



Windows on Children's Thinking



From the principal

“

The best learning environment for children is one in which you can find the highest possible quantity and quality of relationships.”

Carlina Rinaldi



Bialik College

Of prime importance, of course, is the relationship between children and their teachers; but, significant also is the relationship between children and their environment; the relationship between children and the many languages they use, be they words, numbers, clay, paint, music or dance; and the relationships between children and their ideas and experience.

How thoughtfully and beautifully our educators have documented the rich investigations of each group in our Early Learning Centre. This journal certainly brings to life the learning of our children. These investigations build on the curiosity, wonder and imagination of childhood. One cannot help but be amazed by the active and ongoing engagement and understanding of these young children. On a daily basis we are struck by children who are deep thinkers, competent learners, enquirers who research, and inventors who experiment. We marvel at the way ideas flow and circulate, gathering energy and form.

We honour the teachers who research and learn alongside the children – tracing, recording, and supporting the journey. Teachers who listen with their ears and their hearts. Teachers who have slowly, but surely established, with children and parents, a culture of respect, appreciation, interaction, care and love.

We have come to understand that early years education is not a preparation for life; it is life.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Genia Tanove'.

From the Early Learning Centre Coordinator

“

Everyone who has studied children has ended up by discovering not so much their weaknesses and limits but the surprising and extraordinary strength of their potential and their talents.”

Loris Malaguzzi

The investigations in our journal have taken place during 2008. Each one is authentic and purposeful.

An investigation may have been fairly short, or may have continued over many months and may still be ongoing. What follows are not investigations in their entirety but are rather small vignettes, part of the processes, from every classroom in the Early Learning Centre. Each investigation is documented through the recording of discussions and reflections by the children and their teachers and through photographs and other languages.

The documentation is fundamental in our work with our children. It makes the thinking, often very complex, visible, and open to evaluation and interpretation.

Our Early Learning Centre is seen as a place where not only children but also the adults are given the opportunity to share, experiment, reflect together, take risks, build theories and construct knowledge about the world in which they work. Teachers are seen as learners and researchers. Working together with groups of teachers allows for multiple perspectives and different interpretations.

“Children can give us the strength of doubt and the courage of error. They can transmit to us the joy of searching and researching...the value of research, as an openness toward others and toward everything new that is produced by the encounter with others.” – Carla Rinaldi

In this journal the words of the children are italicized, and many of the articles are prefaced by their own words.

In publishing this journal we hope we have given a voice to our children and teachers in the Early Learning Centre.

Daphne Jaddie .



Bialik College



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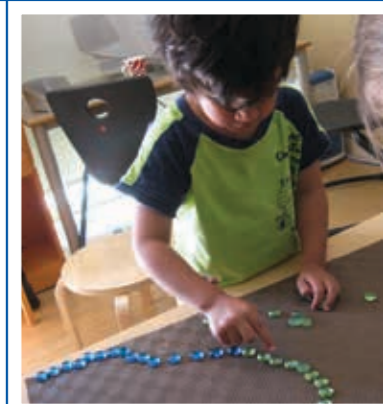
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With

Linda Baise and Sigal Tirosh.

The conventions in this book

Throughout the *Bialik College Early Learning Centre Journal 2008* – *Windows on Children’s Thinking* a *Serif Italicised Font* has been used to indicate the voice of a child.



3 Year Old Kinder

The group holds the individual in its arms...

“ Our research with regard to children’s first encounters with kindergarten indicates that children begin to develop relationships with both people and the environment right from the beginning. ”



Therefore our intentions were to focus on fostering the whole group as well as the individual, and the environment and use it as a catalyst for thinking to happen.

“The environment is seen here as educating the child; in fact is considered as “the third educator” along with the team of two teachers.”¹

In providing meaningful learning experiences for the children, we could draw upon the richness of previous knowledge that these children possessed and could provide us with.

The children were engaged in a number of investigations that gave them the opportunity to think collaboratively with other children.

Within the studio children were invited in small groups to collaborate on the exploration of paint. The focus was not on painting a picture, but rather for the individual children’s choices and thinking to be heard and for the children to work through challenges as a group.

Some of these challenges such as the choice of colour, size of paintbrushes and which area of the paper would be used, involved decision making and compromise.

Well, I’m using blue and you are using blue. Then Elise needs to put in two brushes so we can share.

But I’m not painting near you. I can’t reach the paint.

Well maybe the paint can go you...me...you...me, so that we can paint together.

Okay. Can I go first?

You need to put your paint up to here (points)

Why? I want to paint here.

But see, if you put that colour next to mine, then the white (paper) just goes away and you have a new colour.

We reflected on these conversations and the different processes that each group used to explore collaborative painting. We recognised how important group work was for developing skills such as sharing, listening to other children’s viewpoints and seeing the picture as a whole.

“Being part of something bigger than oneself gives experience in the present meaning and satisfaction.

A small group with a big purpose enlarges the significance of the group but, paradoxically, does not reduce the significance of the individual.”²



Each group had the opportunity to share some of the things they liked or found difficult whilst painting together with the rest of the group. One group commented that they found using small paint brushes difficult to use on large paper. The next group then asked if their sheet of paper could be smaller than the previous group as they still wanted to use small brushes.

Another group commented:

We saw that they (another group) put the colours next to each other and it looked really pretty...and we wanted to do the same.

“We suggest to children that they revisit in the groups the work that they have done. It is not a matter of narrating their actions, but of rethinking the process they worked through, the difficulties they encountered, the doubts, the solutions and the issues that are still unresolved. This is a difficult process but it seems to us to be important for developing an attitude of self reflection about the things we do and our strategies, supporting and at the same time fuelling the processes through which we gain understanding.”³

This process of the individual within the group was also evident in other explorations with a range of materials. After a long process of exploring mark making in clay in small groups, each child was then responsible for designing his or her own clay tile.

The challenge was for the children to collaborate on how their individual tiles would, when put together, make a whole. Together they needed to think, question and listen to each other to create something that represented them all as a group.

Maybe we could make a shape with the tiles so that they all are touching each other.

But some children have made more than one so that’s not fair. Some children have one, but some have three.

Maybe if you have lots, you need to choose which is your favourite and only have that one.

So then we only have 25 because when you count, we have 25 here.

Will 25 tiles fit in a circle? Maybe we could make a shape like a circle and put them in it together.



The children were asked how it felt to think together as part of a group. *Sometimes when you say something, other children think your idea is good and it feels nice.*

When I think with my friends it is fun ‘cause we do it together I like to say my ideas in my head to my friends.

This group of children and their teachers will remain together in 2009, giving us and the children further opportunities to extend upon these and other small group learning experiences. The children are already planning what they might do in their new space. ■

Fig. 1 Whilst involved in collaborative painting, two children negotiate how they are going to use the colour blue at the same time. **Fig. 2** Joshua shows Marissa how he covers the white paper by putting the paint colours next to each other. **Fig. 3** The children listening to a group talk about how they explored collaborative painting. **Fig. 4** Two children collaborate on the markings made in the clay. **Fig. 5** Jade lends a skill to Samuel by showing him how he can push an object into the clay to make similar marks to hers.

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Project Zero, Reggio Children, 2001, *Making Learning Visible*, Reggio Children, 1st Edition.
Edwards C, Gandini L, Forman G, 1998, *The Hundred Languages of Children*, Ablex Publishing Corporation, 2nd Edition.

¹ Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 1998, *The Hundred Languages of Children*, Page 177

² Project Zero, Reggio Children, 2001, *Making Learning Visible*, Page 312

³ Project Zero, Reggio Children, 2001, *Making Learning Visible*, pg 202

“ We reflected on these conversations and the different processes that each group used to explore collaborative painting. We recognised how important group work was for developing skills such as sharing, listening to other children’s viewpoints and seeing the picture as a whole. ”

It's the up side down show...

“ As a group we noticed a light on our ceiling in the class room, but it was moving. The children wondered how it got there. Why was it moving? Will it change? Can we find another one? These questions and more facilitated an investigation into “Reflections” ”



Fig. 1

My colleagues and I looked at different ways we could explore reflections. We looked at the way in which the children engaged with the mirrors in the class room and wondered how we could take their curiosity of their own reflection in mirrors to other places.

The first provocation we presented was a large mirror placed flat on the table.

We wanted the children to explore their reflection (Fig. 1).

What can they see?

How do they feel about their reflection?

How does it make their peers feel?

What theories would they test? (Fig. 2).

I'm making faces.

Open your mouth.

Smiley face.

That is my tongue.

Can lizards do this?

It is the upside down show.

The roof is upside down (Fig. 3).

I remembered when I was a little girl and looking at my own reflection, I pulled funny faces and laughed at what I could do with my face.

After some time we then changed the position of the mirror. We wondered how the children would engage with the mirror if it was up-right?

Would the different angle of the mirror change the way they engaged with it?

Would they make the connection from the mirror being flat to it being up-right?

Changing the position of the mirror did in fact appear to provide the children with a different perspective of their own image and the image of their peers.

We asked the children to look at what their friends saw as they moved around these mirrors and then asked, “What do you look like when you see yourself?” (Fig. 4).

One of the children started to jump as high as he could to see if his head could reach the top of the mirror.

These questions enabled the children to look at themselves and their friends' reflection in a different way.

We also visited the triangular mirror in the Piazza. The unique construction of this type of mirror gave the children the opportunity to see multiple images of them.



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

From our observations it was apparent that the children were not only looking at the image of themselves and their peers but also looking at the environment beyond themselves.

The children began to use pencils on paper to share their knowledge of reflections.

We expanded this investigation to the outdoor environment.

The children were given individual mirrors to capture reflections.

I found a truck, I can see it.

I found water in my mirror.

There is the reflection on the ground.

Look! There is the plant there but it is really behind me.

I can't find the leaf in mine.

We then began to explore other reflective materials (Fig. 5).

The lid is metal; I can see me in it, my face and my reflection.

Look! That's metal and I can see myself.

It was interesting for us to see how much prior knowledge the children had about these materials. They worked out theories together in a group as to why some of the material would reflect images and other materials would not.

Together with my colleagues we discussed many ideas and ways with which we could move the investigation forward. We continued to provide the children with reflective materials (Fig. 6).

This isn't metal, it's a little floppy but I can still see me and a reflection.

It is my reflection; my hair is different in this one.

When I pop it, it makes it go in and out.

When I do this, it makes my tummy big.

I am upside down.

I see my reflection here.



Fig. 6

This investigation is ongoing. The children often see the reflection of water on the roof in the mornings and say

There is water over there, it is a reflection.

It is from light, the light up there.

It is moving, the water is moving, so is the reflection.

When the water moves the light moves too, it must be from the sun, a reflection.

The children continue discussions with each other about the different theories they have learnt from this investigation through collaboration, experimenting and exploring their environment. ■

“ They worked out theories together in a group as to why some of the material would reflect images and other materials would not. ”

This is fun, can I use it forever...

“ Our task regarding creativity is to help children climb their own mountain, as high as possible. No one can do more ” (Loris Malaguzzi)



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

We began first term with the desire and need to connect with each other. We had many questions such as how best to develop and foster meaningful relationships with each other? How would the children explore their classroom environment? Which materials and provocations would encourage the children to connect with each other? The studio was a new concept for me. As a new teacher I began to understand that this space could offer a place where my colleagues and I could facilitate, discuss and challenge children's thinking.

We began by using clay because it is a material which can offer endless possibilities for the children to explore and experiment. This is a natural material which invites touching and squeezing; a wonderful pliable material. It is fascinating in its own right. Clay is a language through which children can explore their own potential for creative and imaginative thinking. As we began our investigation with clay, we found some children were familiar with the material and others were not. As they looked and began to touch the clay curiously they made discoveries *it's yuck, it's like play dough, it looks like poo, its big dough, its cold* etc. While some children were exploring the material others discovered that pinching, pounding, caressing, smoothing and incising all transformed the clay. *We can make something with it, I can roll it, and I can break it.* Children continued to explore the clay for few weeks. We noticed that some children were developing interest in exploring more possibilities and would spend more time in the studio *this is fun, can I use this forever?* Up until this time, although the children were sharing their discoveries, they were still working as individuals and not as a group. We discussed with our Art educator what further "provocations" would now connect individual ideas to the group. A coil of clay was stretched across the table in the studio. We invited a small group of children into the studio and asked them: "What do you see?" Some answers were: *it's deep blue sea, I'm looking, it is clay, it is a long snake, it is a Python, it is a boat, it is a pirate boat.*

It was interesting to see how children had different interpretations of the same thing. They began to help each other with their ideas. On another occasion we presented the clay in a circular coil form and this generated more discussion. The circular shape represented to them many possibilities and in this instance it became a pizza (Fig. 7). *I will make noodles, I will make salami, noodles look like snakes, this is magic – abracadabra is magic.* The children continually linked their experiences, connecting the real to the imaginary.

