



SALSA NEWS

Supporting the Advancement of Learning Stories in America



HAPPY NEW YEAR!

As we say goodbye to 2021 and prepare for the New Year, may we all take the time to acknowledge and honor the continued commitment and good work that our field of early educators have provided for another year unlike any before. May the New Year of 2022 bring you all health, joy and inspiration for a new beginning. ~SALSA

SAVE THE DATE!

5th National
Learning Stories Conference
Saturday, October 1st 2022



STORIES INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- 2021 Learning Stories Conference Recap - 2
- Meet Our Newest BOD Member - 3
- Learning Stories Publication Review -4
- BOD Spotlight - 6
- Featured Learning Story - 7

4TH NATIONAL LEARNING STORIES CONFERENCE RECAP

The 4th National Learning Stories Conference another Great Success!

More than 300 registrants from three different countries and 17 States attended SALSA virtual Learning Stories Conference held on Saturday, October 2, 2021. The conference theme, **“Elevating Learning Stories: Creating Belonging in a Diverse World,”** included 10 breakout sessions and inspiring keynote addresses by Wendy Lee, co-author of Learning Stories in Practice and Director of the Educational Leadership Project in New Zealand and Brenda Soutar, who combined understandings from her Māori lived experiences, work with the Māori, and has co-authored several books, including Understanding Te Whāraiki and the recent revision to New Zealand national bicultural early childhood curriculum, Te Whāraiki. The conference ended with a coffee/wine chat with Dr. Annie White and Wendy Lee, with a special surprise guest appearance by Margaret Carr!!

The SALSA Board would like to offer its heartfelt thanks to Margaret Carr, Brenda Soutar, and Wendy Lee and her colleagues at the Educational Leadership Project, the staff of our sponsor and partner Educa, and the many early learning professionals who gave their time and expertise for this conference event.

Please save the date for next year virtual Learning Stories conference for **Saturday, October 1st 2022!**



MEET OUR NEWEST SALSA BOARD MEMBER: RICHARD GONZALES

Richard Gonzales is an early educator located in beautiful Santa Barbara, California. He is currently a student working towards a master's in Education with an emphasis in Infant/Toddler Mental Health and Constructivism at Portland State University. He first experienced the field of early education as a volunteer for a local preschool while pursuing a bachelors degree in music performance. Upon realizing a growing appreciation for the field, he switched majors and instead went on to complete a degree in Early Childhood Studies at California State University, Channel Islands. While working towards his degree, Richard was able to experience several different classrooms and age groups and discovered that both his true passion and skill set within the field was without question, infants and their families. He currently works for the Early Childhood Care & Education Services Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) where he is an Infant Lead Teacher and their families have remained the core focus of Richard's work within the field of early education. When he first came to UCSB he was introduced to Learning Stories as a form of assessment. For Richard, they made absolute sense within the context of an infant learning environment. Richard has used learning stories to document the development of the children in his classroom, form collaborative partnerships with his families while also sharing valuable information on development in an accessible way, and help project a sharper image of professionalism for the field of early education. Family response to his learning stories has been positive, with several families sharing them far and wide amongst their extended families. Richard hopes dearly that the stories remained preserved for the children to read as they grow.



Outside of the classroom, Richard is an active amateur musician. Trained as a classical flutist he has performed in many large groups local to the Santa Barbara area including the SBCC Concert Band, SBCC Symphony Orchestra, and as Principal Flute of the Westmont College Orchestra. He is a founding member of the Santa Barbara Community Flute Ensemble where he has primarily played the low flutes, a group of instruments he considers his specialty and has deep fondness for. He is also the bass clarinetist for the SBCC Clarinet Quartet. When not in the classroom or on-stage, Richard enjoys spending time with his family and friends, visiting new places and learning as much as he can about them, developing his skills in his newfound woodworking hobby, and then bringing all of that back to his classroom to share with his children. Richard firmly believes that to be a teacher is to be a lifelong learner and to be challenged is to be offered a chance to grow; thus he is always on the lookout for new experiences.

Get involved! Apply for the SALSA Board of Directors or volunteer for a committee!

