

From Nayland Kindergarten and beyond....

# Cohen's Learning Journey

- August- September 2014

Written by Kaiako Lynne

## KNOWING ALL ABOUT ME.

When you first came to Nayland Kindergarten Cohen we asked your Mum and Dad about their aspirations for you, they told us that they wanted you to make friends and enjoy learning new skills. Along with their aspirations the kaiako/teachers have been encouraging you to "stretch your learning muscles" by assessing your own learning journey too to find out your aspirations. This story captures some of your learning journey this term Cohen, as you continue to plan for your own learning as you so often do each day. When Mum and I chatted about how you think so deeply about things, she said you often wake up with a plan already to go, and you jump out of bed and say "I need..".

The teachers often talk about the skills and knowledge you carry with you Cohen, as if you have a bag on your back which we call a "virtual backpack". I know that you know what you need Cohen to further your learning journey, so at times you need no help to seek out the resources you need. You see yourself as a learner, with the confidence to engage in things that interest you, but you are also open to working and playing alongside others to develop new knowledge and skills.

Everyday is a new adventure for you Cohen and this term we have noticed that you are very keen for other children to join your play.

A note from Lynne -

I am always intrigued by Cohen's logical representation of things in the environment, just as he replicated the magnetic shape designs, he also created new innovative ideas for possible designs. This is a great example of how Cohen thinks in units Jo, and then uses the same idea to extend it further.

Ka pai tō mahi Cohen - great work.

Tino pai tō whaakaro- great thinking Cohen.



**All aboard the train ride!**



**A news flash- Cohen's magnetic models.**

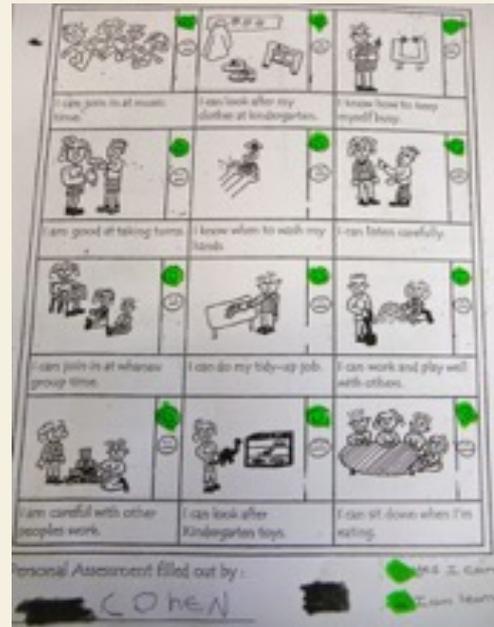
*You are full of surprises Cohen, when you came to show me your drawings I was speechless, it took me a minute to make the connections. Then I was amazed with the absolute detail and dimension of your drawings.*

## Cohen's Learning Journey continues

Attached to this story are some examples of Cohen's mihi/work so you can see how he has assessed himself, shared information about himself and celebrated his learning. This story is a celebration of Cohen's mihi relating to his own aspirations and goals. He clearly knows what he "can do" and what he is "still learning to do", marking the "can do" face with confidence. As I would expect Cohen you then drew more pictures of what you are still learning to do, and I am sure you will get onto it when you know you are ready.

Cohen began by drawing his mihi with drawings of each member of his family inside the box. When I began to write in the words alongside he said "I can do that". Thanks for the reminder Cohen you are a very capable writer of words. He wrote all the words he needed to go alongside the photos, at times asking me for the letter sounds or words. I must say Cohen no other child has ever done this, and you persevered for over 30 minutes to get it right. I am so proud of you Cohen, you are a star, always setting yourself the next goal.

Cohen is confident to stand and say his mihimihi, he understands that this is his responsibility at small group time too. Cohen often asks to be the leader at penguin group, which shows his budding leadership. He is a very thoughtful penguin member always remembering to include me in the welcome with "Kei whea Lynne?", where is Lynne. Cohen sings his way around he whole group, and he would enthusiastically do this everyday as a leader, but sometimes we need to share the leadership roles. One of Cohen's learning journey's is about letting others have a turn too, as his high energy levels make him pretty keen to do it all the time. Another great learning journey Cohen.



One of your strengths Cohen is to draw and create, making your thinking visible on paper and then you translate it into a model to replicate dimension, shape, design and purpose. When you invited me over to see your latest design I was simply blown away Cohen, what a fabulous designer and creator you are. We are going to need innovative and creative people in the 21st century Cohen to lead the way in a world that will look very different to how it does now. If you begin to think about the jobs you might be doing in 12 years time, they will not have been thought of yet, so innovation and creativity are key skills for the 21st century.

I can see that you are already planning for that Cohen, when you showed me your motorbike and trailer I was fascinated with the innovative design and your particular use of the materials on hand. You had so expertly connected the different materials together to create your thinking visually.

It was no surprise that a week later you were then drawing your design for a house and then constructing it from the materials on hand. You know what you are able to do and then you know when to tap into other peoples ideas if you need help. I was happy to help you with the final construction using the sellotape to hold it together as I could clearly see your ideas.



### **"COHEN'S CUPCAKE DELIVERY TRUCK**

It has lots of cupcakes to deliver to the people.

