

**In this issue:**

- Margaret Carr and Wendy Lee - Learning Stories. Constructing Learner Identities in Early Education
- Blogging
- Appreciating Creativity - Whatever Shape It Takes
- Who is... Gillian Fitzgerald?
- Taking the time to stop, listen and reflect
- Learning Story: Putting My Foot Down
- Upcoming Events June - August

**Margaret Carr and Wendy Lee - Learning Stories. Costructing Learner Identities in Early Education**

**HOT OFF THE PRESS:** Prof Margaret Carr (Waikato University) and ELP director Wendy Lee's book *Learning Stories. Constructing Learner Identities in Early Education* is now available!

Margaret's seminal work on Learning Stories was first published in 2001, and this widely acclaimed approach to assessment has since gained a huge international following.

In this new full-colour book, Margaret and Wendy outline the philosophy behind Learning Stories and refer to the latest findings from the research projects they have led with teachers on learning dispositions and learning power, to argue that Learning Stories can construct learner identities in early childhood settings and schools.

On the following pages you will find an excerpt from the 1st chapter (*Learner Identities in Early Education: An Introduction to Four Themes*) of this new book.

**Box 1.1**

In the Learning Story *Design Inspiration* we can see Kyah's willingness to be flexible with the goals she sets herself. Kyah could see that the picture [in a book] of wearable art was made up of old pairs of jeans and recognised that in order to make her own rendition she was not going to be able to use the same materials as the original artist but instead had to make alternative choices with the resources that she had available to her. ... Kyah's view of herself as a learner comes directly from her family's and her teachers' attitudes to learning and intelligence. A paper entitled *Learning is Learnable* (Claxton, 2004: 3) documents how much people unintentionally 'pick up' not just their physical but mental habits and values from those around them. We are deeply immersed in a community of learners, and teachers have a vital role, particularly for children who spend large parts of their days in an early learning, group setting. (Karen H., early childhood teacher, commenting on a Learning Story during a research project)

This quote from a teacher, writing about an episode of learning for 4-year-old Kyah, introduces four themes about the ways that Kyah views herself as a learner. These themes are about young learners who construct their own opportunities to learn, make learning connections from one place to another, recognise the learning journey that they are on, and explore their understandings in a range of increasingly complex ways.

This book will also consider these themes as *consequences for assessment practice*. Assessment for learning plays a powerful role in this early construction of a learner identity. It is the Learning Story and its portfolio – revisited with others – that enables Kyah to recognise the learning journey that is valued here. We are particularly interested in the role of narrative assessments: adults and children telling and re-telling stories of learning and competence, reflecting on the past and planning for the future. As Kyah's teacher points out, significant numbers of young people now spend substantial periods of time each week in early years education group settings – early childhood and school. So we must pay close attention to these themes and consequences.

continued on page 2



The teacher's comment at the beginning of this chapter highlights the way in which the valued adults in Kyah's life view learning and how this makes a difference to Kyah's view of herself as a learner. It also points out that early childhood settings and families can be described as 'communities of learners' in which habits and values to do with learning (as well as many other domains of life) are intentionally, and unintentionally, 'picked up' by participants. Pierre Bourdieu (1990) has had much to say about this, arguing that these values and ways of being are handed down from generation to generation as *habitus*: 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions' that inscribe 'things to do or not to do, things to say or not to say, in relation to a "probable" upcoming future' (p. 53). In the twenty-first century this intergenerational or *vertical* development has become complicated by the growth of early childhood provision and by the international migration of people and ideas. Learning communities extend across the globe now, and the World Wide Web and its social and information networking has a powerful influence on our views about a 'probable' upcoming future. One of our responses to this is to argue that we must now, as well, do more to strengthen the *horizontal* and intersecting circles of influence on learner identity in early childhood provision: connecting the cultures' values, goals and visions across early years educational communities – families, early childhood settings outside the home and schools. Martin Packer and David Greco-Brooks (1999) are two of many writers who have argued that school classrooms are not just places where knowledge and skills are taught (an *epistemological* project); they include *ontological work* (p. 135). Ontological work includes the construction and editing of learner identities and the offering of new possibilities for durable, relocatable dispositions that inscribe things to do or not to do, things to say or not to say and our expectations for the future.

