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## Reflecting on the art of creating bubbles.

Maybe, as I do, you still remember the days when it seemed compulsory to have at least one wall of the centre covered in duplicated bubble paintings. I often wondered if it was about painting, blowing bubbles or following instructions. What I did notice was that repercussions, should some unsuspecting soul get it wrong and suck rather than blow, were rather traumatic. Choking on a mouthful of soap concentrate is not pleasant and I am sure left many children with lingering memories not of pleasure and discovery but of trickery and deception. In this situation the power, the sense and the meaning lies with the teacher, perhaps a metaphor of an earlier understanding of teaching and learning.

As time progressed and bubble painting faded into insignificance a new bubble story emerged. In 2001, after two years helping to pioneer the use of Learning Stories, Margaret Carr visited our centre. Engaging in debate, Margaret used the metaphor of a bubble to explain what it really meant to 'support children's passions'. She likened learning to the child being inside a bubble of their choice. As the child becomes deeply engaged they try out new ideas, gently testing the boundaries stretching the skin as it were. As they deepen their involvement investigating their passion the bubble stays intact, The delicate surface tension that forms the skin of a bubble gently extends as the bubble gets bigger, wider, and longer. The wonder of the engagement and discovery relies on the explorer retaining the power.



**Above:** Wendy creating bubbles in Marka, Sweden

**Below:** Wendy and Annika from Sweden helping Lorraine and her bubble



Then, in 2010, came the Swedish bubble experience! In June this year, as part of the wonderful adventure I had overseas with ELP I was in Hamdon Way Preschool in London and I noticed a series of wonderful bubble photographs on the wall. Children were standing inside intact giant bubbles, I stopped in my tracks and looked again. This time I saw that inside the giant bubble the child was blowing even more bubbles. A little stunned I left with these images implanted in my brain with my thoughts swirling around them. The question, 'How was this possible?' intrigued me. The children's skill inspired me and the complexity of the knowledge these children had formed about bubbles, surface tension, relationships between air and water overwhelmed me. I was left with many thoughts but paramount in my mind was the question, 'Could I do it too?'



Weaving Professional Education into our Practice

03/2010

Once in Sweden I took the question to colleagues and our Swedish friends, suddenly it was a shared challenge. Late into the night we planned and we plotted, driven by a huge sense of fun, passion and excitement. We googled, bought resources, debated difficulties and devised possibilities. The big day came and we spent hours engaged in hard physical work as we tried ideas out. No food, no rest for us, just hours of deep thoughtful involvement (see pictures on the previous page). By nightfall we had experienced the pleasure of partial success. Defeated by gentle wind and physical tiredness, we journeyed on, moving from 'Marka', Annika and Ander's heavenly Swedish country retreat, to Stockholm.



Little did we know our investigation was not over and the best was yet to come. Wendy, Lorraine and I spent an amazing day in an inspirational place called the Tom Tits Experiment. A children's scientific discovery centre just out of Stockholm. In this astonishing place was a bubble area where we found the total bubble experience. Here our experiment was completed and Lorraine saw the world from the inside of a bubble (picture above and right). Its detail exposed through the lens of the taut, stretched, fragile skin of a bubble. We played with stretching bubbles and saw the beauty of the bubble skin. We realised for ourselves the magical yet fragile nature of true tension. Without a state of tension there is no bubble. What skill is required to achieve this state of tension, this shift in power that creates the choreography of the dance between the teacher and the learner.

Robyn Lawrence



### Who Is... Lorraine Sands?

I am very interested in children's ideas. I'm fascinated by the way they express these through their explorations. I hesitate to call it play because that's not quite it. Now that sounds heretical coming from the perspective of an early childhood teacher but 'play' isn't quite enough to explain this. It is more about the 'real work' that children engage in as they find out about their world; the questions they ask and the questions they explore. When Jake came through the door saying words to the effect: "It's not fair, children always get wet when the adults hold the umbrellas" of course it was true. Those pesky umbrellas are way too high for children to be spared a downpour! But it was what made him want to fix the problem that drew a teacher (Jodi) into a collegial look at the problem and half an hour later the most fabulous invention emerged from 'Te Whare Aoutoroa' (our art exploration room) as you can see in the picture! What insight to put a window in to see through!

