

TIPD Visit Report

Bath and North East Somerset visit to Tasmania, Australia



10 UK Teachers with employees from the Department of Education – Tasmania

Visit theme: Early Years Education (4 -7 year olds)

Visit dates: 30th July – 9th August 2009

Visit provider: HTI Merganser

Phases & School types visited: Primary schools. Children aged from 4 – 7.

Key objectives: To look at Early Years Education in Tasmania.

Introduction:

Background Information: The visit was undertaken in the summer holidays of 2009. The group represented 8 schools – 6 in Bath and North East Somerset and 2 in Bristol.

The group consisted of:

- 3 Nursery Teachers
- 4 Reception Teachers
- 1 Reception Teaching Assistant
- 1 Reception/Year 1 Teacher
- 1 Local Authority Early Years Advisory Teacher

What were the aims and objectives of the visit?

- To look at documenting children's learning and progression
- To look at Personal, Social and Emotional Development and Communication, Language and Literacy Development
- To look at Special Education Needs (SEN) and early intervention

What were the expected outcomes?

- To bring back examples of how children's learning and progression is documented
- To bring back elements of good practice we could implement in our own settings

- To learn from each other, as we all come from different settings
- To make links with colleagues from another country
- To have increased knowledge of the Early Years Education system in another country

How were these to be identified and recorded?

These outcomes were to be identified and recorded through:

- Making personal notes on each visit
- Photographs and video
- Group meetings each evening after visiting schools, to discuss and share findings from the day

Report on the experience:

What happened?

The programme began with an introductory half day, hosted by Department of Education, Learning services (North West) General Manager - Malcolm Wells - and members of his team. In this meeting they outlined the state education system and went through the itinerary for the rest of the week. For the following 3 days we had a programme of whole day school visits, which we attended in pairs. The general format for the visits was to spend the mornings in specific classes, and the afternoons in discussion with the teachers we had observed in the morning. Each evening our group held de-briefing sessions to discuss and record what we had seen on our different school visits. The week ended with a feedback session with the Department of Education Learning services team, and guest speakers.

Was the visit a success? Were the objectives achieved?

The visit was extremely successful on all levels. We were made to feel very welcome by everyone involved, and the whole week was well organised, giving us a chance to experience Tasmania both professionally and personally.

The objectives we set for the trip were met, some in more detail than others. For example, we saw and were given examples of the way children are formally assessed, both in Kindergarten and Prep classes, but did not see many examples of informal assessment documentation (i.e. equivalent to our learning diaries). We saw quite a lot of literacy work, and bought back examples of different literacy programs used, but did not see as much formalised PSED. Some members of our group saw more SEN/early intervention work than others.

The Tasmania Early Years Education System:

The Tasmanian Education system is divided up into 4 regions. We were in the North West region, which has:

40 Primary schools – 20 of these have fewer than 200 students, the largest primary school has 600 students (only one this size – most have between 100-350 students).

2 Early Intervention service campuses

2 campuses of school of Special Education

Children start Kindergarten at 4 years old, and attend 2 full days a week (non-compulsory)

Children start compulsory schooling (prep) when they are 5 years old. If a child is 5 years old by 1st January, then they must attend full time school from that academic year.

The school year runs from February to December.

There is a curriculum for each subject that runs from Kindergarten to Grade 10. However, from what we observed, the Early Childhood teachers are aware of the curriculum, and did not appear to need to document against it in the same format as UK Early Years teachers need to against the EYFS. They were confident and trusted in their own expertise. The curriculum can be found here:

<http://www.education.tas.gov.au/curriculum/home>

There is a new Early Years framework being launched next academic year, across Australia called 'Belonging, Being and Becoming'. This is based on children from Birth – Five years and is the first Early Years Framework for Australia. As this has not started as yet, we received limited information on it, but believe it will be more similar to the EYFS than what the teachers follow now.

School visits and educational findings

We visited 8 schools in total, with each teacher visiting 3 different schools, over 3 days. These were located in Devonport and surrounds, and were mainly all mid-sized primary schools. We all visited a mix of Kindergarten and Prep classes (aged 4-6). Visits generally followed the same pattern – arriving at 8.30am, spending the morning in the allocated classroom, spending the afternoon in discussion with the teacher, then finishing around 3.00pm. We found this structure of the day beneficial, as it gave us time to observe the working classroom, then ask the teacher questions about the education system and classroom practices in the afternoon, when they were not teaching.

