Welcome to CUR134

This course will introduce participants to Learning Stories, a powerful assessment tool in early childhood education. When fully embraced by educators, directors, and families, Learning Stories are a transformative approach to assessment. They deepen connections between teachers, families, children, and the broader community. Participants will discover the essential components of Learning Stories and how to develop each component.

Objectives:

By taking notes on the handout and successfully answering assessment questions, participants will meet the following objectives as a result of taking this course:

- Define terminology related to child assessment
- Recognize the benefits of using Learning Stories in early learning environments
- Identify the steps in the process of writing Learning Stories
- Practice developing a Learning Story
- Recall how Learning Stories can be used to plan learning experiences and connect with children and families

References:


Additional Resources:

Course Notes:

Use the section below to record important information from the course.

What are Learning Stories?

Margaret Carr and Wendy Lee from New Zealand launched Learning Stories in their book Learning Stories: Constructing Learner Identities in Early Education. The Learning Story practice was a response to:

A Learning Story is a record of what a caregiver has observed about a child or group of children. Typically, a Learning Story has 3 parts, which we will cover in more depth later:

1.
2.
3.

Learning Stories can use:

**Dispositions** are described as:

Examples:

The retelling of an event becomes a Learning Story when:
Learning Stories create an understanding:

**The Assessment Cycle**

**Benefits for Teachers**

Learning Stories help teachers connect:

Keep the following key features of Learning Stories in mind as you progress through the course.

Learning Stories:

- Help children understand themselves as learners.
- Strengthen teacher observation and communication skills.
- Are unique and personalized.
- Capture complex and unexpected learning.
- Become keepsakes for families and children.
- Provide a valuable source of information about children for teachers in future years.

**How Learning Stories Impact Child Development**

Learning Stories are written in a:
They appeal to families because:

An article from Educa.com entitled "The Magic of Learning Stories" offers 8 ways in which Learning Stories positively impact children’s learning.

Learning Stories:

1. Provide children the opportunity to develop a sense of identity.
2. Encourage family engagement, interpretation, and contribution.
4. Intensify teacher observation skills.
5. Help children feel they are making a contribution.
6. Permit teachers to make communicating about learning personal.
7. Address the whole child as a learner.
8. Integrate teaching, learning, and assessment.

Dual Language Learners and Culturally Responsive Teaching

One additional benefit outlined by early childhood education expert Judy Peck is that Learning Stories help dual language learners feel:

Learning Stories as Assessment

Learning Stories can be a beneficial form of assessment in the early childhood environment. They are considered *informal* and *formative assessments*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informal Assessments...</th>
<th>Formative Assessments...</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use observations and interactions to collect information about children’s learning.</td>
<td>Occur throughout the learning process, not at the end of a unit (summative assessments).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Take place in a regular classroom environment, during normal classroom activities.</td>
<td>Allow teachers to identify gaps in knowledge during the learning process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are unique to each child.</td>
<td>Use feedback to determine needs and next steps.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are non-standardized.</td>
<td>Involve children in reflection and goal setting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do not result in a grade or score.</td>
<td>Are not necessarily scored or graded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are not used to compare students to each other.</td>
<td>Give teachers the opportunity to adjust to improve learning before the end of the unit.</td>
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According to Merriam-Webster, authentic assessment is:

"A set of methods or techniques for assessing the academic achievement of a student that includes activities requiring the application of acquired knowledge and skills to real-world situations and that is often seen as an alternative to standardized testing."

Authentic assessment is the process of:

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Reading Learning Stories out loud to children helps them:

Writing Learning Stories

The information that follows is a summary of how the Learning Story writing process works.

Start with an observation, event, activity, or moment.

Create a story (typically written to the child).

Describe the learning.

Respond to the learning.

Link learning to early learning standards, curriculum planning, and individualized supports.
Key Features of Learning Stories

Facts to keep in mind:

- Learning Stories are usually focused on:

- The story is always:

- Because the stories are written to the children:

- A Learning Story may be:

- A collection of Learning Stories is called:

- Teachers become:

Part One: The Story

The beginning of each Learning Story is:

Early childhood consultant, Judi Pack, proposes looking for these specific elements when documenting a Learning Story:

- Child-initiated play:

- Engagement:

- Intentionality:

- Relationships:

- Learning disposition:
Part Two: What Learning is Happening Here?

