

ABSTRACT

A learning story approach to assessment has been used successfully in preschool settings in New Zealand and seems to be particularly appropriate for assessing learning in early childhood. In Ireland the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2004) has proposed a framework curriculum for children in the age range birth to six. The curriculum will require corresponding assessment practices and a learning story approach may be suitable. There is a need for information about how the approach might be applied in the Irish context. This study describes how learning stories assessment was implemented over a ten-week period with a junior infant class of fourteen girls in a Dublin primary school. The period of implementation began just four months after the children started school.

This study concludes that the learning story approach has enormous potential as an assessment tool for early years teachers in Ireland. It was found that in addition to tracking the development of critical learning dispositions, learning stories could also highlight learning in subject areas including language, mathematics, science, visual arts and music. Using learning stories led to the creation of a dispositional milieu that encouraged children to display and develop the learning dispositions. The approach promoted collaborative assessment and, in particular, there was a high level of parental participation and engagement with the learning stories. In terms of challenges one of the most significant involved in using learning stories assessment was found to be the amount of time required to interpret observations, write learning stories and discuss learning stories with the children. Finally, this study recommends further research, involving early childhood practitioners, on how to adapt learning stories assessment for use in Irish early childhood settings and particularly in infant classes in primary schools.