



Learning Stories

Constructing
Learner Identities
in Early Education

Margaret Carr
and
Wendy Lee



Learning Stories

Education at SAGE

SAGE is a leading international publisher of journals, books, and electronic media for academic, educational, and professional markets.

Our education publishing includes:

- accessible and comprehensive texts for aspiring education professionals and practitioners looking to further their careers through continuing professional development
- inspirational advice and guidance for the classroom
- authoritative state of the art reference from the leading authors in the field

Find out more at: www.sagepub.co.uk/education



Learning Stories

Constructing
Learner Identities
in Early Education

Margaret Carr
and
Wendy Lee



Los Angeles | London | New Delhi
Singapore | Washington DC

© Margaret Carr and Wendy Lee, 2012

First published 2012

Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form, or by any means, only with the prior permission in writing of the publishers, or in the case of reprographic reproduction, in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside those terms should be sent to the publishers.

SAGE Publications Ltd
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP

SAGE Publications Inc.
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
B 1/I 1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area
Mathura Road
New Delhi 110 044

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte Ltd
3 Church Street
#10-04 Samsung Hub
Singapore 049483

Library of Congress Control Number: 2011929638

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-85702-092-5
ISBN 978-0-85702-093-2 (pbk)

Typeset by C&M Digital (P) Ltd, Chennai, India
Printed in India at Replika Press Pvt Ltd
Printed on paper from sustainable resources

To our parents, grandparents and great grandparents, whose lives taught us about courage and resilience and who bequeathed us some good stories.

Contents

<i>List of Learning Stories</i>	viii
<i>List of Tables</i>	ix
<i>About the Authors</i>	x
<i>Preface and Acknowledgements</i>	xi
Chapter 1 Learner identities in early education: an introduction to four themes	1
Chapter 2 Why story?	19
Chapter 3 Agency and dialogue	41
Chapter 4 Making connections across boundaries between places	62
Chapter 5 Recognising and re-cognising learning continuities	86
Chapter 6 Appropriating knowledges and learning dispositions in a range of increasingly complex ways	111
Chapter 7 Reconceptualising assessment	129
<i>References</i>	140
<i>Index</i>	148

List of Learning Stories

1.1	Kamalpreet Enjoys her Portfolio	12
1.2	The Artists Among Us!	14
1.3	Explaining How to Get the Answer	17
2.1	Growth Mindset	22
2.2	Little Miss Scientist	27
2.3	Researcher!	28
2.4	Super Story Writer	31
2.5	George	35
2.6	Home Maker in Action	37
3.1	Cross Country	43
3.2	The Big Big Bigger Fish	47
3.3	My Volcano	50
3.4	Ilaria, Isabella and Katharine's Learning Story	52
3.5	Illustrator, Author and Publisher!	53
3.6	The Genius	56
3.7	"I Can Do It!"	57
3.8	See What I Can Do!	58
3.9	Building a Sticky Bridge	60
4.1	Who Did This?	67
4.2	An Act of Kindness	69
4.3	Writing in Hindi	71
4.4	Looking After Others!	73
4.5	Evie Comes Prepared	77
4.6	Peniamina's Bridge: <i>O le auala laupapa a Peniamina</i>	79
4.7	Te Kohikohi Pūtea	81
4.8	Temple Design	82
5.1	Ruby's Exploration	87
5.2	Anuhe Ringa Rehe!	90
5.3	A Challenge at Kindergarten	93
5.4	Christina's Learning Experience	94
5.5	Kieran the Book Maker	95
5.6	Super Focusing Learning Powers	96
5.7	Budding Photographer	97
5.8	Jackson's Investigations Keep Getting More and More Complex!	101
5.9	Scarlett's Koru, Butterfly and Flower Book	103
5.10	Charleeh-Blu Stories	105
6.1	The Mandir	115

List of Tables

Table 4.1	Examples of a split-screen analysis, boundary crossing and recontextualising objects and processes	84
Table 5.1	Longer term meaning-making dispositions, practices and learner identities: five frameworks	98
Table 7.1	Purposes and consequences, balancing acts and dimensions of progress	136