We searched for ways to encourage the children to revisit working with clay and to engage them, knowing that this material challenged the children and did not provide instant results. One day while playing outside the children began to collect bark and twigs and made marks in the dirt.



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

It was suggested to the children that they continue to use these twigs and bark inside with clay. We considered whether moving the clay from one area to another in the room would reignite the children's interest.

"The term interest is difficult to define with precision. We use it to refer to the disposition to pursue an activity or goal in the absence of expected rewards. We include the tendency to become deeply absorbed enough in an activity to pursue it over an extended period of time with sufficient commitment to accept its routine as well as novel aspects."¹

We brought the bark and twigs inside together with the clay. The table was set up with clay, leaves, twigs and bark. They began to make impressions on clay using bark, leaves and twigs (Fig. 4, 5, 6). – *I can poke the twig in the clay, it makes holes, it makes bumps, I made lots of marks.* We observed that the novelty of moving the clay was short lived and that the studio provided a quiet, contemplative space for further exploration.

A group of children decided to build a tower using clay. One child began breaking tiny pieces of clay and said *I need 100 of these and then mine is going to be high up to the roof* (Fig. 1). We wondered what the number 100 meant to the children? *I am building it strong with bricks like three little pigs.* Another child did not comment but quietly worked on her own tower. She took a small piece of clay and put it on the top of another, pressing it hard so it would not fall. She did not comment verbally but her manipulation of the clay expressed her ideas (Fig. 2). These two children continually appraised their towers (Fig. 3), and discussed the size of the towers. They started to compare and make connections with their towers and city buildings; *they are like tall buildings in the city.* Clay requires attention but what children do with the clay deserves far more attention. Children learn through repetition and sharing their discoveries. They quickly discover that structures may collapse or break, and it takes them time to deal with problems relating to balance and stability and to actually make things stand up.

Sometimes we leave children's explorations to use as provocation for others. We also encourage children to share their discoveries with the whole group. We have discovered that clay can be a language for exploring and communicating ideas.

Loris Malaguzzi says, **"Creativity seems to emerge from multiple experiences, coupled with a well supported development of personal resources, including a sense of freedom to venture beyond the known"**.²

Clay enables children to make their ideas visible in three dimension. It can be an exciting experience for young children to discover that they have made something with a 'back', 'side' and 'front', and sometimes even with an 'inside' and 'underneath'. ■

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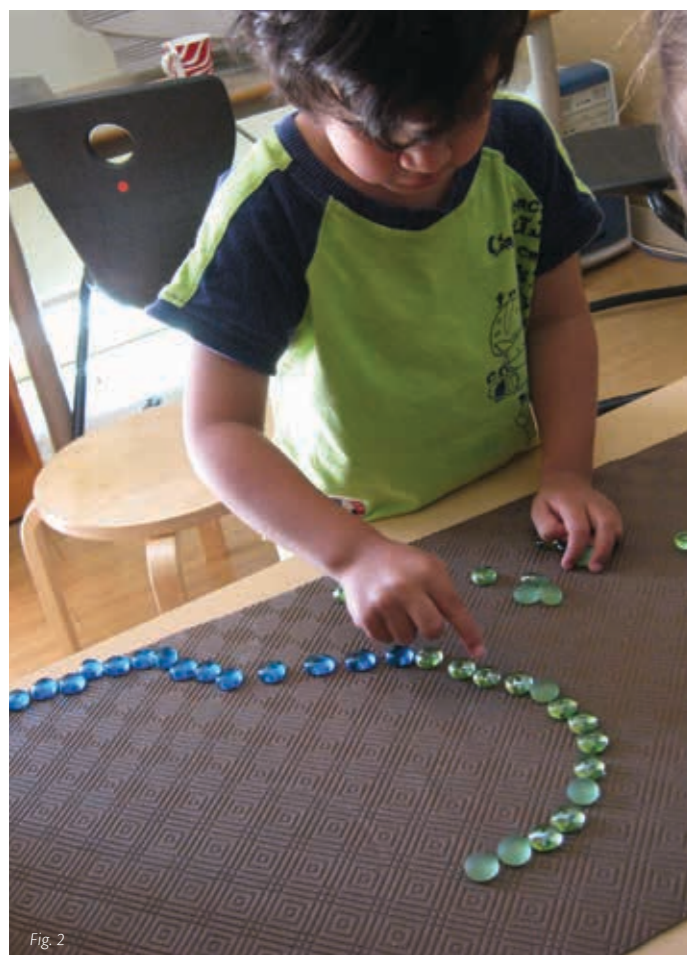
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“ Clay enables children to make their ideas visible in three dimension. It can be an exciting experience for young children to discover that they have made something with a 'back', 'side' and 'front', and sometimes even with an 'inside' and 'underneath'. ”

Exploring pattern in the world around...



The outer natural landscapes of childhood become the inner landscapes of adulthood. ” (Sebba, 1991)



When reflecting on the most memorable and enriching experiences from my own childhood my memories are often of times spent playing with our most wondrous and valuable educational resource, the natural world. Research and experience increasingly show us how important nature is to children and their development, including their ability to build relationships and to learn.

“A play environment that encourages children to use its resources as they choose can provide a wider range of opportunities than one that is purely adult led.”¹

We wondered how the children would respond to an environment rich in natural materials and open-ended resources. Specifically, we wanted to observe how the children’s responses to these materials might change over time, from when they are newly introduced to when they are familiar and comfortable. We looked for insight into how children’s use of these materials could be influenced by their observations of how others use them. And finally, we asked, how would the children’s experience of these materials influence their exploration of the world around them through play?

Our understandings grew as we observed the children’s play develop through their engagement with an evolving learning environment and emergent curriculum.

The learning environment initially welcomed the children to discover collections of different natural, open-ended materials, including pine cones, gum nuts and other seed pods, pieces of bark, blue and green glass beads, wooden blocks and off-cuts, cardboard cylinders and cones, and fabric swatches and stones in various sizes, colours and textures. These materials were all grouped according to characteristics and presented to the children in baskets located on shelves around the room.

Initially the children displayed a basic curiosity in the materials that were most familiar and attractive to them. They were immediately drawn to the coloured glass beads. The children poured beads from and into different sized bowls, listening to the sounds and mixing the different colours. They touched the beads in clenched hands then let them fall through their fingers. Solitary and parallel play often occurred, with children gradually becoming more interactive with each other during their play as their relationships were building over time. Through this sensory exploration of the properties of the glass beads the children were developing early awareness of primary mathematical concepts such as weight and volume. At pack-up times we showed the children how to sort the beads according to colour and display them in readiness for further investigation at a later time.



This exploration engaged the children for several weeks. To extend the children’s use of this material we presented the glass beads with miniature baskets containing small semi-precious stones, in a less busy location and on a fabric mat instead of a hard board. The beads remained untouched for a few days before some children began to work with them in a very different way from before. We observed a shift in interest from discovering the properties of the beads themselves to using the beads as a medium for creative expression in the exploration of line and form. Children focused on their individual compositions, sometimes sharing the resources alongside others. They began to show an interest in each others’ placement of the beads and talked about their intent with peers.

With the use of line, came further development of fundamental mathematical concepts including sorting, classifying and counting.

Seeking to bring this new concept into the group’s awareness and further develop the children’s perception of this material, we initiated a different use of the beads with the class. Sitting in a circle on the mat, we asked each child to select one of the glass beads and place it somewhere inside the circle. Each child enjoyed this opportunity to contribute as a valued individual within the group. We found it interesting that the children predominantly placed the beads adjacent to one another, each child building upon the work of others though there was no discussion during this process. We repeated the activity, adding two beads at a time, before we initiated a reflection on what had happened.

What can you see?

I see lots of blue buttons.

I can see lots of blue buttons and my blue one’s, I’m next to Hayley.

There’s lots of green buttons.

I can see greens.

I can see a one gold.

I can see um. I can see... lots of shiny green.

I see some blue buttons.

I see some blue buttons and green buttons.

I see blue buttons.

I can see numbers.

I can see one lot of white button, one white clean button, a shiny white button.

As the children’s interest in creative design developed further they began to incorporate a wider variety of materials.

The children’s mathematical learning continued to develop and elements of classification, symmetry and sequence were evident in creative design.

Through their play the children began to develop an awareness of pattern.

The children’s design work became increasingly complex as they began to think more deeply about their use of materials and to verbally communicate the meaning or description of their designs.

A number of children who enjoyed using natural materials within their dramatic, imaginative or constructive play showed little interest in or understanding of how to approach pattern with the natural, open-ended materials. We considered that these children, predominantly boys, may benefit from an opportunity to explore a more structured, concrete approach to experimenting with pattern and design.

The introduction of pattern blocks opened up a whole new world of investigation! All the children have enjoyed working with the pattern blocks. Initially the children explored the shapes and how they relate to each other through abstract design. As their confidence and understanding grew, the children worked on more elaborate and meaningful designs.

Some children enjoyed crafting specific images whilst others explored patterns through sequence, symmetry and mandalas.

As the children’s awareness and understanding of pattern developed so too did ours. As a group we enjoyed discovering pattern in the world around us.

Initially the children found patterns on themselves – on the soles of shoes or on clothing they wore. With each discovery the children learnt to identify the repetitive characteristics of a pattern that made it a sequence or a design. The children began to find patterns inside – on the carpet, on toys and in books. Using books and whilst in the playground, we looked at patterns that could be found outdoors in man-made structures as well as in nature, such as buildings and butterflies’ wings.



Fig. 5



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



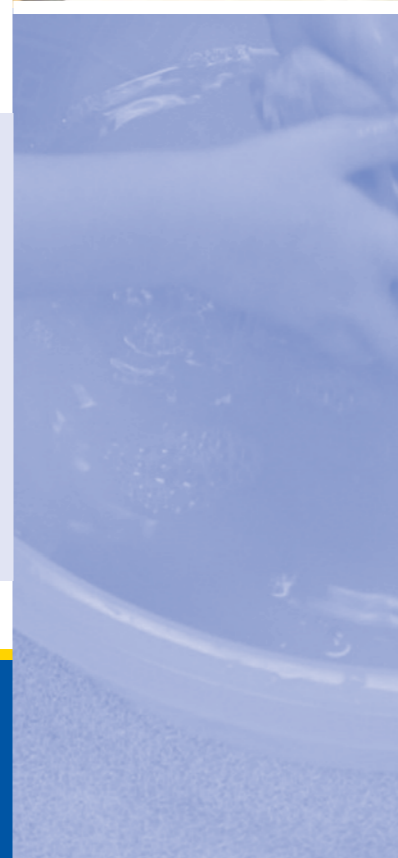
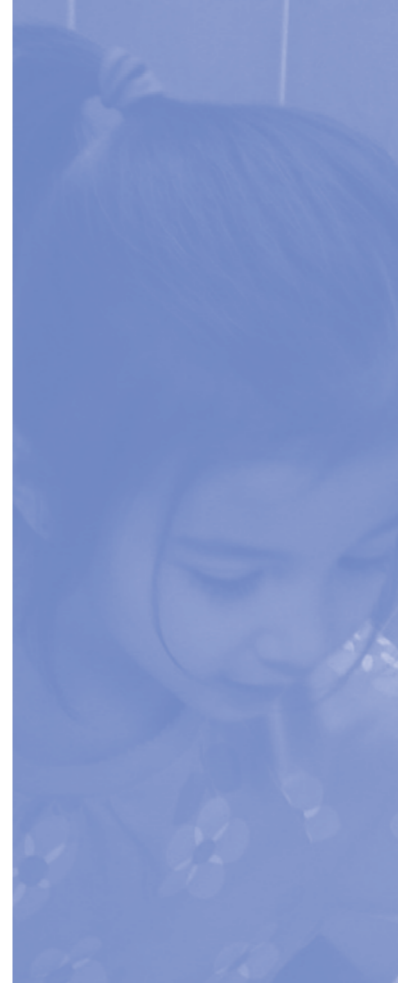
Fig. 6

Over time discussions have shifted to how we could create patterns in the kinder room and playground. We identified a variety of open-ended mediums such as sand and paint. As the children's relationships with each other and the learning environment grew, their thinking and concentration and their play skills developed, pattern became an increasingly integral part of their play throughout the curriculum, including music and movement. We continue to be amazed and inspired by the children's developing exploration, understanding and use of pattern in a wide range of learning experiences. ■

Fig. 1 Children begin to use open-ended resources for creative design. **Fig. 2** Children explore their understanding of mathematical concepts. **Fig. 3** With adult guidance the class developed a shared awareness of pattern. **Fig. 4** Children incorporated natural materials into patterns. **Fig. 5** Some children's work became very thoughtful and complex. They used a wide range of materials, sourced throughout the room. **Fig. 6** This pattern developed over several days. This is the house and these are the people. **Fig. 7** Children's interest in pattern blocks developed rapidly. **Fig. 8** Sequence and symmetry emerged. Children experimented with the third dimension.