We observed many different elements of good practice in all the schools we visited. Some of these were:

Communication, Language and Literacy:

A few schools were involved in an oral language program called Ripples - some were more involved than others. The schools that had the main funding for this were schools that had been identified as having a large number of children with speech and language difficulties. Schools with funding had employed a 'Ripples' teacher, who prepared all the materials needed for lessons, and came into Prep classrooms at a specified time for 45 minutes each day. The class would then be split into 4 groups, depending on their ability. The Ripples teacher and the class teacher would take one group each, and the Ripples Teaching Assistant (TA) and the Prep TA would take the other 2 groups. Each group did similar activities, but were questioned in different ways, depending on their ability. **Appendix 1 – Ripples Questions**
In other schools that did not have Ripples funding, the posters with the 4 levels of questioning were displayed, to remind teachers to question children in this particular way.

Prep, Grade 1 and 2 had to do two hours of literacy a day. We witnessed this in one school where grade 1 and 2 were mixed together, and all the children were placed into ability groups, regardless of their year level. Teacher said they enjoyed working

this way as it promoted cross year planning, and a more integrated way of working. It also meant children knew many of the teachers in the school, making transition times less stressful.

Reading Recovery is a specialist program that some of the schools were involved in. It is an early intervention program for pupils in Grade 1 who are assessed to be well below average in reading. It is a big investment for schools, as they employ a full time Reading Recovery (RR) teacher. This teacher has to be specially trained to teach RR. These specialist RR lessons take place 1:1 daily, for up to 20 weeks. Each session follows exactly the same format and lasts half an hour. The schools involved in RR have noticed great success rates in teaching children who otherwise would have been left behind.

<http://wwwfp.education.tas.gov.au/literacy/readingrecovery.htm>

There is a literacy curriculum teachers have to follow, and suggested resources in the form of 'First Steps' books and CDs.

<http://www.rigby.com.au/firststeps/resource.htm>

There is a scheme called 'Let's Read,' which is similar to the Book Start scheme in the UK. This scheme enables a Health Worker to attend the half day training course, where they develop their skills in working with parents to support their understanding of the importance of reading and also offer different ways to read with their child. The families are given a pack with books, written information and a DVD.

In Kindergarten we saw lots of emphasis on listening skills. In 'Show and Tell' the teacher asked the children 'What does a listener do? What does a speaker do? The children asked each other good questions. In a prep class in another school they had 'De Bono' thinking hats, to encourage children's thinking skills. The 2 hats represented different questions: What do you feel? What do you think is good about it? Some schools displayed several coloured hats with a variety of question types printed on each, to encourage thinking skills.

In one prep class, all children had a 'treasure box of ideas.' This was their own small shoe box, which contained 'treasures' they had bought in from home. They used these boxes to inspire their creative writing.

Many classes used the 'look, say, cover, write' method of learning to spell.

One kinder started the day with phonics to music – 4 songs, so children could switch into learning mode as soon as they arrived.

In each session a new letter/sound was introduced as well as revision of previous letters/sounds. On this particular morning they were concentrating on 'Vowels' – each vowel was written on an 'owl' (vowel owl) – they also sang a song based on 'Bobby Bingo' singing 'a e i o u' instead of 'b i n g o'.

There is a highly successful program called 'Primary Connections' in place in some schools. This is a science based program, teaching literacy through science and is available by year group for the entire compulsory school age. This has been running for 2 years, and there has been a significant improvement in boys writing in this time.

<http://www.science.org.au/primaryconnections/>

Mathematics

Some schools were running a program called 'Count me in too.' This is a play based system, developed in New South Wales, that is run twice a week, in groups of 10 or 12 children. <http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/countmein/>

We saw many examples of teaching through practical use of songs and games where the children were actively engaged in the learning. This was differentiated to meet every child's needs. We also saw quite a lot of worksheets in different numeracy lessons.

Personal, Social Emotional Development

There is no fixed curriculum for PSED, but there is TRIBES, which is a whole school approach.

TRIBES is an inclusive learning process to create a school community culture that maximises the learning potential and progressive personal development of all students. The particular school I visited named their 'TRIBES' process as the 'CREW' – i.e. their mission was to build a **C**aring, **R**esilient and **E**nriched, **W**hole school Community., focused on everyone being:

- Caring and supportive
- Active participants in teaching and learning, and
- Positive and maintaining high expectations for all the teachers and learners.

