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Pedagogy, Community, and Praxis Commentary

Learning Stories and Children’s Rights: Reimagining Assessment in Early Childhood Education

Claire Boss^{*}

Abstract

The essay explores the role of Learning Stories in early childhood education and the connection to the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989). The paper highlights the use of Learning Stories in a teacher preparation program and student perspectives on the value of narrative assessment in their work with children, their mentors, and families.

Keywords: Rights of the Child, Learning Stories, observation, narrative assessment, New Zealand Ministry of Education, Te Whāriki

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Introduction

Early childhood is a significant time for children's development, and early childhood educational environments play a critical role in forming children's identities. Young children's earliest years are the foundation for physical and mental health, emotional security, cultural and personal identity, and developing competencies (United Nations, 1989). Educators maximize the opportunities for each child to achieve their full potential when they engage in practices that honor children's culture, language, family, and communities (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2022). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) aims to maintain children's rights by shaping the perspectives of those who work with, care for, and engage with children, and influencing how they interact with and treat them and what they expect from them (Smith, 2016). Early childhood education can be a force for achieving social justice and children's rights (Smith, 2016), and I argue one way is through narrative assessment in early childhood programs.

Positionality

I am a white, cisgender female who works as a teacher in the Child Development and Educational Studies program at a community college in California. My racial identity plays a role in how I interact with my students, as well as in how I design and teach my curriculum. These factors can have an impact on our students and the communities we serve. As the practicum instructor, I support students studying to become early childhood educators. As Flowers and Shiman (1997) note, teacher education can play a key role in advancing human rights education: "The teacher education program itself must stand for human rights principles in an explicit, public way. It needs to encourage students to see themselves as human rights educators and urge them to act accordingly" (Flowers & Shiman, 1997, p. 164). As global citizens, all children have the right to be protected and have their health and well-being promoted. They should have equal opportunities to learn their language, culture, and identity and have agency in their own lives (Ministry of Education, 2017). One way that teachers can uphold these specific rights

in their teaching practice is through Learning Stories, a narrative assessment that captures significant moments in children's daily interactions and experiences and values the voices of children and families in the documentation process.

What are Learning Stories?

Learning Stories are a commonly used method for child assessment in New Zealand. It is a narrative assessment approach that honors what children can do rather than what they cannot do (Carr & Lee, 2012). This approach provides a unique way of assessing learning that recognizes the whole child, including family, culture, language, and identity (Pacini-Ketchabaw, et al., 2015). Learning Stories present children as competent learners and transform teacher practices and relationships with children, families, and communities. They are observations revised as stories and help teachers understand the path of the child's learning and the pattern of their learning dispositions (Hargraves, 2020). The documentation written to children and families highlights the nature of learning over time and includes the voices of educators, families, and community members.

I teach about Learning Stories in our fieldwork courses as an alternative approach to traditional observation and assessment methods. Students learn how to observe and assess children to gather information about children's learning and development. Observing and assessing children is an integral part of teacher training and practice in early childhood education and can be challenging as assessment practices are often rooted in specific cultural goals and practices, such as Euro-Western ways of knowing and goals for children's development that do not consider the uniqueness of all children (Ball, 2021; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015). When educators complete a conventional assessment, they observe children to collect information about what they know and can do. The goal is to assess children in regard to developmental standards, the means to evaluate children based on predetermined stages (White, 2019). These categories or domains include social-emotional, physical, language, and cognitive development and

determine what a typical child should be capable of doing at a particular age based on their levels of mastery (Dahlberg et al., 1999).

Observation practices in this standardized approach to assessment often exclude child, family, and community voices and, from a modernist perspective, “assume objective truth can be recorded and accurately represented” (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 145). Denying such voices and perspectives diminishes important participation rights as outlined in the Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989). It is necessary to show respect towards children, even the very young ones, and recognize them as individuals with their own rights. It is important to acknowledge that young children are active members of families, communities, and societies who have their own interests, concerns, and perspectives (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005).

Teachers are also encouraged to be objective and separate their emotions and feelings from what is being observed (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015). Traditional observation tools discourage emotional attachment, but objectivity is impossible. “We can never stand outside our perceptions and values when we observe” (Hatherly & Sands, 2002, p. 10). We cannot observe human behavior objectively without personal values influencing the observation. Hatherly and Sands (2002) argue that our observations are inherently subjective and influenced by our social experiences and thought processes.

