

The Stories We Weave: Te Whāriki at 30!

SATURDAY 14 MARCH 2026, 9:00am-4:00pm
Waipuna Hotel & Conference Centre, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland

Conference Programme

8:00-9:00am	Registration Get settled, connect with others, and prepare your heart for the day ahead.
9:00-9.15	Welcome/Whakatau and Opening Inspiration A warm mihi, beautiful music, and a shared sense of possibility to ignite our collective passion.
9.15-9.30	Te Whāriki: Our foundation Emeritus Professor Helen May Helen joins us to share her insights into the founding vision of Te Whāriki.
9.30-10.30	Te Tiriti o Waitangi Roberta Skeoch and Emma Parangi It is a particularly challenging time for Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The current shift away from honouring the obligations within Te Tiriti has real impacts for tamariki, kaiako, and our collective sense of identity as a nation. The narratives used to justify this direction are not new, and the attempt to silence Te Tiriti is not new. This keynote challenges these narratives and reminds teachers of the importance of protecting not only children's language, culture, and identity, but the identity of Aotearoa as a whole.
10.30-11:00	Morning Tea & Networking An opportunity to connect, share stories, and reflect with fellow kaiako.
11:00-12:00pm	Learning Stories: A Legacy of Growth and Inspiration Professor Alex Gunn and Brenda Soutar Join us as Alex and Brenda illuminate the whakapapa of Learning Stories—narratives that uplift mokopuna and shape their identities as confident, capable learners. Be moved by their insights and discover how Learning Stories, grounded in the strengths of Te Whāriki and Te Whatu Pōkeka, cultivate belonging, agency, and lifelong curiosity.
12:00-1:00	Lunch & Connection Share a meal and continue building your community.
1:00-2:00	The (Inter)National Quality Framework – The Musical! Dr. Red Ruby Scarlet and Louise Dorrat Prepare for a professional learning experience like no other! Join Red and Louise in a toe-tapping, hand-clapping theatrical performance that captures the highs, lows, and humorous realities of daily life in early childhood, whether in Aotearoa, Australia, or beyond. Through song and story, they'll highlight critical thinking, collaboration, and celebrating the beauty of our work.
2:00-3:00	Global Inspirations: Heart Warming Stories from the USA, Canada, and China Professor Annie White, Ana Maria Hernandez, Paulina Pulleyn, Julia Koumbassa, Lindsey Shafer, Trish Alsop, Nicoletta Santoian and Jane (Jing) Zhou Join us on an inspiring journey led by the passionate Professor Annie White and a remarkable team of visionary leaders from the USA, Canada, and China. Discover the powerful impact of Learning Stories as these dedicated educators transform early childhood programmes and touch lives around the world. Be inspired by their unwavering passion, innovative ideas, and heartfelt storytelling that are creating

	meaningful, lasting change. Get ready to be motivated and uplifted by stories that celebrate the joy of learning and the incredible potential within every child!
3:00-3:45	Sharing Our Stories: Impact in Action Wendy Lee, Karen Ramsey, Lorraine Sands, Jo Colbert, Marianne MacPherson and Julie Killick Led by Wendy Lee, this session celebrates ELP's long-standing championing of Learning Stories. Emeritus Professor Margaret Carr's pioneering research after Te Whāriki—and the inspiration of Learning Stories, has ignited teachers around the world. Hear from five teachers who began writing Learning Stories in their conceptual phase and join us for a powerful glimpse into the extraordinary journey Learning Stories has taken us on.
3:45-4:00	Closing Reflections & Farewell A heartfelt thank you and a call to carry the inspiration forward.

