

Windows into Children's Thinking

**BIALIK COLLEGE
EARLY LEARNING CENTRE JOURNAL 2013**



From the Principal of Bialik

It is with great pleasure that I introduce to you the 2013 'Windows into Children's Thinking'. Threaded throughout this year's book are stories and narratives.

Stories are central to children's development. Philip Pullman, an author of books directed at older children, wrote that **"after nourishment, shelter and companionship, stories are the thing we need most in the world."** Through stories, our children wonder, explore, contemplate, analyse, make connections and learn about the world.

The art of story-telling is something that all parents can do. A quiet place with phones switched off, a snuggle on the sofa, a pause in the busy afternoon, a calming time at night time – we can all read stories. As parents we can spend engaging periods of time in book shops and libraries with our children, experiencing different stories and genres. Stories also release the inner thespian in all of us as we experiment with voice, tone and expression.

As our children grow older, they become increasingly active collaborators - story telling morphs into story-sharing. When we read together, explore together and share experiences together with our children, we combine the art of story-telling with the art of listening.

I was honoured to join six Bialik colleagues at the Reggio Emilia conference in Queensland earlier in the year. At the conference it was humbling to learn of the esteem in which Bialik is held by educators throughout the world.

Daniela Lanzi, Pedagogista at the Istituzione Scuole e Nidi d'Infanzia in the Municipality of Reggio Emilia reminded us that **"Listening needs to be given time because listening has no time. Listening requires waiting."**

In the hustle and bustle of modern life we can forget the importance of stopping, listening to and sharing our stories.

I do hope that this year's journal inspires all of our community to stop and listen. Listening to our children, and engaging in shared experiences such as story-telling and story sharing helps create the conscious and subconscious memories that are the building blocks of our children's futures.

Thank you for taking the time to read 'Windows into Children's Thinking'.



Jeremy Stowe-Lindner
Principal

From the Head of the Early Learning Centre

"The relationship between the individual and others, between Self and Other, is a key issue for our futures. To choose whether our individual construction is independent of others, or exists with others and through others, means resolving not only the traditional pedagogical-psychological debate, but also the one regarding different images of the human being and humanity." Carla Rinaldi

Research and professional development are closely linked. For this to occur successfully the importance of building strong trusting relationships with each other (the teachers) has been integral to our work. Through this we have been able to build a collaborative environment where teachers and children learn together. It is through this journal that the power of collective reflection and collaborative work amongst us all, serves to highlight this research. It advocates for and strengthens a system of education where teachers, and other educators, are supported and encouraged to plan, think, build understandings and respect multiple points of view. The documentation (copies of transcripts, notes, photos, drawings, clay work and anything else brought to our collaborative sessions helps inform our interpretation of children's thinking and deepens our understandings.

"Documentation is a narrative form, both intrapersonal and interpersonal communication, because it offers those who document and those who read the documentation an opportunity for reflection and learning..."

You try to offer others not what you know, but the boundaries of your knowledge; that is, your limits, which derive from the fact that the 'object' being narrated is a process and a path of research." Carla Rinaldi 2006.

This journal is the eighth in the series entitled "Windows into Children's Thinking". It recounts many stories of the research undertaken by the children and teachers during 2013.

When reading the documentation you will have the opportunity to notice the many languages the children are using when describing their theories and making sense of their world. The words of the children are written in italics, and many of the articles are prefaced by the words of the children. What follows are not investigations in their entirety, but rather small vignettes from every classroom in the ELC.

We hope that in reading this journal you (the reader) will be able to construct your own meanings and questions as active participants of this process.



Daphne Gaddie

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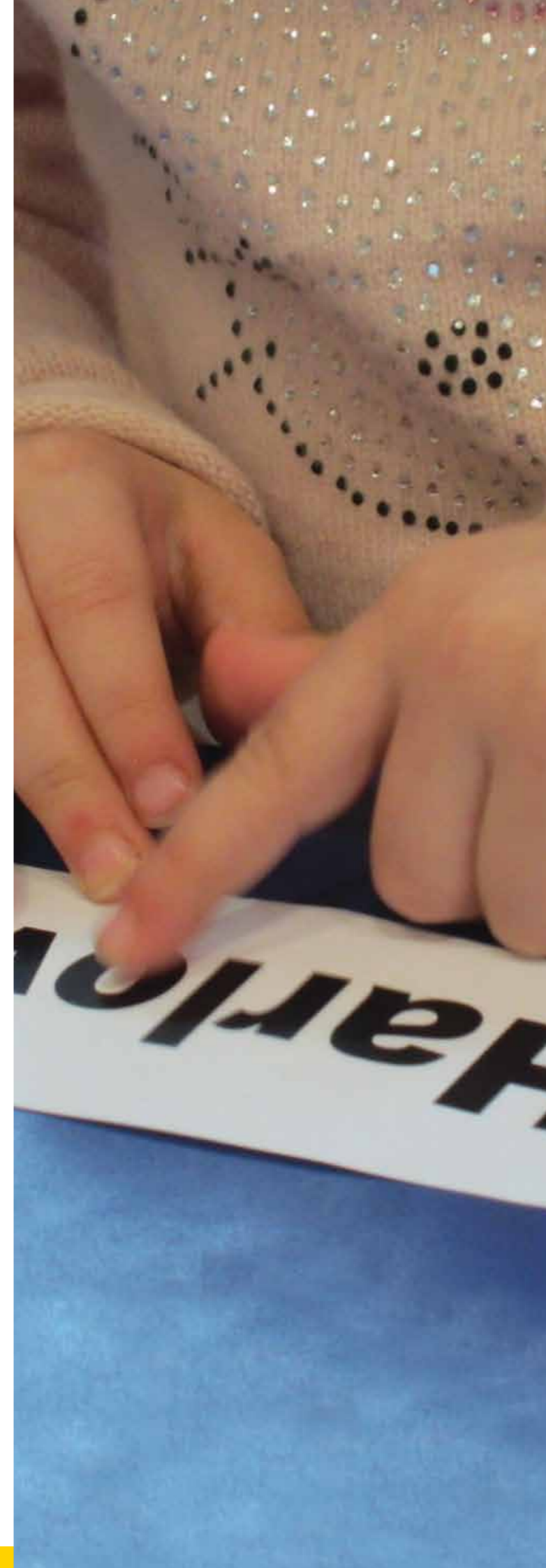
The conventions in this book

A number of styles have been used throughout Bialik College Early Learning Centre Journal 2013 – 'Windows into Children's Thinking' to designate different voices.

Serif Italicised Font
Indicates the voice of a child

Serif Bolded Font
Indicates the voice of an adult

3 Year Old Kinder



You can't see what I am telling you, it's in my head. I am thinking before I start drawing...

“

The question of transferring words into graphic representation is not simple because it involves making strong selections and sometimes they will need to pause to clarify ideas before putting them down on paper and making them visible to others”

(Malaguzzi 1992 cited in The hundred language of children 2012, p. 66)

We began with a new three-year-old group. Although many of the children have been in childcare before, they were coming together at our Centre as a new group.

Making connections and building relationships with the teachers and with each other was our initial goal as the children were settling into their new environment.

We devoted the first few weeks to get to know the children through interactions, conversations and observations. We noticed that children in our kindergarten were often seeking drawing and painting opportunities in a familiar way to them, from previous experiences prior to this year. A great amount of thought was given to how we could create meaningful experiences for the children, using graphic representation, to promote relationships with each other. The idea was to provide children opportunities to explore within a social context. This follows Vygotsky's theory which views learning as a social, collaborative and active process. (Hill 2011, p.3)

Possibilities and materials were considered to invite the children to participate, explore, imagine and share their thoughts and ideas in the social context.

We asked ourselves some questions:

How would a fine liner pen and a paper support the children's interest in drawing?

How would the teacher initiate this experience?

Is it possible to build relationships through the graphic language?

How would we document this process?

We decided to set a table in the studio for a small group of four children to work together with a teacher. All the children in the group participated over the course of many weeks.

The context and strategies drew attention to the symbolic learning of young children. We asked the children:

What lines would you use?

What do you think lines can do?

Can you use your pen to tell stories?

My line looks like a maze...

My lines go like this and like this...

I can do zig-zag zig-zag...

I can do zig-curl zig-curl it's a train line and a road under it...

My line is telling a story about a train going fast...

My lines are stripes that go up and down...

My line is a crooked line...

What is crooked?

It's a silly line like that... (child shows her hand bent)

We noticed that through line making the children constructed and reconstructed their ideas and theories. They often used symbolic representation and verbal language to present meaning to their drawings.

This line is a river and these lines are a rough river...

I need a line for the dolphin, no, no, I need lots of lines to make a whole family of dolphins...I want to make a story...

This is a long snail, it's a circle snail, I just need another circle to make a face...

Lines are telling us where to go...

In addition we realised that children bring prior knowledge gathered from their families into the drawing through different possibilities. (DEECD 2009, p.25) Traces of mathematical concepts were evident as children described shapes, sizes and time lines for their drawn stories:

My lines are squares and circles, they are telling us about a train going fast to help the fire truck to put the fire down...

This is one long line, it is a big lion eating his food, lions love to eat meat...

I made one big line for my rocket and round lines for the smoke...

The children's work was documented (Fig. 1) and their words were written on yellow Post-it® notes. (Fig. 2)

It was observed that some children began to differentiate writing from drawing as they moved from one symbolic language to another:

I did writing at the top and writing at the bottom and fishes in the middle... (Fig. 3)

Moreover, the children found that each transformation generated something new and some children started to write notes for different purposes e.g. do not pack up or indicating work in progress and placed them in relevant spots around the room. (Fig. 4)



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

As our investigation progressed the children showed an interest in using those posted notes to write the words for their own drawing or to document their peers' work as perceived by them:

I finished my drawing; I want to write a note with YOUR pen and this yellow paper...