With traditional tools, teachers offer informed opinions on children’s growth, development, and progress without always acknowledging parents’ perspectives on their children (Escamilla et al., 2021). According to Varga (2011), developmental science observations and data recording procedures are systematic and standardized. Standardized observation and recording have objectified childhood, valuing only certain features, “these procedures of, and underlying beliefs about child study observation, [that] made and remake children as colonized subjects” (Varga, 2011, p. 138). The colonial element refers to the power dynamic between the observing expert and the observed child and the disconnection resulting in removing findings from their context. Parents can passively receive explanations regarding the

interpretation of results and the meaning of children's behavior (Varga, 2011). This involves rejecting cultural and historical contexts that are not part of dominant childhood and parenting scripts, which are recognized as crucial in human rights frameworks.

Ball (2021) states the demand for early educators to use standardized assessment tools is part of a neoliberal regime that seeks to advance all children according to universalized Euro-Western norms of development that believe "all children should develop evenly across all domains according to a homogenizing universal standard" (p. 4). Standardized tools do not acknowledge the cultural differences, contexts, and experiences of all children as they are developed for the general public (Ball, 2021). This contrasts with the CRC, which emphasizes the importance of education in promoting respect for the cultural identity, language, and values of children.

Learning Stories can provide educators the opportunity to highlight significant learning moments in children's daily experiences and acknowledge children's strengths, interests, and growth. Learning Stories align with the goals of the CRC (1998), which provides that education must aim to develop the child's full potential. When using traditional assessment tools, teachers offer their informed opinions on children's growth, development, and progress without always acknowledging parents' perspectives on their child. Learning Stories are meant to be shared and capture children's voices and those of their families (Escamilla et al., 2021). A narrative approach to assessment can document children's interests, progression, and stories and can be a helpful approach to support children's identity and overall development (Ball, 2021). And including the voices of children and families "allow[s] children to share meanings and ownership of their learning" (Smith, 2016, p. 56).

The History of Learning Stories

In 1996, the New Zealand Ministry of Education introduced a new national early childhood education bicultural curriculum, Te Whāriki, firmly grounded in the local sociocultural, bicultural, and ecological context (Ministry of Education, 2017). The curriculum focuses on children's and

family voices regarding children’s learning (Smith, 2016). Te Whāriki was developed when the Ministry of Education placed significant pressure on the early childhood sector to develop a curriculum of its own (McMillan et al., 2023). The partnership with Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust was essential to the revitalization of the Māori language and culture in New Zealand. Tilly Reedy and Tamati Reedy, two Māori leaders and writers, traveled throughout Aotearoa, the indigenous name for New Zealand, to gather the aspirations of the Māori people (Lee et al., 2013). They used this information to develop a curriculum for Kōhanga Reo that nurtured Māori beliefs. Dialogue between all parties was organized, and “representatives from all national early childhood organizations, government agencies, universities, and research and teacher training institutions gave feedback on all the papers” (p. 17).

The Te Whāriki document is written in both English and Māori.¹ Four guiding principles establish this concept of curriculum. The first principle is Empowerment (Whakamana): the early childhood curriculum empowers the child to learn and grow. The second principle is Holistic Development (Kotahitanga): the early childhood curriculum reflects the holistic way children learn and grow. The third principle is Family and Community (Whānau tangata): the wider world of family and community is an integral part of the early childhood curriculum. The fourth principle is Relationships (Ngā hononga): children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places, and things (Ministry of Education, 2017). The Learning Stories approach was developed to align the assessment process with the principles of Te Whāriki (Lee et. al., 2013).

Learning Stories and Children’s Rights

Learning Stories can support children’s rights and social justice in early childhood settings in three ways: (a) by encouraging educators to reflect on their practices and beliefs regarding children’s development and learning; (b) by acknowledging children’s agency and participation; and (c) by respecting children’s identity, language, and culture.

