that you write in journals and share your ideas about the panels and your children's interests with the teachers through the journals. You will also be asked to agree to a 30-minute interview with one of the teachers regarding your impressions of the panels and your child's progress. This interview would take place at the end of April. At the beginning of the study, we will ask to complete a short questionnaire about your understanding of documentation and the role it plays in curriculum development. We will also ask you to complete one questionnaire for each of the four panels that you will view. The questionnaires should take approximately 15 minutes each to complete.

As per the university's guidelines for conducting ethical research I am required to obtain written permission from those of you who are willing to participate in this study. Please note that you are not required to participate in this study and that, should you choose to participate, you are free to drop out of the study at any time. Throughout the study confidentiality and anonymity will be assured – real names will not be used in any publication or presentation of the findings and participants will not be identified.

Thank you for your consideration,

Ellen Jacobs
March 14, 2002

I HAVE READ THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THE NATURE AND CONDITIONS OF THIS STUDY AND AM AWARE THAT SHOULD I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY I CAN DO SO BY INFORMING THE TEACHERS OR ELLEN JACOBS.

_____ Yes, I am willing to participate.

_____ No, I am not willing to participate

YOUR NAME _____ SIGNATURE _____
(please print)

Appendix B

Pre- and Post-Questionnaires with Coding Schemes

Pre-Questionnaire on Documentation

Question 1
In your opinion, what does the term documentation mean?

Question 2

What kinds of things do and should teachers do to document children's classroom learning experiences?

Question 3

Why might documentation be important to teachers, parents and children?

Question 4

What purposes do documentation panels serve?

Coding Scheme for Pre-Questionnaire on Documentation

Question 1

A. To collect examples of children's work
B. To record observations of the children in the classroom and the events, interactions and activities that take place
C. To take photographs, video- and audio-recordings of the children when they are engaged in classroom activities
D. Other

Question 2

A. To collect examples of children's work
B. To record observations of the children when they are engaged in activities
C. To take photographs, video- and audio-recordings of the children when they are engaged in classroom activities
D. Other

Question 3

A. Informs teacher practice
B. Informs parents and teachers about children's competencies and interests
C. Allows children to revisit learning experiences
D. Other

Question 4

A. Informs teacher practice
B. Informs parents and teachers about children's competencies and interests
C. Allows children to revisit learning experiences
D. Other

Post-Questionnaire on Documentation

Question 1
As a parent, do you believe that the documentation panels enhance your own or your child's experience at our school? Why or Why not?

Question 2
Has reading the panels affected your conversations and interactions with your child at home?

Question 3
Do you believe that documentation panels have a place in elementary schools? Why or why not?

Question 4
Which of the panels was the most thought provoking for you? Why?

Coding Scheme for Post-Questionnaire

Question 1

A. Yes
B. No
C. Informed me about classroom activities and objectives
D. Provided me with information to use in interactions at home
E. Promoted communication between i) parents and parents, ii) parents and teachers, and iii) parents and children

Question 2

A. Yes
B. No
C. Improved quality of conversations and interactions with me
D. Improved quality of conversations and interaction with other family members
E. Other

Question 3

A. Yes
    i. Enhances parents experience by connecting them to school
    ii. Enhances children's experience by validating their work

B. No
    i. Takes up too much of the teacher's time
    ii. Parents do not have time or opportunity to view panels in an elementary setting

C. Other

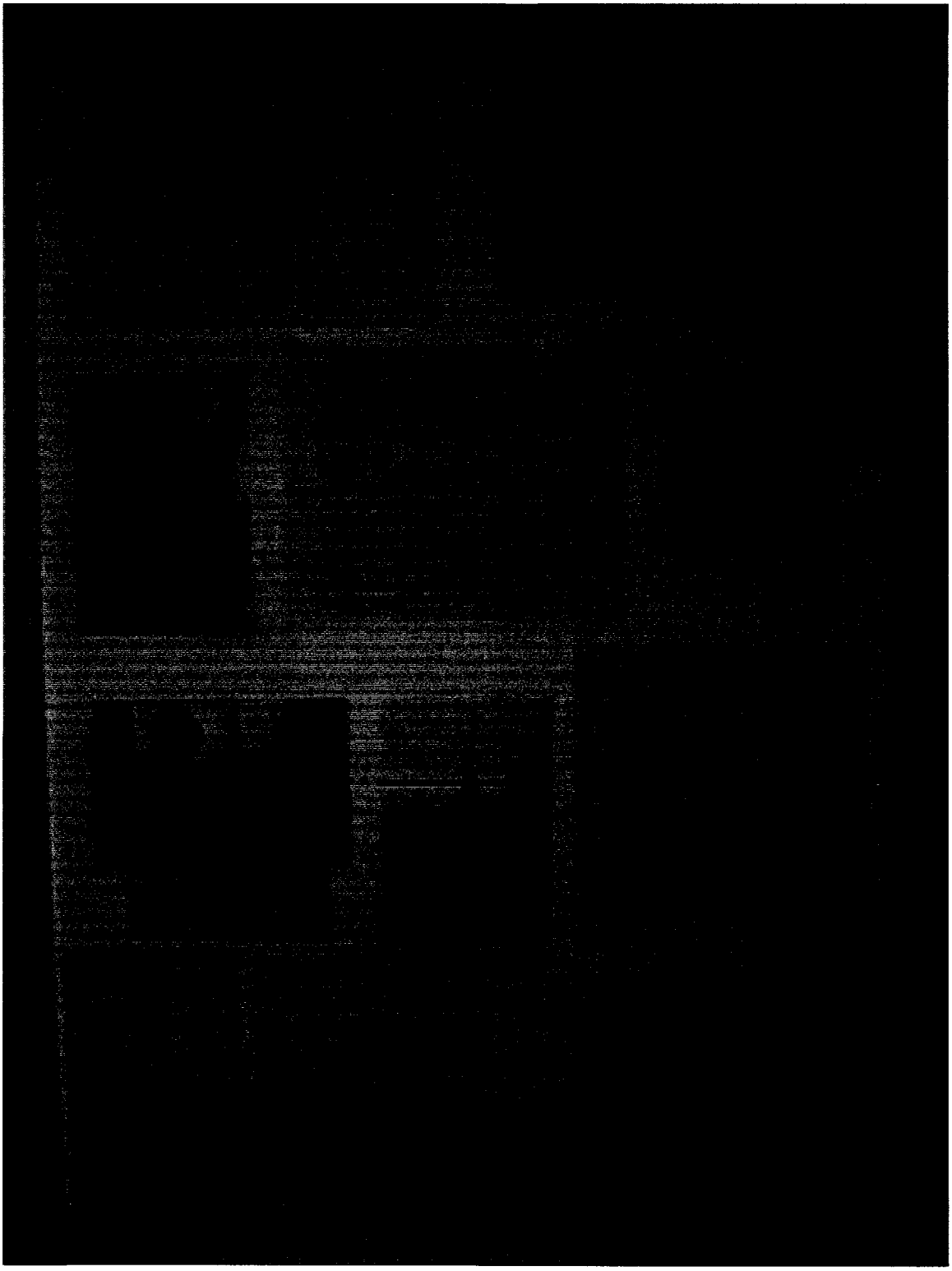
Question 4

A. Panels that included my own child
B. Panels that showed children's complex thought processes
C. Panels that showed children in social interactions
D. Panels that provided information that I didn't already know
E. Other