I am writing about the flowers and the water...

I saw J made lines like a sea... (A documented I) (Fig. 5 & 6)

As the teacher I am hoping to uncover the reasoning for children to use yellow Post-it® notes:

Is it a reflection of teachers' method of documenting?

How do the children perceive the purpose of these notes?

To further my understanding of children's early literacy development and to promote connections and relationships within our group of children, I brought my observations, documentation of the process and the children's work to a professional development meeting to consult with my colleagues. My theory as a research-teacher was discussed: Are a group of children ready to work on a cooperative story?

Following this discussion, we read the book 'The Little Yellow Leaf' by Carin Berger. Then we looked at autumn leaves on the studio table where the children began to draw their stories. (Fig. 7 & 8) This was the beginning of a shift in the children's interaction as they listened and made comments on each other's stories:

The leaves from A's picture are going to fly into my picture, into the rainbow land...

A collaborative story began by one child's initiative and other children's contributions:

The rainbow leaf asked the yellow leaf if she wants to come on a ride together, so they went on a ride until the rain came. The clouds came along and that's when they went back home...

The yellow leaf and the rainbow leaf are going on a ride to the rainbow-land tomorrow where some leaves are not very good with other leaves, but some leaves make friends with other leaves... the leaves in the rainbow land start yellow then turn brown and then turn green. This is the end of the story when all the leaves finally fell off and become friends.

We wondered how this group of children could share this collaborative story with the rest of the group?



Fig. 5

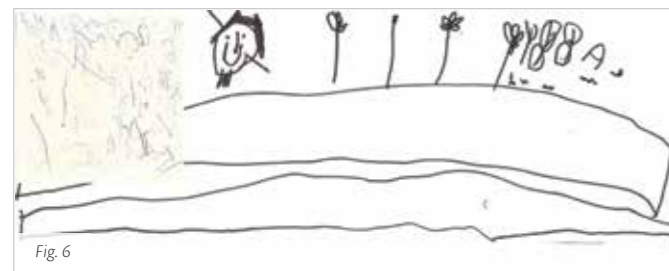


Fig. 6

According to the Reggio Emilia approach, children interpret ideas and represent them through a hundred ways of thinking, expressing, understanding and encountering; therefore the metaphor of 'the hundred languages' helps us to value the extraordinary potentials of our children. (Indications Preschools and Infant-Toddler Centres 2010.)

Is the story finished?

Would this story inspire other stories to evolve?

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Fig. 7



Fig. 8

Kinder 3J



What's in a potato? How a potato became a catalyst for enquiry

“

It all started one day at morning tea, at the beginning of the year, when some of the children discovered pips and seeds in their fruit and vegetables.”



Fig. 1

Seeds live on the ground, and then vegetables grow on a plant. Garden ones do have pips. Plain ones from the market don't. What would happen if we just left the pips on the plate? It won't grow. It will die. We could plant them in the soil. We need water in the ground for the plants.

The vegetable patch became a source of wonder for our children and they brought seeds and vegetables from home for planting. One day a child brought a potato with eyes to kinder. We planted it amongst our cucumber and pea seeds. (Fig. 1) The potato was all but forgotten.

Months later we were weeding the vegetable patch. (Fig. 2) *Look, I found a potato!* (Fig. 3) called out a very excited child, who was soon joined by many others. From one potato we now had many! At our morning meeting time the children discussed the sizes of the potato, big (גדול) medium (בינוני) and small (קטן) in English and Hebrew (at the children's request). They grouped the potatoes into sizes and described these groups. What could we do with the potato? *We could fry it. We could dry it. You have to burn it with hot water. We could put it in the oven.*

A small group gathered in the studio to talk about and draw the potatoes they saw, and what they imagined they could make from the potatoes. Where do potatoes come from? *Potatoes grow under the ground. How does the potato feel? It's hard! It has spots.*

This is a chocolate potato cake. This is a potato and two mashed potatoes! My potato has chocolate on it! (Fig. 4) *The numbers are for how long it takes the potatoes to cook. This is a silly potato – it has a wheel and a shoe!*

What colour is this potato? Look JJ I made all the browns. We should make a potato chocolate cake! (Fig. 5)

The children explored the search engine Google for a chocolate potato cake recipe. At the same time they began to understand the various icons and understood that the 'magnifying glass' icon

meant 'search'. *Wow!* they exclaimed when the recipe was found. Then said, *Press print!*

The children helped to measure out the ingredients, mash the potatoes, stir and pour the mixture. *Oh, I am sooo excited! This is so much fun! Can we lick the spoon?* (Fig. 6) During this process the children were introduced to our class clock, and waited until the 'big hand' would reach 5, which would be 30 minutes cooking time. *Is it ready yet? Can we eat the cake now?* Our cake was ready but too hot to eat. The children waited patiently until the next day when everyone enjoyed a slice for morning tea. (Fig. 7)

Why do I tell this story?

When we, the children, teachers and parents, started the new year in Kinder 3, we embarked on a journey of growth which according to the Chambers Thesaurus could be described as a 'broadening, a change, an evolution, a transformation and flowering'.¹

The discovery of that first potato in our vegetable patch led us on a journey of new learning and transformation. The potato engaged the children and quite unexpectedly became a catalyst for enquiry. It piqued the children's curiosity and imagination. The Early Years Learning Framework states:

“**Play spaces in natural environments... invite open-ended interactions, spontaneity, risk taking, exploration and connection with nature.**”²

The potato created not only a “connection with nature” but connections in curriculum and interpersonal relationships. The potato became part of the ‘fabric of our lives’ in Kinder.

The children never missed an opportunity to make a link to the potato chocolate cake. This is because they were actively involved in the learning experience.

A child is more self-motivated to learn and will learn more if ‘the learning’ is inherently interesting. As Ron Richardt states “**we want to create powerful learning opportunities in our class**”.³

By accepting children's ideas as well as providing a setting that provokes children to think, is a key philosophy of the Reggio Emilia Approach.

The children had been making cakes out of mud in their imaginative play, in our outdoor kitchen. As they worked with the mud they spoke about their ‘recipes’ for their ‘chocolate



Fig. 2

cakes’. We wondered what would happen if we brought mud (in a trough) into the classroom.

Inspired by the Cultures of Thinking Conference, our intent was to probe the children's prior understanding of the concept of recipes and help them to make sense of their ideas, using as many different ‘languages’ as we could, sensory play with mud included:

I am making a chocolate cake like my mum. How does your mum know how to make a chocolate cake? We have ingredients. It says which goes first, which goes last. First is at the top and the last is at the bottom. She looks at the ingredient paper. It was in a book. She just sees on the menu. The menu has all different cakes. I'm making the biggest cake in the whole university! What makes the cake bake? The oven makes it stick together. Would the bringing in of mud into the classroom change their play/learning? We saw how their conversation became more focussed and the interest was sustained.

We observed how “**young children learn most effectively when they are engaged in interaction rather than in merely receptive or passive activities**”.⁴ We discussed how we could further this interest in potatoes and recipes by adapting the children's learning in other contexts. For example: literacy, community and resourcing their own learning through collaborating with their peers. We had a student teacher in our class at this time and she was interested in the development and process of this investigation.

According to Katz⁵, “**the data on children's learning suggest that preschool and kindergarten experiences require an intellectually oriented approach in which children interact in small groups as**

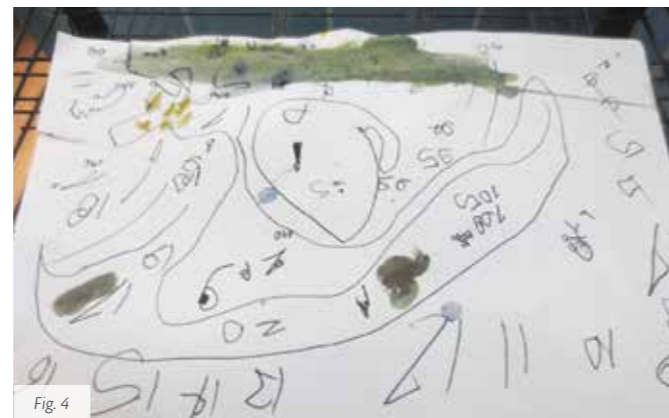


Fig. 4



Fig. 5

they work together on projects that help them make increasing sense of their own experience.”

A small group of children were exploring the concept of stories and whether you need a book to tell a story. When asked “**how can you tell a story?**” the children replied: *We can make some up. We can draw some. Talk it. Sing it. We can watch a movie to find out what characters to be.* The children were asked how they would like to tell a story they made up. The unanimous answer was “*a show*”. Our student teacher wondered about using the potato as a provocation for the story. We started with ‘Once upon a time...’ The children did the rest and ‘Potato Grow’, the play was born.

Potato Grow

– A Story and Play by the children of Kinder 3J



Fig. 8

Once upon a time, there was a plant in the garden.

The plant and the potato are curled up on the floor.

With the sunshine and the rain, the plant began to grow.

The plant starts standing up

It grew and grew.

The plant stands up tall

One day a bunch of snails came and munched on the plant.



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

The snails crawl across to the plant and munch
A little girl called Emma came to check on her plant.
(Emma skips in) When she saw the snails she said “Shoo snail, don't bother me... I want my potato to grow”.
All sing “Shoo snail don't bother me”
The snails slugged off.
Emma dug up the plant. (Emma digs) She found a potato.
It was ginormous.
Emma had to call all her friends to help her dig it out. It was so big, they had to roll it home.
Children roll the potato
They chopped it, boiled it and mashed it. Do actions for chop, boil and mash.
They made mashed potatoes with it.
They invited the snails over for dinner and the snails ate all the mashed potatoes.
THE END

Making connections is at the heart of learning. Our investigations with the potato gave the children opportunities to make connections between prior and new knowledge whilst being engaged in authentic tasks.