It's democracy in action with power imbalances between children and adults deftly, relationally, put to one side. This requires listening to children's ideas and taking them seriously. I once read a transcript of an interview with Sir Arthur MacDiarmid, our celebrated NZ scientist. In fact it was one of the sparks for our journey as a Centre of Innovation at Greerton Early Childhood Centre 2006-2008 exploring children's working theories. He said: "Children must be encouraged to ask lots and lots of questions....." But I'm thinking, children do this intuitively, imperatively! What must happen, is that teachers must listen. Jake's mum knew this because he came to our centre that day armed with an adult's umbrella. The great thing though, is that Mum and Jake knew that it wouldn't end there. No 'that's interesting Jake'-comment and fobbed off so the day's agenda could continue undisturbed. Serious work immediately, with an interested teacher by his side companionably exploring possibilities.





Who is...Lorraine Sands continued



I have worked in a team at Greerton Early Childhood Centre for seventeen years and as I write the number of years down it seems incredible. Much of that time has been spent with the same teachers, yet as I reflect on how our teaching and learning has changed over the years it would be hard to recognise the same place then and now. The bones of the ideas have always been there but the people, places and things we have engaged with along the way have meant that those embryonic early days have blossomed into a vibrancy that has shared leadership and a dispositionally framed learning context at its heart. Whenever the Greerton teachers write about learning and teaching we like to place it in context and so we often accompany our reflections with a Learning Story. It seems right to do that now as I think about the power of ideas and their combination in interesting, surprising ways that give rise to imaginative solutions. The Learning Story here is written for Jacob and it explores what I really want to say:

## Imaginative leaders work like this.....

Jacob, I've become fascinated by the way you combine imagination and leadership to draw many of your friends into amazingly complex dramas. We often say that passionate learners gather other learners around them because they seem to have a drive, a curiosity, an enthusiasm that is contagious. Most importantly they have a burning interest that leads them to want to find out more, explore further.

Each day as I watch you I see this kind of exploration unfolding. Sometimes you combine real life drama with an imaginative insight. I saw this last week as volcanoes erupted everywhere in the back garden and you led your intrepid explorers through the lava pools, avoiding the deep cracks in the earth's crust and racing through the exploding fire and mud. It seemed that every boy at Mitchell Street that day followed your lead and the play was full of excitement, loud whoops of laughter, all mixed with a 'pretend scariness' from everyone on that adventure trail. Then a few days later I saw you with other children using the hoola hoops in a way I have never seen before. Apparently you were trapped inside a bubble and these were floating all over the garden! Then somehow the bubbles joined together. You had climbed inside two, making the hoops intersect and with your friend Jack inside the other hoop (whoops, bubble) you continued to float around the sandpit. Just before this happened you had been with a group of children blowing bubbles, while several other children nearby were trying to spin the hoops around their waists. Just how you thought to combine these two things and become trapped inside a 'hoola hoop bubble' is an imaginative leap into possibility!

**What learning do I think is happening here for Jacob?**

Humankind throughout history has taken the leap from imagination or from what we can dream and made things happen. This is what makes us unique from all other life on this planet. Cheryl and Wayne (Jacob's mum and dad) you might be interested in this link to the TED talks, very funny and very different! [http://www.ted.com/talks/robert\\_sapolsky\\_the\\_uniqueness\\_of\\_humans.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/robert_sapolsky_the_uniqueness_of_humans.html) Imagination then is so important because it wires the brain in a way that allows us to see, seemingly disconnected things and find new ways to use them. I see Jacob's imaginative flair unfolding and think that this freedom to play around with ideas will enable him to develop this way of thinking further. In a 21st century world full of change, requiring imaginative thinkers and leaders, I think Jacob is practicing those dispositions that will enable him to embrace challenge, work hard to meet these and inspire others to be involved. From your friend Lorraine

**Who is...Lorraine Sands continued**

I find myself these days, as I see children working like this, asking them "What's your plan?" I think you have to have a sound relationship with a child to do this or they will look at you as if you're slightly unhinged. Thinking about your thinking gives you fabulous insight, it lights up possibilities and engages others in the process. I don't think we ever really learn anything on our own and its often a slowly building process that takes time to be fully aware of. It's funny to hear myself say that as I have so often sat in classrooms where it was quiet and the main voice, the director's voice, was the teacher's voice. Where is there room for ideas to ferment, for a setting to be an incubator of ideas when conversation is traffic directed and one way? So how much conversation around ideas happens in your place? How often are you writing about this in your Learning Stories? We get what we focus on and if unpacking ideas is important then building a culture in your setting around this is the consequence of putting your ideas into action.

