

“NOTHING WITHOUT JOY”

Reflections from the 2010 Melbourne Study Tour

When I stepped off the plane in an unfamiliar place, I thought I had no preconceived notions of what to expect. However over the coming week I realised just how much my personal cultural values affect my my image of children, and my image of myself a teacher. Therefore my reflections of the tour have been focused on ‘the big picture’ with regards to concepts of community and one’s sense of self within society rather than the specifics of individual early learning centres.

One of the first understandings I made is that there really can be no prescriptive view of what centre inspired by a Reggio philosophy looks like. All the environments we visited had a different personal vision of Reggio principles which was influenced by many factors such as physical space, the role of local and national government, their children and families and their own understandings of what it is to be an early childhood teacher.

Towards the end of the week have visited a variety of centres, each within different communities and contexts there were two ideas that sprung forth and which seemed to bring up so many thought provoking questions that I wanted to unpack them further. These were ‘The role of the teacher’ and the importance of interpersonal relationships within a team of teachers. In discussion with another early childhood teacher on the tour she raised a theory which I thought very interesting - she believed that many of our actions a driven by the emotions associated with either love or fear. Although perhaps simplistic, I wondered how this could be related to ‘the role of the teacher’ ?

Many early years teachers including myself describe the concept of love; whether love for the children or love of their profession as being fundamental to their pedagogical approach. However, perhaps we can also fear - fear change, fear letting go of past knowledge, or fear advocating for our beliefs and values. The role of the teacher is not something that can be easily defined and yet this

study tour has enlightened me to the possibility that it is just as important as our image of the child. Perhaps self knowledge through reflective practice is way of asking - how do I fit into this puzzle?

The importance of team dynamics within early childhood education settings also links into the wider sense of community. The strength of interpersonal relationships within a team of teachers shines through on many levels saying so much about whether your environment is a place of belonging - a place where views can be stated and discussed without fear. Kirsty and Kerrie of St Leonard's school are an example of this collegial acceptance, teaching at separate campuses they are able to maintain a professional relationship which could be described as being 'critical friends'. They are able to acknowledge the values and beliefs which differ as well as those that align. However this is something which takes a good deal of time and trust - thoughtful dialogue flowing openly between teachers is an admirable aspiration and of course contextual within different settings.

Lastly, a message that flowed through the entire week in Melbourne was that 'Education is Hope'. We want children to not just reach their potential but to flourish and I believe we should have those hopes for our early childhood teachers and for their educational settings. On a personal level the study tour gave me a greater appreciation of the journey that Tots Corner has made, and the high level of dedication and commitment shown by every single person associated with the 'Tots team'. We work so hard, and we need to slow down and remember that we really do care most in as a team and as individuals to be the best that we can be. Philosopher Jacques Derrida stated that we need "a place to stand" which I interpreted as a place where you can be comfortable to be you - the real authentic you. This study tour has affirmed my sense of belonging at Tots. As I said to Amy one night upon leaving Tots after a long and at times frustrating day that despite this "I really feel like I've come home". Is this not intrinsic to a Reggio inspired philosophy - where every person's right to be loved, to be respected, to be acknowledged for who they are creates a sense of community and a hope for society as a whole?