When we look at the list compiled by leading early childhood academic Lillian Katz about experiences she feels that children should often have, we feel that our Potato Investigation has afforded the children some or many of those on the list including: “**being intellectually engaged and challenged, extended conversations and interactions with adults and peers, sustained involvement with worthwhile topics – projects children come back to for days and weeks.**” Wilson says that “**children want to be the discoverers, the experimenters, and the theory builders**”.⁶

In dreaming up the chocolate potato cake and then learning about how to make their dream come true, the children sparked a project of great proportions that led to further, sometimes unexpected, learning.

What lies beneath is still being uncovered.

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A pedagogy of belonging... and the significance of a Hebrew name.



Fig. 3

Lekol ish yeish shem shenatan lo Elohim...

לכל איש יש שם שנתנו לו אלוהים ונתנו לו אביו ואמו

לכל איש יש שם שנתנו לו קומתו ואפן חיובו

Every man has a name given by G-d

A name given by their mother and father

And a name given by his standing and manner... Zelda.

Every man has a name. 1974.¹

“

Experiencing belonging- knowing where and with whom you belong, is integral to human existence. Belonging acknowledges children's interdependence with others and the basis of relationships in defining identities. Belonging is central to being and becoming in that it shapes who children are and who they can become.”²

(The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, p. 7)

Names are a very important part of our essence and Hebrew names are a part of our identity and culture.

“It is important to us that our daughter has a Greek name and a Hebrew name. ‘Zoe’, meaning ‘Life’, as she was a miracle and Yael, meaning Ibex and G-d's strength, both of which highlight Zoe's character. We also love the story of Yael in the Book of Judges- we could actually imagine Zoe having the same courage and strength as Yael.”³

Hebrew names started to compete with names from other languages early on in Jewish history. As far back as 200 B.C.E to 500 C.E, many Jews gave their children Aramaic, Greek and Roman names. Later during the Middle Ages in Eastern Europe, it became customary for Jewish parents to give their children two names. A secular name for everyday use and a Hebrew name for religious purposes. Hebrew names are used for calling men to the Torah, for certain prayers and legal documents such as the Ketubah (marriage document). (About.com.Judaism. Religion and Spirituality. Lisa Katz.³

We saw an opportunity for us to delve a little deeper and sent out a short survey to parents asking them why they gave their child that specific Hebrew name and did it have any special significance for them.

According to Judaism's Talmudic tradition, a baby's name is its first gift. (Family Matters. Parenting. Bonnie Rochman).⁴ As Jewish people we feel proud and not afraid to openly carry a Hebrew identity.

“We have always loved the sound of Yael. Actually a teacher once told me that we do not choose our children's names. She described how Hashem determined our names and that the chosen name would come to the mother.”⁵

“Yarin. We gave him that name because when he was born he gave us a lot of happiness, we were glad. The meaning of his name comes from Rina in Hebrew.”⁶

“Judaism places great importance on the naming of each new child. It is believed that the name of a person is closely related to its essence.” (Lisa Katz. Names and Judaism. About.Com.Judaism)⁷

“Albie was given the name Kalman, because it was his Zaida's uncle's name. Uncle Kalman was a very clever, kind and resourceful man who helped the Munz family escape the danger and awful conditions of the Siberian work camp where they were imprisoned in the Second World War. He comandered a train to carry the family to safety in Europe. Unfortunately Uncle Kalman became ill on the journey and did not recover. Zaida sees many of Kalman's special qualities in Albie, in particular, his charisma and charm.”⁸

“When a parent gives a child a name, the parent is giving the child a connection to previous generations. The parent is also making a statement about their hope for who their child will become. In this way, the Hebrew name carries with it some identity for the child.” (Lisa Katz. About.com.Judaism.)⁹

This opened a pathway for us to explore what our young children understood about their Hebrew names and the significance of them.

In order to develop a dialogue we initially researched what they actually knew about the origins of their names. We brainstormed their ideas and noted down some of their thoughts about their perceptions. The discussion began with a child asking another child *What is your name?*

They called me Gabriel first. Gabe is my second name.

Your mum and dad choose your name 'cos they want you to have a good name.

Mamma got my name Jack, and she calls me Jacky boy too. Daddy calls me cheeky little rabbit.

Some of the children readily identified their English written name, and the names of others. (Fig. 1 & 2)

It was William Shakespeare who first posed the famed question, “What's in a name?” According to Shakespeare, “that which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”¹⁰

“Names provide others with a way to identify us and to some extent give us our identity. Names are not the prime source of our identity, but names and the meanings associated with them can provide valuable insight into one's own nature if read in the context of what one already knows of oneself.” (Matt Dubois March 1977)¹¹

“Zac's name is derived from Zachariah the Prophet. We love the name! We think it evokes strength, a visionary use of a fabulous imagination, and an ability to move people to a better place – and lots more.”¹²



Fig. 1

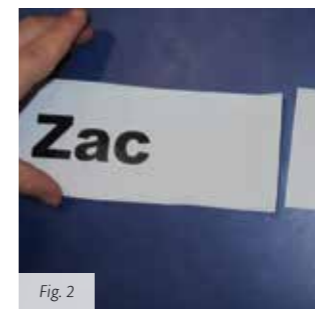


Fig. 2



Fig. 4

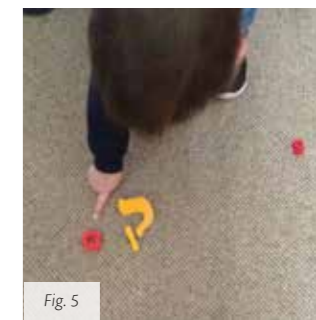


Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

As Jews we are so privileged to have a Hebrew name as well as our English ones, and showing that “name” is a very important part of our essence, which plays an enormous role as part of our Jewish identity and culture.

We posed the following question to the children

Should we all have Hebrew names?

Everyone needs a Hebrew name.

If people don't have a Hebrew name they won't know their Hebrew name, and G-d needs a Hebrew name because He doesn't have one. Because my brain told me.

Cos we need to. My Hebrew name is Dova.

My daddy's Hebrew name is Abba.

A remark made by one of the children, If I gave G-d a Hebrew name it would be 'mah' מה made us realise and become aware that the children identified Hebrew names with the beginning of the Hebrew 'Mah hasheim shelach?' מה השם שלך? What is your name?

“Children need time and space so that they can explore the subject in hand in depth.” (Foundation areas of Learning)¹³

One afternoon as we were sitting around the table a conversation began about their names. Some children were identifying themselves with their secular name and their Hebrew name.

How do we know who we are?

You say hello, who are you?

Albie is me. Albie is a boy. Call me.

How do you call me?

Say your name.

When I was a baby my mummy chose my name.

My name is Besen. Tara. I've just got Tara Besen. No... Luella Tara Besen. My name is from Hawaii.

My name is Tara Chloe. S-t-e-u-a. That's my name. My daddy calls me that.

People need names. So that other people know which names they are. My name is Evie Dova Lichtenstein. דוברה (Dova) is my Hebrew name.

Does having a Hebrew name mean we are discovering another self? Is it a source of our Jewish identity embedded in our roots?

“Evie was born 7 months after her great grandfather passed away and she was given this Hebrew name in Shul when she was three weeks old. Her great grandfather’s name was Berel, which is a derivative of the word “bear” and has a connotation of “bold as a bear.” As a bear in Hebrew is Dov, Evie was given the girl’s name Dova. Evie’s great grandfather Barney Krawitz was admired and respected by everyone who knew and loved him. Barney’s gracious nature, compassion, consideration and passion for his chosen profession, are qualities that we, as Evie’s parents, hope to instil in her.”¹⁴

Young children need the time and opportunity to familiarise themselves with the concept of “another” name. The following conversation demonstrates how the children are thinking about Hebrew and a Hebrew name.

My mum calls me in a different way. She calls me Noochy. I don’t have another name. Just my Hebrew name- Ha –sheim השם which means my name

I have a middle name – Aharon אהרון

“Young children learn from everything that happens to them and around them: they do not separate their learning into different subjects and disciplines.” (Foundation Areas of Learning)¹⁶

On one of our tiyulim טיולים (walks), one of the children came upon the bust of Chaim Nachman Bialik. The child stood in front of this bust and then excitedly shouted out and pointed to something he had found. It was his Hebrew name. There it was Chaim! חיים (Fig. 3)

We asked ourselves how do we make their Hebrew names visible so that the children would naturally use their Hebrew names and understand that there is meaning and significance for each of their names.

“Language is the only homeland.” (Czeslaw Milosz)¹⁵

We started playing with letters, both in Hebrew and English. What is the same and what is different? Do they make the same sounds, do they look the same? (Fig. 4 & 5)

We began to identify some of the Hebrew letters with which the children might be familiar. (Fig. 6 & 7)

We have waited up until now to introduce their ‘Hebrew’ names to them. In order to make this investigation more meaningful we felt the children needed time to begin to understand the complex nature of a Hebrew name and identity. This was also a deciding factor in having a parents’ evening later in the year to share the

depth of this investigation and make it more meaningful to the whole class community. (Fig. 8 & 9)

At our celebratory evening each child received a box, and inside were the letters of their Hebrew name made out of clay. These clay letters were prepared by the staff.