**On the subject of planning and other things. Reflections, ramblings and ruminations.**

Today, for instance, how to describe the work of these young children, the purposeful intent with which they went about their individual and sometimes group activity. Intentions so obvious in each discussion - yet clear only to themselves. Intentions so logical, yet sometimes, sadly, so misunderstood by peers. As these children's intentions crossed the paths of others, misunderstandings, and conflicts arose. Only to be sorted either by a mutual agreement of the children or a subtle change of plans. I watched as young children responded to each others unspoken needs; offered help and thoughtfully supported their friends. Friendships in the making, personalities becoming stronger.

A sense of wonder grew as I watched. I have previously been unwise about working with very young children. These children cannot be described as 'cute' or 'sweet'. They are planners, purposeful actors on their world, seriously undertaking work in order to understand and make sense of their world. I was intrigued, amazed and inspired. This environment allowed these children to act on their ideas and follow through with plans. They were not hoarded into countless planned pre-organised activities. Instead teachers supported ideas, talked with children and supported their articulation of their plans and theories.

I could go on for a long time decrying other practices that do not allow children time and space to complete thought-out plans. Why do we think we know so well what children need? Where did our training and gathering of information lead us down a path of being patronising and all-knowing? Sadly at times we may have lost the art of listening and replaced it with the task of planning. Planning seems to rule the day and fill some teachers minds. It has become the word that justifies, gives meaning to and allows the waste of time and resources.

When did 'Planning' take away our ability to use our intuition and even the ability to respond spontaneously? Our repertoire of responses is fitted into boxes of activities, often on a table. As if the engine room of a centre is on a table with 6 chairs and 1 for the teacher!

What happens on the peripheral is then seen as unimportant, only an extra - when the planned activity is over. Yet this peripheral world is where much of the real learning is happening; as children organise their scripts and roles for intense dramatic play. Negotiations are undertaken about who does what and when. Friendships are built and rebuilt as children figure out ways to communicate their thoughts and feelings. Fairness is unpacked and debated. Theories are articulated and argued over and tested and re-tested. All of this happens often whilst teachers busy themselves with the setting and resetting of activities. Then, sadly, this rich complex play is interrupted, forced abandonment at crucial points of negotiation or critical moments in the story. Children are herded into something seen as meaningful by a well intentioned teacher and children are encouraged to pay attention on such riveting topics as the 'letter of the day'. Bottoms squirm and a game of 'who can shout the answer the loudest' becomes the most interesting part of the group time.

Thankfully I can return to the beginning of this teaching story, knowing that there are teachers who are 'with' the children in the moment by moment learning that goes forward in unknown but interesting pathways. As for the children left squirming on the mat, we can only hope brave teachers will question; 'what is the purpose here?'

Alison Brierley



## I have been reading... *Magic Places - the adults' guide to young children's creative art work* by Pennie Brownlee

Kei Tua o te Pae reminds us of the many literacies available to children and selects for discussion in the last five books four symbol systems and technologies for making meaning. They are Literacy (oral, visual, and written), Mathematics, Information Communication Technology (ICT) and The Arts. The Arts encompasses dance, drama, music - sound arts, and visual arts.

"The Te Whāriki perspective is that children will participate in the symbol systems and technologies of the arts; for personal, social and cultural purposes; for becoming confident and competent in culturally valued enterprises; for expressing emotion; for making connections across place and time; for contributing their own abilities and viewpoints to the community; for communicating with others (including appreciating the ways in which the available cultures communicate and represent); and for making sense of their worlds." (P4 Book 19 Kei Tua o te Pae)

I am interested in multi modal literacies and especially visual art provision for infants, toddlers and young children. I visit many early childhood education settings and I reflect on the invitations, provocations and opportunities for artistic expression that are being offered to our children. To help support me and my sharing with teachers the opportunity to review and investigate their practice and provision around art and creativity I was drawn once again to Pennie Brownlee's fabulous little book [Magic Places](#). This little book is a must have in any centre's library and all teachers back pocket. It is jammed packed with photos, drawings, practical suggestions and theoretical points around the four aspects of creativity, developmental stages of children's art work, and setting up a successful creative programme.

