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# Getting Started with Documentation, Part I: Making a Plan to Document

## Purpose of the Tool

Documentation has long been an area of interest at Project Zero. The book *Visible Learners* explores this concept in depth, while also providing many useful tools for educators.<sup>1</sup> From the *Visible Learners* perspective, documentation is the practice of intentionally observing, recording, and sharing moments of learning and teaching through a variety of media that may include photographs, typed or handwritten notes, audio or video recordings, or examples of student work.

### BUILDING INQUIRY SKILLS

Deciding what to document in one's classroom could be a daunting task. In order to be most prepared to engage in the process of documentation, it is helpful to have a guiding question(s) to focus one's looking. The purpose of this tool is to help you develop just such a guiding question(s) so that you may be most intentional when collecting documentation.

## Suggested Time Commitment



You will probably need at least an hour to engage in this activity, and you will likely return to this activity throughout your innovation process.

## When & How

Engaging in the process of documentation may be useful at any stage of your innovation project work. For example, you may engage in the documentation process just as you are beginning to develop an inquiry focus to gain a better understanding of a particular teaching and learning environment, as you are experimenting with a school-based innovation to gain a sense of how it is going and how it may be improved, or after you have implemented an innovation to further understand the impact of your innovation and to support student learning. To begin making a plan to document, set aside time with your study group members to discuss what you would like to learn by engaging in the process of documentation.

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<sup>1</sup> To learn more about documentation from a *Visible Learners*' perspective, please see Krechevsky, M., Mardell, B., Rivard, M., & Wilson, D. (2013). *Visible learners: Promoting Reggio-inspired approaches in all schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

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## Steps

1. As a group, consider what it is you want to learn from engaging in the process of documentation, and then brainstorm some questions that you could explore in your classrooms/schools. For example, you could ask a **general question** about learning and teaching:

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- While observing students or teachers working together in a group, you might ask: *What do group members do to support each other's learning? What do you see or hear?* For example: What do they say? How do they interact? What strategies do they use to support each other?
  - While looking at a few pieces of student work—either finished products, or works in progress—you might ask: *What opportunities are given to students to put their own spin on the work, and how do they use those opportunities to make their work different from the work of other students?* For example: How does the work of one student look visually different from that of another? Are there differences in how students approached the task that was given to them?

You could also ask a **more specific question** about learning and teaching, for example:

- What do young students do when they are learning to use scissors or glue sticks for the first time? What do you see or hear?
- What do middle school students say when they are discussing a particular historical event or topic in social studies class? What words, questions, or phrases do they use?
- What do students say and do to explain the steps they used to solve a math problem? What do you see or hear?

2. As a group, decide if you are all going to focus on the same question to guide your documentation, or if each person is going to choose their own question. Decide what the question(s) will be.
3. Decide what kind of documentation each of you are going to collect. Remember that documentation can take many forms (e.g., photographs, written notes, video, examples of student work, etc.). Be specific about what you will try to capture to answer your question.
4. Go out and document! Act on your documentation plan based on your guiding question. Bring the documentation you collect to your next study group session where you may use the tool Getting Started with Documentation, Part II: Discussing Documentation.