Appendix C

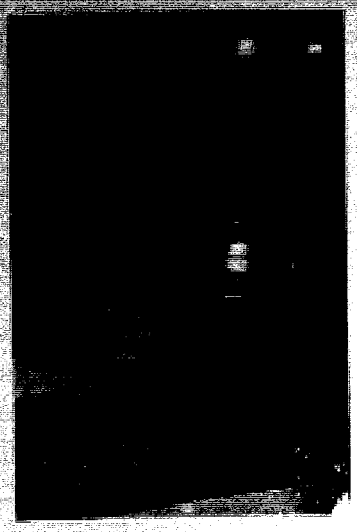
Week 1 Panels: Language of Clay, Clay Revisited, 9/11,

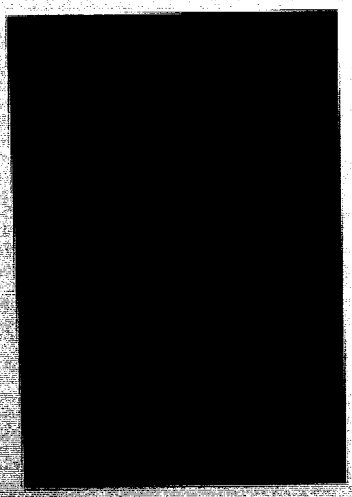
Visiting the Church: A New Perspective



Roman steps [illegible] clay to flatten [illegible]. He says: "It looks like my footprint is a tire track."
Michael tries to make a footprint.
Stepping on the clay, Michael says "Look, I made one too. It's humungous."
Ben says "Me too."
Sathya also uses steps in the clay to flatten it. He looks surprised when his shoe sticks to the clay and addresses

Cathy: "Help Cathy, I'm stuck. Get it out."





Ben: "Look I made a tiny church. I made three."

Ben counts the churches and says, "They're pointy. Now I am going to make a bigger one."

Roman replies, "I am clapping my hands to flatten it. We need some pencil crayons for [illegible]."

Ben looks closely at his churches. Cathy asks, "What do you see?"

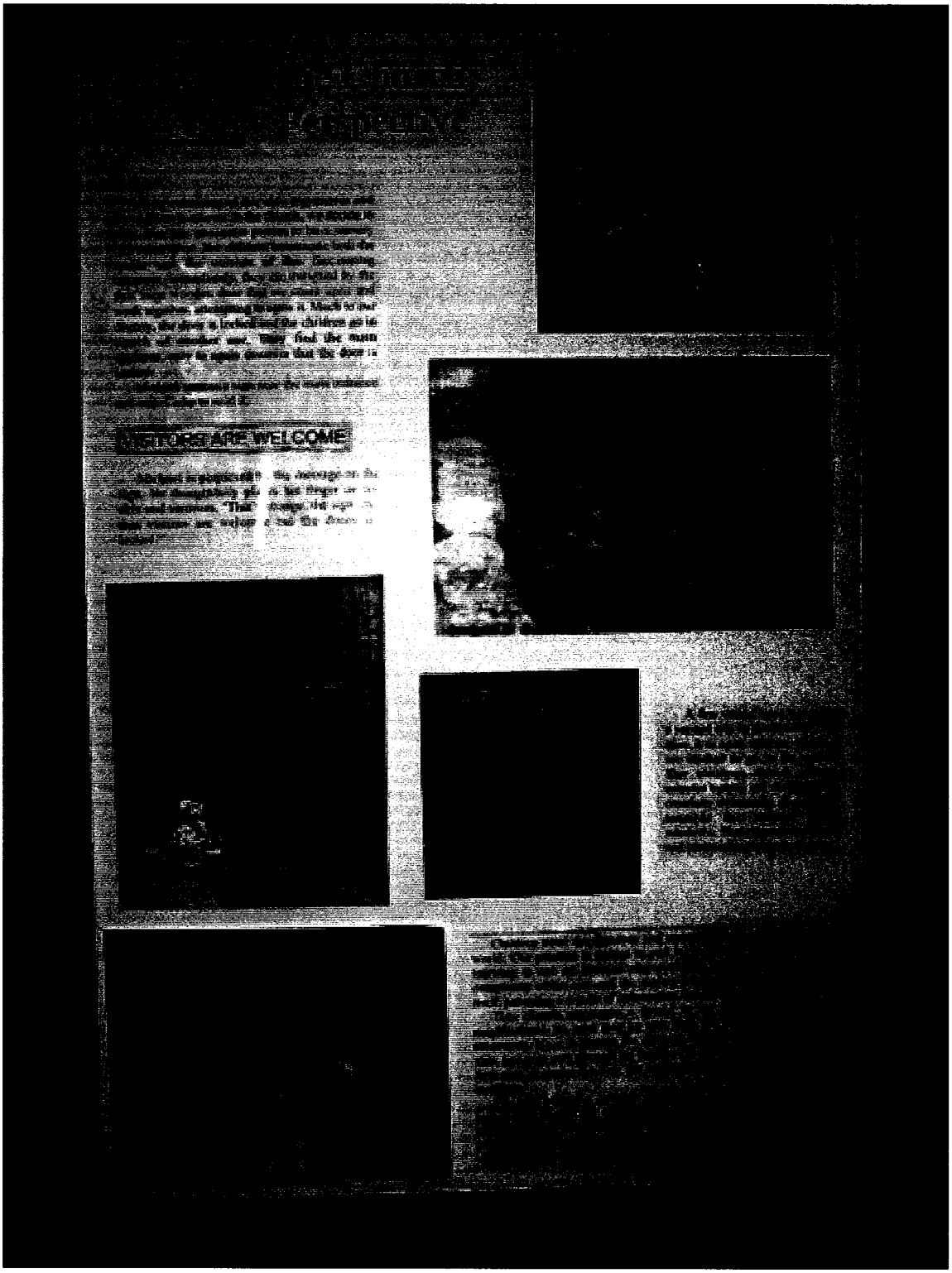
Ben replies, "Great!"