ONLINE WORKSHOPS (access will be given to all attendees following the event):

Learning Stories Without Borders: Exploring Global Applications in Higher Education and Beyond Dr. Annie White, Ed.D. Associate Professor of Early Childhood Studies, School of Education California State University Channel Islands Join me on an international journey, from classrooms to communities, to see how Learning Stories are used in unexpected ways. From university students to personal storytelling, we'll explore how this reflective practice deepens relationships, cultivates inquiry, and honors diversity while crossing boundaries and opening new spaces for learning.
Learning Stories Travel East: A Story of Inspiration and Transformation in China Dr. Jing Zhou, China What happens when the powerful practice of Learning Stories travels from Aotearoa New Zealand to China? How does a philosophy centered on the image of the child, play, and documenting learning resonate across a different cultural landscape? This presentation tells the story of this transformative journey. I will share how Learning Stories and the foundational principles of New Zealand ECE have not only inspired individual teachers but have also begun to influence kindergarten practices and national guidelines in China. This is a story that goes beyond the words on a page; it is about a shift in mindset—impacting the beliefs and practices of hundreds of thousands of educators and, ultimately, the lives of children and their families. This journey was made possible by the groundbreaking work of key New Zealand pioneers. I pay special tribute to Wendy Lee and the Educational Leadership Project (ELP) team, whose expertise since 2013 has been instrumental. I also extend my deepest gratitude to Betty Armstrong and the China-New Zealand Education Trust for their foundational support, which since 1991 has built the vital bridge for Sino-New Zealand ECE exchange.
Learning Stories for Belonging, Reflection, and Leadership: Extending the Framework to Adults and Environments Lindsey Shafer, USA Learning Stories offered me a language and structure to honor children as capable, competent, and full of becoming. Over time, that same framework revealed another layer, an invitation to see the adults in our communities through that same generous, appreciative lens. In 2017, I began writing Learning Stories for teachers, making teaching visible, celebrating identity, and nurturing cultures of gratitude and reflection. I found that Learning Stories can strengthen teams, deepen belonging, and support professional growth not through evaluation, but through noticing, story, and relational appreciation.

Since then, this way of seeing has continued to unfold through my work in leadership, coaching, and design. Today, I hold Learning Stories as a way of being- a pedagogy of community, a practice of honoring growth, and a way of seeing each other with curiosity and care. In this reflection, I will share my journey of extending the Learning Story framework to adults and environments, and how story can help both children and educators bloom.

A story pedagogy is not only for childhood. It is for communities, and for those who gather around children, learning to see themselves anew.

Tracing Lineages of Resistance: Learning Stories and the Work Ahead

Julia Koumbassa, Michigan, USA

Learning Stories did not emerge in isolation—they were born from histories of resistance to standardisation, colonisation, and deficit thinking in early childhood education. I trace the histories that inspired the Learning Story approach, exploring connections to liberatory pedagogies, Reggio Emilia, and global movements for educational freedom. Let's consider what these intertwined histories teach us about power and justice in our work as early childhood educators and how these lessons can guide us forward.

Finding Joy and Wonder through Learning Stories

Ana M. Hernandez, California, USA

Learning stories are a testament to observing what brings joy to children. This enables us to create wonder in our curriculum and our daily practice. This is true not only for children, but educators as well. Our strengths are our own learning story; to foster joy and wonder, we need to recognize these elements in ourselves.

A Connection To Land Through Learning Stories

Trish Alsop and Nicoletta Santoianni, Frog Hollow Children's Centres, Vancouver BC, Canada

A walk through a child's experience with nature and the reflection process, join Trish and Nicoletta as they share their experiences with Frog Hollow Children's Centres located in Vancouver BC, Canada

Belonging Through Observation and Assessment

Paulina Pulleyn, USA

Hello, I am Paulina Pulleyn (she/her). I grew up in Reno, Nevada, USA. Much of my time is spent with my wife Ashley. We go on lots of adventures outside and have game nights with family. I enjoy stories in every form. I find great joy in reading, writing, studying, and working with others. I have a dual bachelors degree in Early Childhood and Special Education. I taught kindergarten and first grade in Reno for two years. I traveled Europe for three months to follow the path of my ancestors and returned with a desire to work for Patagonia's onsite child care.

**Plus many more workshops and resources – all attendees will be kept updated
– watch this space!**