

Dr Affrica Taylor
CEIEC Visiting Scholar Report

My warm thanks go to Prof. Glenda MacNaughton and her team at CEIEC for hosting my April/June visit and providing me with such a convivial research home base during my time in Melbourne. I much appreciate the hospitality that was offered to me. Without the everyday responsibilities and pressures that seem relentless in one's own work place environment, I was able to immerse myself in the kind of research activities that most usually seem so enticing and yet elusive. CEIEC provided me with this unencumbered space and support to do a lot of reading, thinking, discussing ideas, and writing. It was a great luxury and opportunity for me.

My activities during this time mainly centred around a continuation of my literature-based research within the field of children's studies – drawing from the disciplinary fields of queer theory, early education and media studies. More specifically, I was able to focus upon the nexus of childhood innocence and children's sexuality across educational and popular culture contexts. The University's excellent library facilities and resources - hard copy and electronic – were of great assistance during my two months stay. I took full advantage of my borrowing rights to access a wide range of useful material. Through reading widely I was able to deepen my interdisciplinary knowledge base and develop my thinking.

These research activities produced a number of short term outcomes during my time at CEIEC, and continue to contribute to more long term outcomes. Based upon my archival research at University of Melbourne, and while at CEIEC, I wrote and delivered a paper at the NSW Social Justice in Early Childhood Sexuality Conference, at University of Western Sydney on 12 May. Back in Melbourne, I continued to research the topic of children's sexuality, refined my conference presentation and delivered a CEIEC Visiting Scholar Seminar on 13 June entitled 'Troubling Childhood Innocence'. This seminar was well attended by Faculty of Education staff within and without CEIEC and provided a springboard for some interesting discussions about the widening gaps between restraining educational discourses of childhood innocence (and a-sexuality) and rampant popular culture discourses of children's sexuality. My work in this field continues. Based upon feedback and discussions at the CEIEC seminar, I am currently in the final stages of writing an article on this topic for submission to a peer reviewed journal. The topic of Childhood Innocence/Sexuality is also one that I am pursuing with Prof. Deevia Bhana, from University KwaZulu Natal. We are working towards a jointly authored book, which looks at the ways in which childhood innocence/sexuality works itself out in South African and Australian contexts. The literature review that I undertook while at CEIEC will be a necessary component of this larger study.

The co-editing of a special edition of IJEIEC on Queer Theory and Early Childhood Education was another activity that I undertook while at CEIEC, in collaboration with Dr Mindy Blaise from Monash University (and CEIEC affiliate researcher). During my time at CEIEC, Mindy and I received and responded to abstract proposals for this special edition. Having now received submissions from Europe, US, UK, South Africa and Australia, we are currently at

the paper review stage, and well on track for publication near the end of 2007. This work is soon to produce a tangible outcome for Centre, as it promises to be a truly international, diverse and interesting issue, and the first of its kind in the Early Childhood Education field.

Alongside my cross-disciplinary research into children's sexuality and queer theory, I have also been developing a relational approach to identity in early childhood. This approach emphasises the inter-subjective nature of identity, in that it considers identity as a performance of self that is almost always for, with and through others. In the case of young children, identity performances are also often highly inter-textual - with identities being formed around 'borrowings' from popular culture characters in particular. While at CEIEC I wrote a paper called 'Playing with Difference', a case study drawn from my previous ethnographic research in Canberra, which takes a relational approach to young children's identity negotiations. I presented this paper to the 7th International Conference on Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations in Amsterdam, 3-6 July, immediately after my period at CEIEC. My paper is currently under peer review for publication in the Common Ground electronic journal *Diversity*, and includes an acknowledgement to the CEIEC. While in Europe, immediately after being in Melbourne, I also visited Prof. Gunilla Dahlberg at Stockholm Institute of Teacher Education. The purpose of this visit was to discuss our mutual interest in taking a relational approach to difference in early childhood. My work in this area while at CEIEC provided firmer ground for this exchange.

This relational approach was also an underpinning theme of two other seminars that I presented while at University of Melbourne. The first was a postgraduate research seminar on 'Research Conversations' that I facilitated with CEIEC postgraduate students on 5 June. As a counter to the popular neo-liberalist framings of research as competitive individual endeavour, our discussions about reframing research as conversation implicitly drew upon a relational ethics of inter-dependent research practice. Following this, I presented a seminar on 'Tools for Research' to members of the Critical Discourse Analysis Group in the Faculty of Education on 14 June. Again, relational thinking was one of the main research 'tools' that I presented at this seminar, and this time the discussion ranged from the ways in which contemporary philosophers of the 'human' (such as Judith Butler) use relationality, to the ways in which relationality has been extended beyond human relations to the human/non-human interface within Science Studies and Actor Network Theory.

My time at CEIEC was perhaps best typified by relational processes and the associated rewards of being a part of an inclusive and extensive research community. While at CEIEC I was generously accommodated within a network of scholars, both within and beyond the CEIEC team. I hope I managed to reciprocate the kind of scholarly support I received from this network: in particular in my 'conversations' with Dr Karina Davis around her important critical reflections on whiteness with early childhood educators; with Merlyne Cruz around her fascinating work on indigenous methodologies; with Dr Mindy Blaise over the queerer aspects of adult/child relations and with Dr Sherie McClam about the implications of actor network theory for field research. Finally, thanks once again to Professor Glenda McNaughton for encouraging me to pursue my thinking in all these areas and most of all for 'growing the network'.