

APPENDIX F Resources from Tom Drummond for Rethinking Early Childhood Education

A longtime colleague, Tom Drummond, upon retirement from his decades of community college teaching, created a website with writings and resources free for the taking at tomdrummond.com. You'll find a strong philosophical and political stance on this website, most of which we agree with. Tom has included the bulk of his college course materials there, which offers a unique opportunity

to critique and reconceptualize college preparations for teachers in early learning. To pique your interest in regularly visiting and making use of the multitude of resources on this website, appendix F offers two central documents of Tom's that are in line with the thinking of *Learning Together with Young Children*.

Speaking up for Children

When I imagine a healthy childhood that enables a precious, unique human being to be all they can possibly be as an individual, do all they can possibly do for others, and act for the welfare of unseen others and the welfare of the Earth, I see a young six-year-old boy and a young six-year-old girl with these Sixteen Capabilities. I see what I have called the vision of the “hot kid” expressed as descriptive outcomes. This is how I would specify the essential outcomes for early childhood education.

Sixteen Capabilities

Outcomes for early education—the child, childhood, and children’s spaces—that we can all see.

I invite you to notice what is missing. The list of outcomes is **not academic**—full of numbers, letters and readiness; the list is not developmentally described—where a step in age is an improvement over being infantile; the list is **not privileging a few white people like me** who might be fearful of losing that privilege; and the list **does not view children as individuals apart from their communities**—they remain included in many interdependent communities of care. I think, however, the list is specific enough to draw attention to how we think about the children we love and hopefully, over time, engender ever widening agreement about what people around the world desire for every child, for the experience of childhood, and the continuing evolution of children’s spaces.

When children leave early childhood to enter common school they can:

1. Participate as a member of an interdependent community
2. Care for themselves, others, and the community

3. Treat others with love and compassion
4. Cooperate with other children to accomplish group goals
5. Celebrate group accomplishment
6. Laugh and play with a tangible sense of joy
7. Express many human emotions in language and art
8. Be inquisitive
9. Initiate new ideas and invent solutions to problems
10. Stick at difficult tasks or come back to them later in order to succeed
11. Run, hit, catch, throw, kick, and tumble
12. Sing and dance with exuberance
13. Paint, draw, sculpt, and construct objects of beauty
14. Care for common spaces and materials toward cleanliness and order
15. Greet guests with courtesy and charm
16. Act in stewardship for the environment and one’s own health and well-being.

These Sixteen Capabilities could define the common intentions we have for provisions for spaces for children to grow in a community of parents, extended families, educators and staff—no matter what setting, at home or school. **A listing this brief challenges us to evolve spaces toward the common possibility providing resources for the creation of spaces where a spectrum of capabilities grow in diverse places with diverse participants within unforeseen diverse cultures.**

All Sixteen Capabilities are more than lofty aspirations: they are observable. Each can be photographed, videotaped, or described. Each record of an event that illustrates a capability could reside in a portfolio gathered from ages one to

six, where everyone can come to understand how humans grow from infancy onward—uniquely emerging into who they are. With these as a guide, schools could focus their intention on capturing instances where a child was inquisitive, capturing acts of stewardship, or capturing instances of tumbling or of graciousness. Such a collection would not only be heart-warming information for parents to see and celebrate their child but also proof of accomplishment, an acknowledgement of public resources well invested.

Assessment and Evaluation

That collection would be called an assessment. Although assessment is often touted as the must-have necessity to achieve unspecified “quality,” assessment is not complex. It is simply the gathering of information that informs learning and teaching. What matters is how you do it and for whom is it done. Unfortunately, today in the United States the neoliberal discourse, under the perverse requirement for externally mandated assessment, forces educators to waste their planning time filling out forms that few read or care about. That same dominant discourse distorts the aims of early education as “readiness” for common school, a readiness narrowly defined by the privileged as precursors to acquiescence in authoritarian schools. That is just plain wacky.

If we really want to justify assessment as necessary, let us first answer one question: *Who is the audience for any form of assessment?* Whom are we addressing with the results of testing or the setting of standards? The needs of legislators? The desires of the parent-student-teacher association? The golf club? And further, who is making meaning

of whatever results can be found? What does this result say? Is it good? Is that quality? We can't make decisions about forms and methods of assessment without first deciding who cares, who makes meaning, and who corrects where necessary. That is reality.

So, who really cares about any kind of information we can gather on the outcomes we desire in young children?