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1 Playlink. (2001) *Making Sense: Playwork in Practice*. National Children's Bureau. Sebba, R. (1991) *The Landscapes of Childhood*. *Environment and Behaviour*, Vol 23, No 4, pp395-422.



4 Year Old Kinder

“ As the children's relationships with each other and the learning environment grew, their thinking and concentration and their play skills developed, pattern became an increasingly integral part of their play throughout the curriculum, including music and movement. We continue to be amazed and inspired by the children's developing exploration, understanding and use of pattern in a wide range of learning experiences. ”

The story's in your imagination...



Yeah, you can think of your own story ”



“If we can dream it, we can do it. Dream on idle brains.”¹

Last year, as a kinder group, we began our journey together, building relationships with each other. During this process, the children also naturally formed, and are still developing relationships with their environment, and the opportunities and materials thoughtfully provided for them.

This year, as educators, we have continued to follow the children's many varied leads in pursuing their avenues of interest and inquiry.

Stories and dramatic play have played an important part in the kinder life of our group of children. The environment has been lovingly set up with an area containing a rich source of dress-ups, props, books, puppets and a puppet theatre, in order to enrich love of the story, fantasy and drama.

We built on this love, by adding to the strong foundation. Each week the children have arrived at kinder to discover a new story box...

a box containing a storybook, and the appropriate dress-ups, puppets and props, needed for the children to revisit that particular story as often as they wish (Fig. 1).

In addition we extended the relationship with stories and indeed storytellers, by inviting our Grandparents to visit and to read to the children. **“Once upon a time children begged for bedtime stories told by a parent or a grandparent. They were transported to magical places and times”²** and **“for the child, the fairy tale is above all the ideal instrument for keeping the adult nearby.”³**

As educators we all know that, **“there is no imagination curriculum, or pedagogy of the imagination in schools. So, if as poet Wallace Stevens wrote, the imagination is the power of the mind over the possibilities of things, then to neglect the imagination is also to impoverish children's worlds and narrow their hopes”⁴**

According to Alexandra Adornetto, in an article written for the Age newspaper in Melbourne, when she was in Yr 10, **“A key contributor to the death of imagination is indisputably the rise of the digital age.....but technology has not worked alone. Some of the responsibility must also lie with our current education system.”**



Year after year we have observed how children's imagination is sparked by the world of stories, how significant a role they and storytellers play in the lives of children, and how children naturally use their creativity and imagination to tell stories. **“Aside from its symbolic importance, the game of make believe and dress-up is always pleasurable because of the grotesque effects that result from it. It is theatre: to disguise oneself in the clothes of someone else, to play a role, to invent a life, to discover new gestures.”⁵**

Imaginative play can show us how children make sense of their world, and how they use this knowledge to give meaning to their experiences.

In the game, we need to put colour in our hair. We choose which colour, and take turns. You can have a turn now, and I want good behaviour. No snatching. Put it in my hair. Now I give it to the blue mermaid. Let's go off to explore. This is the treasure box with our power shells. Why's it on your side. It needs to be in the middle. It's my story, so it's my box, and I'm the boss. Because you're the prettiest mermaid.. and I'm older than you.

Children enter a world of storying from a very early age, and as educators, we need to provide many opportunities for children's stories to be created, recorded, seen and valued, and favourite stories revisited.

We wanted the children to enjoy the pleasures of storytelling as much as we have over the years. I am always in awe of people who can tell a great story. Research endorses the importance of stories in children's lives, and **“storytelling can contribute significantly to early literacy development.”⁶**

Stories have the power to delight, touch, teach, recall, inspire, motivate and challenge. I wanted the children to experience authorship, and to be able to discuss story structures in order to become more critical creators and listeners, laying the foundations for more creative and imaginative literacy development.

Using various techniques we began to collect the children's stories.

- An adult recorded the children's stories accurately. Children love seeing their words written down, and read again and again. They were also given the opportunity to illustrate their stories (Fig. 5).



- Children recorded their stories on a tape recorder. This is a good technique confident enough to tell their stories in front of their peers (Fig. 6).
- Dramatisation of stories, and use of our story boxes, puppet theatre, and all our props. This is extremely powerful, because it allows the children to revisit their own stories, and others they may love.
- Recording of socio-dramatic play through which children naturally tell stories, set the scene, introduce the main and other characters, get involved in action, and resolve conflicts which may arise.

These stories were then compiled into our own class book of stories, which is always available to read and enjoy.

The journey of a punnet...



A journey takes preparation. But how can one prepare for a journey that is full of factors of “unpredictabilities.”



Children tell a wide range of stories

*Once upon a time there was a happy little butterfly.
Her name was Rainbow.*

There was a red rose for the princess. The Prince gave the Princess a hug, and then the Princess had a pink rose for the Prince. Then the Princess hugged the Prince and gave him a kiss. He was happy. They married each other (Fig. 7).

Once upon a time there was a monkey. His name was Monkey. One day he was looking for bananas, and there was nothing there.... no fruit in the forest. He felt sad.

They packed different colours of raindrops and took them to space. When Vanessa turned 10, her Mum and Dad agreed that she was old enough to be a princess-fairy-mermaid-ballerina (Fig. 8).

Ideas for these stories may come from books, films, TV, personal experiences or other people's experience, according to research done by Preece as early as 1987. She notes that “the children showed themselves able to exploit with skill and confidence, a rich repertoire of narrative forms.”

In addition, cognitive scientist Steven Pinker muses that what fiction might do is allow children to play out, in their mind's eye, hypothetical courses of action. It may give them a huge store of knowledge about different situations and different ways people deal with them... Of a size which we could never build up from our first hand experience.

For many reasons it is hard to imagine a world without stories. I agree wholeheartedly with Canadian storyteller Melvin John, who once stated that a lot of times we need stories to remind us of why we travel this road (Fig. 9, 10).⁷

I hope that these beautiful children we have shared the past two years with, continue to be part of their own, and other wonderful stories ■

.....and the friends in kinder 4Z all lived happily ever after.

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Gianni Rodari – *The Grammar of Fantasy – An Introduction to the Art of Inventing Stories* (1973). Published by – Teachers and Writers Collaborative New York

¹ Alexandra Adornetto – Melbourne year 10 student, and authoress of 'The Shadow Thief'

² Clare Ham Grosbauer – the web March 2004)

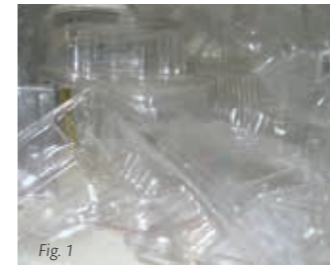
³ Gianni Rodari. *The Grammar of Fantasy* – p.92 (see Fig. 2) (see Fig. 3)

⁴ Herbert Kohl – Foreword in *The Grammar of Fantasy* by Gianni Rodari.

⁵ Gianni Rodari – *The Grammar of Fantasy* p.16 (see Fig. 4)

⁶ Mallan 1991; Jennings, 1991; Cooper, Collins and Saxby, 1992; Glazer and Burke, 1994) – as quoted in – *The Role of Storytelling in Early Literacy Development – Bachelor of Education Paper* – by Louise Phillips.

⁷ Melvin John – Internet article on Storytelling



The scene is set. A group called the Rainbow Friends, comprising 25 three and four year olds, each with their own set of values, mores and understandings are about to embark on a journey that will span a period of nearly two years. Thrown in the mix are their parents and teachers also with their own values, mores and understandings and they too are on this journey.

These are the unpredictabilities!

It all began one morning when a discussion was taking place during our morning meeting. The children found it very important to announce what particular fruit they brought in each morning for their fruit platter.

Strawberries was always a very popular fruit and in great demand. But my thinking was... how did the strawberries arrive each morning?

THIS WAS THE BEGINNING OF OUR JOURNEY.

The strawberries come in a “plastic thingy.”

After a short discussion the plastic thingy became known as a punnet, and from that day on the punnet became an integral part of our thinking.

Reduce Re-use Recycle

“In our world of material wealth, where so many broken items are thrown away rather than mended – we forget that most of the world fixes everything and discards nothing.”¹

Recycling, according to the dictionary means “to pass a substance through a system again for further treatment or use.”

What could this mean to us as a group of people? How could we use a substance that is familiar to us and be able to re-use it in a meaningful way? Should we discard materials, and not find a further use for them?

We started to collect punnets and plastic containers over a period of a few weeks. We found that the children started to recycle and collect plastic material wherever they could find them. We then brought the following discussion to the group.... if we start to recycle and re-use the punnets and other plastic materials and explore the possibilities of these items, where would we go? What other possibilities were there for all plastic items that were brought in on a regular basis?

The children were given time... time to explore, manipulate, create and recreate, pack away, unpack and rekindle their exploration with the many different plastic materials we are constantly exposed to in our everyday lives.



For many reasons it is hard to imagine a world without stories. I agree wholeheartedly with Canadian storyteller Melvin John, who once stated that a lot of times we need stories to remind us of why we travel this road.





Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

Many parents also became interested and involved in the notion of “truly recycling” plastic products that we use on a regular basis in our home.

The plastic stickers that are placed on every piece of fruit soon became an item worth collecting. One family took this collection very seriously, and soon an idea was born.

An investigation about recycling exploded in our room. Every child soon became involved... and all in many different ways.

When a message is conveyed by young children, adults often tend to “sit up and listen.”

We believe that our seriousness and core belief “that we all have to change our thinking to make a difference” was the catalyst for the very serious side of reduce, re-use, recycle journey that was taking place in our room.

When I asked the children to think about what recycling means to them, they responded in the following way...

You can make something from recycling.

You can collect all the lids from the milk bottles.

You can recycle bottle tops. Recycling is a good thing for the world because the world needs recycling, because if you don't recycle there will be too much rubbish.

Our world would be black, black, black, because there would be rubbish.

When we put them in our recycling thing we recycle it and then we use it again. Our world will get all dark if we don't recycle.

Once the children had become very familiar with the qualities of the materials provided, many different possibilities arose.

The opportunity to reuse all the plastic containers we had collected for 18 months became apparent and became very useful tools for play.

The materials were used indoors in exploratory play and outdoors in creative play, especially in the sandpit which soon became a cake shop or restaurant.

This intense interest in our idea of trying to create a better place and not contemplate *the thought of living in a dark world* opened a window to allow families an opportunity to express their understanding in a creative way, bearing in mind the pathways and journey we were all taking.

We asked all the family members in our class to come up with an installation, sculpture or creative piece made totally out of recycled materials. The process was to be documented by the parents and children.

The final outcome would then be displayed for our whole school community to discuss, and debate over and maybe encourage them to take on the responsibility of recycling in a very meaningful way.

It is already evident that this investigation has many of the children and staff in our centre discussing and questioning the intent of some of the installations and sculptures.



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 10



Fig. 12

“By using installations it brings an awareness to our societies mindless use of materials and products – and the severe impact it has on our environment.”²

Fig. 1 Punnets spilling over. **Fig. 2** Using punnets for sandcake.s **Fig. 3** Punnets used for paint mixing **Fig. 4** Construction with punnets. **Fig. 5** A bust covered in stickers. **Fig. 6** Drawing of a black, black world. **Fig. 7** Drawing of a happy world where everybody recycles. **Fig. 8** Hannah and Lani working together with lids to make patterns. **Fig. 9** Mayani with punnets in sandpit. **Fig. 10** Recycled milk containers used for water play outdoors – for the “juice Bar”. **Fig11** A families interpretation using recycled materials and the concept of Rainbow Friends as an installation. **Fig. 12** An installation using all the concepts of recycling, and the punnet holds pride of place.

References

- 1 Stephen J Gould From “Tires to Sandals” 1989
- 2 Abigail Doan Recycled environment Art Installation by MSLK. 2008

“By using installations it brings an awareness to our societies mindless use of materials and products – and the severe impact it has on our environment.”

You are part of the quilt now...



At the beginning of last year my colleagues and I discussed the intent for our classroom community. We wanted to create a sense of belonging, of care, respect, kindness, friendship and in particular sustainability. ”



At the beginning of last year my colleagues and I discussed the intent for our classroom community. We wanted to create a sense of belonging, of care, respect, kindness, friendship and in particular sustainability. We introduced the idea of sustainability to the children by encouraging them to use strategies such as reusing materials, reducing waste of water and paper, taking care of our plants and the creatures that live in our garden and by reinforcing the notion that not everything can be replaced.

Early in the year, one of our colleagues in the classroom told the children that she was having a baby. As time passed the children's anticipation grew. They saw images from her scans and could see the baby was getting bigger. When she told the children that the baby was a girl, some reacted with great excitement and others displayed disappointment.