About the Authors

Margaret Carr is a Professor of Education at the Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research at the University of Waikato, New Zealand. She was a Co-Director of the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum Development project that developed the national curriculum, Te Whāriki, published in 1996. After Te Whāriki was published, she researched in five different early childhood settings – a childcare centre, a kindergarten, a playcentre, a kōhanga reo (Māori language immersion early childhood centre) and a home-based setting to develop, with the teachers, Learning Stories as a narrative assessment practice that was aligned with the sociocultural focus of Te Whāriki. Since then she has researched and published widely on issues of curriculum and assessment in the early years. Formerly a kindergarten teacher, Margaret has taught student teachers in the undergraduate and graduate teacher education programme at the Faculty of Education, and she has a great enthusiasm for co-researching with teachers on action research projects, where the topics are dilemmas and puzzles about curriculum development and assessment that interest the teachers.

Wendy Lee is the Director of the Educational Leadership Project (Ltd), a professional learning provider for the early childhood sector in New Zealand. Wendy has been involved in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) field as a teacher, tutor, lecturer, manager, professional development facilitator and researcher. She has collaborated on three research projects in early years settings with Margaret Carr: *question-asking and question-exploring, learning wisdom and learning in the making: disposition and design in early education*. Prior to this she was a Co-Director with Margaret of the National Early Childhood Assessment and Learning Exemplar Project that developed the *Kei Tua o te Pae* books on assessment for learning in early childhood for the New Zealand early childhood sector. Wendy has a deep interest in curriculum and leadership issues for ECE. She has presented at conferences on early childhood curriculum, leadership and Learning Stories throughout the world, including the UK, Germany, Japan, Iceland, Belgium, the USA, the United Arab Emirates, Norway, the Czech Republic, Canada, Australia and Sweden.

Preface and Acknowledgements

This book is about the role of documentation and assessment in the construction of learner identities in the early years. It discusses the purposes and the consequences of a narrative assessment practice, Learning Stories, that was developed in a country where the early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki, had emphasised learning as responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places and things. *Learning Stories: Constructing Learner Identities in Early Education* follows the 2001 *Assessment in Early Childhood Settings: Learning Stories*, published by Paul Chapman which was then the education arm of SAGE Publications. In the decade since the 2001 book, there has been much innovative development work on Learning Stories, often during collaborations between professional development facilitators and teachers, as well as between university academics and teachers in action or practitioner research projects and programmes. Wendy had led professional development projects as Director of the Educational Leadership Project (ELP), Margaret had explored these ideas with university students, and both of us have worked together on a number of research projects with teachers. It seemed to be the right time to recognise this work in a new book.

We acknowledge here the Ministry of Education in New Zealand for the professional development programme and practitioner research opportunities during this time. Both of us have been centrally involved with projects in the *Centres of Innovation* programme from 2003 to 2009 (Meade, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2010), the writing of the 20 books in the *Kei Tua o te Pae Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars* resource from 2004 to 2009, the professional development that supported that resource from 2006 to 2010, and the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) programme, funded by the Ministry and administered so effectively by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. The TLRI programme has emphasised research in partnership with practitioners and research that makes a difference for teachers, families and learners. Working on the *Kei tua o te pae* books had taught us that the triad of theory, research evidence and examples is valuable for a range of audiences. So planning for this co-authored book began.

A number of research projects with teachers have provided examples, case studies, conversations and reflections for this book. These projects have various titles and intentions: *Learning Wisdom* in nine early childhood centres; *A Question-asking and Question-exploring Culture* in a childcare centre; *Transition to School* in a kindergarten; *Integrating ICTs with Teaching and Learning in the Early Years* in a kindergarten; *Te Tamaiti hei Raukura* (later *Te Pito Mata*) in a kōhanga reo (Māori immersion language nest); *Key Learning Competencies across Place and Time* in three schools and two childcare centres; and *Strengthening Responsive and Reciprocal Relationships in a Whānau Tangata Centre* in a kindergarten. A Royal Society of New Zealand Marsden

Fund project was published as *Learning in the Making: Disposition and Design in the Early Years* and some of the findings in that project have been included here as well. We acknowledge with respect and affection the other Research Associates and collaborative partners on these projects: Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips, Keryn Davis, Judith Duncan, Carolyn Jones, Kate Marshall, Te Wharehuia Milroy, Sue Molloy, Sally Peters, Anne B. Smith and Tina Williams. The ELP team acted as facilitators in the *Learning Wisdom* project: Alison Brierley, Jo Colbert, Kathryn Delany, Julie Killick, Robyn Lawrence, Lorraine Sands and Helen Sola-Nanai.