We wondered if the children would recognise their Hebrew names once they received the clay letters, and if it would open a discussion with their parents about the significance of their particular Hebrew name? (Fig. 10 & 11)



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

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Figures

Fig. 1 Harlow

Fig. 2 Zac

Fig. 3 Harvey pointing

Fig. 4 Gabe

Fig. 5 Albie

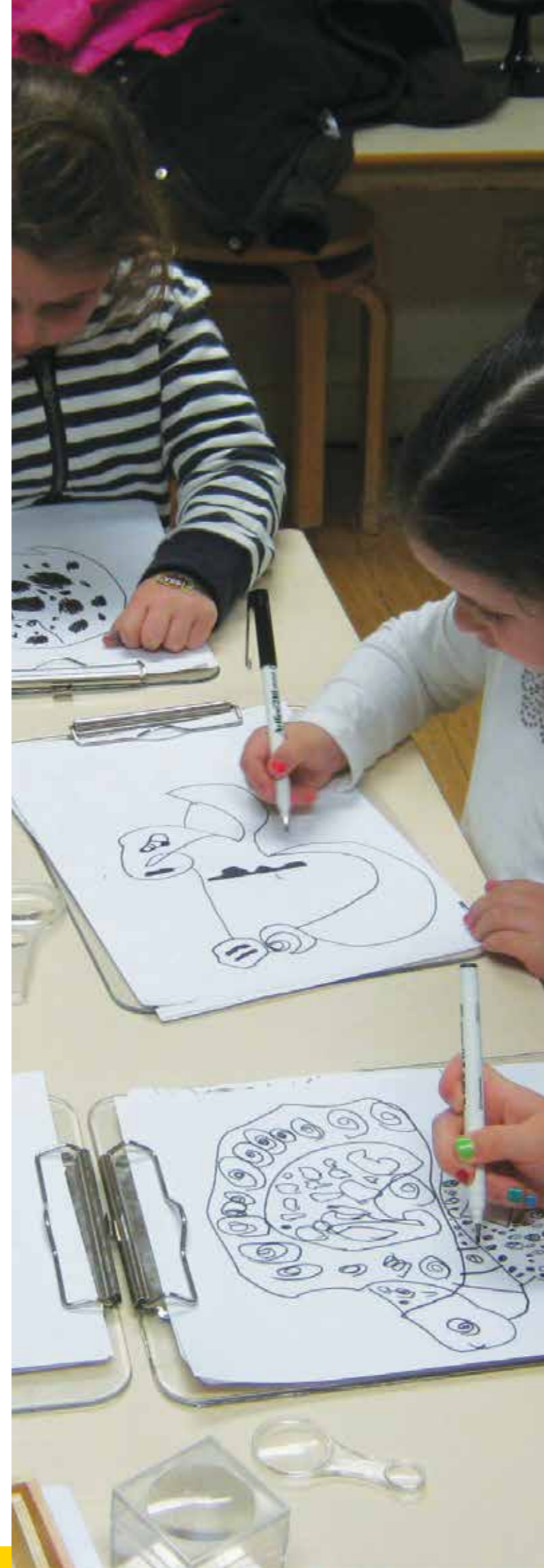
Fig. 6 Gaby

Fig. 7 Zac

Fig. 8-9 Luella and Adi

Fig. 10 Joah

Fig. 11 Pablo and mum



4 Year Old Kinder

I want to do my eyes, my ears, my cheeks, my hair, my helmet, my nose... but I can't fit it all on!



Fig. 2



Fig. 1

“In a community of people that is built on an ever growing web of social interaction and a network of exchange, communication becomes the primary connector of the entire fabric of participation, the unifying agent that binds the most diverse and distant elements of this multiform and complex system that we call a centre or school for young children.” (Edwards et. al. 1998, p.109)¹

The children had many suggestions and ideas about what communication meant to them.

Communication is pointing to show someone something.

It's giving somebody a message. You can make a note that says what you want.

Being generous and giving something away like sharing a toy with someone else.

With the invitation to participate in a dance session, new and different opportunities evolved. As the children used their bodies in response to listening to the rhythm and beat of the music we saw another mode of communication.

“The body is the basis for verbal language but it is, in itself, communication and language. The language of the body is always present and inseparable from the words pronounced and expresses itself in many ways through movements and gestures...” (Cazzoni et.al 2006, p.4)²

When collaborating with one of the children's grandmothers, who took the dance session, we discussed with her our intent for the children. Different types of music would be played that would require the children to communicate how the music would make them feel with their bodies. We also explained to the children that we would photograph their movements to look at later. They were then invited to recreate their movements and poses in clay using these photographs.

We explore and experience clay every day in our classroom. The children are familiar with using clay and with knowing its potentials and properties.

“

Children depend not only on the broadly described sociocultural context within which they live, but also on the more discrete social exchanges that take place among and between individuals in that setting.” (Edwards et. al. 1998, p.26) ¹

We noticed that the children used the clay as if they were drawing with it, except for one child who discovered that he could represent himself by standing up the clay. All the others were laid flat on the table with certain body parts built up with the clay to reflect the pose that was being copied. It was interesting to observe that even a child who was replicating his pose of holding hands with another child completed the whole clay figure flat. (Fig. 1 & 2)

The children also explored how to represent perspective when using clay. One child noticed that you could only see half of his second leg in the photograph. *I'm going to put the shoe here where you can't see it.* His drawings also reflected this observation. (Fig. 3, 4 & 5)

We watched as one child who was completing his clay figure turned his figure horizontal even though the photo he was copying was vertical. When asked why he did this he commented, *It's easier to see the hands this way.*

Another child made the observation that the photo he was copying did not show his shoes. *I can't see my shoes. I can't remember what shape they are. I'll take my shoe off and copy it. I'll do another one and another one because there are two shoes.*

When creating their pose, some children divided up the body into shapes that they put together, *the head is a circle, and the arms are rectangles. My body is a big rectangle, bigger than my arms. My legs are rectangles also. One is much longer than the other. I need to put a heart shape in it. That's my heart because I'm making me.*

Other children were not as focused on the whole body but rather a particular feature such as the hands or face. (Fig. 6)

I want to do my eyes, my ears, my cheeks, my hair, my helmet (hat), my nose... but I can't fit it all on!

Another observation we made was the ease with which children moved from one language to another. Some children began with using the clay but as they dealt with challenges such as the changing perspective of the body, they asked if they could draw the image as well. (Fig. 7, 8 & 9)

Giving the children time to revisit their sculptures, to share them with others, to collaborate in small groups and to persist at a task really made us aware of the perseverance that children have. A number of children commented how they could not complete this task, and yet in their own time, each one of them did.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

When the children had completed their clay figures and shared them with the group we asked ourselves:

Why had every child except for one created clay figures lying down? Were the children's responses developmental or as a result of collaboration and imitation? Could we as researchers do something different to encourage the children to create their figures in 3D? Did the children only create 2D because the photographs they were copying from were flat too?

There was another occasion for the children to participate in a further dance session. We took this as an opportunity to test some of our theories about the previous clay experience. This time we used the iPad to record the children dancing. Once again the children collaborated to create the figures. However, this time we also asked the children to make a figure of themselves that



Fig. 6

could stand up. Some children also chose to draw themselves in a particular pose as they rewatched the video of themselves during the dance session. (Fig. 10)

When small groups of children worked together with the clay we found that the communication changed from general conversing to conversation involving the transmission of information. i.e. helping another child, lending a skill, explaining a theory or idea.

My clay keeps on falling down. Mine doesn't. Why doesn't yours fall down? You have to make the legs fat...fatter than the arms. My legs are fat. See, I rolled them like sausages. Yeah, but then you need to press down like this at the bottom. PUSH! PUSH! PUSH! See...it stands up. I'll hold up the clay and you push down like me. There! Yours is standing up too.

I made me lying down! That's not right. You have to stand up. Okay. I'll push here, and here. There! Standing! Ah...it fell. You hold it up here, and I'll push down. See, maybe if the legs go more on the table it will stand better. Ah, it fell again. I think I need to make some new legs. These ones are too bent.

That's your bottom. It's a round shape. So you need to make the clay in a round shape.

It was interesting for us to revisit the clay experience a second time. It showed us that the children are very capable and do have the ability to take on challenges. Those children that took on the challenge of making their clay figure stand up used various strategies to achieve this.

Seeing their images dancing on the iPad recording captured the children's attention. They were curious to watch not only themselves but their friends too. Before they even started working with the clay they watched the recordings repeatedly.

Some children would stop the recording at a particular point whilst they worked on a particular body part. *I need to stop here because then the arm moves around and I can't see the fingers*

The iPads also encouraged collaboration. As the music and children's responses were heard from the iPad, other children in the classroom gathered around curious to see what was happening. Whilst watching the recording, they would work alongside the children who were constructing their figures.



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

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Figures

- Fig. 1 Nicholas and Joey dancing.
- Fig. 2 Nicholas' clay figure of himself.
- Fig. 3 Jonty's pose.
- Fig. 4 Jonty's clay figure of himself.
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- Fig. 6 Jessie's clay figure with exaggerated features.
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- Fig. 10 Children using the iPads to recreate themselves from clay.

Kinder 4M



The words outside us come from our brains...

What is a story? Is it the telling of events that are casually linked together? Stories have been an intrinsic part of all of our worlds. We took comfort from stories told to us by our families, we encountered fairy tales and fables. Are these the stories that this generation of children is familiar with and for what purpose do they tell stories?

In Reggio Emilia the story is regarded as a way to travel and meet people.

“ Story telling is like travelling - through stories, culture, peoples. Those who travel meet people, identify objects. Those travelling chase dreams and wonders of life. Who knows travels, learns and knows then tells. Travel is then how to tell. ” (Reggionarra) 1

The classroom community is always full of stories, especially stories being read to the children. They come together as a group to listen and discuss but can the children tell a story? (Fig. 1)

The children were invited to write a story in the studio. They also were asked to choose another child that they don't play with all the time; this was to expand their relationships and to look beyond someone that had the same interests as themselves. The children really had to consider who they invited into the studio with them to story tell. We wanted to look beyond the one-way relationship of 'I tell the story and you listen'. (Denning, S)²

The children had to be able to collaborate with each other. When asked about what collaboration meant to them, two children responded with. (Fig. 2)

Making a story up, using our brains and minds and thinking.