The behaviour was extremely good in all the schools we visited, including in classes where teachers said they had some children with behaviour problems. Teachers were very calm, and rarely seemed to raise their voices.

In many schools children were very independent. They knew what they had to do when they entered the classroom, and just got on with their work, no queuing or waiting around. They all seemed very relaxed, knew where all the resources were kept, and were polite and respectful to each other.

At morning tea and lunch times the children were able to get out what ever they wanted to eat from their lunch boxes, giving them total independence. However, they were encouraged to eat their sandwiches first.

Physical movement

The Government directive in Tasmania is for every school child to do at least 20 minutes of physical activity a day. Therefore we saw many movement sessions first thing in the morning. Some schools were doing Brain Gym movements, along with running around outside in organised games. Two schools we visited have grade 6 children who are 'Sports Leaders.' These sports leaders go into the Early Years classes first thing in the morning and run the movement sessions. During these sessions, the teachers stay in the room but stand back. In one room, as small child ran out of the class during the movement session, a Grade 6 child brought him back in, and spoke to him – the teacher did not get involved. We felt this idea was a great way to build leadership skills in Year 6 children, and ensure the younger children get their daily physical activity.

Another movement program we saw was called 'Positive Perceptual motor program.' This is a programme aimed at children in Prep and Grade 1, and helps children with their co-ordination and balance. It's run 3 times a week, for 45 minutes, by a specially trained TA. It includes activities such as walking along a beam, passing a ball from one hand to another, and sitting opposite each other crossed legged, holding hands, rocking in a sea-saw motion, feeling each other's body weight. There is a special music CD and laminated cards that go with the program. More information can be found at: <http://www.smartstarters.com.au/> under Perceptual Motor Program.

SEN

Preschool children with additional needs work with the Early Childhood Intervention Service. This service is for children aged between 0-4, and their families.

This is a free service for families, where they can receive support and education. To be referred to the service, the child must have a diagnosed disability and/or difficulties in two or more areas, including physical, intellectual, communication or sensory.

The service works with the whole family, as children attend, with their parent/s generally for 1 ½ hours a week. They are free to play, with support from a specialised team including Speech and Language Therapists, and Occupational Therapists. Families can ask questions and receive support in caring for their child. More information on this can be found at: <http://www.education.tas.gov.au/early-learning/additionalneeds/earlylearningtas>

Some schools bought in a Music Therapist to work with groups including: children aged 0-4 years and their parents, and children with SEN and their support workers. The professional Music Therapist based each session on the individual needs of the children and families. Their level of expertise ensured a well planned program, leading to great improvements in self esteem and confidence.

Where possible, children with additional needs are integrated into main stream schooling. It's called 'Inclusive Education' where 'all children, regardless of their differences, are part of the school community and can feel they belong.'

<http://www.education.tas.gov.au/curriculum/needs/inclusive>

Students with the most severe levels of disability and the highest support needs are identified and placed on the Register of Students with Severe Disabilities (approximately 1% of the student population). There are various criteria students need to meet to be placed on this register, based on their disability. Students on this register have a specialised package of support to facilitate their participation in school.

Children not on the register can still get additional support in school, but it needs to go to a panel to secure funding for additional support.

There are a high percentage of children diagnosed on the autistic spectrum in Tasmania, many are integrated into mainstream classes. Therefore, there are numerous resources available for teachers of students with SEN, including 'Getting Started.' This is a guide for teachers of students with disabilities in regular schools.

This guide gives teachers many tips including working with families and teaching tips. This guide and other resources for teachers can be found at:

<http://www.education.tas.gov.au/curriculum/needs/disabilities>

We witnessed some examples of children with SEN being integrated into the Early Years classroom, including a child with cerebral palsy, who was physically very disabled, but intellectually very able. We felt this was a contrast to the UK, where a child with such physical disabilities would generally be educated in a special school. Another nice example was of a deaf child in a year one class. He had a specialised TA, who worked with him every morning in various ways, including translating what the teacher was saying, in sign language. In group times the TA sat at the front of the group, next to the teacher, signing to all the children, so the deaf child did not feel singled out. As a consequence, many of the children had learnt some basic signs, and when doing the register, they could choose to reply either in speech, or using signs. All the children appeared to really enjoy this, and the child was so integrated, we didn't realise who he was until we noticed his hearing aide.