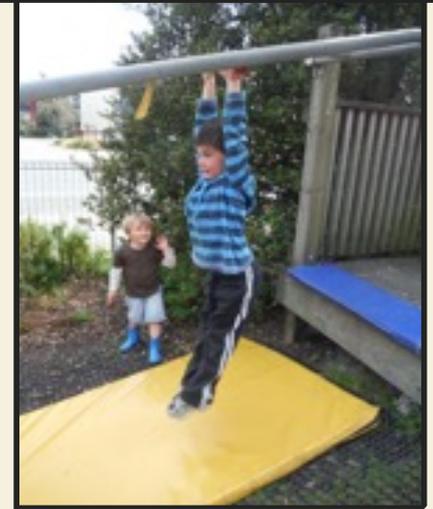
It's only going to go to people's houses if they are very patient when they are 5 and they go to school and their mum makes some for Kindy to share. The front is where people get in. All the cupcakes go in the back. The roof is on the top so the cupcakes don't get wet. The cupcakes are birthday cakes. You need to have lots of sleeps til you're 5".



Teachers at Nayland believe one of the most important skills for children to have is social competence, so group learning experiences are a key part of our learning environment and a powerful way for Cohen to see others as learners too. Cohen is encouraged to play with other children, share his strengths and interests, share his ideas, gather ideas from others, as well as engage in all the social learning e.g. turn taking, listening, being respectful, valuing others opinions and learning about difference. It is fair to say that we all continue to learn these skills throughout our lives, and this is complex learning that takes time, and this is why we often use the phrase “Cohen’s learning journey”, it evolves as he learns.

Cohen is learning about being more physical through watching his peers in the outdoors and through the challenges the teachers encourage him to take on the outdoor equipment. I was keen to ask him how his learning was going on the monkey bars, rope bridge and climbing wall he said, “ I am still learning that”. Cohen was confident to give the climbing wall a go, he happily positioned himself just off the ground and was satisfied with his efforts. He then went to the monkey bars and confidently swung himself off the platform using his arms to support him on No. 3 rung, he held himself there for a short time and then dropped to the ground. Cohen is discovering a new journey.

The teachers are encouraging the whole morning session to challenge themselves on the monkey bars, as developing upper body strength and cross patterning, is key to wiring both sides of the brain for later learning and key to developing upper body strength. One of the reasons that we value Lee Corlett’s perceptual motor sessions so much, is that he designs a programme that promotes children developing core body strength, balance, spatial awareness, directionality. We know that Cohen is really motivated and inspired to be more physical at Lee’s sessions. These forms of physical exercise wire Cohen’s brain for logical and creative thinking, to support his handwriting posture and hand strength and to support reading and writing as Cohen practices moving from left to right. Cohen sees himself as a learner in this realm and he is happy to attempt something new and practice it, satisfied he had tried his best.



### **What learning is happening - He aha te mātauranga i te ako.**

We are all supporting Cohen to learn about how to fill his virtual backpack with tools, strategies and the disposition to be a life long learner, and he is leading the way, showing us that he knows what he needs right now. So by inviting him to self assess his own learning journey and by seeking his perspective on what is important learning for him enables us to understand his thinking and respond in the moment when he is sharing his many ideas with us. If we want to recognise and respond to the learning that is taking place, we need to seek multiple perspectives i.e. from Cohen, his whanau, the teachers, and his peers. Children develop many learning goals that are often not visible, and they often change track as they work, and sometimes their learning is only apparent in retrospect. When I looked at the many photos I had taken of Cohen over the term, it became obvious that he needs to draw, discuss and create his thinking through construction.

When Cohen highlighted the happy face, (I can do this), and neutral face, (I am still learning to do this), self assessment sheet he confidently talked me through each box. Cohen sees himself as a learner, he knows what he can do, and he is happy with what he is achieving. It will be interesting to check in with him later in the year to see if anything has changed as a direct response to his new learning focus.

Cohen's story highlights his ability to think about his learning and to set goals on something he sees as important for him to work on and achieve. Carol Dweek, a leading writer in early childhood education, talks about when children are oriented towards learning goals they strive to increase their competence, to understand or master something new. Cohen is now showing more interest in the monkey bars and physical play and the teachers have responded by encouraging him to watch others and have a goal setting sheet to aim for No. 16 on the monkey bars, as a way for him to visually see his progress, so that he can plan what he needs to do next. This is a way of alerting Cohen to some possible next steps in his learning, through more physical exploration. So now it is timely to challenge him physically. We are also challenging his brain to develop new pathway muscles as "learning and education is about stretching our learning muscles, practice makes the learning muscles stronger". (Claxton, G. 2006) In the natural order of things Cohen will develop his larger muscles first then his hand muscles will develop last. This order of priority, established by the brain, insures that the large muscles necessary for coordination and locomotion (getting from here to there) are well organized and in control, before taking on the complex mastery of the more than 60 combined muscles in the hands (let alone the dozens of bones, hundreds of ligaments and tendons, etc., etc.) (Moving Smart blog, A moving child is a learning child, Nov 2013). Some of the headings in the article sum it up in terms of movement driving learning, "M" is for monkey bars; get ready for writing and "Put your pencils down and go play on the monkey bars", No Kidding!.Climbing, hanging, swinging, and any other high-energy activities that build strength in his upper body and core muscles are vital precursors to fine motor skills".

Friendships and working with others are all precursors to Cohen's further learning journey.

### **Opportunities and Possibilities - Ngā hua pea-ngā taumata.**

Te Whāriki (Early Childhood Curriculum document) is built on a framework of socio-cultural philosophy whereby much emphasis for children's learning is placed around their collaboration with peers and adults. Cohen will have many more opportunities to take up challenges in the physical realm alongside his peers, such as sessions with Lee Corlett, excursions outside the gate, and adaptation of the playground equipment to provide individuals and groups of children with challenges that build on current skills and interests.

We will continue to support Cohen's new found interest in being a physical learner by encouraging him to spend more time outside this term, to learn alongside others and to also build friendships with others.