Ben pushes his churches together to form one pile of clay.

Cathy asks, "What happened to your little churches?"

Ben looks puzzled and says, "I don't know."

Roman suggests, "They disappeared. They are invisible. He continues, "Air is invisible. We breathe air. If we were invisible we could get sucked in someone's nose."


VISITORS ARE WELCOME

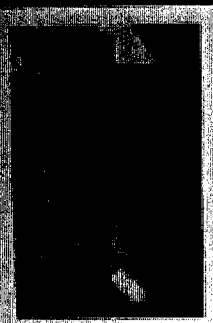
Clay Revisited

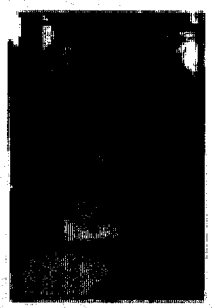
Appendix D

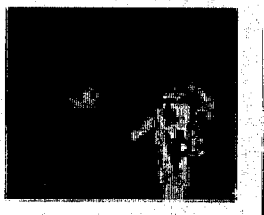
Week 2 Panel: Construction: The Sky's the Limit

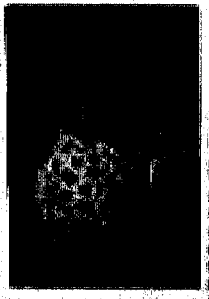
CONSTRUCTION: THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

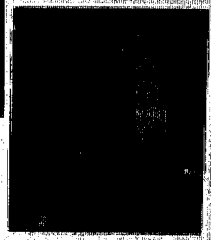
"LOOKING AT SOMETHING FROM MORE THAN ONE POINT OF VIEW IS A THINKING SKILL."

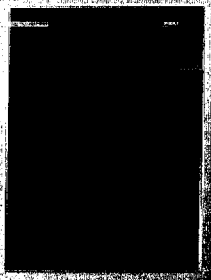


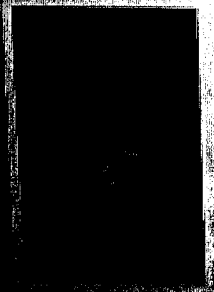


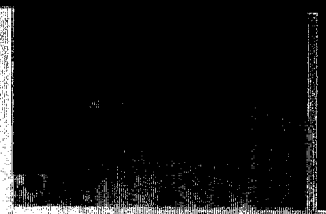












SINCE SEPTEMBER, THE CHILDREN HAVE EXHIBITED AN ONGOING INTEREST IN CONSTRUCTION. BEN'S MOM MADE A TOAST OF PAGE BEN AND ROMAN TO USE THE CRANE HE AND SPED THROUGH THE WINDOW DURING THE CLAY PROJECT. THAT BROUGHT BACK PHOTOGRAPHS OF THEIR VISIT TO THE CONSTRUCTION SITE TO SHARE WITH THE REST OF THE CLASS.

COINCIDENTALLY, A GIFT OF SCRAPS OF WOOD WAS DONATED TO THE NURSERY AROUND THE SAME TIME THAT THE INTEREST IN THE CONSTRUCTION SITE EMERGED. THIS WAS AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY TO PROMOTE [illegible] INFORMATION. THE CHILDREN IMMEDIATELY BEGAN TO USE THE WOOD IN THEIR CONSTRUCTION OF BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES.

SAMIRA SHOWS GREAT INTEREST IN THE SCRAPS OF WOOD. HE BEGINS BY BUILDING A SERIES OF FLAT MOUNDS, BY LAYING ONE WOODEN PIECE ON TOP OF THE OTHER. AFTER OBSERVING SOME OF THE OTHER CHILDREN AT WORK, HE DECLARES, 'I AM GOING TO BUILD A SKYSCRAPER,' AND SETS OFF TO WORK, CONCENTRATING AS HE PLACES ONE BLOCK WITH CARE.

RAMON IS PARTICULARLY ENGAGED IN CONSTRUCTING A SKYSCRAPER. HE USES THE WOODEN PIECES IN A METHODICAL FASHION TO BUILD A SYMMETRICAL STRUCTURE. HE CONCENTRATES ON BALANCING THE PIECES ON THEIR SIDES AND PATIENTLY HOLDS EACH ONE IN PLACE UNTIL THE CHILDREN, WHO HAVE BEEN [illegible]

JUSTIN CREATES VARIOUS [illegible] USES POPSICLE STICKS TO [illegible] FLAT WOODEN BLOCKS. HE [illegible] WHEN THE BLOCKS ARE CLOSE TOGETHER [illegible] METHOD [illegible]

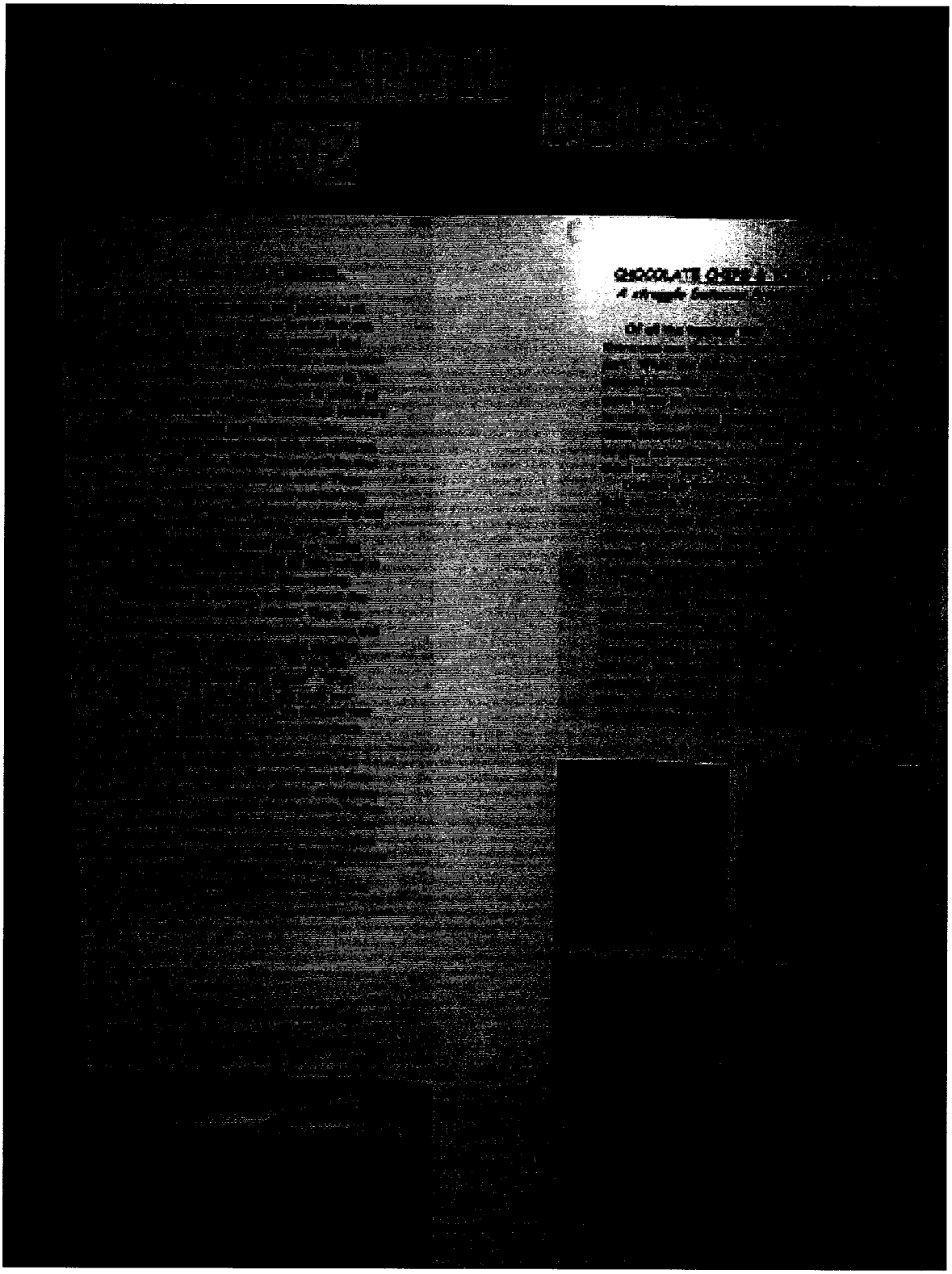
ROMAN STUDIES [illegible] AND COMMENTS [illegible] CATHY ASKED, "[illegible] THINK IT GOES [illegible] AS HE HOLDS UP [illegible] CATALOGUE ON THE [illegible] DAD WORKED [illegible] UNDERSTANDING [illegible] CATHY NOTICES [illegible] GITA MAKING [illegible]