This is true, too, of any places that provide early childhood care and education outside the home. Analysing narratives of three recently arrived immigrant mothers attending child care centres in Belgium during the weeks prior to their young children's entry to school, Michel Vandebroek, Griet Roets and Aïsi Snoeck (2009) have commented that 'the child care centre may be considered as a place where a shared repertoire of cultural patterns is constructed and jointly reconfigured' (p. 209) and one that can challenge the idea of fixed national identities and unitary selves. They acknowledge the writing of Rosi Braidotti (1994) to refer to 'the nomadic subject' (p. 158), 'a hybrid and interconnected identity that occupies a variety of possible subject positions' (Vandebroek et al., 2009: 211). Kyah's story, too, implies at least two possible subject positions: a learner who improvises and a fabric designer. Jenelle, a teacher at this centre, had written a Learning Story about Kyah's design work on this occasion. The centre had been given a book on 'wearable art' from a recent exhibition, and one of the designs was created using 10 metres of denim: it looked like a ball gown made out of children's denim jeans. Kyah constructed her own version, bringing some old clothes from home.

Many of the ideas in this book are encapsulated in the following quote from Jerome Bruner (2002):

It is through narrative that we create and re-create selfhood, and self is a product of our telling and re-telling. We are, from the start, expressions of our culture. Culture is replete with alternative narratives about what self is or might be. (p. 86)

The notion that culture is replete with 'alternative narratives about what self is or might be' is exactly the place where we would like this book to be heading: that children develop repertoires of shared cultural patterns and valued possible learner selves, a product, in part, of learning-story telling and retelling. We argue that teachers, children and families can become co-authors of this telling and re-telling, and that these repertoires are made up of a complex intermingling of stores of knowledge with stores of disposition.

We highlight the teachers' views here, and we have long admired the ways in which teachers of young children are prepared to struggle with and puzzle over the dilemmas and the tensions of the profession. Perhaps because the impetus for much of our thinking has been our work with teachers implementing a bicultural and bilingual curriculum, our ideas resonate with the notion of learning as a cultural process. A chapter in the *Handbook of the learning sciences* by Na'ilah Suad Nasir, Ann Rosebery, Beth Warren and Carol Lee (2006) entitled 'Learning as a cultural process: Achieving equity through diversity' discusses the ways in which culture is central to learning:

By 'culture', we mean the constellation of practices historically developed and dynamically shaped by communities in order to accomplish the purposes they value. Such practices are constituted by the tools they use, the social networks with which they are connected, the ways they organize joint activity, the

continued on page 3



discourses they use and value (i.e., specific ways of conceptualizing, representing, evaluating and engaging with the world). On this view, learning and development can be seen as the acquisition throughout the life course of diverse repertoires of overlapping, complementary, or even conflicting cultural practices. (p. 489)

Our aim in the book is to explore the contribution that narrative assessment as Learning Stories can make towards the construction of a repertoire of cultural practices and learner identities. Our perspective on learner identity and this construction process centrally includes: agency and dialogue (the ways in which joint activity is organised), making connections across boundaries between places (the social networks with which the practice is connected), recognising and re-cognising learning continuities, and appropriating knowledges and learning dispositions in a range of increasingly complex ways (the discourses that are used and valued). Nasir et al. (2006) wrote that cultural practices are constituted, in part, by the tools that communities use. The tools that we will primarily focus on here are the assessment practices, and we will conclude that the tools that assess the learning can also sustain the learning by influencing the other parts of the cultural constellation – the social networks, the way that ‘joint activity’ is organised and the discourses that are used and valued.

[...]

You can get your copy of the book through for example: [fishpond](#), [The Book Depository](#) or [amazon.co.uk](#).