As the time for Gen to go on maternity leave grew closer the children began talking about presents for the baby. In keeping with our focus on sustainability we had come to an agreement in our classroom during the year that the children could only give each other gifts that they had made themselves and we reminded the children of this. We wanted to make sure the children had a sense that the gift was really coming from us, from our class, from our community and that it would be precious.

The children recalled that two of the children's Grandmothers had done some knitting for us and that we had been given some hand crocheted dolls' blankets last year. We agreed that a blanket could be made.

At the end of the week my colleagues and I sat and reflected on the children's thoughts and agreed that a blanket could be made for the baby. We discussed the patterning the children had been doing, its complexity, and the collaborative processes the children were using to create intricate patterns with recycled and found materials, blocks and fabrics and linked this with the idea of a blanket. We decided to make a patchwork quilt.

I had an example of a quilt to show the children and some children told others about their own quilts that had been made or bought for them. We looked up images of quilts on the internet and the children chose their eight favourites, to give us ideas about how a quilt could be made.

The children then drew their thoughts about what they wanted the quilt to look like (Fig. 1). The children compared ideas and talked about which quilt pattern they liked best. The colour of the quilt was of great importance to the children.

Pink, because she is a baby girl.

Red, because that is the only girl colour left.

Blue, she'll be blue, because I like her to be blue, that's my favourite.



We wrote a letter to the children's families and asked them to bring a piece of fabric for the quilt. We asked that the fabric be cotton and that the children should choose it. We also asked that the families write the reason the child had chosen that particular fabric. Two sisters had chosen to bring one of their own baby blankets to be used in the quilt. Many of the children recognised how special this was and treated this fabric very carefully. Other children chose the fabric they liked best, or chose fabric with the teacher's favourite colour (red) in it. The teachers also chose fabric.

To extend the children's interest in patterning and the quilt investigation we scanned the fabric and cut it in to pieces for the children to use to design quilt patterns. The children made many different quilt designs and we photographed them (Fig. 2). Some children wrote a story about the quilt they designed; others discussed their work with teachers, their families and each other.

We discussed the properties of a good patchwork quilt including that pieces of fabric that matched shouldn't be next to each other, that each row needed the same number of pieces. As the children collaborated to make quilt designs they became more and more intricate.

The children were involved in every stage of the quilt's production and each stage provided great learning opportunities. We pre-washed the fabric by hand (Fig. 3).



Changes from the past, in the present and into the future...



Together with my colleagues, I discussed a proposal to explore our understandings and the children's understandings and responses to the concept of change. I saw this exploration as an opportunity to question ourselves not only as teachers, but also as learners, researchers and facilitators. ”



Fig. 6

The colour was coming out of Jessica's fabric. It was coming out when she was squeezing it. I saw it when she did it – the quilt colour. It was on the bottom, it was spinning around a lot.

When ironing the fabric the children commented on the reaction of different types of fabric. This created an opportunity to discuss how different materials were made. We explained that some fabrics were made from plants in the same way that paper is made from trees.

I didn't know paper was made from trees.

I have a paper tree at home, so I did.

I realized that we had been talking about saving paper all year and the children didn't understand why. I wondered how this could be. Had we not explained it properly? Was the concept too difficult? It gave us something else to think about.

When the baby arrived this investigation engaged more children. A child brought a handkerchief to kinder. It looked just like a patchwork quilt. The children used the handkerchief to show each other that pieces that matched shouldn't be next to each other (Fig. 4).

Sewing the quilt together took a long time. Children came and went and we sewed the pieces together on the sewing machine (Fig. 5). The children helped by counting how many squares were in each strip, by handing a different piece of fabric to the teachers as they sewed. The opportunity to sit and sew and talk with the children created a very different context in which to have conversations with children. Sometimes there were large groups of children, sometimes just one. Children raced off to tell their peers that we were sewing their material.

You are part of the quilt now. That's yours next to mine. Look!

As we reflect on this investigation the quilt is not yet finished. Creating this quilt is symbolic of creating a classroom community. Making a quilt, developing friendships and skills all takes time. The opportunities for thinking and discovery that making the quilt provided are immeasurable. We all took our time, did things in our own way and together we created something precious, something to keep forever (Fig. 6). ■



As we reflect on this investigation the quilt is not yet finished. Creating this quilt is symbolic of creating a classroom community. Making a quilt, developing friendships and skills all takes time. The opportunities for thinking and discovery that making the quilt provided are immeasurable. We all took our time, did things in our own way and together we created something precious, something to keep forever. ”

How have we changed or shifted our focus from what we think children need, to listening to what children know and want to know more about?

We often note physical changes within ourselves and within our environment. But I wonder how often we discuss changes in our thinking and the thought processes that prompted a change in our understanding.

Through a process of introspection of my own in thinking about the concept of change as a catalyst for reflection and decision making, I began to share my thoughts with my close colleagues and those colleagues in other faculties in our school. I asked a teacher of history, "Which speeches or images would you cite as significantly imparting an understanding of change in the course of history?" I specifically focused on both the use of words and images, as we have come to understand that there are many ways of making our thoughts visible, many ways of doing and thinking. Some of the thoughts from this colleague included the inaugural speech by John F. Kennedy on 20 August, 1961, a painting by Tom Roberts of the opening of Parliament in Australia and in 1927 when the sitting in the first parliament house where no indigenous people were invited and this year the opening of parliament in Australia on 12 February 2008 with the speech by our Prime Minister, 'Apology to Australia's Indigenous people'. There were of course discoveries and inventions by many that changed our thinking, Leonardo Vinci, and the discoveries by Galileo such as the movement of the earth around the sun, just to name a few. The impact of wars, landmark decisions, policy making and discoveries, many events and experiences to reflect upon.

You the reader also have your own personal moments that changed your lives and direction. I invited the staff in our centre to share their understanding of the concept of change by using a thinking routine, 'Insights and Questions' following the sharing of some of the text and visual images previously mentioned.

Insights

Some changes are really difficult and some changes are exciting.

Change brings about progress.

A change in ourselves can often lead to a change in others.

We are constantly changing because of the people in our lives who move us in some ways as a consequence of their changes.

Change can refresh your landscape.

Change can be confusing.

Questions

What makes some changes easier to handle than others?

Is change always positive?

How do we prepare children for change?

What skills do I need to cope with change?

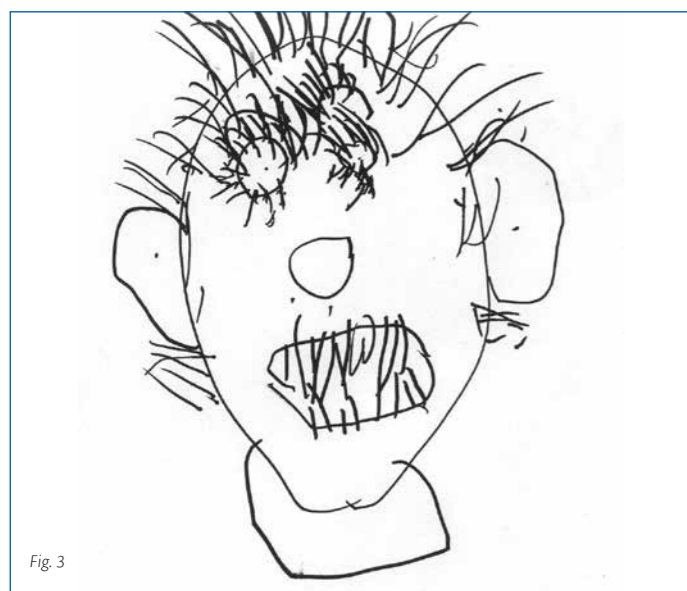
We value our history by continually revisiting our culture and traditions. We invite grandparents and great grandparents to share their family histories with us, rich and diverse and on some occasions tragic but positive. We are also constantly surprised and challenged by the insightfulness of young children from their early years of experience and their ability to make meaning visible through the various strategies and languages they employ.

I mention here languages the children use to make their thinking visible and at the same time the languages we as teachers and researchers use to document children's thoughts and theories. In the same way we reflect on historical events and discoveries, as teachers we also attempt to do so with the careful observation and documentation of children's theories and thinking.

I think of comments made by the educators in Reggio Emilia when they talk about educating for citizens of the future but also life at school, school is life.

As we reacquainted ourselves after the summer break my intent with the children in Kinder 4 was to explore their understandings of change after having had one year of kinder together. During their first year of kinder we focused on exploring evolving relationships within the new groups of children, together with their teachers. We provided opportunities to explore and make theories about the new materials they encountered. Discovering the properties of these materials, how they could be compared, transformed, changed and changed back to resemble their original shape or state.

This year I was interested in understanding a more explicit concept of change. What did this mean? Some had a birthday recently or would do so during the semester. What were their expectations? What were others' expectations? What were their reflections about the year before and their thinking now? What connections would they make between themselves now and the observation of changes around them i.e. new environment, opportunities.



I asked groups of children using a thinking routines, What do you think you know about... change?

- We are big kids now not babies anymore.*
- Like grown ups are.*
- We are nearly prep year olds.*
- My body has grown.*
- You grow for a long time.*
- Well we are four now.*
- I'm taller than 3!*
- When you are one you can say, mum.*
- My mum says I can talk a lot now because I am four!*
- Change means we are growing bigger.*
- Liam is still zero – but he will change.*
- I will always be a little sister but I would like to be a big sister and my brother little.*
- Can a person turn back into a baby?*

Their initial thoughts focused on their visible changes

Following several discussions the children were asked to closely observe themselves 'now they were older.' What was the same and what was different?

Using large mirrors it was suggested to the children to spend some time looking at themselves and initially use black fineliner to document their observations (Fig. 1). They explored how marks, through drawing one's thoughts could also change and add to their observations over time. How did colour accentuate, heighten or change their perceptions? Some children became more discriminating regarding to their choice of colour to add to their features (Fig. 2). Some chose not to add colour and their interpretation of change in themselves relied on line and texture (Figs. 3). They then compared this drawing with one using colour (Fig. 4). This exploration was more than an activity to assess skill and make assumptions. Without time to revisit in a variety of ways, the depth in thinking and knowledge would be thwarted. We know that ongoing opportunities for discussion creates more insightful thinking, participation and development. What underpins this investigation is the constant change for reassessing not in a numerical sense but reassessing attitudes and perceptions. Are my thoughts the same as yesterday or tomorrow? When did they change...?



At this time the children's concept of growing older and taller, lent itself to observing their full image. They had spoken about what they could do now they were a year older. Some of the children showed others in the group how they could change their stance from dancing to jumping and through this their attention turned towards using ones body to indicate a particular emotion or gesture.

The children explored these poses and drew an impression of themselves (Figs. 5, 6).

They further explored the construction of their stance using clay. This material lent itself to constant change as ideas evolved.

They problem solved with their peers. How could this model stand up if this was the gesture/pose they wished to represent? Some chose to represent themselves as they depicted themselves in their drawing, a two-dimensional image using clay to create the lines (Fig. 7). Others began with the legs and found that if these were too thin they would not support the body. This constant recreating and constructing in developing an idea was not a deterrent. Rather this process appeared to internalize skills and possibilities for later use beyond the studio (Fig. 8).

The children were introduced to other interpretations of the human form such as sculptor Alberto Giacometti whose elongated figures evoked much discussion.

The children explored the properties of wire as they interpreted change and movement in response to Giacometti's images (Figs. 9, 10).

Several children spoke about ballets or concerts that they had seen and specifically about the movements of the dancers. The idea of telling a story without words, using gesture and movement to convey changes in an emotion or action became a focus. After a discussion with one of our Year 11 students I invited her to share some of her thoughts about her use of dance as another mode of communication.

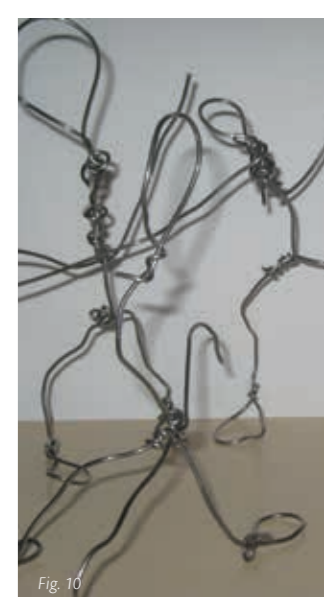




Fig. 11



Fig. 13



Fig. 12

During this investigation there were other concepts of change discussed by the children including the changing of one state from another, for example, hot to cold as well as the concept of metamorphosis;

Change is a word when a caterpillar turns into a butterfly or a cocoon. A caterpillar grows into a butterfly. It is wet first and rests on the cocoon. Further possibilities for exploration...

After some time the discussions about change moved to change in one's thinking.

My brother always changes his mind but he says I can't change my mind.