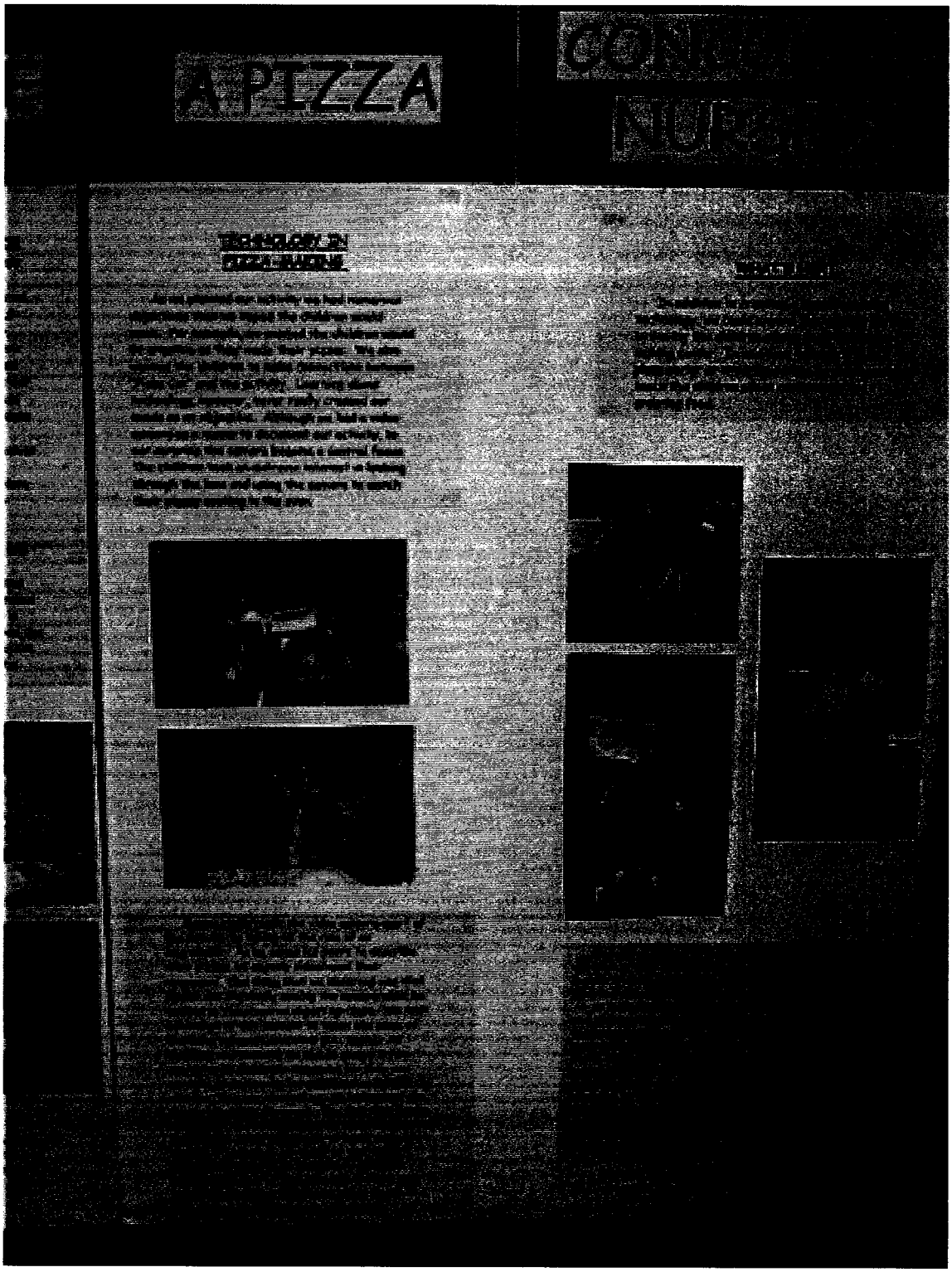
"WITH PIECES [illegible] THE HEIGHT OF [illegible] THEY'RE [illegible] VERY CAREFUL [illegible] AND CAREFUL [illegible] AS SHE [illegible]

THE [illegible] ATTENTION [illegible] TO [illegible]