They do vary in prices so it's a good idea to compare the total price on each site.

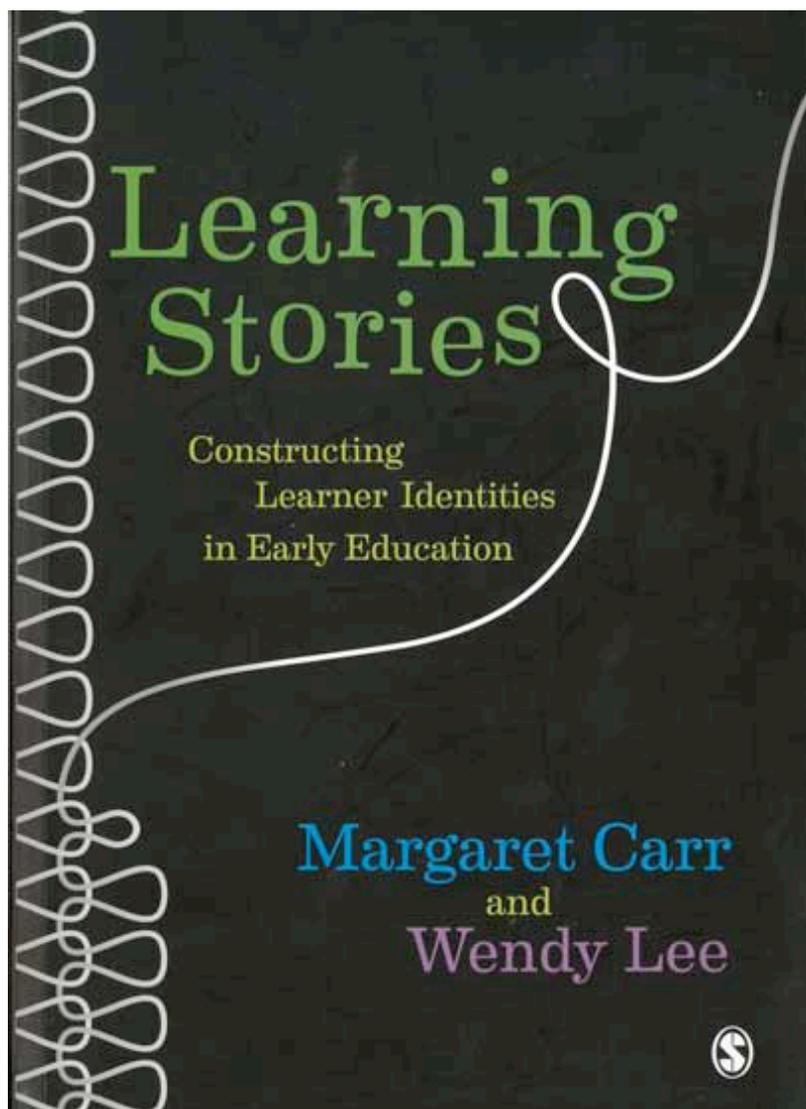
Wendy and Margaret will also talk about aspects of this book at some of our events this year:

12 June, Lecture Series Hamilton  
Margaret Carr: Being a Learner - What Outcomes for Early Childhood? ([read more](#))

19 June, Lecture Series Auckland  
Margaret Carr: Being a Learner - What Outcomes for Early Childhood? ([read more](#))

27 June, Seminar Series Tauranga  
Wendy Lee: Learning Stories: Where are we up to now? (please contact [Annika](#) for more information)

19 July, Seminar Kaitaia  
Wendy Lee: Learning Stories. Constructing Learner Identities (please contact Peter Visser (peterv@farnorthreap.org.nz) at Far North REAP for more information)





## Blogging

As a reader of our Newsletter you may or may not also be a reader of one or both of our blogs. These are accessible through a link on our website and are well worth a visit. There are also links from the ELP blog to Wendy's personal blog and to mine.



<http://educationalleadershipproject.blogspot.co.nz/>

Are there other blogs you access and do you also have your own? Often when you search for something on Google, the information you want is within someones blog and you may not even realise that it is one until you see the peoples comments etc.

