

GO Back To School!

Current and aspiring early childhood professionals looking to pursue further studies can now apply for ECDA scholarships and teaching awards.



TO ENCOURAGE EARLY childhood professionals to enhance their pedagogical practice as well as hone leadership competencies, the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) is now offering a number of scholarships and teaching awards to deserving individuals.

These scholarships and teaching awards are offered in conjunction with selected bachelor and master degree programmes in early childhood education. The scholarships will cover 100 per cent of the programme fees* while the teaching awards will cover 80 per cent of the programme fees* of these programmes.

These are open to ECDA-certified teachers and principals currently working in child care centres or kindergartens licensed/registered with ECDA as well as individuals looking to join the sector (pre-service teachers).

In-service teachers have a choice of two part-time bachelor degree programmes in either Early Childhood Education with Management or Early Childhood and Chinese Language Education at SIM University. Eligible teachers can also choose to take up a part-time Master of Education offered by the National Institute of Education.

The scholarship or teaching award for in-service teachers will include a learning

resource allowance, a centre subsidy and a study bonus.

For pre-service teachers, scholarships and teaching awards for the full-time Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education at the Singapore Institute of Technology are also available. These will include a training allowance, learning resource allowance and a subsidy for the programme's overseas immersion programme.

To be eligible, applicants must be either Singapore Citizens or Permanent Residents. They should not be concurrently holding or serving a bond for any other scholarship, bursary or funding. In addition, they must have gained acceptance into the academic programme to be awarded the scholarship or teaching award.

“ Besides enhancing my knowledge in early childhood, the course I attended also enabled me to hone my skills in other areas such as management in the workplace, and refine my interpersonal skills.

Nur Binte Riduan,
Bachelor of Early
Childhood Education with
Management, SIM

“ Through this degree programme, I gained insights into what early childhood education is about. I am confident of being a better teacher and am more equipped to inspire young lives.

Ong Pei Qi,
Bachelor of Science in
Early Childhood Education, SIT



*Sponsorship of programme fees is capped at amount payable by Singapore Citizen. For more information, please log on to www.ecda.gov.sg



The Power Of Learning Stories

Stories are a powerful assessment tool that can transform the way children learn and develop. Dr Margaret Carr and Ms Wendy Lee, who helped develop New Zealand's acclaimed *Te Whāriki* early childhood curriculum, tell *Beanstalk* more about narrative assessment.

IN 1996, A new early childhood curriculum was introduced in New Zealand. Called *Te Whāriki*, the curriculum emphasised a shift from traditional knowledge-based learning of a child to his or her holistic development. Its aim is to develop children into competent and confident learners who would be healthy in mind, body and spirit; as well as secure in their sense of belonging, and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society.

At the heart of this curriculum is the use of narrative assessment or Learning Stories. The intention of Learning Stories is to make a positive difference and to nurture learning opportunities for children.

These Learning Stories come in the form of 'portfolios' which not only document a child's learning but also analyse progress. Children and their parents could then respond, either verbally or in writing, to these portfolios — thus building valuable learning partnerships between teachers, parents and children.

Behind this widely-acclaimed approach to assessment are Dr Margaret Carr and Ms Wendy Lee. Dr Carr is currently Professor of



Education at New Zealand's University of Waikato. She was also Co-Director of the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum Development project that developed *Te Whāriki*. Ms Lee is currently the Director of the Educational Leadership Project, a professional learning provider for the early childhood sector in New Zealand.



INSPIRED TO LEARN

"Learning Stories," explained Dr Carr, are stories about what children do, as part of their everyday learning, at their early childhood centre or pre-school. These stories are designed to show to reader the learning that the child has done that day."

competencies as thinking individuals

Positive sense of selves and connectedness to the world; appreciation of caring relations and shared understandings

Empathy; including others in their play, sharing toys, and flexibility in adapting to one another

Construction and organisation of information in ways understood by oneself and others in language-rich and thoughtful environments

The process of learning stories sharpens my observation and critical thinking skills; I have learnt to be sensitive to young children's behaviours, become aware of the assumptions and values that impact my practice, and seek to discover the world from the eyes of the child.

