

**CEIEC Visiting Scholar Report**Period of visit: Aug 4th to 25<sup>th</sup> 2008

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My visit to the CEIEC originally arose out of an enquiry prompted by reading Glenda MacNaughton's (2005) *Doing Foucault in Early Childhood Studies*. My specific question was whether and how the approach of building critically knowing early childhood communities could be extended to work with undergraduate students, in order to build critical awareness of their preconceptions and assumptions about childhood. My interest in the CEIEC grew further, with the realisation that the theoretical work of the team supported and enhanced my own approach, not only to teaching early childhood studies students, but also in the area of participation and democracy in relation to young children.

During my time at the CEIEC, I was able to meet with several members of the team to discuss research projects. I also shared common areas of research with Jane Page and approaches to teaching undergraduate students with Kylie Smith. I taught four sessions with both undergraduates and postgraduates. These were based on early childhood practices in the UK during which students were invited to reflect on their impressions of issues relevant to children and childhood in the UK and whether these were similar to views in Australia. I was also able to copy articles from the IJEIEC for future reference and in support of themes in my forthcoming book about belonging and young children's participation at the start of school. Finally, I visited the Swanston Street Children's Centre with Kylie Smith.

When the visit to the centre took place, I was drawing to the end of a period of leave I had been given from my teaching post, in order to write the book. Thus, the time spent at the centre inspired me to complete the book with greater understanding of and reference to a postcolonial theoretical understanding of the concept of belonging. My discussions with Prasanna Srinivasan were especially useful, in this respect, and I also thank her for the care and consideration she showed me during the three weeks as well as the opportunity she gave me to disseminate my research to her students on the experiences of ethnic minority students on our course at Sheffield Hallam University.

Below is a detailed account of the meetings and seminars which took place during my visit:

### ***Meetings and subjects of discussion***

#### Jane Page:

- Briefing about course structures and the ‘Melbourne model’
- Young children’s discourses of emotions, citizenship and participation.
- Future plans for co-authorship of a paper: ‘Building democratic learning communities in early childhood’

#### Glenda MacNaughton:

- Critically knowing early childhood communities and action research methodology.

#### Kylie Smith:

- Port Phillip Project
- Critically Knowing approaches with ECS students
- Visit to Swanston Street Children’s Centre

#### Karina Davis:

Postcolonial and critical race theory

Project exploring cultural diversity in the early childhood years

### ***Teaching sessions and key themes***

#### Adapting the Curriculum

- Constructs of childhood: comparisons between UK and Australia.
- Early childhood policy and practice in the UK: *Ten Year Strategy, Every Child Matters, Foundation Stage Curriculum.*
- Research into listening to children: Clark and Moss (2001), Hart’s (1992) *Ladder of Participation.*

#### Individualising the Curriculum

- Disability rights approaches to disability.
- UK legislation and practices re. ‘special education needs’.
- Social and medical models of disability.
- Examples of action from practice as an SEN support teacher.
- SEN stories.

### ***Reflections***

Reflecting back on the teaching sessions, it seems that there was particular value for students in examining their preconceptions about childhood in another national context, albeit similar in many ways to their own. This enabled them to question their own Australian context from a more critical stance.

Similarly, the definitions of special education need adopted in UK legislation led to debate about the definitions of 'special need' in their own context and the impact of learning English as an additional language on notions of disability in schools.

Finally, the opportunity to disseminate research undertaken with our British Minority Ethnic students about experiences of our course and placements provided a useful frame of reference for discussion of the cultural barriers faced by students in Higher Education in Australia.

My visit to the CEIEC still needs further reflection and discussion with colleagues at Sheffield Hallam in order to come to fruition. In the next few months, I hope to look at ways to develop critical awareness and embed cultural diversity issues and postcolonial theoretical approaches on our own courses. I also hope to work with Jane Page on a paper reflecting our mutual research interests in young children's perspectives on citizenship, power and identity.

With many thanks to all the team and also Kate Alexander, who helped with the practical arrangements and accommodated me in her office. Also thanks to the Swanston Street Children's Centre staff and children who let me look at them and enjoy the atmosphere!

Caroline Bath, Sept 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008