

# Get smart: Learning stories go digital



Portfolios are often a treasured record of our child's time at Playcentre. Filled with photos, artwork, and written observations, they give great enjoyment and pride for both tamariki and their whānau. Otumoetai Playcentre member Jodie Moore explores the use of digital apps to aid kaiako in assessment.

In addition to the value learning portfolios hold for whānau, the Ministry of Education requires early childhood centres to use 'assessment' as well as planning and evaluation to inform its programmes. Learning stories are often used as a way to record and assess the learning we observe on session and can result in a rich and insightful record; especially when considered as part of a child's portfolio. Margaret Carr, co-author of the original *Te Whāriki* (2007), is widely credited as the leading creator of learning stories. Carr advocates an approach to writing stories which focuses on learning dispositions and highlighting tamariki strengths and interests. At Playcentre this 'assessment' becomes a collective responsibility among member whānau. At times, it can seem like a task at the bottom of the already too long 'to-do' list. However, in recent times the emergence of free or low-cost apps has provided a platform for writing learning stories, and other forms of assessment, which are both easy to use and potentially time-saving.

Project Life, Canva and, my personal preference, PicCollage are especially useful. These apps allow multiple photos to be uploaded straight from your phone's photo gallery (no more searching for cables and plugging in cameras to laptops). They can also provide numerous backgrounds, fonts, colours, borders and additional images. The multiple options are easy to

access and can be selected quickly. Text can be typed directly into the template selected and extracts from *Te Whāriki* copied and pasted from the pdf copy available online. Adjustments and amendments can be made easily allowing for multiple revisions to be made when you have the time to do so. The resulting document is often visually appealing. When completed, saving to your photo gallery or Dropbox, emailing, uploading and printing can also be achieved with a minimum of fuss. Whilst the aforementioned apps are free, the more prolific writer may enjoy the wider variety provided by the in-app purchases (mostly around \$3-5) but this is by no means necessary.

An unexpected consequence of my own use of PicCollage has been the significant increase in the number of learning stories I write. This is a trend I have observed centre-wide. Whilst there are clearly advantages to this, one might also need to consider the printing costs for those using paper portfolios. Alternatively, centres may see benefits in creating online portfolios and uploading these documents. Centre policies relating to the use and distribution of photos should be considered.

For more ideas, the 'Playcentre Portfolio Enthusiasts' Facebook page can be a great source of inspiration for both hand-written and electronically produced learning stories, shared to the page by generous members.

## Tips for getting started

- Choose one app and explore before moving on to another.
- Embrace a trial and error approach. The great thing about digital assessment is it can be deleted or altered in a flash.
- Back up your work! Consider creating a cloud based account that all Centre members can access and upload to.
- Share your knowledge and your stories with other members. Consider purchasing a Centre tablet for your members to use so that access to the technology is available to all.
- Have fun!



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