The term ‘practitioner inquiry’ has been used to refer to ‘the array of educational research genres where the practitioner is the researcher, the professional context is the research site, and practice itself is the focus of study’ (Cochran-Smith and Donnell, 2006: 503). Our experience tells us that practitioner inquiry has the capacity to construct theory and to contribute to an understanding of knowing and learning that goes beyond the local, informing the everyday practice in other places. This notion of practitioner research has been embedded in the Educational Leadership Project programme (www.elp.co.nz) since 2000. In all of these practitioner projects teachers and research associates collaboratively developed ideas that made a difference to their own reflections on practice and to their pedagogy, while at the same time they have contributed to our thinking and to the writing of this book. We acknowledge with gratitude the contributions from the children’s families and teachers in these projects. The schools and early childhood settings are acknowledged on p. xv. The Learning Stories in the book illustrate or exemplify a point being made: they were not chosen because they are exemplary or ‘perfect’. They come from particular contexts and not much information about their learners or their environments and communities is included in them, so they should be read as contributing to the debate and critique that should accompany discussions about assessment. We hope that readers will re-contextualise the messages that the examples and the attached text tell.

We were especially delighted when SAGE agreed that a substantial number of the examples could be in full colour. We hoped that this opportunity to include so many authentic examples would make the book interesting to teachers and student teachers, and that the research and theoretical ideas underpinning the notion of narrative assessments would also be interesting to the academy. As in the earlier book, we have sought an alignment of practice and theory. It has been a complex jigsaw to put together – including Learning Story examples, case studies of teachers’ interactions with children, quotes from theoretical writers, and comments from teachers. We have greatly appreciated the tolerance, trust and competence of the SAGE team: Jude Bowen, who had the idea of a new book, Alex Molineux, Thea Watson, copy-editor Roza El-Eini, proofreader Christine Bitten and indexer Bill Farrington who have worked with us to design and construct this mosaic of

ideas and examples. Thanks too to Malcom Carr and Kathleen Ullal for careful editing at the New Zealand end.

The earlier book often foregrounded the children; in this book we have included many more teachers' voices. Quotes from teachers begin each chapter – except for Chapter 4, where a parent comment opens the discussion. This 'second generation' of Learning Story teachers have been making the most of the possibilities of new digital technologies, writing the assessments with and for the learners as well as for the families, revisiting the portfolios with children, talking with them about their learning, and puzzling with their co-teachers over the analysis of learning outcomes.

The first Learning Stories book had looked closely at one of the more neglected of assessed outcomes in early childhood discussions, learning dispositions, because these had been introduced in the 1996 national early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki. This book widens the lense to explore learner outcomes as a mingling and merging of stores of knowledge with stores of disposition, inviting 'spilt-screen' or dual focus pedagogies (Claxton, Chambers, Powell and Lucas, 2011) and assessments. It describes (in Chapter 1, for instance) the classroom assessment work of teachers like Yvonne S. who constructs portfolios and Learning Stories in which reporting on numeracy, literacy, science, art – and so on – is closely woven into and with stories of learning episodes that also take note of the dispositions and possible selves that accompanied the learning. By 2007 a new school curriculum in New Zealand had introduced dispositional outcomes – *key competencies*. In that school curriculum document an alignment was described across the sectors: the school key competencies were aligned with the strands of outcome in Te Whāriki. Table 5.1 in Chapter 5 includes that alignment, together with some of the longer term dispositional processes highlighted in teachers' work. School classroom teachers, together with their principals, have been exploring the inclusion of key competencies in their pedagogy in many imaginative ways, including using Learning Stories in their assessments, and we have included a number of these. Four of these stories (from Michael, Molly, Leilani and Bayley), and the quotes from Gary and Raymond in Chapter 7, were originally collected in Christchurch in 2010 and 2011 for a DVD resource on Learning Stories in schools to be published by NZCER Press at the same time as this book. Our thanks to NZCER Press for permission to include them here. We acknowledge the assistance of Keryn Davis and Jocelyn Wright in enabling us to access this work during the very difficult time following the devastating Christchurch earthquakes of September 2010 and February 2011, and we take this opportunity to salute the resilience of these facilitators, teachers, children and families in this earthquake-torn city.