<https://www.salsa-global.org/connect/get-involved/>

LEARNING STORIES & TEACHER INQUIRY GROUP

BOOK REVIEW FROM TEACHER COLLEGE RECORD

REVIEWED BY BURHANETTIN KESKIN - DECEMBER 13, 2021

As noted in the Introduction, *Learning Stories and Teacher Inquiry Groups: Reimagining Teaching and Assessment in Early Childhood Education*, by Escamilla and colleagues (2021) is written for the purpose of providing a model to improve professional support among early childhood educators by helping them “rethink and redo some of the most persistent patterns and cycles that may have hindered progress in their professional growth” (p. 1).

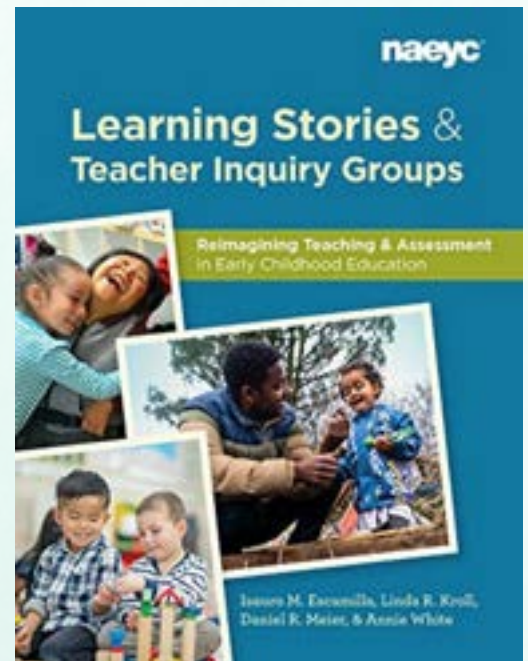
What should have been provided at the beginning of the book (a clear definition of Learning Stories) is provided in the second chapter: “Learning Stories is a narrative-based approach to assessment and teaching created by educators in New Zealand to highlight children’s strengths and improve instruction based on the interests, talents, needs, and rights of children and their families” (Carr, 2001; Carr & Lee, 2012, 2019 as cited in Escamilla et al., 2021, p. 15). The three basic principles of a Learning Story are described as: (1) teachers’ written observation and photographs of children engaged in action or artifact created by children, (2) a written analysis of the observation based on the teachers’ perspective, and

(3) a plan to expand the child’s learning with the anticipation of the perspective of the family on the learning experiences of their child. A Learning Story could also be associated with assessment, which is an optional component.

In the first chapter, titled “The Power of Teacher Inquiry Groups: Linking Inquiry, Documentation, and Reflection,” the authors underline the importance of regularly employing reflection, which opens the doors to inquiry and pushes teaching out of the boredom of routines, maintaining its thought-provoking nature. Analyzing artifacts and sharing documentations (i.e., observation notes, videos, photographs) play a vital role to the inquiry process. The inquiry group consisted of teachers sharing their observation notes in the inquiry group meetings. In these notes, a positive approach to inquiry is used by perceiving the act of inquiry as a descriptive process with questions like “What is it that happened here?” rather than a negative or critical one through questions like “What did go wrong?” Teachers, engaged in recurrently held inquiry meetings, support each other’s teaching and assessment while enhancing their knowledge of child development and learning. By doing so, teachers extend the collaborative inquiry process while taking part in co-reflective practices.

In Chapter 2, the authors discuss a framework for authentic assessment and critical pedagogy that includes the perspective of the teacher, child, and family with appreciation for children’s and their families’ “funds of knowledge.” A significant difference is underscored between traditional assessment (teachers’ opinions as an expert on the child’s development) and authentic assessment (teachers’ opinions as a partner provided through a Learning Story along with the parents’ perspective). Unlike the traditional assessment approach revolving solely around the teacher’s perspective, Learning Stories emphasize creativity, flexibility, and individual skills and uniqueness, while embracing children’s identities and obtaining the parents’ perspectives on their own children.