In her foreword Pennie says, "This books is about love and respect..." and it truly is. It kindly and supportively offers new ways of viewing and doing things in an environment created to nurture children and their expressive enquiry into our world.

Pennie clearly states that, "Every child arrives onto this planet both an artist and a miracle - every child - yours included ...and that ... all children have three great needs ...**audio-visual** communication. That means from day one they need eye contact with us and they need us to speak gently with them. Allied to that they need **nurturing**, which is another way saying that they need tenderness and care, love and respect. Lastly, they need to **play**. Play is not an optional extra. Play is the activity that wires in all of the intelligences, and creative play is the highest form of play."

I particularly liked the useful discussion into **So-called creative activities** (p.35), such as, colouring-in books, colouring-in worksheets, picture stencils, cut-out shapes for the children to colour in or stick things to, tracing templates to draw around. Pennie looks at these activities in the light of common arguments put forward in their favour. Her responses to the arguments for these so-called creative activities is thought provoking, e.g. to the argument "Colouring doesn't hurt anyone" she responds.

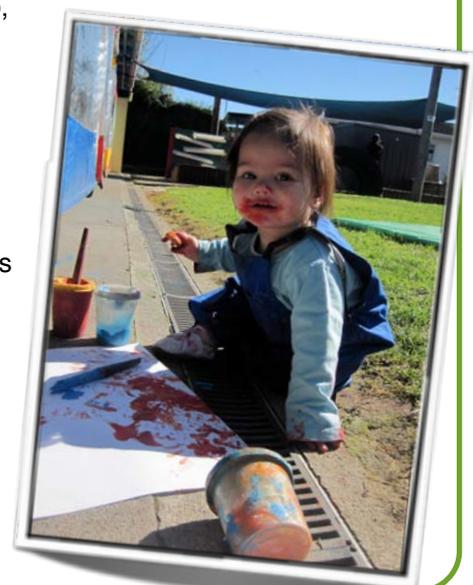
"Most people, from about five years and older, are nowhere near their art development potential. Because of past damaging 'art' experiences, colouring in included, ...It is ridiculous to say that these activities don't hurt anyone. The only ones who are not damaged are those with above-average creative confidence and artistic ability. They manage to survive in spite of these activities." (p.37)

I wholeheartedly recommend this book to teachers and parents who are supporting children's expressive arts by responding in appropriate ways while continuing to reflect on and review their provision of fantastic art experiences for young children in richly resourced child initiated environments.

Kathryn Delany



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## Fontastic

Believe it or not fonts are a hotly debated topic in our household. Living with two designers who always have an opinion on what font to use I asked them both which is their favourite which turned out to be a difficult question for them to answer. It became clear that unlike me who tends to use the same font for everything, they had many favourite fonts for different purposes.

Look at any list online of the worst fonts and top of the list is Comic Sans. In Early Childhood teachers often choose Comic Sans because of its closeness to the written letter, its formation of the letter 'a' is shaped in the same way it is written. Critics of Comic Sans say it is an uneven font, the spacing is not the same for every letter, it is a casual font often used with the wrong purpose in mind - it was designed to mimic comic strip script and was released by Microsoft in 1995.

Gill Sans and Helvetica on the other hand are two of the most popular fonts. Gil Sans was designed by Eric Gill in the 1920's, it has been used widely in the London Underground. Helvetica was created in 1957 and when you look around at packaging it is every where. Energizer, Post-it, evian, Microsoft. I like it because it is clean and crisp without any fussiness.

So, there are a few golden rules when it comes to choosing a font, the first of which is to think about the purpose of the font. Is it for a learning story or other documentation that you want children to revisit? If it is then it needs to be easily 'read' by children, some fonts like brushed script are really difficult for children to identify individual letters. This is a common mistake I see when I read through children's learning story, the font used is distracting from the content, and is often hard to read for me as an adult. What must this be like for children when they are revisiting documentation? Comic Life's default font is capitals and I often see this in learning stories (see my Comic Life sheet on our website on tips to avoid this).