Early Intervention in speech and language therapy

Every Kindergarten child (around 4 years old, but equivalent to nursery in schooling terms) is assessed by a Speech and Language Therapist for receptive language skills. This is a relatively simple test where the child had to say things like 'which child has red hair?' in a picture of children, or which dog does not have long hair?' etc. This information is then used to help determine which schools will receive extra funding for language programs such as Ripples. Across Tasmania, approximately 25% of children are not meeting targets in these speech tests, so this is an area of focus across the whole state.

Assessment

Children are assessed in Kindergarten using the 'Kindergarten Development Check (KDC).' The KDC 'helps Kindergarten Teachers monitor and observe important skills for learning and determine whether students are making appropriate progress for their age.' The Kinder children are assessed in the following areas: Gross motor, Fine motor, Personal and social behaviour, Cognitive development, Listening speaking and understanding and Speech and Language. Every Kinder child has to be assessed against the 21 critical core markers, which are broken into 3 areas – Thinking, Literacy and Numeracy and Health and Wellbeing. Some of the markers are: 'ask questions', 'talks fluently without stuttering,' and 'separates comfortably from parent/carer.' Next to each of these markers, the teachers marks Yes or No. Any child with a No against any of these 21 markers at the first check will automatically be identified as being at risk of not achieving expected developmental outcomes. The teachers will then consult with the parents of these children and implement an intervention program in the areas needed.

These checks are suppose to be monitored as part of the everyday kinder program, rather than sitting the child down and asking him or her specific questions. More information, including the 21 core markers can be found at:

<http://wwwfp.education.tas.gov.au/oer/kindergarten/>

In the first year of compulsory schooling (Prep class) children are tested using 'Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) twice, once within the first 4 weeks of starting school, and once early in the last term of the year. PIPs is a baseline assessment that assesses the early literacy and numeracy skill of Prep children across Australia. The purpose behind this testing is so teachers can use the results to inform their teaching practice, and to identify any children who would benefit from early intervention programs. The assessment is carried out on each child, with the teacher, using a computer program. Each one takes around 20 minutes. Teachers are given a week's supply cover to carry out these assessments on every child in their class. The results are then collated, and any child that is below a certain number in their first assessment will have an intervention program developed for them. Kindergarten teachers particularly find the PIPs testing stressful, as they feel they have to ensure their Kinder children are up to a certain level before they leave Kinder (which is non-compulsory schooling), which is resulting in more structured, rather than play based teaching in Kinder.

www.education.murdoch.edu.au/pips

Early Years teachers we spoke to said they also keep their own records of observations on individual children, but these are not shared with parents. There doesn't appear to be anything equivalent to our Learning Diaries, although examples of the children's work is kept as evidence and sent home at the end of the year.

Launch into learning

Launch into Learning (LIL) is a government initiative that started in 2007 with a small number of schools, and is now run in 44 schools across the state. It's a program that works with families with children aged birth – 4, similar to 'Stay and Play' groups in the UK, except that it is often run by 2 qualified Early Childhood Teachers and a TA, and has a particular focus each week. Schools apply for funding to run the initiative, based on certain criteria including their 'Educational Needs indicator' which indicates how many children with SEN they have in the school, if this is high; they are more likely to receive funding. The funding also states that schools involved in LIL must work together and support each other, rather than work in isolation.

LIL is based on the knowledge that parents are children's first and most influential educators, so supporting parents to help their children's learning and development in the earliest years can improve the quality of outcomes for children living in vulnerable circumstances. The sessions are run once a week in term time, for 1 ½ hours, and are free to attend. The education of both children and parents is play based and achieved through modelling good practice. The sessions follow a similar routine each week, where children can freely choose activities both in and outdoors, then come together for a story and singing.

Although the initiative is still relatively new, schools involved have found it highly beneficial in a number of ways including: building relationships with families before they start school, making links with other local schools, and good multi-agency working. The way they feel it could be changed is if sessions could be held more regularly for some vulnerable families, as research has shown that meeting with some of these families just once a week doesn't change things, they need contact 2-3 times a week.

