

Learning notes: an alternative to learning stories

Some teachers seek a wider range of assessment tools and strategies to use alongside learning stories. The concept of learning notes, developed by Ken Blaiklock, provides a strategy for assessment that is both comprehensive and time-practical. Learning notes can be produced more frequently than learning stories, and aid teachers in carrying out a range of assessment across *Te Whāriki's* strands and learning outcomes.

Unlike learning stories, learning notes do not follow a narrative format. This means they are less time-consuming and can be completed more frequently for children, quickly building up a picture of the child as a learner. They can be used to: provide an accurate, concise description of an event; interpretation of learning; and next steps. These three components can be summarised as describe, interpret and what next?

- **Describe** involves writing a description of a child's involvement in a learning experience in a sentence or two, or up to several paragraphs. Information about the context, time, other participants and language expressed can be included. This part of the learning note is written at the time of observation or shortly afterwards, perhaps in a notebook to be written up later, or on a post-it which is transferred to the child's portfolio. Blaiklock suggests sometimes only the 'describe' section of a learning note is needed, particularly where accomplishments are obvious, however ERO is very critical of assessment practices that do not highlight learning.
- **Interpret** is a comment that highlights the significance of the learning.
- In the **What next?** section ideas for extending and following on from what was observed are recorded.

Strengths of learning notes

- **Ease of use** The thinking behind learning notes is one that teachers naturally follow when working with and observing children, often in an informal way.
- **Speed** Learning notes provide a more immediate form of assessment, as the note form makes them relatively quick to produce. This means that the assessment is recorded relatively soon after the event, making a delay between writing up and analysing the event less likely, and so plans for following up the learning event can be quickly implemented. Teachers may be able to complete several learning notes for each child per week.
- **Enabling additional interpretations** Because initial observations are (ideally) written without interpretation, they can be shared with families and colleagues to gain further interpretations. It can be harder to facilitate this when the teacher's interpretation is interwoven into the account of an event, as with a narrative form of assessment. However, more detail in the 'describe' section will be required to gain rich and varied interpretations from non-observers.