Our imaginations and our thinking.

The words outside us come from our brains too, and we can explain our thinking in our brains. (Fig. 3)

The children were asked to briefly discuss ideas before beginning to narrate their story. Each pair was given one large sheet of paper and black fine liners, they began to draw and tell the story simultaneously. One child had the opportunity to say a sentence and the other child listened and said the next sentence, developing the story line as they proceeded. (Fig. 4)

The particular materials were offered to the children to allow them to make marks as they spoke. This gave the children the opportunity to clarify their thoughts by drawing their thoughts. (Katz, L & Cesarone, B 1995).³ It is recognised in Reggio Emilia that children learn more deeply when they represent the same context in different media (Katz, L & Cesarone, B 1995). Only



Fig. 1

one piece of paper was offered to the two children so they had to make a connection between themselves. They had to be respectful of the others work but also had to read the other's work as well as listen to their words. 'A storyteller tells the pictures seen in his or her mind and passes them to the listeners mind for interpretation' (McKay, H & Dudley, B 1996).⁴ Giving the children the two languages, of drawing and the spoken word, permitted them to have a deeper interpretation and connection to each other's ideas. (Fig. 5)

Not every pair wished to collaborate. One pair decided to draw a line down the middle of the page and complete two individual drawings. They wrote two individual stories, not wanting to listen to the other child but making connections between their stories and their own experiences.

Looking through history, we see stories as a way of connecting; connections between families, cultures and eras; a way of passing information from one generation to the next.

The most customary method for this was through a fable or fairy tale, usually told to the child by a parent or grandparent. (Rodari, G 1996)⁵

When it is bedtime you can read them a story so they can think about it and dream a story in your head and then in the morning you can go to kinder and write a story.

When the children began to write their stories they most commonly began with

Once upon a time...

Or

Once there was...

Tapping into the language of a fairy tale. As soon as these words were spoken the children connected into the world of fantasy into an "atmosphere of anything is possible" (McKay, H & Dudley, B 1996). The children then began to travel, as per the theories of Reggionarra. They used kings, queens, princesses, princes and even fire breathing dragons to tell their stories.

In Israel there were horses and knights. So one night the doors opened and the horses looked and ran out the door... (Fig. 6)



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

There was a fire-breathing dragon that was breathing fire on the King and Queen. So they got a match and got fire and burned the dragon's tail...

Once upon a time there lived a school of dragons, and the school was very big. Then there was a teacher to teach them to be a big scary dragon. The dragons shoved themselves through the door. Then the teacher said you have to fight the baddies. The teacher said sit on the mat...

Once upon a time there was an angel called Arel and he was lighting the moon, the sun and the stars. He liked to light everything in the night and the morning. Then one day he saw a fairy called Topeia and found a boy called William... (Fig. 7)



Fig. 8

In the children's stories we see connections with their culture, their communities and themselves. They also developed stronger relationships with language and the understanding of the structure of a story. But did they connect with the other children?

Did they consider their storytelling collaborator as a friend?

Yes, because he likes fire-breathing dragons.

I like to play with him at the blocks.

I play with more people now, not only two.

(Fig. 8)

Two of the children formed a strong connection and looked to further develop their story. Puppets became the vehicle to tell their story. Research was done on how to build a puppet theatre and this was ornamented with considerable time invested by the children. It was completed in true collaborative partnership, with each child supporting the other. When one child was challenged, the other stepped in and assisted and vice versa, thus lifting the level of potential development in each other. (Vygotsky, L 1978)⁶

All the children have discussed how to present their stories with their community. The children have determined that they would like to have their peers and their families involved in the final telling of their stories, thus completing a cycle of connections to the community, language and the familiar.

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You have to be born to belong to the country.



“ Children have the right to be recognised as the bearers of important rights: individual, social and legal. They both carry and construct their own culture and are therefore active participants in the organisation of their identity, their autonomy and their capabilities. The construction of this organisation takes place through relationships and interactions with peers, adults, ideas and objects, as well as both real and imaginary events of a communicative world.” (Malaguzzi 1994)¹

What is our identity with the country that we are born in? Our place of birth becomes a part of our national identity. 'Identity' is a term that is widely used and, as a consequence, can mean many different things to different people. Identity is sometimes used to refer to a sense of integration of the self, in which different aspects come together as a whole. No matter where we live, we connect ourselves with the country we were born in. Where ever we go, the emotional ties with our birth place will always be with us. *I am Australian because I was born in Australia. I was born in India but I am Australian because I live in Australia. You can change a place where you live. Where ever you make a house that is what you become. You need to be born to belong to the country.* I was born in India and have been living in Australia for twenty two years. I have been naturalised for the past eighteen years yet people refer to me as an 'Indian'. Is it because I was born in India or because I look Indian or is it because I have an Indian accent? I wondered how long one has to live in a country to belong there? **“National identity is dependent on several different factors: country of origin, country of residence, ethnic or religious ties and identifying with one's nationality.”**²

It is important to define basic sociological terms of identity to understand cultural identity. Culture is learned and passed through generations and includes the beliefs and value systems of a society. Culture has been described as features that are shared and bind people together into a community. Migration has contributed to the richness in diversity of cultures, ethnicities and races in developed countries. Studies of immigrants show similar patterns, as the new arrivals deal with the meaning of their national identity of origin while often taking on a new identity as a resident of the country in which they now live. **“Migration can be defined as the process of going from one country, region or place of residence to settle in another. The duration of this new settlement**

varies on individuals who relocate either semi-permanently or permanently to another country.”³

The idea of national identity is closely related to a feeling of nation. It is the glue that binds all citizens to a sense of belonging to that nation. We asked the children what they know about a country. Country is a place where you live. *Country is a place where you go on holiday. Country is on the earth and earth is a planet. Country is a piece of land. It's called continent. Country is something that lives inside the world.* We brought in the world map and a globe for the children to share their prior knowledge. *There are different countries. Some have water around them. The countries near this black line (equator) are hotter. There are different colours so we can see different countries.* (Fig. 1)

We asked the children to draw their understanding of a country. The common factor in their drawings was a big round circle which was representing the world and inside this big circle were tiny circles. These tiny circles were given the names of the country that the children might have travelled to or might have heard of. (Fig. 2 & 3)

What is special about a country? *Language, name, people, national anthem, food, clothes, money, animals and a flag.* **“Many people gain a sense of positive self-esteem from their identity group, which furthers a sense of community and belonging. National identity is a sense of belonging to one state or to one nation, a feeling one shares with a group of people, regardless of one's citizenship status. It is not an inborn trait. Various studies have shown that a person's national identity is a direct result of the presence of elements from the 'common points' in people's daily lives e.g. national symbols and language. Language is a central feature of human identity and a powerful symbol of national and ethnic identity.”** (Spolsky, 1999, p. 181)⁴

Communication is a common thread this year across the four year old kindergartens. The children were now making connections with flags of particular countries. What understanding did the children have of flags? What do flags communicate? In our class



Fig. 1

room we have an Australian and an Israeli flag. What do these flags mean to children? During different celebrations we have discussed these flags and its meaning. The children observed the different patterns and symbols on these flags. At this time one of our team members gave us a bag full of small flags attached to small sticks from different countries that she had collected at home. This opened up new possibilities within this investigation. The children initially explored these small flags and pressed the sticks upright into a foam base. This was done randomly without appearing to have a system. We wondered if the children were aware of the differences and similarities in the flags. We asked the children to sort and categorise the flags according to their pattern. Did the children notice the differences amongst the flags? Some flags had



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

very little differences. Some had horizontal lines while the others flag may have the same colours but vertical lines. We saw this as an opportunity to introduce the words 'vertical' and 'horizontal'. The children became more aware of the new vocabulary as they sorted the flags. (Fig. 4) With this new information we noticed that the children began to replicate the flags by drawing them on small pieces of paper.

For some children colour was more important than the width of the vertical or horizontal lines. We now wondered if they understood the concept of a flag and ask them if a pattern on a flag can be changed. Some of the children felt it cannot be changed while others were not quite sure. One child brought a flag poster from home. This gave an opportunity to further explore many other flags, their patterns, colours and symbols. Some children had an understanding of the Israeli flag with its Magen David, an important symbol in Judaism. The Indian flag has a blue circle with twenty four lines which represents the twenty four hours in a day. The Australian flag has symbols that include the Union Jack, Commonwealth Star and Southern Cross. They began noticing more symbols on the flags that were on the poster. The children also noticed that there was a common factor amongst all the flags on the poster, that all flags were rectangular shape even though they had different patterns, colours and symbols. (Fig. 5)

The children compared the flags in our class room to the flags on the poster for their shapes and noticed that they were rectangular too.

Why do we need flags? Flags tell us which country we are talking about. Flags are signs for the countries. If we see a flag on the building we know it belongs to the flag country. Flags are symbols for the countries.

One of the children started to design her own flag and shared her flag with the class. *I think the heart is a symbol of love and in our class we love each other. That is why I had love heart in my flag.* (Fig. 6)

We wondered if the class would like to make their own class flag. *You need to think what colours you will choose and why do you want to choose them. You need to know the meaning of the symbols in a flag. We will all have to think hard to make one pattern for our class flag. Like there is a one flag for the country. Not everybody in one country makes different flags.*

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Figures

- Fig. 1 Children observing the world map.
 Fig. 2-3 Children's drawing of the world.
 Fig. 4 Children sorting out the flags into categories.
 Fig. 5 Children looking at the flag poster.
 Fig. 6 Children began designing their own flag.