Appendix E

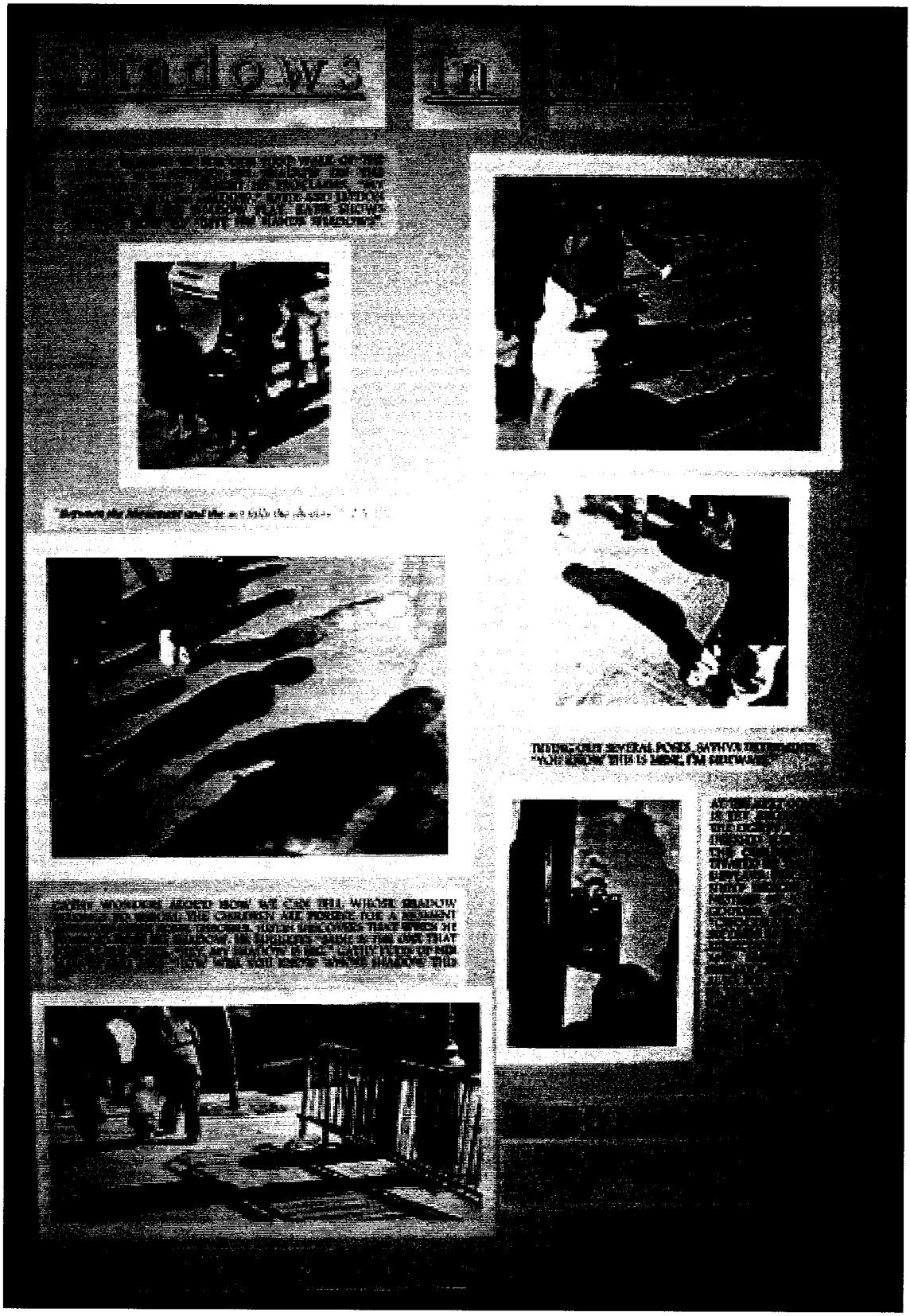
Week 3 Panel: Let's Make a Pizza




A PIZZA

Appendix F

Week 4 Panel: Shadows in the Sun



Appendix G

Weekly Panel Questionnaire and Coding Scheme

Weekly Panel Questionnaire

Question 1
What does the panel tell you about the children's experience in the class?

Question 2
What is the most captivating aspect of the panel for you? Why?

Question 3
What did you learn about your child or other children from this panel?

Question 4

Did you know this before?

Question 5

Was your child in the panel?

Coding Scheme for Weekly Panel Questionnaires

Question 1

A. Links to teacher goals
B. Links to children's interests
C. Links to influence of peers interactions on learning
D. Links to role of hands on learning experiences and exploration of classroom materials
E. Other

Question 2

A. Helps in understanding teacher goals
B. Helps in understanding children's approach to learning
C. Narrative accounts of children's classroom activities
D. Teacher interpretations of children's actions
E. Images of children in photographs and work samples
F. Other

Question 3

A. Role of social interaction in children's learning
B. Role of previous experiences in children's learning
C. Role of the environment in children's learning
D. Other

Question 4

A. Did not know before
B. Knew before
C. Helped to change previous perspective
D. Other

Question 5

A. Yes
    i) found panel interesting/informative
    ii) did not find panel interesting/informative

B. No
    i) found panel interesting/informative
    ii) did not find panel interesting/informative

C. Other

Appendix H

Questions for Focus Group

Questions for Focus Group

- **Video Clip # 1 (April 3/02)**

K, B and I: In this clip, it seems that the three of you are having an in-depth conversation. Please elaborate on the nature of this conversation.

B and M: You both enter the room a little later and seem to chat on and off. What were your own reactions to this initial phase of the project?

S: Interestingly, we were very concerned about the fact that we did not have any sound on our tapes and so we lost much of the data that we could have had from the discussions among parents. We noticed that you observed the first panel alone and there was no discussion for us to regret missing. Could you tell us a little bit about what you were thinking as you were reading these panels? Was this something that you would have liked to share with any of the other parents had they been in the room with you?

All: When your children were not in the panels do you think that you spent as much time reading them? Do you think you remember the panel contents as well when your own children are not in them?

- **Video Clip #2 (April 10/02)**

B and S & K: We see in the video clip that you had a lengthy conversation while looking at the **Visiting the Church** panel. Please share your thoughts on this panel, specifically in reference to the conversation that we see you having. What were you talking about during this lengthy discussion?

M and R had a serious discussion about the events of September 11th. What were your thoughts on this panel and what did it tell you about the children? Did any of you discuss this panel later on?

- **Video Clip #3 (April 16/02)**

K: You and S's mom seemed to speak at length as you were filling out the questionnaires. How was this conversation related to the panels?

All: Did you share the project with family members who were not able to view the panels? If so, what kinds of things did you tell them? Were your spouses interested in hearing about the project? Would you have taken the panels home if the option had been presented?

- **Video Clip #4 (April 18/02)**

It seems that most of you had the chance to discuss the panels with Tat some point during the project. Was your conversation with T the same or different from those you had with other parents?

T said that the experience of being involved in the project was invaluable. She felt able to speak with you all on a less formal basis and felt that sharing ideas about the panels gave her a better sense of what parents really look for in their children's educational experience. What are your own thoughts on this?