In Chapter 3, Escamilla and colleagues describe the steps of creating Learning Stories that “humanize the lived experiences of children, teachers, and families” (p. 31) by using photographs and videos, observing and documenting the child’s interactions, rethinking about the events and reflection upon the possible meanings, selecting images to tell the story visually, writing the Learning Story and sharing it with the inquiry group to obtain feedback, editing the story in light of the feedback provided, and sharing it with the child’s family.



Continued on Next Page...

Publication Review Continued...

In the fourth chapter, the authors present a series of appealing and useful questions, rooted in constructivist theory, to the reader regarding the role of inquiry and Learning Stories for children's socialization, play, and language, such as "What's happening?"; "What does it mean?"; "What does this activity mean or what benefits does it have?"; "What learning do I see?"; "What are the opportunities and possibilities?"; "What could we do to support the child?"; and "What do the child's parent think?" Learning Stories provided in this chapter offer insight into how children deal with issues such as independence, relationships, self-regulation, languages, and content learning.

In the fifth chapter, titled "Integrating Inquiry and Learning Stories for Equitable Learning Opportunities," the authors ask the reader to be mindful about the role of one's own cultural background on observation, documentation, and assessment of children's learning, and to focus on the strength of the child through authentic assessments. Escamilla and colleagues also call attention to the problematic behaviors displayed by children as an occasion for inquiry, and invite the reader to find ways in which expectations and environment could be adapted to permit the "child's cultural way of being" (p. 79). In alignment with NAEYC's concern, authors ask teachers to respect children's diverse backgrounds and to ensure that all children have fair access to the learning environment, materials, and interactions (teacher-to-child and child-to-child).

The last chapter, titled "Family Engagement and Learning Stories: Inclusion of Diverse Voices," starts with a beautiful and powerful quote from Rachel Naomi Remen: "In telling them [our stories], we are telling each other the human story. Stories that touch us in this place of common humanness awaken us and weave us together as a family once again" (as cited in Escamilla et al., 2021, p. 83). Learning Stories provided in this chapter and throughout the book are full of messages of profound respect and appreciation for one another that are excellent tools reminding us that we are all a family with many diversities. The reader is reminded that such stories are not only beneficial for the child and the family but also for the teacher, as the writing process of these stories has transformative power for the teacher as well. Lastly, the appendices include summaries of various assessment tools that could complement Learning Stories, and of resources and approaches for teachers to start their own inquiry group.

It should be noted that Learning Stores are addressed to children but also sometimes to parents.

As I was reading through the Learning Stories provided in the book, I must admit that I became emotional at times, which I never thought would happen when reading a textbook. One of my favorite Learning Stories in this book was "Where Love Grows," written for a parent. In this story, the teacher, among other things, affectionally reflects on a statement made by a single mother describing her tough journey: "I am all we have" (p. 86). The teacher, Kelly Rowe, then takes the reader to appreciate the beauty and wisdom this statement entails while assuring the parent, Priscilla, that her children are growing on a solid foundation very much surrounded with love despite the challenges this family faces.

On the whole, this book is an excellent resource for teachers who want to deepen their understanding of children and their families, and strengthening the relationships between the teacher, child, and the family with a continuing self-evaluation and reflection through stories. The authors, throughout the book, present engaging ideas and insightful questions to enhance the teaching practice, children's development, and learning while engaging the family in the process. A great strength of the book is that it offers a genuine and precious practice, in accordance with NAEYC's philosophy, to connect with the children and their families. Some of the Learning Stories provided in the book will warm the hearts of the parties involved (the teacher, child, and family). It is hard to imagine a better way of involving parents in the education of their children than through these Learning Stories that speak not only to minds but also to hearts.

Escamilla, I. M., Kroll, L. R., Meier, D. R., & White, A. (2021). *Learning Stories and Teacher Inquiry Groups: Reimagining Teaching and Assessment in Early Childhood Education*. NAEYC.

Teachers College Record, Date Published: December 13, 2021

<https://www.tcrecord.org> ID Number: 23926, Date Accessed: 1/2/2022 5:26:15 PM

<https://www.tcrecord.org/PrintContent.asp?ContentID=23926>

CONGRADULATIONS DR. ISAURO ESCAMILLA

VICE PRESIDENT OF SALSA

Dear Colleagues,

Please join in congratulating Dr. Isauro M. Escamilla Calan, who successfully passed the final dissertation phase in July 2021 as approved by a committee of Dr. Daniel Meier (chair), and Dr. Barbara Henderson and Dr. Annie White (California State University Channel Islands).