¹ The document can be accessed at: <https://www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/teaching-and-learning/te-whariki/>

Children's rights are shaped and intimately connected to their educators through responsive, reciprocal interactions, nurturing, and emotional relationships (Smith, 2016). For example, in CRC Article 5, the role of adults, such as parents and teachers, is to provide guidance and direction while respecting children's interests and agency. The learning stories process provides educators, as researchers, with an opportunity to analyze the observations they collect and challenge dominant ideologies and biases. "By exploring how we make sense of these observations," Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2015), explain, "we can gain a better understanding of how to disrupt these hegemonies of knowledge" (p. 124).

Learning Stories do not measure performance goals and school readiness but involve "collaboration with families, high expectations of confidence in the children, and multiple opportunities for children to tell their stories" (Carr, 2001, p. 203). Educators offer opportunities for children to construct their identity and acquire culturally valued skills and knowledge in a secure relationship (Smith, 2016). Learning Stories are useful to educators in helping children learn and grow by allowing educators to examine their preconceived ideas regarding children and their development (Carr, 2001). Teachers who research their classrooms are deliberate in their use of observation and reflection to make sense of what is seen or experienced. Reflection allows teachers to question "their points of view, rooted in personal and formal theories, culturally learned ways of seeing, and personal core values" (Meier & Stremmel, 2010, p. 250).

According to Lee et al. (2013), the assessment process can either hinder or support the curriculum. Learning Stories aim to highlight the multifaceted nature of learning, encompassing social, emotional, and motivational components. Traditionally, formative assessment approaches focus on identifying gaps in children's learning and development, whereas Learning Stories capture children's strengths, interests, abilities, and dispositions (Carr, 2001). As the learning community discusses and makes decisions about children's learning, teachers give attention to and aim to highlight key dispositions (Carr, 2001).

In the Te Whāriki curriculum, educators notice and observe children, what they are interested in, and how they are learning. The approach takes the time to see and acknowledge children's interests, skills, and abilities, celebrating each child's personality and talents (Ministry of Education, 2017). Learning Stories are one way to document teaching and learning that go beyond objective information used to assess a child against a set of norms. They view the "whole child as a person rather than fragmenting the child into separate parts based on predetermined assessment measures" and levels of mastery (Escamilla et al., 2021, p. 16). Educators are creating new theories as they interact with children and families, resisting dominating systems of assessment (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015). For example, Angela, an educator in California using the Learning Stories method, notes the following:

My experience writing this first learning story is beyond anything that I had initially imagined. I am grateful that I was given the opportunity to observe, capture, and highlight the unique personality, growth, and interests of this child. I was able to give a voice to her abilities and learning. This story allowed me to connect with the child in a respectful way, as well as create a bond with her family. These moments are what I think make learning stories meaningful and special. (personal communication with Angela, October 2, 2023)

Smith (2016) argues that there is a common belief that young children lack the ability to participate in their early childhood education environments. This perspective suggests that children are seen as passive individuals in their learning experiences. However, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment (2005), highlights that young children are highly attuned to their surroundings and acquire an understanding "of the people, places, and routines in their lives, along with awareness of their own unique identity" (p. 7).

CRC Article 29 insists that young children enter childhood settings with rich funds of knowledge from their families (United Nations, 1989; Smith, 2016). According to Hedges et al. (2011), funds of knowledge can help us understand how children acquire knowledge and develop interests through their daily experiences and activities. These funds of knowledge are

shaped by children's social relationships, which play a crucial role in their learning process and in shaping their understanding of the world (Hedges, et al. 2011). According to the United Nations General Comment (2005), "Through these relationships, children construct a personal identity and acquire culturally valued skills, knowledge, and behaviors. In these ways, parents (and other caregivers) are normally the major conduit through which young children are able to realize their rights" (para 16, p. 8).

Culture is a central aspect of children's experience at home and a significant factor in influencing children's identity development. Children from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds often learn in cultural environments that differ from those they have experienced in their families and communities (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). Early childhood programs may be the first setting where children are exposed to mainstream norms of the dominant U.S. culture, which can be inequitable when those in power believe their understanding of the world is the only legitimate one (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2020). Many teachers may not have had the opportunity to gain knowledge or experience to prepare them for working with culturally and linguistically diverse children. There is a need to improve teachers' abilities to understand, respect, and engage with young children who bring many home cultures and values into the classroom (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2020). Learning Stories cultivates respect for human rights and cultural identity and honors the call that many have made for a more human rights-based approach to assessment (Hantzopoulos et al., 2021). Another teacher utilizing the Learning Stories framework, Delfina, noted the following:

I loved writing the story of the child I observed during my student teaching class because through observation I was able to evaluate the child's development and see the great qualities she had. It gives the child the opportunity to believe in themselves, and the story helps the child build good self-esteem because the child can see all the good qualities that he/she possesses. When we highlight the beautiful things that every human being possesses, especially children, we help them grow and believe in themselves. This will open doors for children to experience new opportunities in the world

around them. (personal communication with Delfina, September 29, 2023)

Article 29 and Article 30 in CRC (1989) assert the importance that education shall direct the development of respect for the child's parents and their own cultural identity, language, and values of the country in which the child is living, and the country from which the child originates (Smith, 2016). Learning Stories can capture teachers' deep regard and respect for children's cultural identities. According to Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2015), educators can expand their perspectives by recognizing the multiple meanings embedded in a single moment of practice, helping them become aware of their implicit assumptions about children: "through these awakenings, educators come to consider hidden assumptions and act to interrupt injustices" (p.130) in early childhood programs.

Culturally responsive caring binds individuals to their society, communities, and each other; therefore, moral, and social pedagogy is necessary (Gay, 2002). Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework emphasizes the value of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and relationships that marginalized children possess and bring into the classroom. These strengths often need to be recognized in the dominant mainstream culture (Erdemir, 2022). Educators can better serve children by acknowledging and appreciating their strengths and the richness of their cultural heritages. Learning Stories are a way for teachers to know the communities where they work and dignify the children's cultures and the people in their lives. They celebrate children's culture by incorporating families' values and aspirations while including families' language and voices. Learning Stories promote the interests and strengths of children with the family context woven into the process (White, 2019). Family engagement is critical to positive learning outcomes for children. Families are considered intellectual resources in the Learning Stories context, no matter their social, linguistic, religious, economic, or cultural background (Escamilla, 2022). An educator, Sandra, who is using Learning Stories, offered the following:

Learning Stories bring the child's learning to life. Storytelling is a beautiful way to highlight all the wonderful things children are and can do through words and pictures. I believe children's families are

an important part of the child's learning; after all they are the child's first teacher. Sharing learning stories with families helps build a sense of community and belonging between all partners in the child's learning. This sense of community and belonging then contributes to a child's positive sense of self as they hear and see the learning, they have actively participated in. As the child learns through the story all the amazing things they have participated in and how they challenge themselves, it builds the child's confidence and contributes to further exploration and mastery of skills. For caregivers, it gives them insight into the child's learning and development using a story that highlights all the competencies, capabilities, possibilities, wonders, excitement, and active learning of their child, rather than a report or word sharing "they are doing great." It is a way to connect home and school. (personal communication with Sandra, October 1, 2023)

A framework to begin the process of incorporating Learning Stories in educational settings is provided in Appendix A. To further exemplify how Learning Stories uphold the rights enshrined in the CRC, sample narratives of my community college students utilizing the framework are provided in Appendix B and C (with the explicit permission of the educators and students featured in them).

Conclusion

Documenting children's unique dispositions, competencies, and interests is a way to uphold children's rights. These stories are introduced to students to help capture the learning that occurs consistently, moment by moment, through everyday experiences. Our role as educators is to focus on the learning happening now, rather than where the child needs to be.

Learning Stories are also utilized to highlight the qualities of children, family, language, and culture, especially as the narrative is written in the child's language of love. This approach has enabled students to form closer relationships with children, considering their families while developing a curriculum tailored to their needs and interests. Learning Stories captures the meaning of children's lived experiences and the meaning with teachers and families.

In Te Whāriki, children's rights to express and share their views are embedded in the curriculum along with the importance of children's and families' voices being included in the narrative assessment process (Ministry of Education, 2017). It is believed that there is no one path to learning and that culturally rich settings provide different pathways for learning.

Ball (2021) emphasizes that a good assessment should not rely solely on one source of information but should involve observing the child's strengths and challenges, considering their cultural context. According to Ritchie and Rau (2010), educators influence the lives of children as they set cultural values and priorities in their environments. Narratives provide a strategy for generating new possibilities that move us beyond colonist patterns of dominance and marginalization. "We need to show that we value diversity, not only in our rhetoric but in our everyday practices, including how we assess children's learning and development" (Ball, 2021, p. 8).