Is your piece of work going to be enlarged? Some fonts work better than others at larger sizes, and if your document is going to be printed some smaller fonts do not print well. Different fonts take up different amounts of space, even at the same point size, Papyrus for example takes up more space than Arial. Think about the impact you want to make, don't be afraid to mix fonts if you are making a poster, the impact of these can be very eye catching.

Check out the font family, Helvetica has the following options in it's family.  This is great when you are making a document with a variety of font sizes and you want to stick with the same font. Check that the font you are using 'set' is complete. Particularly if you are typing Maori words, you want the macron to be straight over the vowel.

For more information about fonts and selecting best fonts and avoiding the worst check out the following link: <http://absolutegraphics.co.uk/bestworstfonts.asp?strID=Guest>

Jo Colbert

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

Comic Sans

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

Helvetica

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog

Gil Sans

*The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog*

*Brushed Script*

✓ Regular  
Oblique  
Bold  
Bold Oblique

### Upcoming Events

**30.10.2010**  
Inspiration Day Wellington  
Karen Ramsey and Wendy Lee -  
Planning Stories and Stories of Interest

**09.11.2010**  
Lecture Series Auckland  
Robyn Lawrence -  
Bicultural Perspectives

**16.11.2010**  
Lecture Series Hamilton  
Robyn Lawrence -  
Bicultural Perspectives

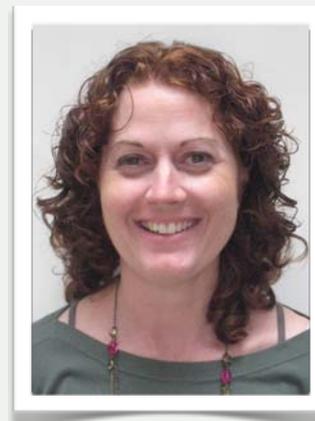


## Changes at ELP

October saw two changes to the ELP team.

Janelle Riley left ELP after more than 3 years as office administrator to take on a full-time position at I-CAR in Hamilton. Janelle had been in charge of organising our events, invoicing and all general inquiries here at ELP. Even though we are sad that Janelle isn't working at our head office anymore, we think this new job offers Janelle a fantastic opportunity to take on a leadership role and to further her career.

As a consequence of Janelle's leaving, Annika has taken over as office administrator. You can contact her for all your booking, event and invoice enquiries. Marie will be in charge of all our MoE related work, in addition to all cluster/non-cluster and in-centre work.



Further, Julie Killick left ELP to work as Head Teacher at Stanmore Bay Kindergarten.

Kathryn posted the following message on our blog:

He aha te mea nui o te ao? **He tangata! He tangata! He tangata!**

What is the most important thing in the world? It is people! It is people! It is people!

**The ELP official line** - No one ever leaves ELP and ELP never leaves you - we are like the Soprano family - you can never get out alive. This being so we have agreed to **lend** Julie Killick to the North Auckland Kindergarten Association. Julie is now the Head Teacher at Stanmore Bay Kindergarten.

Julie, you have given us many gifts. You brought your wonderful sense of joy, love, and fun to our family. You inspired us to play and try out many 'possible selves'.

### Julie, Petal

The 'possible selves'  
With fun and love  
Expose  
Leader, teacher, traveller,  
warrior and wise woman

The who to be...  
Dressage Queen, Ken  
Miss Bunny, Secret Angel  
Rita/Frida Kahlo and Storyteller  
Your scarf wrapped presence  
and JOY  
a gift to us

Our lesson learnt  
to PLAY  
Experience life's full richness  
with FUN  
The what to be  
who to do...  
Doing others  
Being human  
FRIENDS  
our friend



And so never a farewell, it is the sharing of a wonderful friend and family member. Julie, you will always be present in our fun, hearts, minds and practice.

We then received this fabulous reply from the teachers at Stanmore Bay:

"We are honoured and delighted that Julie has been 'lent' to us at Stanmore Bay Kindergarten! She has claimed herself to be a Hillbilly and a Bay Blobber ~ hanging out with us on the hill over looking the wonderful bay! Julie has already injected an enthusiasm and infectious laughter often missed in the day to day struggles of teaching practice. The joy of starting each new day is evident in our newly formed team as we celebrate our uniqueness and look forward to sharing our passions with the children, whanau and friends of the Stanmore Bay community. With much Aroha to the ELP team - thanks for your gift to us!"