Blogs care sometimes described as online diaries, although I feel this term could be slightly misleading and prefer to think of them as personal websites that are easy to create and easy to update. Blogging is one way of being a part of the global community, in a way it's a bit like a group letter - remember the ones that were often sent at Christmas time to let people know what the whānau had been up to for the year? Well a blog is a little like that, but more frequent and to a wider audience.

The key is to update regularly as it will keep your readers interested and make them want to keep coming back to your blog. Blogs can become an ongoing conversation and more often than not I will read through the comments that people have posted on someone's blog. When I have a problem with my computer in particular it is often through the ongoing discussion that I find the answer I am looking for.

Share your interest or passion, without a doubt there will be an audience out there that is interested in what you have to say and what better thing to write about than something that interests you. I tend to write mostly

about things to do with Apple, iPods, iPads, applications etc. and I write about rugby, particularly the All Blacks.

Start reading blogs and become a follower of the ones that are of interest to you. Make comments as well as this will build your confidence in getting your voice out there. Have you thought about submitting something to one of the ELP blogs, this is a great way to begin your blogging journey?

Start your own practice blog. Use either blogger [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com) or WordPress [www.WordPress.com](http://www.WordPress.com) and give it a name that you will not want to use again (i.e, Jo Colbert test blog). Both of these blogging platforms have their own templates that you can edit and customise to give your blog an individual look and feel. Once you have made your blog, go to your settings and make it private, viewable only to writers of this blog. By doing this you can write to your heart's content and no one will see it. I have a test blog and I use it to work out things I am not sure about and when I have practiced I am then able to use what I have learnt on my public blog.

Some of the teams I have been working with lately have been using a private blog for self review, the whole team has access to the blog and contributes to ongoing professional discussions. Using a blog for self review enables access from any computer and can become an ongoing diary or reflective journal.

If you have not thought about it before, I urge you to consider giving blogging a go, try something new for 30 days and see if you can cultivate a new habit. Start a blog, comment on a blog or add a post to one of our blogs.

<http://elp-kindness.blogspot.co.nz/>



Jo Colbert



## Appreciating creativity - whatever shape it takes!



The ability to see beyond rust, cobwebs and falling off bits; to see possibilities in something that is or could be useful; are things that I have much to learn about.

The machine I am describing (or rather machines) now starts - thanks to much tinkering, adaptation, grinding and interesting language. It started up with a hiss and a roar reminiscent of a traction engine. The neighbours were alarmed, and the chickens ran for cover.

It is not yet finished and I doubt it will ever have a coat of paint and be glossy and beautiful again. But it will do the job it is newly designed for and that is remarkable. We nearly have a machine that moves wood up our steep hill.

Many people see the possibilities for remaking or reworking objects into something new - often into works of art. I have a 'new' cardigan. I bought it off Trade Me; it is made from an old

cardigan and has been reworked, restitched and embellished. It has a new life, and no doubt carries stories from its old life that I do not know about. It is a work of art.

It is extremely satisfying when; instead of new, glossy, plastic, or expensive, we choose to see the possibilities in something older and preloved. It speaks of resourcefulness, sustainability and stretches our creative minds.



Transforming something old into something 'new' requires 'tinkering', playing around, experimenting, and messing about. This is a space that Guy Claxton might describe as 'foggy'; not quite knowing what the end result might be, but willing to be immersed in the uncertainty of finding out. Rich learning sits in this space if we are prepared to be comfortable with not knowing where we might end up.

Gever Tulley, who founded the Tinkering School and has written the book *50 Dangerous Things (you should let your children do)*, advocates for messing around with things. The philosophy that underpins his work with children is that: "Grand schemes, wild ideas, crazy notions, and intuitive leaps of imagination are, of course, encouraged and fertilized." (<http://www.fiftydangerousthings.com/about-the-authors>)

As a teacher the idea of shaping and reshaping has always been of interest to me. The idea that spaces can be more fluid and responsive is worth considering. Children know this. We will all have watched as children move furniture (if they are allowed), drape fabric and create spaces that fit their plans. Chairs become animal cages, rockets, cars and anything else imaginable. Children are willing to use all available resources and are able to see into a future of possibilities. We can learn so much from them.