Questions of resilience and democracy have been in our minds as we have worked in early childhood, and as we were writing this book. Contested terrain is traversed here, as Michel Vandenbroeck and Maria Bouverne-De Bie (2006: 128) indicated

when they examined how the ‘concepts of participation, children’s rights and “agency” may be troubled as discursive regimes’. They argued that it seems necessary to integrate both ‘macro’ (the broader social structure) and ‘micro’ (positioning children in their own contexts) approaches to these concepts. We have in this book zoomed in on examples at the ‘micro’ level, often analysing them for their ‘middle-level situated meanings’ (Gee, 1997, 2000–2001). At a ‘macro’ level, this book is written at a time of globalisation and globalised crises where the response from many is to hunker down and look after the individual and the short-term. In a paper entitled ‘Education for democracy: reasons and strategies’, Wolfgang Edelstein comments that, across the world, there are now ‘serious threats to the very foundations and basic components of democratic systems: the corrosion, as Münkler calls it, of the *sociomoral resources of democracy*’ (italics in the original). He adds, and we agree, that:

A democratic school is not a luxury. Learning democracy is not just an extension of the serious business of learning for life. It is the serious business of learning for life and, as such, it must be a central goal of education in school. (Edelstein, 2011: 127)

The requirements for learning democracy, the ‘non-cognitive’ and difficult-to-measure skills and dispositions towards kindness and responsibility and dialogue, as well as agency, emotional development, curiosity and the resilience to persevere with difficult tasks, can be fostered in the early years. They contribute in the longer term to the growth of well-being and the culture of the community at large. At the same time, the obverse is true: individualistic, undemocratic and disempowering environments and purposes in the early years can contribute towards the development of these qualities in adulthood. Assessment in the early years contributes centrally to this learning, and, although it is a complex task to assess them, we ignore these dispositions at our peril. Gunilla Dahlberg and Peter Moss (2005: vi) warn that the ‘increasing institutionalisation of childhood may lead to greater and more effective governing of children’ and they point out that this may happen if early childhood institutions are understood as ‘enclosures for the effective application of technologies to produce predetermined and standardised outcomes’. This book suggests some alternative possibilities: early childhood practitioners constructed not as technicians, but as ethical and thoughtful theorists and commentators as well as caring and competent teachers; learning outcomes as dispositional and relational, sited in ‘the middle’ between the learner and the particular cultural environment; a major educational outcome as the appropriation of a repertoire of learner identities and possible selves; and learning described as inextricably distributed across the child, the family and community, the teachers, and the cultural resources available. The possibilities for an assessment practice to connect all this together in educational places of interpretation, personalisation, wise practice, dialogue and joy are the major discussion points in this book.

We acknowledge with gratitude the Learning Stories, transcripts, case studies, and research project conversations that contributed to our thinking about Learning Stories from teachers at the following early childhood centres and schools.

Aratupu Preschool and Nursery
Awhi Whanau Early Childhood Centre
Carol White Family and Children's Centre
Discovery 1 School
Faamasani Aoga Amata Preschool
Flat Bush Kindergarten
Greerton Early Childhood Centre
Halswell Primary School
Harbourview Kindergarten
Highland Park Kindergarten
Hinemoa Kindergarten
Hornby Primary School
Hungerford Nursery School Centre for Children and Families, Berkshire, England
Kids Express
Kita Sommergarten, Berlin, Germany
Lady Gowrie Childcare Centre, Adelaide, South Australia
St Paulinus Primary School, Guisborough, England
Tai Tamariki Kindergarten
Taitoko Kindergarten
Te Kōhanga Reo o Mana Tamariki
Mangere Bridge Kindergarten
Mangere Bridge Primary School
New Brighton Community Preschool and Nursery
Northcote Primary School
Otahuhu Kindergarten
Pakuranga Baptist Kindergarten
Papanui Primary School
Papatoetoe Kindergarten
Parkview Primary School
Pigeon Mountain Kindergarten
Roskill South Kindergarten
Rotorua Primary School
Stanmore Bay Kindergarten
York House Nursery, Durham, England

