

# learning stories

Learning stories are a useful and innovative way to describe the progress of a child's learning ... through these stories carers can focus on achievement and plan for further learning based on individual interests and strengths. More widely used in long day care settings, learning stories are finding a place in family day care. Kate Ryan explains...



Learning Stories are a way of documenting the different ways that children learn. These stories not only capture what is happening in a simple and effective way, but they can be the beginning point for further planning to extend a child's interests and strengths. This technique grew out of the New Zealand *Te Whariki Early Years Curriculum Project* and the work of Dr. Margaret Carr.

Quite simply, a learning story uses a story-telling format rather than a more traditional 'observation' report to describe children's learning. The child becomes the subject of the story and his learning journey is captured through a description of what he's doing, as well as what he may be feeling. The stories focus on what children can do as opposed

to what they can't, and in this way they provide insights into children's strengths, interests and learning dispositions.

The following example from Hatterly & Sands (2002) takes place in a childcare centre and more clearly describes the concept of a learning story.

### Describing the learning

The little rug is no longer necessary as Wiremu is off exploring the world. His roly-poly antics are leading him in a new direction! He pulls himself into headstand positions (gymnastic potential here) then flops down and looks up with those dramatic dark eyes as if to say, 'Well what do you think of that?' And while on the move he's checking the environment out

with lots of 'observational pauses'. Big world here I come!

### Review of the learning

We're seeing progress here. Each day there is a little more confidence and strength in Wiremu's movements and such determination and persistence.

### What next

We could position interesting objects at a little distance, however Wiremu has his own personal agenda. He's self-motivated to be 'on the move'. Give him lots of space and opportunity to use those developing muscles. He loves the verbal stimulation, so lots of talking with him – this is so very pleasurable anyway, as he gives such wonderful feedback! ▶

## Learning Stories in Family Day Care

Deb Kelly is a fieldworker with family day care based in Clare, South Australia. She had been a carer for five years, and cared for children and young adults in family day care, out of school hours care and Community Choices Post School Options. Many of them had additional needs.

Deb attended a family day care respite meeting where representatives from the Il Nido Childcare Centre spoke to fieldworkers about learning stories, a concept she'd also heard about several years earlier.

From that training, Deb went on to talk to the group of carers she supported about how, together, they might use learning stories with the children in care. The carers were excited because they were already doing something like this, albeit in a fragmented way. Learning stories provided them with a framework in which to work.

Deb can see the learning story concept working for all children, and particularly for those families who have a child with additional needs. Most of these families only hear about what their child cannot do, as opposed to what they can do, or at least attempt.

### References:

<http://www.ruakind.org.nz/newsJune03.htm> [accessed 14 July 2006]

<http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/staff/SueHill/Learningstories.pdf> [accessed 14 July 2006]

Hatterly A. & Sands L. 2002 'So what is different about Learning Stories?' *The First Years: Nga Tau Tuatahi New Zealand Journal of Infant and Toddler Education* Vol 4 (1) pp 8-12.

Learning stories shows a child's progress over time and tend to be a more engaging form of reporting. The stories also provide valuable information which can be used to establish strong links between home and the care environment, and provide parents with an insight into what happens when the child is in care.

There are many benefits that we have found for early childhood programs in implementing learning stories. They encourage parents to look at their child's records more frequently; and parents share their thoughts and feelings with us more than they had previously. Parents are now writing their own learning stories providing us with an insight into children's learning at home. Staff receive positive feedback from children and families, providing motivation to continue to improve their stories.

Kate Ryan is Assistant Director/  
Child Educator with the Il Nido  
Childcare Centre in South Australia.  
She also works with the Gowrie  
Training Centre. 🌟