Appendix A: Key Concepts of Learning Stories

Learning Stories are narratives created from structured observations designed to provide a cumulative series of pictures and written text about a child's learning. They are observations made into stories for the child and their families (Carr & Lee, 2012).

- Learning Stories enhances children's sense of themselves as capable, competent learners.
- Learning Stories reflect the holistic way children learn and engage in their cultural contexts.
- Learning Stories reflect reciprocal relationships between the child, people, and the learning environment.
- Learning Stories involve the perspectives of the child, parents/guardians, and extended family.
- Learning Stories honors the family, culture, language, and community.
- Learning Stories represents a moment in time.
- Stories are formative and strength-based.

Learning Stories are a narrative assessment that honors children's competence and confidence (Carr, 2001). The method includes documenting children's learning experiences and written observations as "stories" written directly to the child about the child (Carr, 2001; Carr & Lee, 2012). Learning Stories are meant to be written in the child's home language and shared with families who contribute to the story.

Learning Stories include:

- Descriptions of crucial behaviors or dispositions.
- What learning is taking place?
- What steps might be taken to extend and support learning?
- Children's interests, skills, knowledge, and working theories.
- The child's voice and the teacher's response.
- Multiple perspectives.

- Links to the child's family context.
- Cultural knowledge and ways of learning.

Components of a Learning Story include: (Escamilla, et al. 2021)

1. **The story: Always focus on the child's strengths or interests;** write directly to the child; the details of what happened; include the child's voice. Add photos. ***Noticing**
2. **What learning is happening?** Take time to consider the child's learning process of meaning-making. Reflect on what you know of this child yet stay open to discovering something new. This section describes what the child does and says from your perspective, paying close attention to observable details. Remember the story should be written in the child's language of love. Share thoughts with others. ***Recognizing**
3. **Opportunities and Possibilities:** ideas about possible next steps. "What we will do to strengthen, support, and extend learning?" ***Responding**
4. **"What is the Family Perspective?"** Provide a copy of the story to the family. The family members may have things to say to the child and the teachers. You might prompt them with questions and even offer to write up any comments they care to provide.

Appendix B: Sample Learning Story: “Gather Around Class”

Date October 30, 2023

Storyteller: Gigi Pearce

Dear Luna,

Today while we had indoor play time, I was able to observe you engaging and interacting with your peers during pretend play in the area where group meetings are held. I watched you walk over to the whiteboard and the chair Mrs. Angelica uses. Soon you sat down in the chair, pointed with one finger towards imaginary children seated on the circular carpet, and said, “Sit down.” This began your play.

You were pretending to be teacher Angelica, with a smile on your face. You started to re-enact the daily routine of group meetings for two of your classmates after they joined your play. A few minutes later the roles of your play shifted to further include June and Bella. You all took turns being the teacher and students. Luna, when it was June’s turn as the teacher, you helped Bella go through the daily routine by responding yes or no to all the questions when asked if you had done the morning activity or had breakfast yet. A while later another classmate Maria joined your play when it was her turn to be the teacher. She decided to read a book to the class. While this occurred Luna, I watched as you sat on the carpet waiting to hear the story then directed your gaze back toward Maria as she said, “All eyes on me,” getting ready to go over the schedule again. Then Luna, when it was your turn to be the teacher once more, you asked, “What do community helpers do?” You turned to the whiteboard with a marker in hand and wrote their responses down on the board.



What learning is happening?

Luna, over the last few months I have seen how your creativity and ideas for pretend play have continued to expand as you've gotten more familiar with the environment. During today's activity, I saw you were confident, self-assured, and connected to your peers. Luna, your engagement in today's activity showed me that you feel safe in your surroundings. You are not afraid to speak up for yourself and have the initiative to seek adult help in resolving conflicts as they occur.

Luna, I saw your confidence and safety in your surroundings shine as you walked toward the whiteboard and chair to begin your pretend play. You showed self-assurance in your ideas of your play when you asked students to sit down so you could teach them about community helpers and go over the daily schedule.