Ken Robinson says that creativity is educated out of children. Cultivating creativity is something teachers have a responsibility to do. Guy Claxton suggests,

We have to start by displaying to them our own creativity. And, like all effective coaches, a creativity coach has to walk the talk. Or perhaps, in the case of creativity, we should not so much be 'walking' it as dancing it. (Robinson, 2011, p. 3)

Early Childhood Centres are places where ideas are mulled over; where resources are adapted and children can make



Weaving Professional Education into our Practice

their marks by moving, shaping and re-conceptualising the learning environment. Or they can be highly structured, static, unmovable and rigid; words that we might also use to describe mindsets and attitudes.

So whilst I might not always appreciate the noise and mess that reshaping machinery inflicts on my landscape (and ears!) - I have learnt to appreciate the creative process that takes place. And if the end result is a fabulous construction that does something useful - even better.

### References:

Claxton, G. (1998). *Hare brain, tortoise mind. Why intelligence increases when you think less.* London: Fourth Estate.

Claxton, G. (2003). *Creativity: A guide for the advanced learner (and teacher).* Available from <http://www.guyclaxton.com/publications.htm>

Dweck, C. (2008). *Mindset. The new psychology of success. How we can learn to fulfill our potential.* New York: Ballantine.

Robinson, K. (2011). *Out of our minds. Learning to be creative.* West Sussex: Capstone.

Tulley, G. Fifty Dangerous Things Website: <http://www.fiftydangerousthings.com/>

Alison Brierley



## Who is... Gillian Fitzgerald?

First and foremost, I'm a mother of two fantastic teenage boys who are my greatest achievement to date, and who I give thanks for everyday, as they continue to grow into 'good men'.

I have been involved in early childhood education since the early '80's, the majority of this time was spent in kindergartens and until very recently thought that that would be how I'd see out my career.

Well life has a habit of turning things on its head, and in 2010 that was exactly what happened to me, which saw me needing to reevaluate my life. I adopted, what Carol Dweck calls, a 'growth mindset' and decided to take the plunge and look for a new challenge career path, as some would say, 'facing my fears and doing it anyway'.

In February 2012, I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to join the ELP team and so have begun a new chapter in my life's journey. Nothing warms my heart more, than seeing teaching teams excited about learning and having the opportunity to be the person that inspires some of that passion is very exciting to me. I too am excited about the learning that is ahead for me, as I continue to grow alongside those I work with.

When it comes to my personal life I have three main passions, travel, movies and good food and wine and I have become very skilled in being able to, most time, combine at least two of my three passions!





## Taking the time to stop, listen and reflect... by Lynn Rupe

As a new team member to ELP all the travel around the country, for me, has been very interesting. There is so much to see and experience while traveling from airport to motel, to airport and home. On one of these excursions I was standing waiting to get my bag checked in and in front of me was someone checking their beloved pet into baggage. She farewelled him and moved away, I think somewhat apprehensive about what lay in store for her beloved family member. I was curious to see what was inside and asked the check in assistant about the contents of the animal crate. It turns out that inside was a little labra-doodle, leaving from Tauranga and going off to Melbourne. It was, to say the least, very, very cute. We stood and oohed and ahned over the puppy for a few minutes before it disappeared behind the curtain.

With time on my hands before the flight I sat and watched out the window at the hive of industry prior to take-off. The cargo engineers were moving the luggage into the plane - this was a job that obviously needed to be done in a speedy fashion so as the scheduled time for flight was not interrupted. The bags were tossed up into the plane by one attendant while the other was inside the hold ensuring everything was stacked safely. This is how it went - bag in, sort, bag in, sort, puppy in, sort, bag in.....you get the idea. I am not saying that there is anything wrong with this picture but I did feel sorry for the men loading the plane as they did not even hesitate for a second to look inside the crate to see what treasure it might hold. Now this got my brain thinking about early childhood settings.