A deeper level of this investigation was the intent to develop an understanding of the broader concept of change. Could it include how one perceives change, opportunities for listening to others thoughts; negotiation; compromising; evolving; changing points of view with new information? What happens when one changes position? Is it about not letting go of the past but embracing the future and the realization that nothing will ever be the same again?

A focus on climate change and its effects on our environment was a recurrent topic of conversation when discussing the concept of change with both our younger children but also with our prep and year one children. A group of year one children theorized what changes could be made to repair what they saw as the negative impact of some "changes" in our environment.

And from a group of seven year old children who discussed change in the context of how change, or shift in our thinking, could benefit ourselves and our world.

It takes all kinds to make a world.

What makes someone different from you, really they are the same.

We can learn from nature. It makes us breathe it can give us medicine.

Some medicine is made out of leaves and leaves are for food too.

You can learn from life under the ground and above the ground, in the trees and under the water (Figs. 11, 12, 13).

If you look closely, you can learn from nature.

Taking it into your eyes, into your brain and putting it down somewhere.

Open your ears wide and listen...

We need to communicate, think and learn.

You think about what other people are saying and thinking and then you come up with your thoughts.

People learn from other people. And those people can learn, you can be a teacher.

You can learn by communicating by looking at what people are thinking (Figs. 14).

Part of a story written by one child was about taking advice and learning from others. He wrote about, animals who give repeated advice to a monkey so that he would not get burnt from lying in the sun. The monkey continually replied "that does not suit me" and he suffered the negative ramifications of his actions. Finally he realized the benefits of listening to others and being open to changing his state of mind.

After some time sharing their thoughts on the effects of change in our environment a group of seven year old children wrote a script for a story which they intended to use to create a film.



Fig. 14



A bad world needed help from the good world. They wrote a letter asking the good world to send food and clothes, but the good world said, We will send you food and clothes but why is your world bad?. The bad world said, "There is rubbish in our water and no one looks after the plants. We do not have clean water". The good world said, "We will help you but we will also send you seeds to grow and people to help you make your world good" (Figs. 15, 16, 17).

As the children shared and illustrated their ideas another child responded ... The picture can give imagination in your head and the marks give detail.

Discussions with our staff continue as we know change is constant and evolving.

Recently a young child engaged in a discussion with me in the playground,

Did you know that the earth is going to be destroyed.

The earth is going to be destroyed by the sun.

The sun is much, much bigger than the earth.

The sun will become closer and closer to the earth and it will destroy it.

It will happen.

We will be underground.

My dad says so.

These thoughts challenged me as an educator. What were we really listening to when we "listened" to our young children and when was the right time to listen and "listen" beyond the classroom.

I recall some of the comments made by the educators in Reggio who tell us not to waste children's time by keeping them busy but by engaging them in authentic learning experiences



The Greek philosopher Epictetus wrote, "We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak."¹

Change is wanting something different.

Everywhere changes. ■

References

¹ Epictetus, STANDS4 LLC. c2007, Quotes.net [Internet]. Available from <http://www.quotes.net/quote/6808>. (Accessed: October 23, 2008).



Prep

“ These thoughts challenged me as an educator. What were we really listening to when we “listened” to our young children and when was the right time to listen and “listen” beyond the classroom. ”

A community is like two people on a motorbike...

Monday, 4 February 2008 – a group of children come together for the first time. Many of them bring memories of their kinder years downstairs in our Early Learning Centre while others are new to this environment

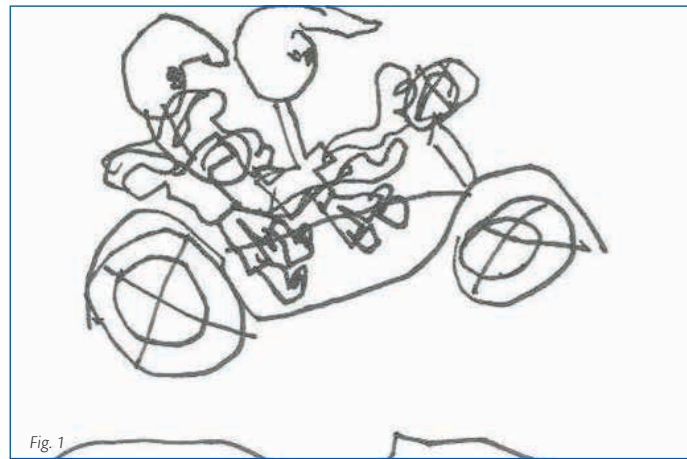


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

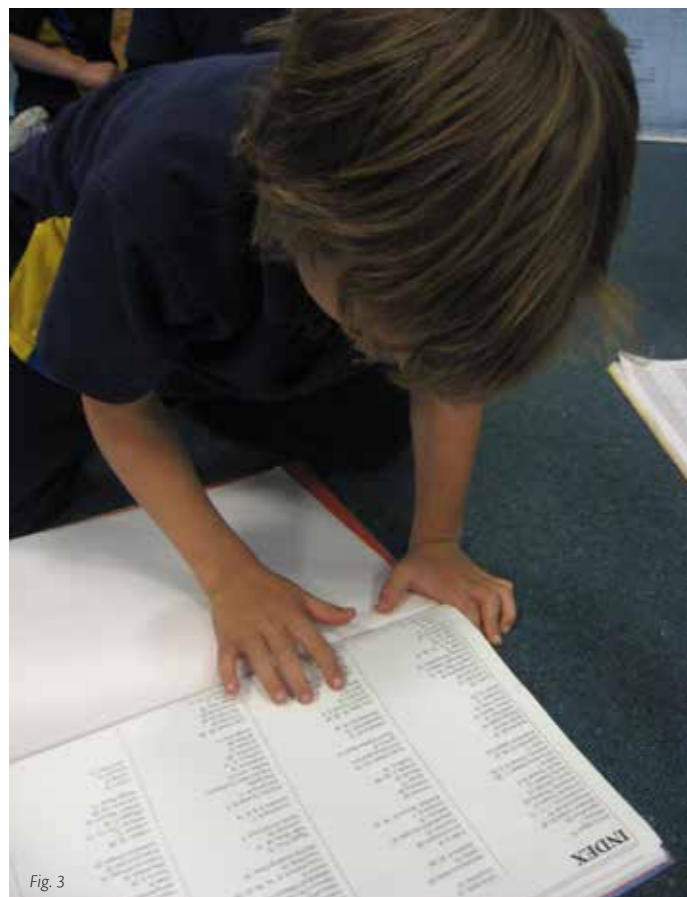


Fig. 3

Monday, 4 February 2008 – a group of children come together for the first time. Many of them bring memories of their kinder years downstairs in our Early Learning Centre while others are new to this environment. Although most of the children know each other, the kinder groups have regrouped to form three new prep classes. The sound of excited voices, nervous gestures and tentative smiles permeate the air as the children proudly parade their new uniforms marking another stage in their lives. Flashes from cameras catch the moment. The seeds of relationships are planted and we begin our journey of discovery, exploration and learning, together.

For me too it is a new journey, my first year at Bialik as a teacher. My colleagues and I were very aware of the importance of nurturing these relationships, for ourselves and the children. With this in mind we created many opportunities to get to know each other and share aspects of ourselves. The children shared special photos of themselves and their families; they created character profiles using writing, drawing, painting and other mediums. These experiences and many others enabled us to uncover aspects of our own and each others identity. This helped to create the foundation and starting point for our own classroom community.

Whilst driving to work early this year I heard a discussion on the radio about a show exploring the question 'what makes your community special?' Given our classroom investigation and our goal of creating our own classroom community, we took this question to the children.



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

*Everyone does a community together.
We all gather... a friend community. People making new friends.
Listening
Respect everyone in the classroom and don't hurt their feelings.
I feel safe when people look after me.
Our community is really special because people help when people don't know.
I feel special when people look after me.*

The children created their own set of expectations within our own community and discussed the unique aspects that underpin the community we were creating. Following on from this they created their own metaphors to demonstrate their understanding of what a community is (Fig. 1, 2).

A community is like very much people on a Ferris wheel and lots of people holding hands.

A community is like two people on a motorbike because they are riding together.

*We're doing puzzles and joining them together to make a shape.
It's a community because everyone is working together in groups.
They are helping each other what to make.*

We also took the opportunity to explore other communities beyond the ones we are part of, on a daily basis. The children's natural interest in the world around them together with their wonderfully diverse life experiences enabled us to think big and question, investigate and discuss broader world issues.

*If Israel and Egypt are next to each other then why are they so different?
Why isn't there a sea between some countries?
Imagine if the world was all one colour.*

We had discussions about places in the world around us; from the Pyramids and the Dead Sea to the Eiffel Tower and the Great Wall of China. We met visitors from other countries and people who had visited other countries and came to share their stories with us. We learnt words in different languages and we read books in other languages as well. The Beijing Olympics also gave us further opportunities to investigate the countries of the world, their flags, languages and symbols as well as different characteristics of the cultures they represent. We used the internet, books and atlases to research and investigate the location of different countries (Fig. 3, 4).

To explore the concept of community objectively we used inanimate objects to steer the exploration away from their feelings, relationships and experiences. During one of our discussions the children were asked to choose a coloured pencil and bring it to our meeting. Two pieces of paper were placed in the middle of the circle and the children were asked to think carefully as they placed their pencil on these pieces of paper and explain the reason why they placed it in that position. The purpose of this experience was for the children to focus on the positioning of the object within a space rather than the objects themselves (Fig. 4, 5).

*Comfortable.
So it can be comfy—it is warm.
I wanted it to be with another pencil.
Because it will get under the shade of Marnies [pencil].
Because then the paper connects.
So it can get warm—the pencils will go around it.
So it doesn't stay alone.*

It was interesting to note that through these experiences the children once again focused on the interactions and feelings of the pencils within the group (rather than the physical placement) in order to justify their positioning.

To extend this further we looked up the word 'community' in the dictionary. According to the Concise Oxford dictionary a community is defined in the following ways...

noun (pl. communities) 1 a group of people living together in one place. 2 (the community) the people of an area or country considered collectively; society. 3 a group of people with a common religion, race, or profession: the scientific community. 4 the holding of certain attitudes and interests in common. 5 a group of interdependent plants or animals growing or living together or occupying a specified habitat. ¹

An investigation into our Community...

“

...to be in a group is a situation of great privilege” (Malaguzzi 1998:95)

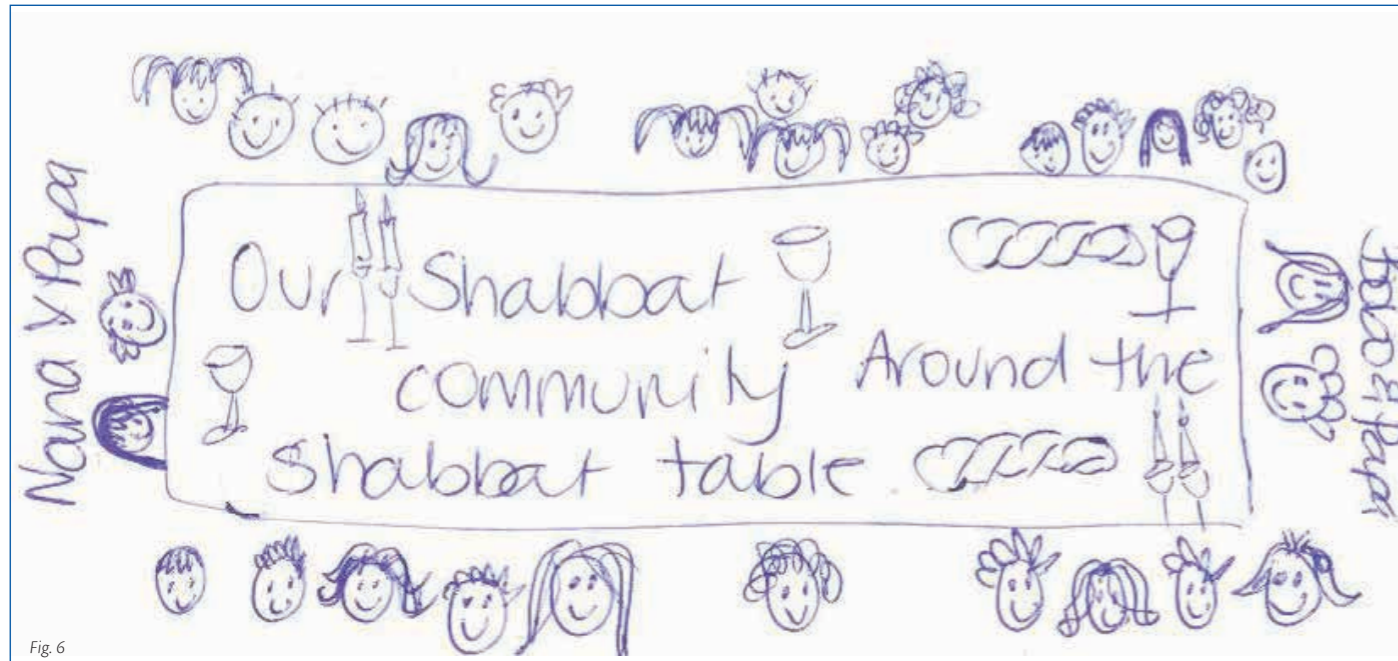


Fig. 6

As a group we reflected on this definition and noted the contrast between the children's definition which focused on relationships, feelings and interactions of the people within the community and the dictionary's definition which focused more significantly on the physical space. To unpack this further, we asked the children and their families as well as our fellow staff members to share their interpretations (Fig. 6).