The clear identification of learning is:

Why Describe the Learning?

Identifying the learning is one of the most challenging aspects of writing Learning Stories.

Sometimes, it may be challenging to:

What Does this Part of a Story Accomplish?

When teachers clearly illustrate the learning that happens, it can:

- Demonstrate strategies used to support the learning.
- Describe the learning process for the child.
- Include aspects of the program’s philosophy.
- Refer to the child’s cultural context.
- Show that they know the child well.
- Help teachers make connections to learning standards.

Capture and Extend Complex Learning

Writing Learning Stories begins with the knowledge that children learn at:

Focus on Strengths

When describing the learning that is happening, it is important that teachers identify the child’s:
Strength-Based Language (attached at the end of the handout)

Part Three: Opportunities and Possibilities. What’s Next?

The final part of each Learning Story describes what caregivers can do to:

Reflection

This section of a Learning Story offers teachers a chance to:

Providing Feedback and Making Adjustments

Again, formative assessment refers to the idea of using assessment to:

Practice Preparation: Questions to Consider

Step One: The Story

Questions to think about:

- How does this differ from other forms of observation documentation you have used in the past?
- What is the impact of addressing Daniel directly in the story?
- How can including children’s voices help strengthen relationships with children and families?
- What did this teacher do to clarify their engagement with these children?
- What materials or experiences seem to interest the child the most?
- How could you use this section to help children and families understand how learning happens?
- What learning might you choose to emphasize in the next section of this Learning Story?

Step Two: What Learning is Happening Here?

Questions to think about:

- Does this section of the Learning Story highlight important learning that is occurring?
Part Three: Opportunities and Possibilities. What’s Next?

Questions to think about:

- Does this section provide the family with a clear picture of what their child is learning?
- Does it offer realistic options for what’s next?
- What materials could be introduced to promote the strengthening of Daniel’s skills?
- What activities can you think of that could extend Daniel’s learning?
- How would you use this section to encourage cooperative activities at home?
- How might asking questions help create collaboration between a family and a teacher?

Reminders for Writing Learning Stories

- Write in a positive tone.
- Use a strong title to grab attention.
- Make it personal.
- Photos can help tell a story.
- Find your voice.
- Stories do not have to be perfect.
- Ask families questions.
- Share stories immediately!
Questions to Think About in Every Story

Here are some good questions to ask when writing a Learning Story:

- Is the child showing a specific pattern of thinking, disposition, or intelligence?
- How does the child’s learning align with the program’s philosophy, and what is deemed important in the learning environment?
- How can the story reflect the child’s cultural background?
- How can the story reference or include the home environment?

Practice Writing a Learning Story

It is now time for you to practice writing your very own Learning Story. The first step is to watch the video, which you can access by clicking the link here to open the video in a separate window.

As you watch, imagine that you are a teacher in the learning environment who is making the observations. Make notes of what you observe as you watch.

Reflection

The Story: Take a minute and write the beginning of your Learning Story. This should be an account of your observations from the video.

Reflection

What Learning is Happening Here?: Continue with the process of writing a Learning Story by documentating some of the skills you noticed Emma using.
Reflection
What's Next?: Continue with the process of writing a Learning Story by sharing what you hope to see Emma do in the future. You can also engage with the child’s family here.

If you would like to practice writing learning stories on your own, here are a few videos you could use:

- A visit to the art gallery
- Learning about negotiation in play
- Sandpit play
- Practicing skills

Making Learning Stories Your Own

While Learning Stories have distinct elements, each one will be_____________________. The main unique characteristic is:

Teachers have options when composing Learning Stories for children and families.

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Including Learning Standards and Program Philosophy Notes:
Alternative Approaches to Writing Learning Stories

An alternative approach from "Learning Stories: Observation, Reflection, and Narrative in Early Childhood Education"

1. Title
2. Observation
3. What Does it Mean? (or What Learning Do I See Happening?)
4. Opportunities and Possibilities (or How Can We Support You in Your Learning?)
5. Questions to the Family
6. Observed Milestones or Learning Dispositions

The video from Massey University offers another approach to writing a learning story.