Did the way you viewed the panels change over the course of the four weeks? If so, how?

Appendix I

Responses to Pre-Study Questionnaire

Responses to Pre-Study Questionnaire

Question 1: In your opinion, what does the term documentation mean?	
Participant	**Response**
1	Documentation means keeping a record if the activities the children are involved in and a record of what they have learned. Notes, photos, samples of work, videos of classroom activities, etc., are all examples of documentation.
2	Documentation means to put actions, words, etc, into document form – some sort of record that can be revisited over and over. Although documentation may strive to replicate exactly what was said, done, felt, it can only be one slice or band of what took place, one perspective.
3	In my opinion, documentation means recording events, happenings and interactions between children that occur in the classroom. The teacher may introduce new terms or situations which she may think will initiate interest or foster creativity among the children.
4	To record observations about children's behaviors, interest, learning styles or patterns and/or overall development.
5	It's a way to write down what has happened in the class while it is still fresh in our memory. We can reflect back on it in the future.
Question 2: What kinds of things do and should teachers do to document children's classroom learning experiences?	
1	Teachers keep records (using vehicles mentioned above) of ongoing activities and the learning achieved. They discuss the activities and the learning with the parents of the children involved.
2	Teachers do take verbatim notes, record voices, videotape and display children's work with captions. Teachers could keep journals about their students (written or perhaps audiotaped) for their own use or for sharing with children and parents.
3	The teacher may introduce new items (e.g., wood blocks used by the kids to paint, glue, clay, models of planets, globes, etc.) and new situations (taking them to the museum, church, planetarium, etc.) and see what interests them and try to capitalize on their interests to teach them new things.
4	Note-taking, photographs, portfolios (a collection of children's work), reports (i.e., for older students), recordings (audio or video)
5	I think it is good to reflect back on what has been going on with the child in the classroom. The teachers can keep or post some of the artwork or photos. The teacher or students can keep journals.
Question 3: Why might documentation be important to teachers, parents and children?	
1	Documentation is important to teachers so that they can chart the progress (or lack of it) of each of their students. Documentation is "concrete" proof. Parents want to know what and how their children are doing and documentation helps teachers provide parents with this information. Documentation is important for children because it allows teachers to zone in on areas in which the children may require further challenges. It's like a map, indicating where to go next.
2	Documentation could help teachers to evaluate their programs plan projects,

	get to know students, appreciate and acknowledge their own good work and their students' good work. For parents, documentation helps to keep sturdy bridges between home and school. Documentation also evokes pride and wonder in me as a parents and me to pay attention to what my children are saying and doing, to look for connections and to attempt to see things as they might.
3	From a teacher's point of view, she may learn what a child is interested in, what a child is exposed to already, how he/she is applying what he knows already in a situation. The teacher may show new things to the child which he was previously unaware of. From a parent's point of view, she learn more of what her child is doing in class, builds on his interests, gets new ideas/situations, which she can expose her kids to. From a kid's point of view, the pictures and written material with their names on them are interesting. They can talk about it and tell their parents and teachers about what they did and felt. This improves their thinking and verbal abilities.
4	To inform about the children's learning and development. To assess (i.e., if there are suspected problems or concerns). To avoid mis-assessment (i.e., to dispel a perception which in fact may be inaccurate).
5	How the child is developing, with their different skills. What types of experiences the children are having in the classroom. The parents can see if they can add to or continue some of the experiences at home. The child could have a tangible memory to reflect back on at a later date.
Question 4: What purposes do documentation panels serve?	
1	Documentation panels allow teachers, parents and children to see what they have learned and how they went about it. They open the door to various discussions of how and why things were done the way they were. Such discussions can lead to new ideas and new ways of doing things. They provide teachers, parents and children with the satisfaction of a job well done. They can also be used as a reference for future projects, i.e., in terms of how things were done, what to do again, what not to do again, etc.
2	Most important, the act of documenting a child's efforts or experience implies that the child's efforts or experience are important, worth taking note, worth attention. My initial reaction when reading the panels is spiritual: fast-paced lurches to a full stop and I observe, reflect, savor children's words and actions. It reminds me of meditation when the point is to pay attention, see how everything is related, connected, meaningful, significant. My reaction was also emotional. The panels recorded a lot about my sons and I was very thrilled and engrossed. I felt did feel sorry for other parents who might feel that their children had been neglected. This is a sensitive topic, I realize. The panels require a great deal of long-term effort to create. To create panels for every child would be a lot of work, but it would have to be that all children in a class were given equal time in the spotlight – so to speak. Children who are non-verbal or less verbal would present documentation challenges. I believe you are on to something very powerful and positive. The panels are very precious. I just wanted to grab some of them and run.

3	The documentation panels help the teachers understand the children better. They know how the children listen, understand and interpret things in the classroom and how they in turn gain knowledge and form inter-personal relationships.
4	To provide a format in which to see the evolution of a theme, learning unit, etc. To provide a tangible means by which others can observe the process of learning.
5	I feel that they can showcase and clarify what is going on in the classroom. They can help to spotlight some of the child's experiences. It lets others know what is going on in the classroom or school.

Appendix J

Responses to Post-Study Questionnaire

Responses to Post-Study Questionnaire

Question 1: As a parent, do you believe that documentation panels enhance your own or your child's experience at our school? Why or why not?	
Participant	**Response**
1	The panels do enhance my experience as a parent at this school. They give me a better understanding of the activities that take place in class – the "hows" and the "whys." The underlying objectives of some of the activities are not always clear to me and this is where the panels come in handy. They're also useful in that they give me a whole picture of what went on. I don't always view a given activity from start to finish (only bits and pieces) so the panels kind of tie everything together. I don't know if the panels have enhanced my child's experience at school and on occasion has called me over to look at some pictures with him (i.e., the one of all the kids sitting on the fire truck).
2	Yes, I definitely believe they enhance my experience here. I have not yet taken the time to read and discuss the panels with my children but I hope to do so because I think they would enjoy reviewing their work and take great satisfaction in the fact that their efforts have been so beautifully recorded.
3	Definitely, the panels enhanced my/our experience at school. It made me more aware of what my child and other children are interested in, their experiences, their likes, what captivates them, etc. I listen more to what my child says and try to answer his questions – in a way that is appropriate and enriching to him. The little theoretical notes about early childhood development, comments the educators give in the panel made me more aware of children and their feelings, thoughts and expressions. From reading the panels, I realized how significant the apparently insignificant was/is.
4	I believe that panels are a wonderful way to depict the children's learning at school. Most often, parents have to rely on verbal accounts of the children's experiences and participation. When the children are in "formal" school, they generally only have written documentation (i.e., report cards) and few if any verbal accounts. Visual documentation make experiences seem more tangible. Parents have use of yet another way of learning about their children's learning. Which parent is not thrilled to see their children in action. I think it may even be a way to further enhance and develop communication between home and school, making parents less leery about what is going on at school and making teachers better able to explain what they are doing.
5	Yes, I believe that the documentation has enhanced my experience at school. It lets me see some of the activities that happened when I wasn't around. It also focuses my attention on things that I wouldn't normally notice. I think that it could enhance my son's experiences also but it's a little hard to get him to sit down and focus ion it for a long time. I would like to see his reactions if he saw the photos in a year from now.
Question 2: Has reading the panels affected your conversations and interactions with your child at home?	
1	I'm not sure that they have but I see how they could. I often ask my child "What did you do in class today?" and he replies "Not much" or "I don't