Are we so busy with getting the job of being an early childhood teacher done that we miss the moment? The ooh and ahhh moment. I am sure that this question has been discussed many times before on the ELP site, in PD, in the staffroom amongst teachers and in other numerous settings where reflective teachers consider what wise practice looks like. But it is still a question worth considering again and again. *"Slowing down, taking the time, being relaxed and unhurried gives teachers a chance to think through the possibilities and cue into children's questions. As these questions are often unspoken, listening carefully to the many languages offered by young children is an essential, ethical responsibility for teachers."* (Greerton Early Childhood Centre) This shared understanding of wise practice that comes out of the Greerton Early Childhood Centres COI Final report is worth considering deeply about what allows us to slow down within our settings?

If we look at current research there are many contributing factors to quality, an extensive list of these is in a report put out by the Office of the Children's Commissioner written by Carroll-Lind & Angus (2011). The list includes ratios, group size, floor space, quiet spaces, qualifications and parental involvement to name some. *"Staff child ratio and group size indicators—two of the best indicators for determining the quality of a child care program.....These two indicators improve the caregiving behaviors of staff and the safety of children. And on the mental health and school readiness side, more secure attachments occur with higher staff child ratios and smaller group sizes.* (Fiene, 2002, cited on <http://www.childforum.com/weekly-early-childhood-update/326-being-informed-8th-april.html>)

It is interesting that in the above quote it says ratio and group size **effect** the "caregiving behaviours" of staff. While we can have the external effects sorted we still need to constantly be reflecting on our teaching practice. Questions around being too busy during our day to sit and really listen to children, or thinking about getting the nappies out of the way so we can move onto lunch or morning tea. What does lunch time in our settings look like - quiet, inviting, intimate, relationship building, full of kind and curious conversation, I wonder? I know I have been in restaurants that I wanted to leave as soon as I could because of the noise and the constant movement unlike other restaurants where I would like to linger with friends or family and make eating a real social event. Do our rules and preconceived ideas of what it is to get the job of teaching done for the day stop us from being the best that we can be? Are we moving children along a conveyor belt from one aspect of the day to the next and missing the ooh and the ahh of our profession?

Maybe there was a rule for the cargo loader, "thou shalt not stop and talk to the dog". Maybe we have rules within our centres that need to be challenged so as they can fit the child's day rather than the child having to bend into the routine and rule of the centre which are maybe more to do with management of time and resources than responsive teaching.

Below is a Learning Story from a teacher that took the time to stop, listen and reflect on what it was that the child was saying and also on her own teaching practice and ideals. We can have all the structure right and still miss the ooh and ahh, but in this case I think Kerry could walk away and internally be ahhhing over the outcome for Isabelle.

# Putting my foot down

Isabelle, I have really enjoyed watching you grow and learn over the last few weeks. You have shown us more and more of your personality as you develop more communication skills.

Today, you made me laugh and seriously consider my teaching practice. Here at day care we have a rule that you must sit down when you are eating so that you don't choke on your food. We model this to the children; we remind you all and try very hard to ensure we all follow this rule. Today, however, you had been a little bit off and hadn't really eaten much of your food. Your key teacher Kelly was a little concerned and asked us all to try hard to get you to eat something. When I asked you if you would like some lunch you perked up and made a noise that indicated 'yes'. So I prepared a plate of yummy food for you and when I went to put it down at the table you had set up a cushion and a table in the library corner. 'Hmm,' I thought, 'very ingenious but no, our rule is you need sit at the table to eat or was it???' So I encouraged you to sit at the table to eat. Izzy, you didn't like this and you began to put your foot down and insist on sitting in your special area in the library corner. I continued to coax you to sit down and with no avail I stopped and wondered what to do next.

