



Editorial

The International Journal of Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood (IJEIEC) publishes work that illustrates, extends, inspires and provokes innovative approaches to the theory and practices of social justice, children's rights and equity around young children. This special edition of IJEIEC, focused on whiteness, continues to pursue those aims. It draws on scholarship in diverse countries and nations that integrates issues of race and discrimination with critical white studies to explore the political, historical and discursive foundations of specific local and national expressions of 'whiteness'.

Discussion and theorising around whiteness has circulated within a number of professions for some years. Critical race theories within the United States began within the legal circles in the 1970's as critical legal studies and, since then, theorising around critical race feminism and critical white studies has developed (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997). Critical white studies and whiteness theorising has increasingly called for white individuals and communities to acknowledge whiteness as a social construction while calling for further explorations of the pervasive influences

whiteness has on the identity constructions of white people and their communities. As Frankenberg (1993) argues:

To speak of whiteness is, I think, to assign *everyone* a place in the relations of racism. It is to emphasize that dealing with racism is not merely an option for white people – that, rather, racism shapes white people's lives and identities in a way that is inseparable from other facets of daily life.' (p.6)

'White' discourses are intimately associated with discriminatory social structures. Through discursive practices that encourage and allow whiteness to be simultaneously universalised while overlooked as a cultural group, these discourses create the illusion that white individuals and communities can choose whether and how to engage with issues of race, discrimination and citizenship. This, combined with white practices of privileging the individual and their actions and effort, allows white people to ignore or deny their part in both individuals as

well as structural and institutional discrimination. Yet Lillian Holt, (an Australian Indigenous woman and Vice Chancellor's Fellow at the University of Melbourne) in a recent debate titled 'Reconciliation: In or out of step?' (held at BMW Edge Theatre, Federation Square, Melbourne on Thursday 2nd June 2005), has suggested within a discussion that focused on the interrogation of whiteness that whites who wish to challenge discrimination must say, 'Let this begin with me.'

Histories and identities (both individual and communal) are integrally tied up within the actions, practices and institutions of the powerful white discourses within their societies. Until these white discourses are acknowledged, white individuals and communities cannot begin to question and critique how these discourses influence and position their own histories and identities or explore how their actions silence and oppress others. Acknowledging and questioning whiteness can begin to focus attention on the social practices and discourses white individuals and communities draw from in their negotiations of race, culture and identities (the articles in this edition provide examples and explore this in more depth). As a consequence, whiteness theories provide a point of departure from other approaches to exploring race and discrimination. Whiteness theorising makes white discursive social practices and negotiations of identity the focus of research and exploration instead of continually positioning 'others' as the focus of research and theorising...as if the causes and answers to discrimination rest with them. Further, in countries that have a history of both colonialism and

whiteness, whiteness theories can be supported by postcolonial theories in attempts to situate, explore and deconstruct the development, existence and maintenance of power and privilege in white, colonial countries.

The authors in this edition argue that in the early childhood field, white discourses operate to silence discussion of white involvement in discrimination while supporting discriminatory practices within education. Whiteness theories used within education can begin to shift the focus from attempts at 'inclusion' of 'others' within an education system founded on discriminatory whiteness to a critique and exploration of how whiteness in education acts to discriminate against others while maintaining privileges for whites. This pervasive and invisible influence of whiteness limits any attempts for genuine educational practices that aim to challenge discrimination and oppression as white educators fail to see how they are part of oppressive white discourses that in turn, influence pedagogical practice. As educators, white individuals have a special responsibility to ensure that critiques of whiteness, and the privileges attached to it, have a continuing place in our explorations of our own practices as well as the structure and practices of our pedagogies.

Some of the writing and scholarship around whiteness has raised concerns about the danger of working within whiteness theories - that focusing on whiteness may 'reclaim the floor' for whites while supporting complacency around the need for continual reflection of how white privilege and discourses produce a legacy of generational blindness to the extent of discrimination and oppression faced by others and

whites involvement in this (hooks, 1990; Delgado & Stefancic, 1997; Fine, Weis, Powell & Mun Wong, 1997). These authors and theorists are concerned that a focus on whiteness 'could surface as the new intellectual fetish, leaving questions of power, privilege and race/ethnic political minorities behind...' (Fine et al, 1997, p.xii). In order to remain mindful of these concerns and ensure explorations of whiteness are embarked upon to disrupt and deconstruct oppression and discrimination, whiteness theorists must ask how they are working to disrupt and deconstruct whiteness. Rather than taking white discourses for granted, whiteness theorists must take them apart to show how they limit and marginalise others. Whiteness theorising must always highlight the inequities and oppression associated with white discourses. Whiteness theorists must always work to create more equitable ways of being and recognise that in some times and places, it is more important to listen to, learn from and support others as they strive to claim power for themselves.

The authors in this special edition of IJEIEC begin to explore these issues. Taylor urges us to explore the micro-practices involved in children's constructions of national identities, to learn the specificities of Australian whiteness. Davis examines the influence of white discursive dichotomies on constructions of identities in early childhood educators' curricula. Cave, King and Giugni bring together Indigenous and white voices as they reflect on their own practices around children's identity negotiations. Rau and Ritchie discuss the involvement of Maori in early childhood settings with a specific focus on the Te Whariki bicultural curriculum. Finally, Md Nor discusses the

use of Persona Dolls in Muslim early childhood settings, reminding white educators to be aware of the complex issues that arise in any cross cultural work.

We hope that this edition of IJEIEC prompts conversations and debates about how whiteness theorising can cast new light on how whiteness privileges some and marginalise others within the early childhood field. The CEIEC is keen to encourage continuing dialogue between practitioners, policy-makers, researchers and academics through, for example, establishing networks of theorists and activists, proposing sessions and papers for the CEIEC annual conference. If you are interested in developing these ideas, please contact me.

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