## Carol Dweck conference and Mindset Rule #1

In our last newsletter I shared a little of our work in England and more specifically the work we did with Carol Dweck and the work focussed around her theoretical ideas. For everyone on the ELP team, meeting and working with Carol Dweck was a wonderful privilege. In this article I want to share a little of the work she talked about at the Conference.

For those of you who have not accessed her book, I would encourage you to get a copy for your early childhood centre library. This book has the power to change all our lives not just the children we work with. The book is '[Mindset: The New Psychology of Success](#)'. In this book, Carol identifies two mindsets that play important roles in people's success. In one, the fixed mindset, people believe that their talents and abilities are fixed traits. They have a certain amount and that's that; nothing can be done to change it. Carol Dweck's research has now shown that when people adopt the fixed mindset, it can limit their success. What happens in this scenario is that they become over-concerned with proving their talents and abilities, hiding deficiencies, and reacting defensively to mistakes or setbacks - because deficiencies and mistakes imply a (permanent) lack of talent or ability. People in this mindset will actually pass up important opportunities to learn and grow if there is a risk of unmasking weakness.

And now for Carol Dweck's presentation. Carol began with one of her favourite quotes (interesting to note it is one that the ELP team have also used frequently in recent years) by Benjamin Barber and illustrated below.



### Learner or Non-learner?



**"I don't divide the world into the weak and the strong, or the successes and the failures... I divide the world into the learners and non-learners."**

*Benjamin Barber*

She went on to say "Why would anyone become a non-learner? We are born with such an irrepressible, exuberant desire to learn, as all of you know. Well you never see an unmotivated baby - that would be ridiculous right? Instead we see babies instantly curious and attacking the most daunting tasks of a lifetime with tremendous gusto..."





“When we put too much emphasis on performing, on being gifted, on being talented ... then we created kids who feel that they have to be infallible and employers in the USA are telling me that we have created a generation of young workers that cannot get through the day without an award.”

Carol is very interested in looking deeply at how we ensure that our children remain learners. She believes that this is essentially what her work is about. She talked about her concerns of seeing children as young as three who fall apart as soon as they make mistakes and anyone challenges this. These children would be those identified as having a fixed mindset. Children who already believe that basic qualities are fixed, this sadly is the mindset that turns children into non-learners. She raised the issue of whether or not mindsets can be changed and her response was that they could be changed, stating that mindsets are very basic, they are a part of who we are and therefore control a lot of our behaviour, but they are just beliefs - and beliefs can be changed.

She then went on to talk about what she described as three mindset rules. Each was illustrated with her research.

## Mindset Rule #1

**Fixed Mindset:  
LOOK INTELLIGENT AT ALL  
COSTS**

**Growth Mindset:  
LEARN, LEARN, LEARN**

Mindset rule number one: in a fixed mindset the rule is “look clever at all times and at all costs, don’t make mistakes; but in a growth mindset the cardinal rule is learn, learn, learn”. She went on to describe two pieces of research with both 12-year-olds and approximately 20-year-olds. Both studies described how fixed mindsets turned children and young people into non-learners. In a third study Carol Dweck described how they measured different parts of their brains and especially the part that told them whether they were entering a state of intense attention to receive new information, to learn something. In this study the students were brought into the brainwave lab and were outfitted with a capful of electrodes that measured the different parts of the brain and the activity in the brain.



They were then asked a series of difficult questions. This research showed very conclusively the difference between a fixed and a growth mindset. As Carol described in illustrating the conclusions of this research “If you encapsulate this to life, you can see one group (fixed mindset) is going around saying, “Give me praise, tell me I am right, tell me how great I am.” But the other group (growth mindset), they are saying, “Tell me when I am wrong, tell me something I do not know, teach me something.” You can see how over time the latter children are going to acquire a much larger body of skills and knowledge and keep that joy of learning, remaining learners”.

I will tell you about Mindset Rule #2 in the next newsletter.

Wendy Lee