Evaluation: Summary of the Key Educational Outcomes:

The opportunity to see Early Years Education in Tasmania has been invaluable. We saw many elements of good practice including:

- Some form of daily physical activity, or aspects of the Positive Perceptual motor program
- Very calm teaching, with limited use of raised voices, which appeared to result in calm, polite children. The classrooms were also bigger than those in the UK, which may have helped with the calmness
- Limited amounts of written planning
- Some lessons were very fast paced – which ensured children did not get bored and become disruptive
- High emphasis on speaking and listening skills

Some different practices we noticed were:

- Unplanned use of the outdoors as part of the classroom, so very little indoor/outdoor free flow
- Little independent choosing time – more structured in Kindergartens than in nurseries in the UK
- Use of many work sheets when teaching numeracy and literacy
- Healthy eating – children brought snacks and lunch from home, without restriction of what they could bring in. Some schools were working with their PTA (Parent, teacher association) to encourage healthier lunch boxes, including eating fruit at morning tea.

As a result of the visit, some elements we will introduce or change in our classrooms are:

- Daily exercise program, first thing in the morning
- Using calmer voices!
- PE - will suggest Reception children do not have to get changed when they first start school - not the best use of time!
- Will look into buying A3 pocket files for storing Early Years work
- Will consider reducing time spent planning. Planning is much less complicated in Tasmania than in UK. Focus should always be on benefit to the children.
- Start involving parents in understanding the importance of reading with your child and how to do it, prior to giving out the book start packs.

Alongside all the new ideas we gained from visiting schools in Tasmania, we also learnt a lot from each other as individual teachers, and this is a link we will continue back in the UK.

Dissemination proposals:

There are various ways we will be disseminating our findings and details of our trip including:

- Individual presentations in school and at Governors meetings

- Discuss the trip and findings at the Nursery Teachers Cluster group
- Hold a presentation for the Early Years Professional network meeting
- Discuss findings with colleagues from the LA
- Feedback to local universities
- Feedback to the bookstart steering committee

Proposals for developments and continuing links

We have already made email contact with the team members from the Department of Education, Tasmania, since our return, and this will continue.

We have swapped email addresses with the teachers and schools we met during the trip, and will continue to share Early Years practice with them.

Appendix: General advice for others visiting

We recommend you meet formally at least twice before the trip, just to discuss the general logistics of the trip – meeting points etc, and meet at least once socially if possible, so you can begin to get to know each other before spending 10 days together.

Devonport in Tasmania is a very friendly, welcoming place to visit. Everyone we met from hotel staff to Principals to our hosts could not do enough for us. Anything we asked for, both professionally and personally was catered for.

We were taken and collected from our schools daily, and taken to any sight seeing places we wanted to go after school. The hosts gave up their weekends both when we arrived and when we departed, to take us on day long sight-seeing trips. We were even lucky enough to be invited to one of the host's houses for dinner – the prospect of cooking for 10 did not daunt her at all!

Devonport is quite a small city set on the coast, with a limited number of restaurants; however, what was there was of a very good quality. The seafood is especially good in the area!

The schools were also very welcoming – allowing us to observe and participate in their classrooms in the morning, then have a professional discussion with them about the education system in the afternoon. When we visited it was a very busy time for teachers, as they had parent/teacher meetings every evening that week, however, we were never made to feel we were in the way, or rushed out the door.

There are many useful website to visit, for most of which there are links throughout the report. The Department of Education, Tasmania website is:

<http://www.education.tas.gov.au/home>

For general information on Devonport, go to: <http://www.devonporttasmania.travel/>

APPENDIX ONE

Ripples Questions

Level 1

Labelling

Find one like this

What do you hear?

What do you see?

What do you touch?

What is this?

Level 2

Analysing Experience

Find one that can..... (function)

What do you do with this?

Where is it? (Location)

What is happening? (describing a scene)

Find me one that is..... And.....

Find one that is different (identifying differences)

Name something that is a (give a category)

Level 3

Organising Experience

Find one to use with this (using verbal and visual knowledge)

Tell me how to.... (giving directions)

Do... then... (following directions)

Make these pictures in a story (sequencing)
What happened to all of these (generalization)
Find two the same (similarities)
Find something that is not a ... (e.g. animal)
Find something that can't.... (e.g. hop)
What is a ... (defining words)
What could he say? (role playing)
Tell this story (modelling)

Level 4

Reasoning Experience

What might happen next (prediction)
Where will...?
What would happen if...?
Why will...? (justifying)
Why do you think that?
Why wouldn't it....?
What made it happen? (identifying causes)
What could you do? (finding solutions)
What could we use? (selecting a means)
Why should we use that? (explaining)
Why can't we....?
How are they the same? (explaining same and different)