1. Start with the context or setting. Where is all this action going on?
2. What have you noticed leading up to this learning?
3. Who is involved? Name them all using their names.
4. What happened here? What was going on?
5. What deliberate teaching was involved? The way the environment/resources are set up as well as interactions with people, places, and things.
6. How did it all work out, and what was everyone’s contribution? What were some of the children’s comments, and what was your response to the children if you were involved?
7. What learning and involvement were you particularly impressed about? State them in your own words.
8. Suggest 1 or 2 opportunities that may further support the learning.

The great thing about Learning Stories is the:

Utilizing Learning Stories

Reading Learning Stories to Children

Teachers should share Learning Stories with children:

Talking to children about their learning:

Occasionally, a teacher may ask the child if it is okay to read the story to the____________________.
Planning Based on Learning Stories

By using Learning Stories, teachers will gain insight into children’s:

Teachers can make decisions about:

Learning stories can also provide insight into how teachers could arrange

Connecting with Families

Because Learning Stories provide context by describing how the child’s experiences are connected, including connections to home:

Learning Stories make learning visible, making it easier for families to contribute to their child’s education.

Beyond that crucial role, Learning Stories also:

Acknowledging Family Aspirations
Questions for Families to Answer

Here are 3 open-ended questions that will help families feel valued:

1. What is important that we should know about your child?
2. What can we do to ensure your children’s success in our program?
3. How can we respect your family’s culture and language in our communication with you?

Other examples:

Addressing Critiques of Learning Stories

Learning Stories Include Subjective Statements

Lack of Guidance on the Frequency of Using Learning Stories

Learning Stories Do Not Show Changes in Children’s Learning Over Time

Learning Story Resource

One digital tool that could make the Learning Story writing process easier is Educa, which is a digital platform that brings Learning Stories to the cloud. Educa’s software allows teachers and families to create, write, read, and share stories from any device.

The content for this course was developed by the team at Educa. For more information, visit their website at www.geteduca.com.
CUR134: An Introduction to Learning Stories
Strength-Based Language

The list below is far from exhaustive but is a good starting point for a Learning Story:

**Character Strengths**

- Caring
- Cooperative
- Curious
- Eager
- Hardworking
- Helpful
- Independent
- Kind
- Loyal
- Resilient

**Social Strengths**

- Accepts differences in others.
- Accepts personal responsibility for actions (good and bad).
- Asks for help when needed.
- Can be redirected away from a negative situation to a positive one.
- Is cooperative with others.
- Has a good sense of humor.
- Has ways of coping when frustrated (like not hitting).
- Is a good listener.
- Likes to help and is sensitive to the needs of others.
- Puts effort into making friends and keeping them.
- Shares, takes turns, and can compromise.

**Language and Literacy Strengths**

- Can answer who, what, when, where, why, and how questions in conversation (or about a story).
- Likes learning the words in songs.
- Likes listening to stories.
- Likes talking to people.
- Uses lots of words and likes learning new words.
- Uses words to express needs, wants, and ideas.
- Can make predictions based on what has happened so far in a story.
- Can rhyme and do other tasks that involve understanding the sound structure of words.
- Enjoys being read to.
- Makes connections between stories and personal experiences.
Math and Logic Strengths

- Asks for help.
- Can ignore distractions and stay focused on tasks.
- Can keep track of time and obligations.
- Can learn from mistakes and solve problems.
- Can pause to think through decisions or choices.
- Can recognize and try to control "big feelings."
- Can work or play independently.
- Follows the rules and routines well.
- Has a growth mindset and believes skills can improve with effort.
- Has strong number sense, like being able to quickly compare groups of items and know which is larger and which is smaller.
- Is a self-starter.
- Sees and understands patterns in nature and in numbers.
- Works well/gets along well in groups.
- Works well/gets along well one-on-one.

Other Strengths and Talents

- Can dance, act, or sing.
- Can swim or play sports.
- Enjoys entertaining people.
- Is creative.
- Is gentle with animals.
- Likes drawing and doodling.
- Likes working on projects with others.