Cynthia Tan Xin Yi
Principal



Written from the perspective of the teacher, these stories (in the form of a portfolio) chart the journey of a child's learning. They include teacher observations, transcripts of conversations between teacher and child, and examples of the child's work. The portfolio would include videos and photographs to illustrate the examples. "The idea of the portfolio is that it is accessible to both children and parents" said Ms Lee.

Children can then use these portfolios to assess their own development. The result is a powerful learning environment that stimulates, provokes and encourages. Children are empowered to contribute to their own learning and inspired to set their own goals.



PARENTS ON BOARD

Another key feature of Learning Stories is that parents are also involved in the learning process.

Children take home their

portfolio and parents are invited to respond.

"We know that the engagement of the family is critical for the success of the child," said Ms Lee. "So any process that promotes engagement is a useful one."

Dr Carr and Ms Lee were in Singapore in November 2013 to conduct a Masterclass on Learning Stories. Held over two days at Suntec City Convention & Exhibition Centre, the Masterclass was organised as part of the Early Childhood Development Agency's Early Childhood Conference 2013 to uplift the quality of documentation and assessment in the early years.

New media has also helped transform these portfolios and increase the level of parent engagement.

Teachers in New Zealand create and upload entries in a child's learning story directly to a website. The children get a hard copy of the story but the entry is also transmitted immediately to the parents' smartphone or computer. Parents are then able to text or email back, setting into motion a two-way exchange between their child's teacher and themselves.



21st CENTURY LEARNING

Since its incorporation into the New Zealand curriculum, Learning Stories has received much praise, although there have been a few reservations about it

as well. As Ms Lee put it, "We need to make visible learning in the traditional areas — be it literacy or mathematics — but always weaving together 21st century

THE STORY OF A CHILD

The Masterclass in Learning Stories was attended by some 60 senior teachers, centre leaders, curriculum specialists and trainers.

Learning Stories also gives teachers the chance to analyse the learning. I think this is the missing element from the portfolios we currently produce in Singapore. We produce very beautiful portfolios but [these] lack that [needed] analysis. It will be good to link the learning to some theories and use the stories to share with parents the developmental milestones for children in that particular age group.

N. KANNIGADEVI RAVINDRAN
Manager, Special Needs Presbyterian Community Services



I find Learning Stories a refreshing and creative way of presenting a child's abilities and achievements. It also gives educators the chance to advocate for their children's learning and create a community of learners consisting of parents, teachers, children and the wider community. Most importantly, the idea of Learning Stories is quite flexible... it can be adjusted to suit a centre's format while still highlighting the dispositions the children have mastered or attained.

SUA SWEE LEE
Assistant Principal Healthy Start Child Development Centre



learning dispositions at the same time."

Dr Carr agreed: "It really depends on how you view outcomes for students. If you view outcomes in terms of specific sets of skills, then telling a story would not be relevant to you. But if you feel that the important aspects of learning are in real life — what you would do in real life and your relationships with other people, places and things — then a story is an appropriate way to describe the learning."

Today, the idea of narrative assessment has been adopted all around the world.

"This is because the notion of the story is universal. All cultures tell stories, and everyone can connect with them," said Ms Lee. ♥

Excerpt of a Learning Story

by Cynthia Tan Xin Yi, Principal, The Caterpillar's Cove Child Development and Study Centre.

TODDLERS AT COOPERATIVE PLAY

We were outdoors when I noticed N take one of the toy pieces J was playing with, to the latter's dismay. I guided both toddlers to clarify their intentions and N discovered J had been trying to stack the pieces. J then held N's hand as an invitation to stack them together.

They stared at the fruit of their collaboration — a pile of stacked pieces, and counted aloud when I shared my wondering — "How many hands and feet are there?" When

I suggested they could lay the pieces out to count more accurately, I noticed how they placed them in a single line, taking one another's cue on where to position the next piece. Once all the pieces were laid out, we counted a total of twelve!

What aspects of children's learning does this exemplify?

Meaningful interaction through intentional facilitation; providing space and time for toddlers to listen and express, developing their