DOCUMENTATION AND DISPLAY: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

It can sometimes be hard to distinguish documentation from display. One thing you can do is to look back at the five features of documentation:

- Does the “display/documentation” involve a question about learning?
- Is it shared back with the learners?
- Does it involve more than one medium?
- Does it entail multiple perspectives, and include adult analysis or reflections?
- Does it help inform future learning experiences as well as revisit past learning?

You could also say that most documentation shows evidence of the learning process as well as product, and isn't just a record of what happened, but an analysis or interpretation of the learning that took place. The handout entitled Documentation: When Does It Make Learning Visible? may be helpful as well.

Finally, the following quotes may be informative. They are from a chapter by George Forman and Brenda Fyfe entitled "Negotiated Learning through Design, Documentation, and Discourse" in the Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach--Advanced Reflections (pp.245-246).

- "The passage from display to documentation travels the path from informing to educating and thereby changes the teacher's perspective from observing children to studying children..."

- "When applied to negotiated learning, displays should be converted to documentation by adding interpretation and explanation to the graphics. A set of photographs pasted to poster board showing a trip to the farm is a display. A set of photographs captioned with the children's words would still be a display. The panel needs commentary to qualify as documentation..."

- "Documentation invites inquiry about the children's thinking and invites predictions about effective teaching...Display invites pleasure and satisfaction, but is not deliberately designed to provoke hypotheses. Documentation is a research report used to enhance discourse rather than a record of a past event."

- "Documentation, as we mean it here, is more focused on children than on a child. Even when a child is featured in documentation, the intent is to have the viewer treat this child as a representative child..."

- "Documentation tries to raise questions about children's thinking and teaching strategies rather than to mark the progress of all individual children..."