Now you got me thinking, Izzy. Was our rule actually that you had to sit at the table to eat? Well, no, the rule is that you need to sit down to eat. Then I thought about you and your day and remembered that most importantly you hadn't eaten much and any food that you did eat today was a bonus. So I listened to you and your wishes and let you sit at your special little area that you created. You were thrilled and sat for ages eating everything off your plate. Thank you, Izzy, for being so assertive in your wishes. You helped me to really think about my teaching practice and ensure that I do what is best for you and your learning.

I'm so glad that you perked up and had lots to eat, and I'm also really proud of you for organising a special area to eat in and for putting your foot down to ensure your desires were met. Next time I will think first about your desires and how they can fit within the rules before dismissing your creativity.

By Kerry Laugesen, September 2011





## Upcoming Events

## June - August 2012

**06.06.2012**

Seminar, Rotorua  
Gillian Fitzgerald: Environments  
(3-5pm, repeated: 6-8pm)

**09.06.2012**

Leadership Inspiration Day, Hamilton  
(9am - 3pm)

**12.06.2012**

Lecture Series, Hamilton  
Prof. Margaret Carr: Being a Learner  
- What Outcomes for Early  
Childhood?  
(7-9pm)

**16.06.2012**

Under Twos Inspiration Day, Lower  
Hutt  
(9am - 3pm)

**19.06.2012**

Lecture Series, Auckland  
Prof. Margaret Carr: Being a Learner  
- What Outcomes for Early  
Childhood?  
(7-9pm)

**20.06.2012**

Seminar, Tokoroa  
Lynn Rupe: Social Competence  
(3-5pm, repeated: 6-8pm)

**27.06.2012**

Seminar, Tauranga  
Wendy Lee: Learning Stories - The  
Power to Construct Learner Identity  
(3-5pm, repeated: 6-8pm)

**10.07.2012**

Lecture Series, Hamilton  
Lorraine Sands & Christina Leef:  
Disrupting Conventional Thinking  
through Sharing Perspectives,  
Growing Conversations and  
Depening Understanding...  
(7-9pm)

**11.07.2012**

Seminar, Rotorua  
Lynn Rupe: Key Teacher (3-5pm,  
repeated: 6-8pm)

**11.07.2012**

Seminar, Otorohanga  
Wendy Lee: Social Competence  
(3-5pm, repeated from 6pm - 8pm)

**17.07.2012**

Lecture Series, Auckland  
Lorraine Sands & Christina Leef:  
Disrupting Conventional Thinking  
through Sharing Perspectives,  
Growing Conversations and  
Depening Understanding...  
(7-9pm)

**18.07.2012**

Seminar, Tokoroa  
Wendy Lee: Rosters and Routines  
(3-5pm, repeated: 6-8pm)

**19.07.2012**

Seminar, Kaitaia  
Wendy Lee: Learning Stories - The  
Power to Construct Learner Identity  
(6 - 8.30pm)

**07.08.2012**

Seminar, Tokoroa  
Lorraine Sands: Transitions  
(3-5pm, repeated: 6-8pm)

**14.08.2012**

Lecture Series: Hamilton  
Wendy Lee: The Power and the  
Passion of the Teacher  
(7-9pm)

**15.08.2012**

Seminar, Rotorua  
Lorraine Sands: Transitions  
(3-5pm, repeated: 6-8pm)

**21.08.2012**

Lecture Series: Auckland  
Wendy Lee: The Power and the  
Passion of the Teacher  
(7-9pm)

**27.08.2012**

Seminar, Tauranga  
Lynn Rupe: Let's Do the Maths on  
Quality  
(7-9pm)

### Enrollments:

Please send an email to Annika:  
[annika.philipp@elp.co.nz](mailto:annika.philipp@elp.co.nz)  
with the title (and itme if applicable)  
of the event you would like to enrol  
for and the names of the teachers  
you would like to enrol.

Although we can take late  
enrollments for most of our events  
we would prefer if you could book  
your spaces in advance; otherwise  
we can't guarantee that these  
events will take place.