

Book Review

The writing teacher's guide to pedagogical documentation: Rethinking how we assess learners and learning by Angela Stockman

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Standardized testing has been increasingly criticized as a form of student evaluation due to its lack of focus on student individuality. In response, calls for authentic student assessment have encouraged educators, like Angela Stockman, to challenge traditional methods of student evaluation in favor of holistic approaches. Her book, *The Writing Teacher's Guide to Pedagogical Documentation: Rethinking How We Assess Learners and Learning*, extends those critiques; her intervention suggests pedagogical documentation of learning processes as a nuanced replacement for evaluating students. Stockman's 3-part book is a comprehensive framework for instructors looking to adopt a fresh perspective on student evaluation, offering a welcome change from traditional methods of assessment and instead emphasizing personal growth and student-centered learning.

Stockman opens with a 12-page introduction that details the author's background and interests, including the many educational hats she has worn over the years; she has taught English across a variety of grade levels, designed curricula and instruction, and worked as a regional literature specialist, all of which establish her credibility as a documentarian. Stockman addresses her readers directly, giving them agency to use the text as a guidebook. She explores the meaning of pedagogical documentation, explaining it as "the practice of making learning visible" through the collection, interpretation, and discussion of multimodal media. The first part of the book surveys

the benefits, best practices, and limitations of documentation, underscoring that pedagogical documentation supports reflection, interaction, and connection with students.

Part II of the book pivots Stockman's focus from theoretical approaches to practical applications of documentation in a classroom, centered around her metaphor of a "documentation kaleidoscope." The framework of the kaleidoscope reminds instructors that students are individuals with different contexts and backgrounds, each represented by a new combination in the kaleidoscope. Stockman emphasizes the agility needed to become a documentarian throughout this chapter; willingness to adapt to unprecedented findings and patterns supports insightful documentation. At the end of each chapter, Stockman includes helpful TLDR (Too Long, Didn't Read) summaries, skillfully reinforcing the navigability of the text and allowing the readers to avoid long commentary if they so desire. Part III, in contrast, compiles extensive resources for instructors in the form of detailed assessments and worksheets that function as a jumping-off point for instructors undertaking their own documentation projects.


A crucial facet of pedagogical documentation is undoubtedly the length of time it takes compared to standard methods of analysis. Stockman's book is perhaps limited in its exploration of documentation's interaction with time. Throughout the book, Stockman emphasizes that documentation is a "journey" for the students and learners (33), but focuses on the methods of documentation rather than a particular timeline. Previous scholarship suggests that documentation is "slow knowledge" that displays a stark contrast to the bustling speed of modern technology and the desire to immediately learn, teach, and retain (Carlsen & Clark, 2022). In this sense, pedagogical documentarians are expected to create intentional, yet natural, learning environments that can sustain deep, long-term learning over a long period of time in order to most benefit the learners (Carlsen & Clark, 2022). Stockman's book avoids delving into the particulars of student and documentarian pace, but does underscore the value of being present and immersed (52) when documenting student interactions and learning.


While Stockman undoubtedly packs her book with a multitude of details and relevant information, the organization of the sections occasionally feels repetitive in order to maintain the integrity of each part. For example, she explains deductive versus inductive strategies in chapter three, circles back during the introduction to section two, recommends which to use in chapter 6, and reminds the reader of her suggestions again in section 3. While Stockman may have felt this method necessary to help readers who jump from section to section, it felt somewhat repetitive and scattered when reading her book cover to cover. Moreover, Stockman inserted small spotlights of relevant experts and contacts that she had collaborated with throughout her book. These individuals undoubtedly contributed to her journey as a documentarian herself; however, the asides risked feeling out of place at times, detracting from her larger narrative.

With these potential drawbacks in mind, Stockman's introduction is incredibly useful in providing a roadmap for the book lying ahead and giving the reader leave to take what they need. The TLDR sections peppered throughout the pages allow readers to do just so, skipping chapters irrelevant to their needs without missing important information. Additionally, the entire third section was reserved for helpful resources including questions to inspire future documentarians, reminders as to the benefits of an inductive versus deductive approach, tips for seeking diverse perspectives, and much more. These tools are invaluable to educators looking for a translation between theoretical approach and practical application. Stockman's overall integration of personal narrative is a meaningful contribution to the book in strengthening the ethos and inspiration of the readers. Her book contains an abundance of resources that an aspiring documentarian can use practically as they navigate bringing these ways of thinking into the classroom; therefore, she makes this way of teaching attainable, rather than passively suggesting others adopt her methods.

Stockman's book provides a concise overview of pedagogical documentation. She explains the significance and effectiveness of using documentation in a classroom setting as opposed to standardized grading or testing. In parts II and III, Stockman illustrates how audience members may undertake their own documentation journeys by detailing crucial outlooks. The key points and themes of the book are logical and reflect inclusive perspectives on truly improving learning for all students. Stockman's ideas lean into the intuitiveness of teaching rather than the standardization of it, which is crucial for student success and growth. Readers come away from this book with a renewed passion for celebrating their students' learning journeys by focusing on student individuality and personal and academic growth - an innovative approach that supplements existing methodology of student assessment.

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