Luna, you also showed me that you are connected to your peers while playing when you shifted the roles of your play to include June, Bella, and Maria when they wanted to join you. This allowed you to all have turns being teacher and students. I saw you are not afraid to speak up for yourself when you got up from the carpet during play and told June, "No, I'm the teacher." Additionally, Luna, I saw you seek adult help in resolving conflicts when you and Y had different ideas of who was going to be the teacher reading a story to the class since you both wanted to do that. Mrs. Angelica came over and said you can take turns reading, teachers need an audience when reading stories.

Opportunities and Possibilities?

Luna, during the past months I've been in the classroom I have truly enjoyed seeing you grow, and engage in many different forms of pretend play. One next step to support you is to incorporate more school items into the dramatic play center so that when you want to be the teacher leading a class while playing there's another area for you to engage with if the carpet where group meetings are held is being used by other classmates or teachers. Another step to support you is to ask you more questions when you are playing, about different things that are done in group meetings and by

teachers when I notice that you are having trouble thinking of different activities teachers do with students such as reading stories. In this way, your play can build on what you already re-enact through incorporating storytelling or having your class get ready to go outside to play.

Luna, it has been a pleasure to be part of your educational journey. I remember the first day of student teaching I was so nervous, then you came up during outside play and said hi, and my nerves went away. Thank you for reminding me to never stop asking questions. I look forward to each new question you have for me every time you see me; they've become a highlight of my day. I have really enjoyed seeing you learn and grow throughout the past months in all areas, especially creatively. I know your future contains endless possibilities and I cannot wait to see the next lesson Teacher Luna has planned.

Sincerely, Gigi

The Teacher Voices

Ms. Luna,

I recall the first day you entered the Preschool so unsure of yourself and if this was a safe space for you. You stayed next to your mother for security. When your mom said goodbye, I reassured you I would keep you safe and you said with a smile "Okay teacher." As the school days passed, you became more and more confident in your social skills and often would play teacher sitting in my chair. This gave me insight as to how my students view me. One day long after I retire, I would love to know that yes you would be the Teacher sitting in the chair you love so much. I wish you much success as you embark on your Educational Career.

Respectfully,

Teacher Angelica

Dear Luna,

Oh, the places you'll go. I remember the first few weeks of school you were somewhat shy. However, as the weeks progressed you gained security,

independence, and curiosity. You always ask, “Why teacher?” This kept us teachers always thinking to give you a response. You are full of curiosity and questions. You are very kind and loving to all. Thank you for being you. It has been a pleasure working with you and seeing the growth you have made. Wish you well in your journey to come.

Kindly,
Ms. Ana

Dear Luna,

From the moment I met you I knew you were going to be so much fun to get to know. You came in ready to explore every corner of the classroom and be everyone’s best friend. I love how you’re welcoming to your friends and how you’re always ready to learn something new. You have such an inquisitive mind that watching you blossom in just three months has been a pleasure to witness. Please continue to ask questions and continue to get all the answers. Your mind is a sponge! I can’t wait to see what this year will bring you.

With love,
Miss. Sandra

The Mother’s Voice

She loves to role-play her day at school while playing with her dolls. Her favorite teacher to act out is Ms. Angelica. Luna has always been very social when it comes to people including both children and adults. She loves making new friends. She has a huge imagination and loves to act out people in her life or characters she sees on television. Luna has such a huge personality that makes her such a joy to be around. Both children and adults tend to get drawn to her. I would describe Luna’s personality as strong, confident, and determined. Since Luna started school, I have seen her grow and advance in so many different ways. She will come home singing new songs, practicing writing her name, becoming more interested in storytime,

and reading books. She is also learning how to ask the other children if they want to play with her and how to share.

August 18th was Luna's first day of the program. I remember her being so excited. That morning Luna woke up and couldn't wait to be on her way to school. I was very happy to see her excitement and the bravery that she had for a new environment. Luna went to school ready to play and make new friends. When I think back from Luna's first day of school to where she is now, I see so much growth. She comes home to tell me about her day with all of her friends. She tells me how they play together on the playground, in the sandbox, and with the other toys. Luna's favorite friend seems to be Edward. Edward has given Luna two flower bouquets. Luna says that Edward said he is going to marry her (lol). Luna also enjoys her teachers Ms. Angelica, Ms. Sandra, and Ms. Ana.

I think Luna is very smart and gets the hang of things very quickly. She is a fast learner when she is willing to take the time to be patient as she figures it out. I am so proud of the little girl she is becoming, and I cannot wait to see what the future holds for her.