How do we interpret light?



“
How do we interpret light? The artist, the writer, the actor, the scientist, the mathematician, the poet, the filmmaker...”

At the end of a school year, as we were leaving for the summer holidays, one of my colleagues said to me: “What about light?”

A teacher of Hebrew language and Jewish Studies, animated in her short discussion with me, left me pondering this comment and I returned to revisit this with her and our Prep colleagues at the beginning of the school year. What about light and why explore light? And why the colleague’s interest? What were the links and questions to uncover which would go beyond the rudimentary facts that could be answered from an internet search engine or a ‘How to’ book. For our staff an investigation is not isolated to a theme or topic. Wider consideration is given to what can be discovered beyond ‘question and answer’ routines, and what continues to provoke and be pursued by the artist, the writer, the actor, the scientist, the mathematician, the poet, the filmmaker... So, too ourselves, in the questioning and understanding about light within our lives today and looking back through history.

What did we as teachers already know about light, in our daily lives, travels and experiences?

We questioned ourselves about light; as a commodity, light in play, light as time, light as survival, light as growth, light and culture, light and spiritual significance, light and science. These discussions continued amongst ourselves over several months; clarifying some of the provocations we would share with the children to elicit their curiosity, and developing theories to further our own research and wonderings.

During many sessions we continued to ask the children about what they ‘now know about light’ and their definition of light as they explored and refined their theories.

Their initial definitions and generalisations may have been gleaned from the professions or expertise of family members; or a specific child’s interest in astronomy and science; or from reading picture books, watching documentaries and movies. *Light is there for you. If I came to life and there was no light I would bump so everyone needs to see where we go. The sun is actually white in space. Yes it’s like that in my brother’s space book. There are more suns at the night time, all stars are far away suns.*

Our intent was to unpack their generalisations at the same time as keeping their curiosity, mystery, and imagination alive. We also felt that light became a springboard into a range of learning areas and specific subject studies.

Children’s conversations were rich in themselves, however as was our intent, they were also shared using a range of materials and skills.

This investigation spanned our three Prep classes together with their classroom teachers during the course of their day, and during their sessions with our Jewish Studies teachers, and myself as the Arts Educator. These sessions comprised whole class groups;



small class groups and cross class groups. In the following articles you will read about some of the children’s and teachers research, excitement and theory making. This investigation was also explored beyond the classroom as our focus continued to seek meaning by generalising knowledge and application.

Rather than begin our focus in what would occur in the classroom we looked beyond to our community.

A festival, entitled ‘White Night Melbourne’ in February of this year was an all-night event held in Melbourne for the first time, although an annual event already established in 22 countries. Our city was transformed into a ‘light event’. Well known buildings were veiled with light projections; our Yarra River featured many illuminated expositions, as well as street artists, musicians, films and cultural events focusing on light. This was an event which brought several hundred thousands of visitors to our city centre. Light and its creative uses was marvelled at and enjoyed by both adults and children as dusk descended.¹

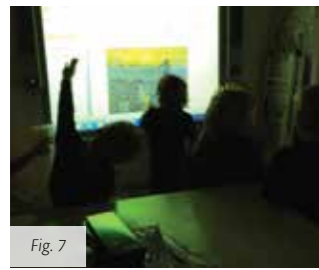
This event provoked thinking for us, not only of the creative use of light through these media, but also its reference within our Jewish history, festivals and traditions where light signifies the beginning and end of a celebration or solemnity. We also referred to several periods in Arts history, where the use of light by artists (in the subjects of their paintings) caused public outcry as well as religious fervour disputing what was conveyed by artists of the time. Without devoting this article to either a history or art lesson the use of light through a technique known as ‘chiaroscuro’, by the Italian artist Caravaggio, created dramatic effects using stark light and dark in his painting during the 1600’s, a device continued to be used today and later in history during the 1800’s. The art movement known as Impressionism offered both ourselves and our students a provocation which not only spanned the learning of new techniques but questions about ways of seeing. Today we may take these ways of seeing for granted however, in the past these points of view ostracised many well-known artists from their patrons, politicians and public alike.

We asked ourselves about the familiarity of the ‘tools of light’ in our practice today. We reflected on our use of overhead light projectors, shadow screens, light tables, interactive whiteboards, digital cameras, iPads etc. and what and how these experiences are recorded.

From an early age, starting from three year old kindergarten, our children explore transformations with light as they develop relationships with new materials, new friends and listen to new thoughts. The excitement of exploring with light never seems to dissipate as the children progress into their school years. The opportunity for light to ‘open our eyes’, discover and search further was our intent for the Preps, as groups of children went beyond the classroom to ‘search for the light’ that may be ‘hiding’ or discovering the smallest glimpse of light. The focus on narratives, imagination, and curiosity was our intent. *When you sleep you close your eyes and you can see too...* The groups used iPads to photo and film their observations and discoveries and this documentation was revisited back in the studio where many more questions were posed by the children. Their observations of light and dark, pattern in shadow from surrounding architecture or natural terrain together with the position of themselves prompted groups to revisit and discuss these events. (Fig. 1)

At the same time stories were read. ‘When Darkness Slipped In’ by Ella Burfoot resonated with some of the children as they spoke about their *night light or when there really were others that appeared when light met the darkness.*² And so too with ‘A Game of Shadows’ by Herve Tullet, both a book and a series of shadow ‘stencil-like’ pages (which could be used on an overhead projector or with a torch shining through) which offered the children another lense to discover the continuing mystery of light and perceptions.³ Stories were created together as was knowledge and theory building, using different materials. (Fig. 2)

The mystery of dark and light was further explored through the technique of etching, where a single engraved line could conjure an element of suspense. At the same time we embedded skills to assist with the recording of the children’s observations and imagination. (Fig. 3, 4, 5 & 6)



And what of the light as expressed by the Impressionist artists? In viewing a series of paintings from the Impressionist period, such as 'A Starry Night' or 'The Sower' by Vincent Van Gogh, we noted that these paintings provoked discussion and debate about the artists intent and the children reflected on their own knowledge as well as listened to the knowledge of their friends. Heightening their observations and deductions, the elements of time, place, and seasons became subjects of discussion. *Those stars are little suns, there is a man in a field of sunflowers or wheat. You can see at the back white near the trees, green on the top near the sun which looks like fireworks.*

This last comment summed up the style of painting, not only for these children but for many children and adults before them, when confronted by this new style of Impressionist painting. The dabs or short obvious brushstrokes of paint, with layer upon layer of thick painted marks evoked an impression of the light that encompassed many 'light moments' of the day both in an outside environment or focusing on an indoor subject. The array of marks in the 'A Starry Night' painting of the sun setting could in fact, as mentioned by one child, be construed as a sky of fireworks!

A man is walking to work or going home, he is walking to pick up some wheat, no he is going home. Maybe he got the wheat and now the sun is going down. There is blue on the floor. The sun is making shadow. When it is sunny it makes shadows or when the sun goes down too. (Fig. 7, 8, 9 & 10)

As the children began to paint the light they had described, they discussed each other's knowledge. They also explored colour mixing and the shades that best described their thinking about a particular light and its effects. *My paper is white so if I paint with white paint you will not see the moon I am painting. I am making it a little grey.* (Fig. 11)

I am painting the moon. There is more than one moon. No there is only one moon, that is what I have painted. The first two planets close to the sun has no moon. Jupiter has nearly 28 moons. Earth has only one moon. I am going to paint the stars. The stars are always there even though you can't see

them in the daylight. Yes moonlight is another light. Electricity can make light. It is very hot, like fire electricity. It can make light. (Fig. 12 & 13)

As mentioned in the introduction, we wanted to explore beyond generalisation and develop a rich vocabulary. Giving the children an opportunity to discuss each other's thoughts, through a range of media and sharing effects they had created, new words were discovered to describe these.

The light is dusk; Sunrise. Light is sunlight. Shadows are there. In the middle of the day there is no shadow. Light is time. The moon moves around. The world is down below, when the earth goes around the sun. Sometimes the sun is always in front of one country and that is where it is morning. And the country on the other side it is night time. (Fig. 14)

Is this morning time? No it is afternoon time. Shadows and the sun tell the time. Sometimes it is too dark to go out or too early.

During the winter our city celebrated 'The Light in Winter', an annual month long festival. This year we saw, in the middle of the city, a large steel sculpture entitled, 'The Helix Tree' by artist Bruce Ramus.⁴ At dusk this 'tree' would light up with series of coloured lights running up the tree in response to sound and pitch. This was a unique opportunity to discuss further the many elements and concepts of light we had been exploring. However, this sculpture encompassed new and exciting directions through the use of both sculpture and technology and, of course, inspiration in exploring light. Many of our children and their families and the teachers attended one of the dusk performances where community choirs and the public sang into speakers connected to the tree. The public marvelled at the changing light effects from the sounds of voices singing. The children brought back to their class videos and photos they had taken at this event to share with the rest of their class. The uniqueness of this sculpture continued a discussion about light. The children's emotional, technological and scientific lenses were heightened as was their awareness of the broader effects and impact of light. (Fig 15, 16 & 17)

The layers of understanding as to the impact of light and colour was also revisited through the reading of the story, 'The Black Book of Colours'.⁵ This book highlights the use of words and other senses to gain an understanding of those who do not have sight and how one can relate to colour through other senses. The children listened to the story of Thomas who shared his thoughts about colour. This was for some an introduction to Braille which accompanied the text in this story.