- A team working together.*
- Something new. A group. Collecting friends. Together always.*
- Circle of friends.*
- A group of people who are not alone. Listen to whoever is talking*
- People with common interests.*
- Shabbat Community – around the Shabbat table.*
- Made up of people working together.*
- An extended family.*
- Similar values and experiences.*
- Doing things together.*
- In your community you can feel you're safe.*
- In a big community we would feel lost and when you step inside a small community you already feel welcome.*

What is apparent from this research is the contrasting views and interpretations of this word. A word that brings with it a multitude of definitions, ambiguity and more questions. As we continue to explore the impact of this word, it is evident that the language we use plays a significant role in our day to day interactions. We each have our own lens, our own experiences and our own backgrounds that we bring to these words and these play a vital role in our interpretations.

So as we move forward and into Year 1, our investigation will explore the impact that language and communication plays in our lives, our 'community' and the 'communities' of the world. ■

References:

1 Compact Oxford English Dictionary of Current English, Third Edition, 2005, Oxford University Press, http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/community?view=uk

“

So as we move forward and into Year 1, our investigation will explore the impact that language and communication plays in our lives, our 'community' and the 'communities' of the world.”



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

The beginning of our Prep year meant that there would be 25 children coming together to learn for the following two years. Many of them did not know each other and some had been separated from friends they had made in kindergarten. How to make this a wonderful, inspiring and productive period for all of them was the question we asked ourselves.

Remembering Loris Malaguzzi's words **“I believe there is no possibility of existing without relationships. Relationships are a necessity of life”**¹ set us on a path to foster these young relationships and promote a sense of unity so that cognitive development could also flourish. Our idea of a community came from many discussions where the children decided a community was when there are people who are working together and helping each other. They feel like part of your family but they are not.”

The words of the song 'Circle of Friends' became very popular in our class. 'Come join our circle of friends. It's a circle that never ends. There's always room for one more...

How would we create a community in Prep K?

- Introducing ourselves. Learning about others.
 - Forming a common set of values and promises to each other.
 - Working together and helping each other.
- We value group learning as it provides many opportunities for developing the skills of listening, expressing ideas, negotiating, resolving conflict and problem solving.

Soon after this, the Prep and Year One children went by bus to Federation Square to view a children's film festival. Before we left we talked about what they thought they would see on the way. Not one child mentioned the Yarra River. We were very surprised by this since it was once the life force of the Melbourne community. So we discussed the Yarra in great detail and we showed them photos of what it looked like. Consequently during the drive into the city there were many excited cries *there's the Yarra River Teacher Kathleen!*

The discussion about the Yarra continued back at school and one child told us it was made in a work shop. The children appeared to have little understanding of where the river came from until one little girl who spends many weekends exploring the outdoors told us it starts in the mountains when the snow starts to melt.

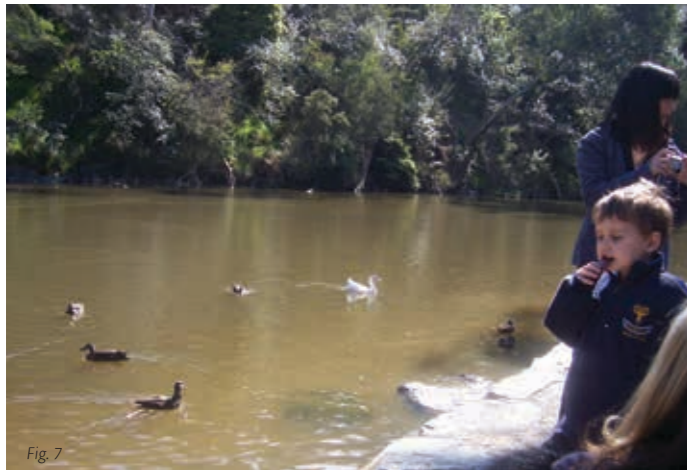


Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

The Yarra is a large part of our extended community in the city of Melbourne and it has had a significant influence on all Melbournians in some way. Our intent in continuing with the investigation of the Yarra River was to encourage the children to wonder about rivers and their importance for a community. We wanted to find out what they knew about rivers and in turn for them to gain an understanding of the importance of a river to a community. Why did people decide to build Melbourne here near the Yarra River? Why was it so important for them? We hoped that the children would uncover the knowledge that our forebears built their communities around water, that it was hugely important for their daily survival but now that the Melbourne community has changed and it's needs have changed the Yarra has a different role in our broader community. We wanted them to understand that the historical role of the Yarra River has changed from being a necessity for our community to being used mainly for pleasure and recreation.

In my past experience in teaching I might have considered making a model from paper maché to show the flow of a river and its origins. However after discussing this with my colleagues I realized it might limit the possibilities for thinking rather than extend and challenge the children.

Instead, using the thinking routine 'What do you think you know about rivers?' the children put forward their thoughts:

They make splashing sounds. They are long. They make me feel happy.

It's like some one is digging a road in the sand and then the river comes up in it.

In the classroom they set about making their ideas and thinking visible. Using a range of materials the children shared their initial theories through different languages... through block building, through designing with various equipment and through drawings to gain an understanding of a river (Fig. 3, 4, 5, 6).

"Education should occupy public spaces and not solely be within the walls of the institution."²

Eventually this investigation was leading us to experience the Yarra River in 3-D, to use the environment as the third teacher. We wanted the children to experience the river for themselves so I talked to people I knew to find out where we could spend time by the river, at a place that was really unspoilt. We wanted the experience to be safe, to be relatively close to us and easily accessible for five year olds. We chose an area in Warrandyte where it was quiet and the sounds of the river were very easily heard. These sounds were varied, changing from whispers to faster, noisy sounds. The flow was also changing as the water came up against rocks and branches and there were also the ducks and other wildlife who inhabited the area. You could see this part of the Yarra was a dynamic element in the local community with many people making use of it in different ways. There were families walking and sitting and soaking in Nature. There were people fishing and walking their dogs. There were beautiful trees overhanging the banks, housing plenty of the local bird life. This place was definitely suitable for our purposes.

We intended that the children would draw their observations in detail, take their time and really observe the colour, movement and direction of the water. We wanted them to listen and hear the sounds of the water and the environment. We wanted them to document their observations by recording and taking photos as well as drawing.

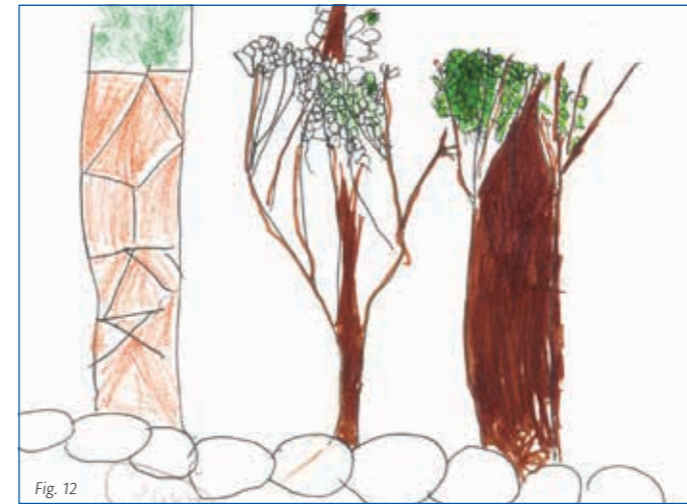


Fig. 12

They used clipboards and paper and fine liners. They worked in groups taking photographs of what they saw the river doing. They painted the scenes in front of them from direct observation. They recorded the sounds of the water that they heard. They used magnifying glasses and collected samples of what was around on the river bank. They used binoculars to closely watch the wildlife (Fig. 7, 8, 9, 10).

The parents who came with us were asked to write down the children's observations and document their conversations and comments.

It's fast and bumpy and smooth. It's relaxing.

It's rough and crashing and the little waves look like they're fighting each other from each side.

It's wonderful and splashy. It's calm.

I feel happy and it makes me feel like putting my feet in it.

It's so curvy. It doesn't have to go in straight lines.

It's like soft music. It goes down and then it's like a roundabout. It goes splash and bang. Splash splash, pchoo, bang bang swish swash, bling, blong, bling, blong Whoosh, whoosh.

It makes me feel like fishing. Noisy water makes me want to make some noise.

The river runs into the sea.



Fig. 13

On returning to the studio, we discussed how to keep the curiosity alive. The life of the water constantly ebbs and flows, the sounds change as does the colour. We discussed the link between sounds and words. How could one make visible these sounds? Using a range of materials, the children revisited the words that they had used earlier. However they also carried new words from their experiences of being near the flowing river. The children shared their strategies of drawing these thoughts and using still photography, captured these words as they moved across their paintings of the rivers. The children recorded the sounds of the water using their voices and experimented with other instruments and objects to accompany these animated descriptive words.

We are looking forward to seeing where this investigation will lead us over the next year. It has many possibilities. It has the potential to lead us in many directions and fortunately we have this time together to let our ideas flow. As Amelia Gambetti said, **"Children need time to go back and forth, to return and see things from a different point of view."**³ They will be able to use this time to be, to do, to think and reflect, to talk and to listen. ■

References

- 1 Lori Malaguzzi. (1998) in Thornton, L and Brunton, P. *Understanding the Reggio Approach*, London, David Fulton Pub. 2005, p.72
- 2 E Giacomini. (2000) 'Historical, cultural and pedagogical aspects of the Reggio Emilia municipal infant-toddler and preschool experience.' Presentation to UK Study Group, Reggio Emilia, October.
- 3 Amelia Gambetti. (2003) in Thornton, L and Brunton, P. *Understanding the Reggio Approach*, London, David Fulton Pub. 2005, p.59

“Children need time to go back and forth, to return and see things from a different point of view.” (2003:76) They will be able to use this time to be, to do, to think and reflect, to talk and to listen. ”

Maybe it's the Indian world. Maybe the islands on the hands...

“ Within a culture there are many shared thoughts and ideas that enable a group of people to live harmoniously together. ”



Fig. 1

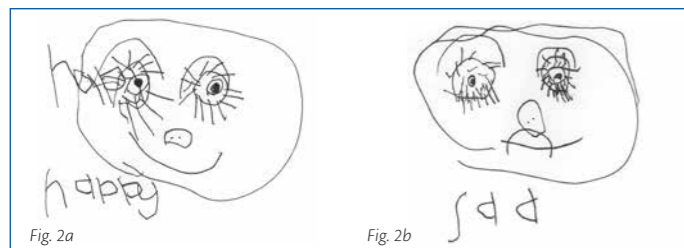


Fig. 2a

Fig. 2b

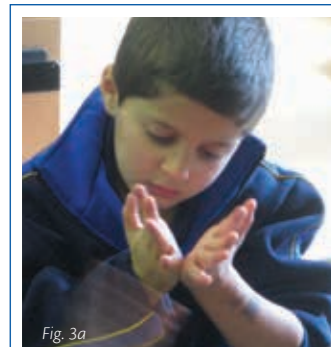


Fig. 3a



Fig. 3b



Fig. 3c

Within a culture there are many shared thoughts and ideas that enable a group of people to live harmoniously together. These shared understandings have been passed down through generations with stories; written, drawn, performed and told. They pass on the experience of previous generations and adapt with the experience of the new. Each story has a message to convey, and each message differs for each individual. It is the experience we bring to the story, our own interpretation and understandings that influence the message we take away. But throughout the cultures, there are common threads, common understandings which remain universal to all cultures and people. Through common symbols and gestures, different cultures can communicate and learn the history and stories of one another.

The stories that we are told and read every day each reveal a message which we use to make sense of ourselves and the notions which consume our lives. We take what we feel is important, pass on that which we feel may benefit others, and continuously learn from the mistakes or experiences of those around us. As children still developing their skills in writing; drawing and expression are used as primary outlets for communicating thoughts, ideas and emotions. In drawing we use symbols to represent ideas and in expression we convey emotion.

Our lives are surrounded by symbols and symbolism. Looking at the symbols in our everyday surroundings, the children have come to recognise they have many common understandings between them. Each child knows what a stop sign looks like; *its red and this shape* (Fig. 1). They know the symbol for McDonalds, or that toilets are indicated by a picture of a boy and girl. Gradually, the children have developed an understanding that words are not as strong as they thought and there are many different ways in which they can express themselves and understand others. Through facial expressions we communicate when we are happy, smiling; or sad, sad eyes (Fig. 2a, b). A handshake can be interpreted in many ways... thankyou, hello, goodbye, well done, welcome, making of a deal, good luck, congratulations, where meaning is determined by the context in which it is communicated.