Dr. Escamilla's dissertation is entitled "Learning Stories: Improving Dual Language Instruction, Assessment, and Teacher Inquiry in Preschool Education." Dr. Escamilla's dissertation makes an important contribution to knowledge in the early childhood field on understanding and using the approach of Learning Stories as a form of authentic assessment and critical pedagogy. His research successfully showed new ways to adapt the concept of Learning Stories, originally from New Zealand, for young children and their families in a local San Francisco, California context.

Dr. Escamilla conducted interviews with teachers and families, as well as collecting a large number of Learning Stories that he and his colleagues wrote. Dr. Escamilla utilized narrative inquiry and testimonio to create a powerful story of the pedagogical, social, and political value of Learning Stories for young children, their families, and early childhood educators. The research also helped illuminate how Learning Stories can elevate the image of children as dual language learners who are competent, motivated, and talented. Dr. Escamilla's research also serves to validate the value of systematic Teacher Inquiry in the form of Inquiry Groups held at early childhood sites to promote a forum for professional dialogue, trust, and teacher support.

Many thanks to Dr. Henderson and Dr. White for their thoughtful and insightful support of Dr. Escamilla's research and writing. It was a pleasure to work with such a talented team of early childhood researchers and practitioners.

Congratulations Dr. Escamilla, and we look forward to your public sharing and dissemination of this important research. We know that your research will help inform policy and practice for dual language learners at the national, state, and international levels. We wish you the very best in your continued work with Learning Stories in your roles as preschool teacher, adjunct faculty, vice-president of Supporting the Advancement of Learning Stories in America (www.salsa-global.org) and board member for the East Bay Chapter of the California Association for the Education of Young Children (EBC —CAAEYC). Congratulations!!

Dr. Daniel R. Meier
Professor, Department of Elementary Education
San Francisco State University

Reprint by permission of Dr. Daniel Meier.

Estimados Colegas,

Por favor, únense a felicitar al Dr. Isauro M. Escamilla Calan, quien aprobó con éxito la fase final de disertación en julio del 2021, según lo aprobado por un comité integrado por el Dr. Daniel Meier (presidente), la Dra. Barbara Henderson y la Dra. Annie White (California State University Channel Islands).



La disertación del Dr. Escamilla se titula "Historias de Aprendizaje: Mejorando la Instrucción de Lenguaje Dual, la Evaluación y la Investigación Pedagógica en la Educación Preescolar." La disertación del Dr. Escamilla hace una importante contribución al conocimiento en el campo de la primera infancia sobre la comprensión y el uso de las Historias de Aprendizaje como una forma de evaluación auténtica y pedagogía crítica. Su investigación mostró con éxito nuevas formas de adaptar Learning Stories (Historias de Aprendizaje), concepto originario de Nueva Zelanda, con niños de edad preescolar y sus familias en un contexto local de San Francisco, California.

El Dr. Escamilla realizó entrevistas con maestros y familias, además de recopilar una gran cantidad de Historias de Aprendizaje que él y sus colegas escribieron. El Dr. Escamilla utilizó la investigación narrativa y los testimonios para crear una poderosa historia sobre el valor pedagógico y sociopolítico de las Historias de Aprendizaje para niños de edad preescolar, sus familias y educadores de la primera infancia. La investigación también ayudó a iluminar cómo Learning Stories (Historias de Aprendizaje) puede elevar la imagen de los niños que aprenden en dos idiomas y como seres competentes, motivados y talentosos. La investigación del Dr. Escamilla también sirve para validar el valor de la investigación pedagógica sistemática realizada por maestros en forma de Grupos de Investigación en escuelas o centros de educación de la primera infancia, así como para promover un foro dedicado al diálogo profesional basado en la confianza y el apoyo hacia los maestros.

Muchas gracias a la Dra. Henderson y a la Dra. White por su reflexivo y refinado apoyo a la investigación y escritura del Dr. Escamilla. Fue un placer trabajar con un equipo tan talentoso de investigadores y profesionales de la primera infancia.