The focus and celebration of light was further considered with the classroom teachers and myself as we explored the opacity and transparency of light with the children as they designed 'holders of light' which followed on from discussions after many children had visited the 'Light in Winter' festival. The children designed and created three dimensional structures to create patterns of light when used with small lights within these structures. (Fig. 18)

“ It is on the strength of observation and reflection that one finds a way. So we must dig and delve unceasingly.” (Claude Monet)⁶

Within the Great Hall of our National Gallery of Victoria, a large stain glass ceiling covers the entire expanse. The brilliance of colour, enormity of size and the 224 triangular pieces and other shapes encourages the viewer to view lying down and looking up or viewing from the highest vantage points closer to the ceiling in the Gallery. Shapes within shapes are discovered as the light from the sky filters through creating vibrancy, shadow and reflection. At school the children viewed images of this ceiling on an interactive whiteboard and were struck with the myriad shapes and patterns. They engaged in creating their own designs and in this process, discussed and included a combination of geometric and organic shapes to view on the overhead projector. However, with this provocation, the children found delight in layering their semitransparent colour designs, one on top of the other, and observing the effects of the joining of their designs. (Fig. 19, 20 & 21)

Visiting the enormous and imposing space during the NGV excursion offered the children, teachers and accompanying parents further discussion about scale, mathematical concepts and the awe of the brilliance of vivid coloured light shining through to the walls. One could not help ponder the designs, colour and light whilst lying on the floor and gazing and refocusing on new areas of the ceiling and the light filtering through. (Fig. 22)

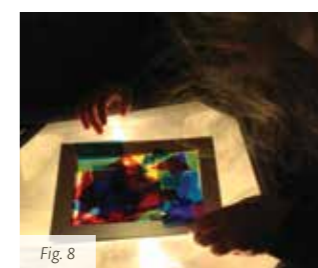
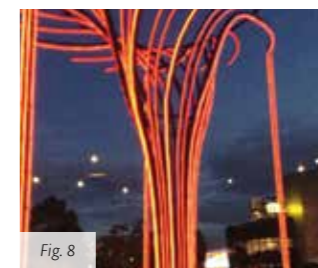
And now, as the Prep year is nearing its final term, our children, and teachers are exploring Melbourne architecture and architectural landmarks. How does shape and pattern support the design and intent? What materials catch and reflect the light? The continuation of this investigation will remain not as a topic but rather it is now embedded in the children's ongoing learning as another element to consider and draw upon one's knowledge, when required, to meet new questions and investigations.

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And there was light!

וַיְהִי אֹרֶךְ



Fig. 7

“

‘Bereshit barah Elohim et hashamayim ve’ha’aretz’...

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

And God said, Let there be light; and there was light.

And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.”¹

In the beginning... On the first day of the school year we read the children a story called ‘The Apple Tree’s Discovery’.² This was just after the Jewish festival of ‘Tu’Bishvat’ which is the acknowledgement of the trees and the important part that nature plays within Judaism. As Jewish Studies teachers, we are always looking at nature and the link between nature and ourselves.

This story describes a little apple tree looking up and seeing the stars shining through the branches of the bigger trees and the apple tree wished that it could have the same stars ‘hanging’ from its own branches. God kept saying ‘Be patient little apple tree’. Eventually, when it was time, the apples fell from the little apple trees’ own branches and split on the ground with a star facing up. The little apple tree realised that its own star was within and had been there all the time.

We showed the children that if you hold an apple on its side and cut it through the middle, you can see a perfect star. (Fig. 1) The children listened attentively to the story and when we cut the apple open, the children saw a star.

Wow! How did you do that?

The realisation dawned that the children may not, as we thought they would, be making the connection between the ‘star within’ as being a part of their own identity. We wondered why? Could it be that the children were relating to the literal shape of the star? We were alluding to the star as being a ‘light’ inside us. And so, after discussing this with my colleagues we decided to ask the question



Fig. 1

in other ways. We wanted each child to realise their own value and worth as a unique individual and to recognise their own ‘light’ within.

‘What is your light? What is special about you? What is your own star?’

We made a booklet called ‘The Star inside me.’ We wondered if these new questions had changed the children’s thinking. (Fig. 2)

I am special because I have a lot of love.

My light is my mum because she loves me.

I am always happy.

My family is my special star.

I love my imagination.

‘Light is vital for life, has great metaphorical significance, and is a highly fascinating element which the children encounter in their everyday experience from a very early age.’³

We continued to explore the concept ‘light’. As researchers we were reminded of the story of The Creation where the world was ‘without form’, so too, this investigation developed.

We would not be focussing on the science of ‘light,’ but rather ‘light’ according to our Jewish identity which was expanded in our Hebrew and Jewish Studies lessons. At first, we truly felt as if we were ‘in the dark’, but leave it to the children to shape our ideas, and to shed some ‘light’ – we merely facilitated this investigation.

After deciding to go to our core, the Bible, we now read the children the story of ‘The Creation.’

God created everything.

There was nothing... and then there was light and trees and animals.

I think God was made from a little bit of light from the sun. (Fig. 3)

The children’s questions were endless, challenging and confronting, and reflected the depth in their thinking.

Is God a He or a She?

What does God look like?

What is the light in your life?

Who made people – people or God?



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

I’m wondering if the story of The Creation is true. I’m not sure if the Jewish way is true or the other way that I saw in a documentary, that our world was created by the earth crashing into a planet?

We decided to call in the ‘experts’ to assist us. This idea of experts was borne from our knowledge of the ‘Sanhedrin’, which was an assembly or council of 70 Judges in Israel during the time of the second Temple. The ‘Sanhedrin’ were inundated with familial matters, matters about the law and matters about biblical interpretations.

We called on experts from within our school; the Co-ordinator of Hebrew and Jewish Studies, the Head of Jewish Life, our Principal and a community Rabbi. These leaders were going to act as our ‘Sanhedrin.’

The children asked these same questions to the panel. (Fig. 4)

With reference to Questions 1 and 2, our ‘Sanhedrin’ were in agreement that sometimes when we read the Bible we read that God is a He and sometimes it says that the spirit of God is female. We are all a little bit like God. God can be both.

God doesn’t have a shape or a body. Some people say it’s like a spirit or the wind. One of our ‘Sanhedrin’ answered that thousands of years ago many clever Rabbis asked that same question. Another one of our ‘Sanhedrin’ answered that in his opinion, God is more of an idea.



Fig. 4

The Rabbi asked the children “What is the most beautiful thing in your life?”

- Nature
- Sunset
- A rainbow
- Friendship

He asked how could it be possible for so many different things to be God?

His answer was that God is everywhere and everything; a light, a white light.

I think that God must be everything.

The Rabbi said “God is everything worthwhile. God is love and love is the source of all energy.”

Question 3: The light in my life...

The Sanhedrin agreed that their families were the light in their lives. The children were asked what the most beautiful thing was in their lives.

- My friends and my family.*
- My mum’s pregnant.*
- My dog.*
- Is there God in my family?*

Rabbi Schneur Waks replied “There is God in your family, in animals, in childbirth, in nature, in love, in safety and caring for others, in sunrise and sunset, in friends, in everything”.

How is it possible for so many things to have God?

‘Because God is everywhere and everything – God is light.’

Question 4 and 5: The Creation verses the big bang theory...

The Sanhedrin all agreed that God made people and people made people too – so both are correct. The first people were made by God from the soil of the earth; Adam and Eve. Thereafter, people made people and God is the bit that makes us all special. God is the bit that makes us laugh, cry and feel things.



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

The ‘Sanhedrin’ accepted both theories; that of Creation and of the Big Bang theory.

“When the Torah tells a story we use words. When Scientists make documentaries, they use scientific language – we say ‘light’, the scientists say ‘big bang.’ Scientists say it’s nature and we say it’s God and God and nature are one and the same thing.” (Tali Barr-Waanders – Coordinator, Hebrew and Jewish Studies)

“Lots of people all around the world have different beliefs – Jewish people have a story in the Torah telling us how the world was created. Other religions have other stories. Scientists have a view that the ‘Big Bang’ happened 15 billion years ago and that what we have today is the result of the ‘Big Bang. Personally, I believe in both – it’s acceptable to believe in either or both theories.” (Dan Sztrajt – Head of Jewish Life)

“Maybe both are true. We believe that God created everything in seven days – How do we know how long a day is? One day could be a million years.” (Jeremy Stowe-Lindner – Bialik Principal)

Jane Breskin Zalben wrote a children’s book called ‘Light’.⁴ The creation of this story was inspired by a 16th Century *midrash* (a legend based on a biblical text) which was written by Rabbi Isaac Luria of Safed (1534-1572) who founded the Kabbalah, the mystical teachings in Judaism. In his poetry, he saw the story of creation this way: ‘When the world originated, God planned to put sparks of light

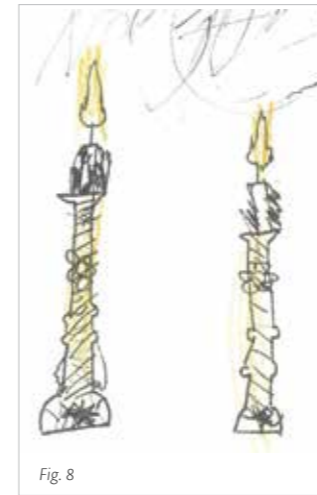


Fig. 8

into everything. The holy light was stored in vessels, but it was so strong, the vessels broke into millions of pieces. People were made to find these shards of light, bring them together and restore the shattered vessels, thereby ‘repairing the world.’ (tikkun olam in Hebrew).

‘Do you think that God broke the jar on purpose or by accident?’

He dropped it so that people would have to look for the light.

Did they manage to connect the world?

Maybe we are still busy connecting the world?

Our intent was that light could be a metaphor for so many purposes. The children were now making a link between the ‘light’ that we were investigating and they understood that this was a spiritual kind of light. They were becoming protagonists in discovering the complexities of the concept of ‘light’.