	remember." Instead I could say, "I saw such and such in a panel that you made pizza, that you went for a walk, etc." "What kind of pizza did you make?" "What did you see on your walk?" The panels could enable me to ask more specific questions to my child and I would probably get more specific answers. A question like "What did you do in class today?" is probably too overwhelming for a young child. He's done at least a 100 things probably and can't possibly list them all!
2	Yes, observing how the teachers interact with students (from my spot in the observation room) and reading the panels has taught me a great deal and I do try to emulate what I see done here at Concordia. For example, if my son says, "I have a great idea, let's …," I take this more seriously and try to facilitate making the idea a reality as soon as possible. Before Concordia, I would put off or dismiss some ideas. I thought they wouldn't work, would be too messy, too noisy, etc. Now I know that it's not the product so much as the process that counts. So the optimism, curiosity, motivation are very precious to me and I try to keep that in mind now. Some questions I have learned here are "Oh, how would you do that?" and "How would you begin?" and "What do you think might happen?"
3	Yes, I listen more to my children and I'm reading more books and articles on parenting. This has surely affected my conversations and interactions (for the better) with my kids at home. I am beginning to see that there are effective ways of handling difficult situations which occur at home. My husband has also shown interest in the books I bring home and is trying to understand and implement effective ways of handling the kids and situations affecting the children.
4	Yes it has. Because I have been able to see some of the learning experiences I now have a visual arsenal which naturally brings forth questions about my child's interests and participation in school.
5	Yes, we often try to reflect and build on some of the activities that go on in school. The photos help us remember some of the activities and experiences that have happened at school. The panels also remind me of things that I have forgotten about.
Question 3: Do you believe that documentation panels have a place in elementary schools? Why or why not?	
1	I believe documentation panels do have a place in elementary schools for the reasons outlined above: a better understanding and overall view for parents of what's going on at school and better communication between parent and child about what's going on at school.
2	Yes, they have a place. They would help parents appreciate their children's work. They would help parents to make more connections between home and school. They provide positive examples of listening to, responding to, and appreciating children and how they perceive the world.
3	The documentation panels could be used in elementary schools but I think that due to the number of kids attending each grade I don't know if the teachers have time for that. It is not practical because parents don't come to the school that often – only perhaps for parent/teacher meetings.

4	Very much so! Like with everything, however, it depends on the teacher in question. Some may find it to be too much work while others will embrace the idea; it may actually facilitate their ability to explain the how and what of their teaching as well as the outcome (i.e., the children's learning).
5	I think that the documentation could have a place in any school in any shape or form. They can help us remember and reflect upon some of the experiences the students have in school. I think that they can also be used as a point of discussion.
Question 4: Which of the panels was the most thought provoking for you? Why?	
1	I think the "shadows" panel was the most thought provoking for me. It left me with a warm fuzzy feeling. It's amazing how much can be learned from a walk in the warm, spring sunshine. As adults, it's just something that we take for granted but children capture all of the magic: the shadows, the reflections, chocolate! And the enjoyment of each other's company.
2	The planes-bumping-into-fat-buildings panel was a shock because I had tried to minimize my son's exposure to this event and the media coverage. Apparently, the radio was his source. I think the topic was handled perfectly by Cathy. Very thought provoking was the teachers' observation that children make connections between past and present experiences – sometimes in ways that I might miss. For example, clay in a workshop in a church led to making clay churches while at school.
3	Almost all the panels were thought provoking to me. Some of the comments by the children are so endearing and their experiences so moving. I liked the "Shadows in the Sun" a lot because just a walk around the block created so much interest and thought provoking experiences for the children.
4	There was not really one that stands out more than another. I enjoyed them all. I obviously enjoyed seeing my own son depicted in a variety of panels.
5	I thought the photo with the reflection of Billy's face in the mirror was very interesting. I thought that it was a great photo. From what was written next to the photo, I think Billy thought it was also interesting. I thought all the photos in this series were pretty neat.

Appendix K

Responses to Question 1 on Weekly Panel Questionnaires

Responses to Question 1 on Weekly Panel Questionnaires

Question: What does the Panel tell you about the children's experience in the class?				
	Response			
Participant	The Language of Clay	Construction: The Sky's the Limit	Let's Make a Pizza	Shadows in the Sun
1	The children related the activity to what was going on in their lives*.	They all approached it differently✧. They all learned something in the process. Rob and Jack worked on the concept of measuring objects in addition to how to build a skyscraper. Jon and Jack added a more artistic touch to their skyscrapers. Jon and Rob also went the scientific route with their measurements.	The whole process of making pizza was a very enjoyable one for all the children. It was an activity that allowed them to be creative in their own individual ways, i.e., choice of toppings, how to put it together, etc. They learned that heat causes certain foods to melt⌑. They also learned about videotaping.	The panel tells me that the children's experience is not limited to "in" class only⌑. A lot can be learned outside the classroom as well.✧
2	Class experiences draw on home experiences and on family outings*. Everything counts and everything is interconnected ✧.	It tells me that children make connections✧: the skyscrapers outside, the construction site, and building activities in school are all connected. Their actions and words are purposeful – holding wood up to your eyes is a necessary exploration of wood's properties⌑.	The children's ideas and enthusiasm drove this activity. The teachers were very responsive to the children's cues✧.	It tells me that simply leaving the classroom caused an explosion of new ideas and connections with previous learning and experience.* It illustrates how important the children are to each other – how much they can learn from one another✧⌖.
3	The children have their own ideas, ways of expressing	The wooden blocks generated a lot of interest in the children. The	A wonderful learning experience, one that will be repeated throughout	The children with their experience of working with