Felicitaciones Dr. Escamilla, y esperamos a que pronto comparta públicamente y disemine esta importante investigación. Sabemos que su investigación ayudará a informar la política y la práctica para los estudiantes de dos idiomas a nivel nacional, estatal, e internacional. Le deseamos lo mejor en su trabajo continuo con Learning Stories (Historias de Aprendizaje) en sus diferentes facetas como maestro de preescolar, profesor adjunto, vicepresidente de Supporting the Advancement of Learning Stories in America (Apoyando el Avance de Historias de Aprendizaje en América) (www.salsa-global.org), miembro de la mesa directiva del East Bay Chapter of the California Association for the Education of Young Children (EBC —CAAEYC) [El Capítulo del Este de la Bahía de la Asociación de California para la Educación de Niños Pequeños]. ¡¡Enhorabuena!!

Tanya (Tatsiana) Polenchuk is the Program Coordinator of Fulton Afterschool at Hardisty, Fulton Child Care Centre in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. She learned the value of professional documentation about children's learning and development during her six years of work as a preschool/kindergarten teacher in the country of origin, Belarus. "Adrian's Maze Adventure" is a learning story Tanya wrote during her enrollment in Exploring Early Childhood Curriculum: Play, Participation and Possibilities winter 2021 course at MacEwan University.



ADRIAN'S MAZE ADVENTURE

by Tanya Polenchuk

Adrian, you began with creating an outside border. You made a dot and from it, you led the line to the top of the border, then you opened up a new path and closed it off:

- You know Tanya, I just keep adding the walls with spaces in between. I am drawing a simple maze with a path from start to finish. Though, it is not gonna be as simple as it seems. I know how to make it complicated. And as you see, it has a cool shape, right? It wouldn't be hard to identify this shape, right? What do you think, Tanya?

- It looks like a bear paw to me, Adrian.

- That's what I said! It is so easy to identify what kind of maze I am drawing, right? But I will make it very hard to walk through this maze.

Adrian, I was wondering what you were going to do next. I observed you persistently designing the layout of passages and walls within your maze, and then you started to fill it in. You continually opened up new options and closed them off quickly.

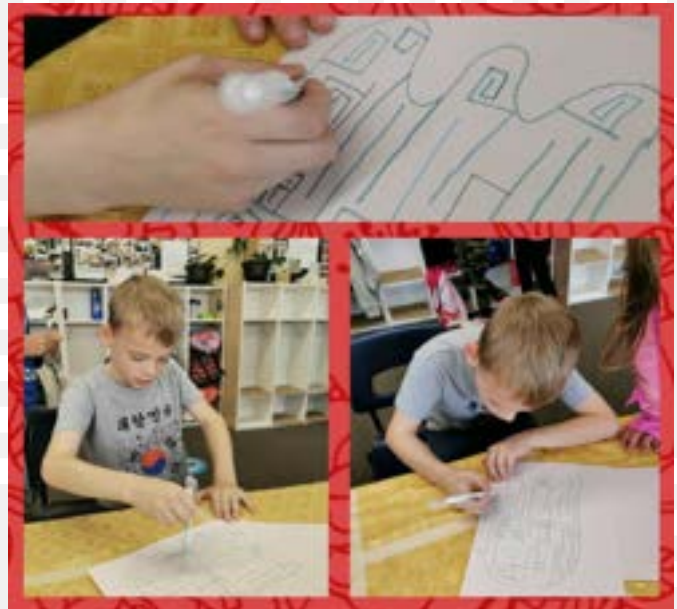
- Does it still look like a Bear Paw, Tanya?

- Yes, it does, Adrian.

-Well, then... because I want my maze to be a picture maze. It is almost like generating algorithms in a video game, you know...See, I am adding a few different kinds of loops, they are not rounded loops, kind of rectangular loops. When I finish my maze I will invite my friends to follow it with a finger. Would you like to be the first to try Tanya?

- I would be honored to try it first, Adrian.

Read the entire Learning Story [here](#).



For more information about SALSA, please email us at salsa.usa10@gmail.com or visit our website www.salsa-global.org



@salsalearningstories