Thinking about the symbols surrounding us, we began to wonder what other common understandings we might have, which ones were similar in different cultures and what stories they had to tell. In many cultures, it is characteristic for parts of the human body to symbolise common ideas. The hands for example are often a symbol of power and protection. Specific to the Jewish religion, the Chamsah is a representation of the protective hand of G-d, providing its carrier a good luck prayer. Similarly, Indian culture believes the hand is a symbol of mystic power for it mirrors the individual personality. With this in mind, we were interested in the children exploring their own personality and characteristics. What did their qualities reveal about them?

In various explorations, the children began to closely observe themselves and share their thoughts, discovering that they each had features distinct to them. Like a handprint is unique to each individual, each child had their own story to tell. What story did the marks left behind leave with them? The children observed their own hands, commenting on their unique characteristics, *mine has lines going this way and his lines are more swirly*. Slowly they began to recognise that while they essentially had the same features, the details were completely different (Fig. 3a, b, c, 4).

Together with our art educator we discussed our ideas of how we might proceed further in this investigation. She discussed the “senses” and in particular sight and touch which can trigger our understanding of each others perceptions and our environment. We decided to continue our focus on two aspects of ourselves which demonstrated our identity, hands and feet. Helene proceeded to discuss one concept with the children, “Where have these feet travelled?”

Presenting a series of photographs to the children depicting impressions of shoeprints on different surfaces, the children discussed their interpretations with one another. One particular image of a print in snow evoked many theories from the group (Fig. 5, 6).

It must be in the snow.

Maybe on the moon it is very cold there.

It is ice, not snow.

He must have been jumping his footprint is very deep.

He was wearing runners like me

It could be a gumboot.

Or a moon boot.

It could be my size.

Maybe it is at Mt Buller.

I can see some blue and brown.

Well it is dark brown and I can see some green. That means it is the dirt underneath.

We observed the varying “degrees or shades” one brings to a discussion. The children’s focus vacillated between the footprint and the environment, both important and interlinked. We encouraged the children to scrutinise the images in the photographs and listen to each others opinions and look again with newly gained information. Their discussion became narrative in nature where they began to invent stories about the shoe print and its owner, where the feet had come from and the destination they might be travelling to.

One child decided this footprint must be a child’s, because his foot measured the same as his and the sole or impression of the shoe “*looks like mine*” (Fig. 7). The children began to look at their own footprints and the soles of their shoes, making prints using paint and impressions in the playground sand pit and drawing from direct observation noting specific marks and features (Fig. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12). During this time, we noticed in fact that the conversations about their feet and their shoes became a conversation about themselves. We posed a metaphorical question to the children, “Where have your feet travelled?”

Some of the children joined in enthusiastically with comments such as, *my shoes came from America to here, we bought them there and then they came back to Australia with me. My shoes travel everywhere with me, to the pool, the park, the shops.*

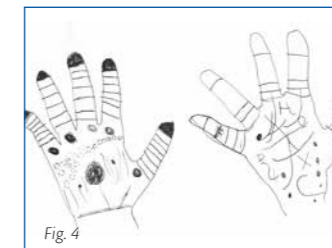


Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

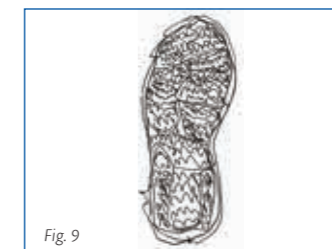


Fig. 9

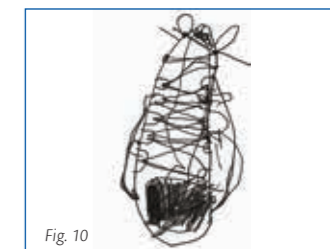


Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

My shoes are only allowed to travel from home to school and then home again (Fig. 13).

One child listened intently to his friends responses and then finally responded: *Your feet can't travel without you they are part of you and who you are.* This comment encapsulated our original intent of looking at our identity within our classroom community, but not in isolation. We are individuals within a group. During this investigation, the children shared who they were with others in their group, noting their similarities and differences. As they talked they illustrated and compared the 'travels of their feet' discovering some of the commonalities and interests between them (Fig. 14, 15).

As an additional aspect, we began to collect examples from different cultures of ways in which stories are left behind. Using an image of a hand we found in a magazine, a small group sat to discuss its purpose and content.

It's a lady with paint on her hands.

If you take a close look, you will see they are dots and they are Indian because that's how they draw. They use dots.

They're not Indian. It's African dots. I've seen African people on television. They have dots.

The hands are different. They're different paintings. Patterns.

There's a little tincy face.

Like an eye.

It looks like she is going to a party because her hands are all dressed up.

Maybe someone was praying. Somebody died so she was praying but before she painted her hands. She painted them to pray with.

It's an upside down hand.

Maybe it's the Indian world. Maybe the islands on the hands.



Fig. 14



Fig. 15

The children were making all kinds of connections with previous conversations or knowledge they had. They were looking closely at the drawings and had begun exploring the symbols illustrated in greater depth. We wondered if any of their interpretations corresponded with their actual intention and which ones differed but still provided the children with a sense of meaning?

As we interpret the world around us, we draw from the experience we have and the knowledge we have gained to make sense of the unfamiliar. We construct our own theories and use them to expand our understanding. As our investigation continues, the children are beginning to heighten their awareness of the similarities and shared understandings between different societies and in turn deepen their understanding about themselves and the stories that we each leave behind to shape a culture. While their life experience is thus far limited, the children continue to make sense of their world with the skills and knowledge they have, and as they develop and experience more, their theories and interpretations will also develop, forever adapting with the messages they are given. ■



Year 1

“

While their life experience is thus far limited, the children continue to make sense of their world with the skills and knowledge they have, and as they develop and experience more, their theories and interpretations will also develop, forever adapting with the messages they are given ”

'REAL' to the 'UNREAL'...

“ Exploring shadows always intrigues and fascinates young children. There is the aspect of fun and the side of eeriness and curiosity. ”



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Worldwide there are myths, magical-religious beliefs, superstitions and taboos that provide a clue to the interest shown in shadows. During a visit from a shadow puppeteer the children in this class became enthralled with shadows. The children began to create their own shadow puppets out of cardboard and enjoyed the opportunity of experimenting with shadow hand puppets by using an overhead projector and shadow screen (Fig. 1).

Their interest was renewed when they were read a story entitled Mr. Bear's Shadow by Chizuko Kuratomi. Whilst the story was being read the children shared their observations.

They were playing a strange game. Each of them tried to jump on one another's shadow, but not to let anyone jump on his shadow. There's no point playing the shadow game because you land up on top of their shadow because your shadow is on top of their shadow. Once I played it and I caught someone's shadow. You need to run and jump fast. It's good if you go on the tree shadows because they'll never be able to catch your shadow. It was fun! Then he noticed something terrible. His shadow had shrunk. It was tiny I think he shrank because he was old. I think that the sun just went down so his shadow wasn't that big.

Together with our art educator we continued to follow their interest by using various thinking routines including What do you 'See, Think, Wonder' and asking the children to 'Step Inside' metaphorically and imagine they were speaking from the viewpoint of one aspect or feature from a series of photos depicting light and shadows. The children demonstrated their knowledge and perceptions both orally and in written form.

I think a shadow is something that follows you. A shadow is your reflection that is black. A shadow follows you because shadows do what you do. A shadow is a reflection made by the sun. It is on the ground and it is blackish grey. It's weird, cool, funny, clever, silly, lovely, alone, slick, slack. It's everything and important to you. It is under you and part of you. A shadow comes from the sun because the sun is light. Shadows are copy cats, they are creepy and scary. Shadows follow us and are black. They are tiny at midday. Shadows are fast and only come when it is light.

On a sunny day the class monitored the position of the sun, the shadows in the playground and their shadows. They posed and traced their shadows at various times during the day and drew and recorded their interpretations.



The sun was moving. Our shadows were moving because the sun was moving. This morning I saw that when the sun was diagonal on one side the shadow is on the other side. Shadows are a profile of your body. They can reflect on anything.

To further support the children's investigation we set up the studio as a dark room. The children constructed and manoeuvred objects on black and white tables whilst using torches as the light source (Fig. 3). They also added objects onto the overhead projector and projected the shadows onto a shadow screen (Fig. 4). We asked them to observe and document their thoughts and observations by taking photographs and writing about what had occurred within these areas.

If you use a projector and you have blocks, when you move the light on the projector up, it shrinks up the shadow. When you move the light down the shadow elongates.

Some children also created other puppet shows by making shadow puppets and developing stories to accompany the various background scenes they had projected onto the wall.

The children identified the need for there to be a light source to generate the shadows and this was often as a result of the sun.

When it is afternoon your shadow gets smaller. The sun is to the left and you stand there you get a shadow on your right. The sun creates shadows by its brightness in the dark, when there is light the background is the shadow and it would be in the dark.



Fig. 4

They noted the properties of the sun

The sun is a big ball of lava. It helps the plants grow and gives us a little bit of oxygen to make us breathe by the air and warmness. The sun creates shadows by light, a bit of shade and interesting things. The sun warms up your pool and it's called solar heating.

The sun is a big star, it is the hottest star in space. The sun can't shine on two parts of the earth at the same time. The sun makes us warm in summer and very cold in winter because in summer the earth is very close to the sun and in winter the earth is far-away from the sun. The sun helps grow things like plants, fruit and vegetables.

The group also became interested in light and dark in reference to "Time."

The planet earth moves so fast that you can't feel it. My zaide and I and my brother worked it out. We went on the calculator and we worked it out, how fast it spins around. While it is spinning the sun doesn't move. When the sun is at the back of the world it is night time in that part of the world.

Although the children shared their understandings with regards to factual information gained during this exploration, the children continued to marvel at shadows and imagine and create stories sprinkled only with some of these facts. However we began to notice that the children's drawings now included greater detail, for example, the position of their characters shadows in relation to the sun's rays. They also noted the colour changes in objects and people as the sun cast a shadow at various times of the day. The children explored their ideas and stories using filmmaking techniques by capturing changes in scenes using still photography. They collated these images to create a short animation which further relived the mystery and imagination of this exploration.

The boy is afraid of shadows and in the night he calls his mother but when the mother turns the light on the shadow has disappeared. He has a dream that he is walking in the forest with his dog. The bats see their shadows on the trees and they are afraid too. A mouse sees his shadow on the wall and he thinks it's a monster. All the animals want to do something about these shadows. So they call the Shadow Catcher. He tells the animals that he can capture the shadows. And he does and the animals are very happy. He captures the shadows at midday but the shadows come back in the afternoon! (Fig. 6).

The children's interest in the effects of the sun and the shadows it produces continues. This investigation now turned to "Light" being a clue or an answer.

The children went exploring but they became lost and afraid when it started to get dark and they saw shadows they tried to find their way back. Suddenly one of the children took a torch from his backpack and shone the way home (Fig. 7). ■



We need to care...



This year our primary objective was to give the children an opportunity to establish relationships with each other and their environment. ”



This year our primary objective was to give the children an opportunity to establish relationships with each other and their environment. As well, our initial intent was to give the children time and opportunities to learn more about the values of respect, tolerance, empathy and kindness, and through everyday discussion, acts of kindness, role play and modelling internalise these values.

Kenneth Little Hawk, a Native American storyteller and keynote speaker, descending from the Micmac and Mohawk tribes who visited our school in 2006, left us the following motto:

The Good Hearted Tribe

I will treat all people with respect.

I will care and share.

I will be kind to animals.

I will live in harmony with nature.

I will give my heart lots of chances to be good.

This motto epitomises the essence of the values we want to impart to the children and is something we as a class refer to on a regular basis.

When we discussed our values as a group of teachers initially, the word 'Chessed' came to the fore. Yisrael Nathan (2004) defines 'Chessed' as **"an act of loving kindness done without any expectation of remuneration."**¹

This was one of the values we wanted the children to embrace.

We started by asking the children what they thought a 'need' was.

Needs help us stay alive.

Needs can help you survive.

In small groups, the children discussed what they felt their needs were and their justification for choosing these. It was interesting to listen to each group's conversation and to observe how the children not only gave their viewpoints but listened to other children's ideas (Fig. 1).

You need cows.

You don't need cows.

You do because if you didn't have cows you wouldn't have milk and we need milk to drink.

No you don't need milk because you can have water. You definitely need water to live, so you don't need cows.

We need water because otherwise we would die.

Your body would die of thirst.

Your body would dry up and you would die because our body is mainly made up of water.