Question: What does the Panel tell you about the children's experience in the class?				
	Response			
Participant	The Language of Clay	Construction: The Sky's the Limit	Let's Make a Pizza	Shadows in the Sun
	their ideas, their previous experiences influenced the way they played.*	pictures of the construction site created an interest in skyscrapers✧ and they used the wooden blocks to construct tall structures. ⌑	their lives.*	the overhead projector* were able to relate that experience with the shadows they saw outside. ⌑
4	Children's ideas and past experiences* are respected; they are guided with open-ended questioning and never told how to do it.✧	This panel is a pure example of how the outside world has been brought inside the classroom to further enhance the children's learning⌑. It truly is a meaningful experience as the month of September was most certainly a time of buildings*.	It suggests that from one initial experience comes the opportunity for many other potential learning experiences (i.e, from a story to making pizza to film).*	It tells me that a simple activity can lead to interesting investigations by the children. They explored their shadows with each other ⌖and problem-solved to figure out whose was whose✧.
5	The children used their imagination to create with the clay.✧ They modeled real things in their lives and some revisited past experiences.*	Their experience seems to be rich and varied. They seem to be able to experiment with many different objects and materials⌑. The different activities seem to be connected (e.g., clay, building churches, skyscrapers etc.)✧	The children really have input into the emergent curriculum model that the school uses. They have input into what goes on in the class and I think they really enjoy it. The curriculum seems to follow the wants of the group and also the individual.✧	Some of their experiences were outside the class⌑. They seem to enjoy themselves. Even the simplest thing, like a shadow can be seen as very interesting✧.

* relates to past experiences
⌑ relates to value of hand on learning experiences
⌖ relates to role of peer interaction
✧ relates to the way children learn

Appendix L

Responses to Question 3 on the Weekly Questionnaire

Responses to Question 3 on the Weekly Questionnaires

Question: What did you learn about your child or other children from the panel?				
	Response			
Participant	**The Language of Clay**	**Construction: The Sky's the Limit**	**Let's Make a Pizza**	**Shadows in the Sun**
1	Rob's comment about air being invisible and we can be sucked up into someone's nose if we were invisible indicates to me that Rob is often one step ahead. He'll take a concept or idea and apply it in another area of his world. I also learned that children obviously enjoy working together.	Jon showed a lot of creativity with his use of popsicle sticks. It was interesting that he studied the properties of wood, i.e., you can't see through it. Jack's patience in waiting for the glue to dry on each piece of wood was remarkable. His structure was quite high. Rob continued to pursue the math/science angle of things with his interest in measuring the structure. He awakened Jon's curiosity about measuring things.	I learned that Rob is very interested in technology. It's quite funny that he was more interested in videotaping than in making pizza. Billy's conclusion about melting shows that he too likes to take things one step further. My child is rather creative with his choice of "chocolate" as a pizza topping.	The methods the children used to determine which shadow belonged to whom was interesting. They thought about it, i.e., Jon jumped, Sam stood sideways, Kit used her hands, Billy said his shadow was big, etc. Each had a unique way of solving the problem. Kit showed Billy how to make shadows with her hands. She took on the role of helper.

Question: What did you learn about your child or other children from the panel?				
	Response			
Participant	**The Language of Clay**	**Construction: The Sky's the Limit**	**Let's Make a Pizza**	**Shadows in the Sun**
2	Well I learned that they have good memories and make connections in the present with many things in the past so it's good to help them, encourage them to get out and about and experience as much as possible. I learned that the children teacher each other very well.	I learned how friendly and easy-going Jack is – to allow another child to help him paint the wooden structure that he so patiently built. I learned that children can learn a lot from each other (not just social skills, but actual content, work habits, concepts to explore).	Children are careful observers – gathering information all the time and working hard to make connection. I learned that my child is capable of using a video camera; he has not been allowed to use ours at home. He had mentioned more than once that he wanted to make movies with his brother and me when he grows up. Now I see that we shouldn't put this off any longer.	I learned that Billy is very responsive to good questions. He has something to say, to share but it's often not succinct and I must wait patiently – give him the time he needs.
3	Billy and Rob were allowed to work on the clay with their own imaginations. They started by building a church (using hands and their feet) and realized that the clay could be manipulated in a lot of ways. Jon made the connection of clay with cement	The kids made a connection between skyscrapers and building similar tall pieces with the wooden blocks was fascinating. Gluing the pieces of wood, painting them, trying to see through the glued pieces, measuring	The children enjoyed making the pizza and using all the different toppings. They had many good ideas for the toppings. They also liked the video camera and were interested in	That my child was able to recognize his shadow and the angle of the shadow being related to the way he posed.

Question: What did you learn about your child or other children from the panel?				
	Response			
Participant	**The Language of Clay**	**Construction: The Sky's the Limit**	**Let's Make a Pizza**	**Shadows in the Sun**
	and pizza dough. Sam (my child) realized that clay was sticky and that surprised him as this was his first experience of stepping on clay.	them were all ideas that the kids came up with. The teachers let them discover many things by letting them experiment by themselves. My kid was able to glue them together and make a skyscraper – he was able to start and complete the task. The children's interests were kindled and they came to conclusions by working together in different ways.	how it worked. It's interesting that making pizza can lead to making movies.	
4	I didn't know that my child had played with clay before as he never mentioned it at home. It has sparked me to get some clay for him to work with. I also found it interesting to see how interested Billy and rob were in the clay. I naturally assumed their church theme was related to the fact that their mom teaches Sunday school. Their participation in a clay workshop adds another dimension.	I liked the photo depicting Jack (my child) and Rob working together on painting the skyscraper. It reinforces for me how the children are encouraged to interact, socialize, and work together, how projects are encouraged.	The panel reminded me that my child was sick that week and did not participate in the activity. I did enjoy the photos of Rob and his captivation with technology.	I learned that the children enjoy each other and that simply going for a walk together can lead to wonderful learning experiences and foster positive peer relationships.

Question: What did you learn about your child or other children from the panel?				
Response				
Participant	**The Language of Clay**	**Construction: The Sky's the Limit**	**Let's Make a Pizza**	**Shadows in the Sun**
5	The children seemed to be able to mould the clay into several different objects. The children were also able to combine the clay with other objects and materials to create new objects. They all seemed to be able to shape the clay into objects for the most part.	I thought it was interesting how they were able to go from building simple flat structure to more complex vertical structures and painting them. I liked to see my son test to see if he could see between the two pieces of wood.	I think they all really enjoy hands-on activities. I liked the fact that the teachers were okay with the use of the video camera (technology). The children really seem to know what they like when it comes to pizza toppings and they jumped right into the activity feet first. I didn't even see them tasting small samples before they made their pizza. They seemed to work on making the pizzas, cooking them and then eating.	I like that they were tying to figure out exactly whose shadow belonged to who. I like how they tried to make a logical connection. I thought that it was very creative to make the shadows part of the learning experience.