The answer is simple: the people who care, who can make meaning of the information, and can do something about it are the child, the family, and the educators. The child cares about himself or herself, obviously. The child's family cares, too. The educators care, and the staff and administration care. Therefore, all assessment of provisions for children and childhood must be directed to these audiences and presented in a form these audiences understand. These are *internal* audiences. These audiences are the only people who can evaluate the worthiness of the information and the only people who can alter and improve those provisions.

When we speak of outcomes or goals for early education, I invite you to speak out about these Sixteen Capabilities and frame a new discourse, a discourse that speaks of children, families, and society.

- We must keep the focus clearly on the child through the eyes of the audiences who care.
- We must enable participation from all who care.
- We must establish methods that are logical, transparent, and somewhat indefinite.
- We must invest in the opportunities we decide are best right now, based on an evolving understanding of the common good.

Writing Learning Stories

With thanks to Margaret Carr and Wendy Lee who created these gems, have the deepest ideas, and offer here the most comprehensive place to look.

A learning story engages listeners in an adventure of childhood enlivened with our own humanity and heart. Become a storyteller and share your voice.

The storyteller shares a tale of emergence, speaking to the child, to the child's family, to guests, and to ourselves as observers and educators. A learning story builds upon the tradition of stories told around a campfire. There is no "right way" to tell a story, but a story of learning always begins with the learner's initiative—where the emergence begins. The child or children start on their own, without cues or direction. Stories are always about "good" things we value: nothing negative is said or implied about any child. The tale progresses through the subsequent stages of engagement (becoming involved) and intentionality (causing something) and continues forward in time—one instance one day or connected instances over several days. Generally, this is the sequence to be attentive to when capturing the stages of a story:

Initiative → Engagement → Intentionality → Representation → Benefaction → Reflection

The New Zealand–Aotearoa Learning Story Narrative Assessment connects what we see and how we make meaning of it together to the ideals of society and culture(s) as proposed by the goals and strands of Te Whāriki. I believe the congruence among assessment, shared goals, and societal ideals is the best of all possible worlds. Despite the lack of that congruence here in the U.S., I wish to show how one can write learning stories to attend to and convey the stages of learning for anyone in any context, for all learning has a natural flow—passages, I call them—outlined in the arrowed sequence above.

I have found learning stories that attend to those passages to be profound agents of transformation for all involved.

A Learning Story Convention

Six Guides

It is essential to have at least one picture of the child, or group of children if it is group learning story. Of course, the more photographs you have, the more your story can convey. Then you write the text from your perspective to accompany the photographs or stills selected from video.

- I like to begin with my own interest in what the child has taken the initiative to do. When I talk about myself in the first person using "I . . ." I give a "voice" to me, the storyteller. An observer brings a personal perspective to the tale.
- Then I describe what the child does and says from my perspective as someone who cares and is listening closely to discover what is happening. It is not totally objective: I am endeavoring to be present with my heart. I can only see the child from the outside. I try to pay close attention. This is the heart of the story.
- At the end, I title a paragraph "**What it means**" and write about the significance of what I saw. I am often weak at this part. I need help. This meaning-making is best done in a dialogue with other adults. Many perspectives can be included here. If the results of that meeting are voiced directly to the child, the child can hear educators speak educational words, even though they may be complex. "**You . . .**" Great literature offers stories to be encountered again and again and re-constructed by readers and groups of readers over time.

- Next I offer an additional paragraph “**Opportunities and Possibilities**” to describe what we (adults, educators, parents) can provide next and give voice to what we think the future may hold. This gives a bit of insight for the participants in the school (parents, friends, and prospective enrollees) about how thoughtful educators think about what they do. Many people who wish the best for their children do not realize what educators do. It is difficult for outsiders to understand how educators learn the ways to lead in an inquisitive and responsive way to benefit unique children. It is hard to see how educators constantly evolve their own understanding and devote themselves to a quest for what might be best over time. “*We . . .*” is the voice to this statement of reflective intent by evolving adults.

- Finally, I offer a blank page for the family to respond with their view. Members of the family may have things to say to the child and to the educators. Some may easily offer something; others might need a prompt. I am sure you can find a way to draw them out based in your relationship. *I am wondering what would you say to your child about this. What do you see happening? What delights you?*
- Like every good story, I make sure to have a title.

I make two copies of each story, one for the child and one for the school to be added to as the child grows.