Appendix C: Sample Learning Story “Once Upon a Buggy”

Dear Vienna,

Today while we were outdoors, I was able to observe you and your peers interact and make discoveries in Mrs. Terri’s garden. It was bright and sunny outside as I watched you immediately go past the gate and head straight towards the shed to grab one of the shovels that was sitting against the wall. You picked one up and carefully walked back to stand in front of one of the garden boxes.

With a smile on your face, you reached inside and began digging away with your yellow plastic shovel. Suddenly, you stumbled upon a tiny gray-looking creature that was trying to wiggle its way out of the piled soil. As its antennas started to move around, you took a step back. Then, you closed your eyes and shouted “BUGGY!”. As some of your peers gathered around to take a peek, you opened your eyes and proceeded to gently pick up the roly-poly from the dirt. You observed as it curled up in a ball and let out a giggle.



“Ivan, Ivan, Ivan, look what I found,” you announced out loud while stretching your hand out to show him. Then, you passed it over to him and the both of you observed as it crawled around on your hands. “It tickles!” the both of you exclaimed. Then, the roly-poly fell into the garden box and crawled away beneath the soil. You pointed at it and waved goodbye. When



I asked where he went you responded, “he left with his family, I miss him already.”

After that, you continued to explore the garden and found a different creature crawling around in the soil. You found a long worm at the bottom of a hole and tried to help him out. You directly looked over at Phoenix and asked for a turn with his shovel. You tell him, “Phoenix, can I have a turn?” and he replied, “okay, when I am done.” Shortly after, you both traded shovels with each other and exchanged

a polite “thank you.” With the worm hanging over your shovel, you ran over to the camera and posed for a picture.

As the activity came to an end, you put your shovel away and hurried over to pick up the two baskets you used earlier to collect flowers in. With one in each hand, you rushed over to line up near the gate. You waited there and shouted “over here” to direct your friends.

What Learning is Happening?

Vienna, this outdoor activity has allowed us to see so much about who you are. You were self-assured, curious, determined and socially connected with your peers all throughout this learning moment. Today, you demonstrated your confidence and outgoing personality by getting straight to digging and going up to the camera to have a picture taken of you. Your participation in this activity also shows that you are comfortable in your space and have the will to participate and interact with the people around you. You and Ivan formed a strong duo and partnership to explore and gain a better understanding of your observations and your surroundings. You were able to take the initiative in navigating your exploration into one of your

interests and also exchanging words with your peers to work around the shared space you were in.

Opportunities and Possibilities

Vienna, during this time, I have had the opportunity to observe you develop and strengthen new skills day by day. Thank you for allowing me to see you unfold and be part of your learning experiences. A next step in helping support you is to provide more moments like these for you to engage in your interests and continue demonstrating your strengths. I will continually observe and ask questions to obtain a better understanding of your learning progress.

Sincerely, Angela

Letter From Mrs. Terri

Vienna, you are the youngest and smallest preschooler but you are mighty. You have so much knowledge and many skills you share with your peers. I know your older sister, Isabelle, has helped you with skills to grow into a confident preschooler you are today. Your voice was so soft when you first came here. You have grown into a louder voice to be heard by all of us.

You know how to share, ask and wait for turns and negotiate to get your needs met. I love your enthusiasm, curiosity and kindness. You have a wonderful giggle that fills the room. You are such a good friend to everyone. It is such a pleasure being your preschool teacher! You warm my heart,

Mrs. Terri

Letter From Mommy

Vienna, you are an independent, can-do girl. Throughout this preschool year, you have gained more and more independence in wanting to do more things on your own. You were nervous at the idea of going to school like sissy but once you went to visit, you were excited to go and learn each day. You forget to give hugs because you are ready to learn and grow. You now get a jacket and shoes on by yourself along with buckling yourself in

which has caused grandma to be late dropping you off without proper Vienna independent time accounted for. You are a little explorer who loves looking for bugs and learning about which ones are OK to touch and which ones we look at from a distance. You are not too sure about flying bugs like mosquito eaters. You are brave and strong which gives mom some scares when we need to be independent and zipline across the yard. You are my brave, fierce, independent girl and I cannot wait to see what you grow into as you learn more and more.

I love you,
Mommy.

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