How do you know what our body is made up of?

Because I have a book at home about the body and it tells you that our body is made up mainly of water.



The children explored their ideas and stories using filmmaking techniques by capturing changes in scenes using still photography. They collated these images to create a short animation which further relived the mystery and imagination of this exploration. ”





One aspect that most interested us was the children's thoughts and reasoning behind the needs they had decided on. Each need evoked an intense discussion and the way in which the children were able to justify why they had chosen a particular need demonstrated the depth of their understanding.

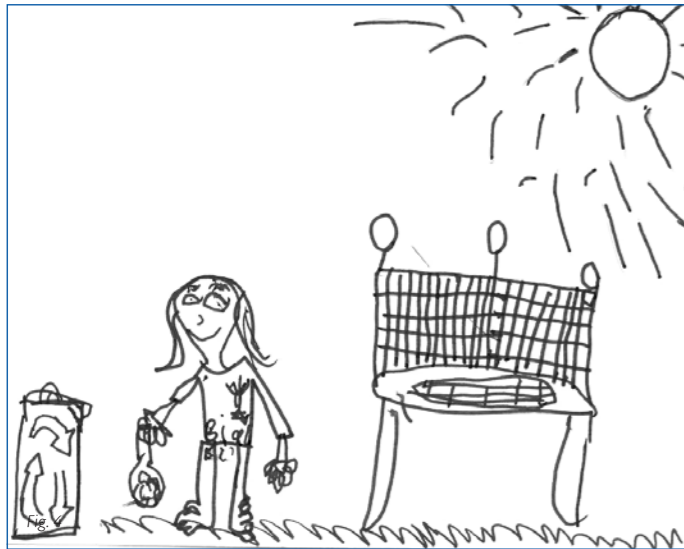
After reading through all the children's conversations we noticed the following comments:

You need to care, because if you don't care about the environment we won't have it.

We can use less water.

We can ask for peace in the world.

We can give things to people who don't have anything to make them feel better.



Each time we read through the discussions that had taken place a new path towards achieving our initial intent emerged, and we discovered that the role of small group and whole class discussion played an integral part in the paths that this investigation followed.

You used the word give, what does that mean?

Giving means being kind.

When you give something you don't want it back.

What can you give?

Food, friendship, water, love, care, kindness, money, family (adoption), toys.

At the start of third term our investigation was further enhanced by a trip one of the teachers in our ELC embarked on to a centre for abandoned and homeless children aged 3 to 18 in Israel, 'Neve Michael'. She spoke to the children about the centre, the children who lived there, the hardships they faced and what we could do to make a difference.



The children then asked Sandy:

Why are they alone?

What has happened to their parents?

What can we do to help?

How can we make a difference?

What do they need?

We were interested in finding out what had led the children to ask these particular questions.

Were they becoming more aware of who they were?

Were they becoming more aware of others?

Was it important to them as individuals and as a group to be able to help others?

We brought their questions back to the whole class and gave the children an opportunity to discuss these questions and then find ways of solving them.

Their questions challenged the children's own thinking and they decided that Sandy could help them with some of their puzzles. After listening to Sandy's responses the discussion turned to how they could help make a difference to the children in 'Neve Michael'.

From these discussions the children decided the following:

We've decided to make a book about us and Australia.

Can you take a photo of each of us to go with our page?

Then we can send it with Sandy and the children will know we care about them.

Why do you feel this will make a difference?

Because the children in Israel will know that children in Australia which is so far away care about them.

Because we have made something for them to show we care about them.

Because we're interested in them (Fig. 2).

Sandy's visit to Israel and the subsequent viewing of the DVD from 'Neve Michael' heightened the children's awareness of the importance of giving, and how a meaningful act of kindness could make such a difference in a child's life. It also demonstrated to the children that acts of kindness can take place globally as well as locally.

At a subsequent discussion with a group of teachers the question was raised as to whether children as young as six and seven could be empathetic.

In, 'How Children Develop Empathy,' October 2007 Lawrence Kutner, states that:

"To empathize with someone is to understand what he is feeling or, more properly, to understand what you would feel like if you were in his situation. It is an extension of self-concept, but it is far more complex. It requires an awareness that others think of themselves in ways that are both similar to and different from the way you do, and that they also have emotions they associate with those thoughts and images."²

He goes on to say that, **"Unlike intelligence and physical attractiveness, which depend largely on genetics, empathy is a skill that children learn. Its value is multifold."** He believes that the best teachers of that skill are the children's parents and that children can be empathetic from a young age if they are taught to be.

This seemed to be the case as the investigation continued and it became apparent that the children were beginning to incorporate the values of empathy, respect, tolerance and kindness into everyday life. Their caring of others became automatic both individually and as a whole group.

An example of this was when a child fell down the stairs all the children came to her aid. A small group stayed with her, others went down the stairs to gather her belongings, while another group of children came to find us and explain the situation and what was needed.

Recently a new child joined our class and once again these values were very much evident in the children.

Teacher Roz Emily needs a folder and a 'Take Home' book cover.

Can Emily's locker be next to mine?

You know the films we are making, Emily needs to make one.

Can I show Emily where everything goes?

Does Emily know where the library and music room and bathroom are?

Can I show her?

The 'Cultures of Thinking' project from Harvard University that our school is involved in encourages children to think at a much deeper level and through its various routines children are able to take their thinking to the next level and justify their thoughts. To gain an insight into how the children had embraced the values of empathy, kindness, tolerance and respect and how their relationships with each other and the environment had developed we asked the children to use the routine 'CSI', (colour, symbol and image) to describe the class. What we found interesting was that many of the children used colours and symbols that represented the environment, friendship and love and that many of their images depicted them helping each other or the environment (Fig. 3).

I chose red because there is a lot of love in our class.

I chose people holding hands as my symbol because we are all friends.

My picture is about when Isabel hurt herself and everyone in the class helped her (Fig. 4, 5).

There is a particular feeling as you walk into the classroom, a sense of 'wholeness', peace, community, trust and self worth.

The children have developed meaningful relationships and strong bonds with one another. They have gained so much through their commitment and deeper understanding of the values of respect, tolerance, empathy and 'Chessed'. ■

Fig. 1 Children researching their needs. **Fig. 2** Children looking at how far away Israel is from Australia. **Fig. 3** Children drawing their images of kindness. **Fig. 4** Caring for the environment by recycling. **Fig. 5** Caring about our friends when they are hurt is an act of kindness.

References:

- 1 Yisrael Nathan 2004 *The Power of Chessed*. (A magazine article published in Israel) Breslev
- 2 Lawrence Kutner, PH.D 2007 *How Children Develop Empathy*. Harper Perennial

“The children have developed meaningful relationships and strong bonds with one another. They have gained so much through their commitment and deeper understanding of the values of respect, tolerance, empathy and 'Chessed'.”

We always give each other advice. We always work together as a team...



Our intention was to observe the different ways children form relationships with each other and within a group and the impact and influence these relationships have in their learning.



Our research began in Prep last year. This is the second year the children and I have been together as we follow the two year process of Prep and Grade One.

Our intention was to observe the different ways children form relationships with each other and within a group and the impact and influence these relationships have in their learning.

What do children consider when working as a team?

How do children negotiate within a group in finding resolutions?

How do children, negotiate, plan, work together, include others, make decisions and problem solve?

Our reflections from Prep were that children coming together in a new setting with a new group of children, gained confidence when engaging with children they might not have connected with before.

The children began utilizing the different areas within the classroom and through imaginative play, familiar characters such as Mum, Dad, baby, sister, brother and even the pet cat or dog, became possible – a safe, fun and well known base from which to creatively engage.

“When the important adults in the child’s life establish a climate for make-believe, encouraging and accepting the child’s imaginings with enthusiasm and respect, they foster creativity.”¹

Our classroom studio also provided the children with a space to explore their thinking in small groups using materials such as clay, paint, water and many other materials. The larger classroom where the furniture is arranged to support small group interactions created an environment where relationships began to develop and friendships began to form.

These opportunities of working in small groups, sometimes with teacher or parent assistance to scaffold the children’s learning, gave the children the freedom to investigate and engage in what they loved to be involved in, and in the process were discovering their strengths and skills in a safe supportive environment (Fig. 1).

The children discovered through their observations and experiences in their interactions that as individuals they had something to offer the group. Their strengths and skills could be used and directed to engage the interests of others. They were not only learners but became teachers as well; a reciprocal interaction was taking place as they realized that even if they did not usually play together they could relate to each other through helping and supporting each other, working as a team as they put forward their individual insights (Fig. 2).

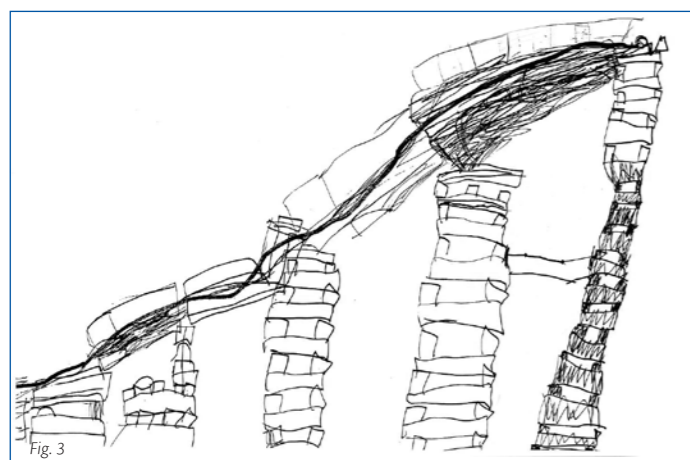


Fig. 4

“Vygotsky’s idea about shared activity and it’s role in development go much beyond the adult – directed learning.”²

Two children had been playing over a weekend and had decided to build a “marble run” together with the big wooden blocks at school.

We started the marble run then we needed help because it was a little bit hard to balance. We knew Max was a really good builder so we asked him to help us.

We talked together about balancing and what size the marble run should be. We needed to balance the blocks so we asked Gal and Jaime to help us because Max, Benji and I couldn’t balance the blocks. We tried different ways of balancing the blocks (Fig. 3, 4).

The group of boys had come together and they were working as a team, helping each other to balance the blocks (Fig. 5).

Working together is way better than just one or two people.

We all had ideas and we listened to each other. We basically made one idea out of all our ideas and then chose that one and tried it and if it didn’t work we just kept on trying. If it really didn’t work we tried a different idea.

“Children, like adults, do much of their best learning when they are actively engaged in a problem, especially with other people.”³

The team used skills of negotiation and compromise, taking turns and listening to the ideas of others (Fig. 6).



Fig. 5

At one stage during their building of the marble run they had included the rest of the boys in the class, however some problems arose...

One day one person in the group was being naughty and was not building and so we told him not to muck around and be sensible otherwise he will not be in it because we just want sensible people so we can build it properly.

The children’s decision was that if you didn’t work as a team then you did not have a place in the group.

Our friendships got stronger because we did lots of things together. We talked about the marble run a lot.

Through documenting whole class and small group discussions we gained an understanding of how children reach their hypotheses and internalize their learning.



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

“Through sensitive and thoughtful exchanges with the child the teacher discovers exactly what the child’s concept is.”⁴

The value of collaboration with our colleagues played a major role in exploring the interpretations and ideas. We met regularly to discuss the documentation being presented in order to extend and further the children’s experiences and investigations. Although this marble run comprised a small group of children in the class the lesson learnt here about collaboration and learning together were generalized in many investigations over the year, for example;

During our discussion on “Light” using a Harvard Cultures of Thinking routine, **“What do you think you know about... light?”** The children engaged in a conversation formulating their hypotheses about how light travels.

When you are in your room and you switch on your light the light can’t go straight into your eyes it has to travel.

What do you mean by travel?

Travel is when something goes from one place to another, like the light goes from the roof to your eyes

You can bend a part of the light and it goes in different directions

The role of the teacher is seen as, **“provoking occasions of discovery through a kind of alert, inspired facilitation and stimulation of children’s dialogue, co-action, and co-construction of knowledge. Because intellectual discovery is believed to be an essentially social process, the teacher assists even the youngest children to learn to listen to others, take account of their goals and ideas, and communicate successfully.”⁵**

As we reflect on our time together during these two years we celebrate the interconnection and inseparability of teaching, learning, documentation, assessment and individual and group learning within our wonderful social and cultural context of making thinking visible. ■

References

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1 Vygotsky – *Scaffolding Children’s Learning: Vygotsky and Early Childhood Education* (Page 64)

2 *Scaffolding Children’s Learning: Vygotsky and Early Childhood Education* (Tharp&Gallimore,1988).

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4 Vygotsky – *Scaffolding Children’s Learning: Vygotsky and Early Childhood Education.*

5 *Scaffolding Children’s Learning: Vygotsky and Early Childhood Education.* (Edwards, 1993) (Page 113).



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