Transforming teaching and learning through the conscious practice of gratitude in education

When: 12.30pm-1.30pm, Wednesday 19 June 2013

Where: Ako Pai Marae, Faculty of Education, Donald Street, Karori, Wellington

Dr Kerry Howells
(University of Tasmania)

Many thinkers in the fields of philosophy, sociology, positive psychology, spirituality and anthropology have discussed the central place of gratitude in enriching our relationships and sense of community. The theoretical exploration of this seminar is uniquely positioned in the field of education, and draws on a recent book publication, Howells, K., Gratitude in Education: A Radical View, to postulate how the conscious practice of gratitude can assist to bring about transformative educational outcomes. Gratitude is conceptualised here as “the non-reciprocal giving back out of appreciation for what has been received”, which highlights both gratitude as an action and the relational aspect of gratitude that involves both giver and receiver. The potential of such a notion lies in its ability to strengthen a paradigm of giving, and thus loosen the grip of the exchange paradigm that dominates much current educational discourse and teaching and learning practices. We will also explore a wider framework from which to consider student disengagement, while taking into account some of the dilemmas that may arise when considering the concept of gratitude in the complex terrain of university education. Participants will be introduced to strategies they can implement in their teaching and research process.

Kerry Howells is an academic and teacher educator in the University of Tasmania Faculty of Education, teaching in the Masters of Teaching program in the areas of educational philosophy, professional studies and practitioner research. Kerry’s broad research areas are teacher identity and student engagement. In order to fully realise her passion to teach to ‘awake’ learners in all their diversity, Dr Howells has developed a unique approach where traditional teaching and learning practices are enhanced by greater attention to practices of gratitude. Her work demonstrates that students’ gratitude is more fully realised when teachers and school leaders first attend to their practice of gratitude. Dr Howells has applied this approach in invited presentations at seven universities and eight schools, many of which have participated in her research. Her recent book publication, Gratitude in Education: A Radical View, has been hailed by reviewers as ‘ground-breaking’ and an important contribution to the field. Since her commencement at UTAS in 2006, Kerry has been the recipient of nine teaching awards – including three national awards, and the 2009 UTAS Teaching Excellence Award.