From now on, I’m going to look everywhere for light.

While relating to our stories and investigation about the creation, it was only natural to discuss ‘Shabbat.’ The children made the connection between *Shabbat* and resting on the seventh day and the welcoming of the light of *Shabbat*.

The children were asked to ‘step inside’ and to be the candles that were illuminated.

I feel happy as a candle coz the candle is shining.

I feel warm

Being inside the candle makes me feel happy because the flames take my words up to God.

I see the Shabbat coming in, it means that God is welcome in my house.

In another Prep class, the teacher turned off the lights and the Shabbat candles were lit. This class was asked to consider – What do you see? What are you thinking? What are you wondering?

I see the Shabbat candles

I see a flame from a candle.

It is shining.

I think I see God.

I am thinking that God is in the sky. Sometimes God is angry, sometimes He is nice.

I am thinking that God made this world because he liked this world and also God is in our bodies... I can feel him inside me.

I’m wondering why God made man last?

Maybe had He made man first, man would have destroyed the world?

I’m wondering if the world is like an empty piece of paper.

I am thinking about a wish – I wish that everyone in the world had food.

On Shabbat, just before we say the *berachah* (blessing for the candles) the children are encouraged to make a global wish which goes up to God with the flames from the candles.

The third Prep class was asked ‘What do you feel when you look at the Shabbat candles?’ (Fig. 8)

I feel that God is in my heart.

I feel close to nature.

I feel love in my heart for my parents.

I feel that it helps the Jewish people stick together.

Light is a thread meandering through each and every Jewish festival.

We also chose to explore light through the festivals of Purim, Pesach and Lag B’Omer.

The idea of ‘light’ was transformed into the idea of ‘courage’, which is a common theme in these festivals. As told in the Bible, Moses’s face was shining when he received the Torah from God. This could well have been the illumination from the Torah, which transcends into knowledge.

During this investigation, the children continued to explore the concept of ‘light’ – initially very literally and now they were embarking on a more spiritual path.

Children love and often make use of metaphors. This transformation made us see that the concept of ‘light’ can be perceived and viewed in so many different ways. Sometimes metaphorical language, because it lacks definition, opens up new concepts and ideas and becomes the only tool available to the new understanding that is seeking to emerge.

Plato said ‘We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark, the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light.’⁵

We learnt a valuable lesson and the children proved it... **and there was light!**

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Figures

- Fig. 1 The star inside the apple.
- Fig. 2 My family is my special star.
- Fig. 3 The Creation. Day 3.
- Fig. 4 Tali Barr- Waanders and the children.
- Fig. 5 Dan Sztrajt answering the children’s questions
- Fig. 6 Jeremy Stowe-Lindner answering the children’s questions.
- Fig. 7 Rabbi Schneur Waks exploring the concept of light with the children.
- Fig. 8 I feel nice when I see the Shabbat candles.

Encouraging creative thinking and process rather than transmitting and seeking out circumscribed truths.



Vea Vecchi, one of Reggio Emilia's respected educators and author of 'Art and Creativity in Reggio Emilia' contests an idea of teaching that chooses to 'transmit circumscribed "truths" in various disciplines'. Her choice and position is clear, **'to stand by children's sides together constructing contexts in which they can explore their own ideas and hypotheses individually or in groups and discuss them with friends and teachers.'**¹

Vea states: **"It is important to society that schools and we as teachers are clearly aware of how much space we leave children for original thinking, without rushing to restrict it with predetermined schemes that define what is correct according to school culture. How much do we support children to have different ideas from those of other people and how do we accustom them to arguing and discussing their ideas with their classmates? I am quite convinced that greater attention to processes, rather than only the final product, would help us to feel greater respect for the independent thinking strategies of children and teenagers."**²

Through our investigation on Light the children were encouraged to draw on their prior knowledge or schema, formulate their own ideas and construct their theories to share within the group. The teacher's role in supporting creativity and imagination, and scaffolding the children's reflections on their thinking and that of their peers, helped to develop an environment whereby the children were encouraged to question, problem solve, challenge and consider the many possibilities that were put forward. This enabled the children to formulate their ideas, reflect on their thinking by listening to others, and engage in discourse from different perspectives.

Looking at the sun's light while walking in the school grounds the children were asked "What do you notice and wonder about how light is formed and how it effects our environment and ourselves?"

The children considered the different forms of light at different times of the day and night, exploring their theories of light coming from outside; such as in natural forms of light from the sun, moon, stars, lava, and fire and inside light such as in artificial light used to generate electricity. Through drawings and discussions the children shared their thoughts about how light is formed.

I drew the sun. The sun has pointy bits and there are holes on the pointy bits and inside the sun there is warmth and electricity wires. There is a big hole in the middle of the sun and the cords of the electricity shock and then they go on fire. You can't see the holes because the wire makes the fire and it gets bigger, so that is how it is really light and in summer it gets lighter.

The children listened to this explanation and asked the question;

Are you using your imagination or do you know this is true?

I used my imagination but I know there are holes in the sun. I know about the sun because I have seen it in a space book.

But my space book at home says there are no holes in the sun.

I think there are holes in the sun. I believe that is a fact. I know because the lines coming out from the sun are coming out of the holes in the sun.

I know this from my space book and my space book and my space globe that tells me about space.

But my book tells me there are no holes coming from the sun. (Fig. 1 & 2)

The children were discovering how they could formulate an idea based on prior knowledge and add to this thinking of how they imagine this idea to be possible. They then needed to find evidence to support their thinking as their ideas were challenged by their peers. They were learning to consider different possibilities and reflect on their own thinking as well as the consensus of the group.

Franken views the importance of seeing creativity in a social context and contextualises creativity by saying: **"Creativity is defined as the tendency to generate or recognise ideas, alternatives, or possibilities that may be useful in solving problems, communicating with others, and entertaining ourselves and others."**³

As we look at the teacher's role in guiding the children to problem solve, communicate with others and value ideas and possibilities we see the significance of promoting the development of creative imagination.

“

When asked 'what is imagination?'

The children's responses highlighted their capacity to think deeply, employing their own sense of judgment and value to the way they view and engage in the world.”

Imagination is when you think about something.

Imagination sometimes comes true and sometimes it doesn't.

Imagination is when you are thinking about making something and thinking about how to make it.

Imagination is when you think about something you like and you want it to happen. You are imagining that it is coming true.

Egan defines imagination as **"the capacity to think of things as possibly being so; it is an intentional act of mind; it is the source of invention, novelty, and generativity; it is not implicated in all perception and the construction of all meaning; it is not distinct from rationality but it is rather a capacity that greatly enriches rational thinking."**⁴

We observed the development of the children's thinking as they debate whether there are bumps of lava on the sun; (Fig. 3)

I know there are bumps of lava on the sun.

I agree with that.

I don't agree with that. On my space globe it says there are no bumps of lava on the sun.

I saw it on TV with my Papa and they said there were bumps of lava on the sun.

It might not be real because it was on TV.

It's real because they were looking through a telescope and they told us that it was real.

The children were going through the process of establishing what they believe through questioning the possibilities and sources of information they had gathered. They were discovering that seeking the answers may involve ongoing investigation and building on from their ideas; as ideas are continually developing and growing. (Fig. 4)



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



I drew the moon and the Aliens living in the holes of the moon. The moon is important because where would the Aliens live if there wasn't a moon. There are stars all around in the night. The stars help the moon shine. The moon shines and the Aliens like the moon shining on their home because it looks beautiful. The Aliens names sound like a light part of the moon. They like their home so much because they like the light parts of their home.

You think there are Aliens on the moon but how do you know?

Aliens are not really on the moon. Aliens are only on TV shows.

The TV shows make you think that they are real.

TV shows are fun because you can imagine something about them that is fun.

I know Aliens live on the moon because there are holes on the moon and the Aliens live on the moon.

It might just be in a show and not be true.

The Aliens could be invisible.

People have been looking for Alien's for years and haven't found one yet.

Not even one!

Sometimes they hide when people look for them because they are scared of the people.

As teachers it would be easy to point the children in the direction of seeking out the facts through the internet, books or documentaries, but wouldn't this end debate, questioning and the rich source of wondering and dialogue that the children are engaged in?

The children's reflections on their own thinking, hypotheses and drawings and that of their peers, provided us with the unique opportunity of being able to observe the process through which cognitive as well as social interactions develop.

The importance of small group interactions that encourage the children to work together as a team provided the forum for each child's voice to be heard and valued. The children's strengths were recognised and conveyed within the group as different roles were taken on such as; illustrator, documenter, organiser, spokesperson, photographer and video person. (Fig. 5 & 6)

The Statement of Philosophy titled The Declaration of Intent, by Kerrie O'Neill, rings true in our learning environment:



"Children are protagonists and co-participants in their own learning. We will provide experiences that allow them to develop cognitive processes that promote problem solving. Children need to deconstruct information often to accommodate and reconstruct new understandings and meanings."⁵

Documenting the thoughts and theories that the children generate when posed with open ended and thought-provoking provocations, and reflecting on these with the children and colleagues, provides exciting opportunities and possibilities for teachers and children. We are witnesses to children's voices being heard as they listen to each other and feel the need to respond and enter the discourse. If we listen... provide time... for thoughts to formulate, and provide a safe forum where the children feel encouraged to exchange, agree with and challenge ideas, then relationships, connections, affirmations of identity can constantly develop and grow, as we purposefully encourage the creative thinking process.

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Figures

- Fig. 1 Drawing of the holes and electricity in the sun.
 Fig. 2 Experimenting with how a light bulb works.
 Fig. 3 Drawing of bumps of lava on the sun.
 Fig. 4 Drawing of the moon and the aliens living in the holes of the moon.
 Fig. 5 The earth, sun and moon explaining day and night done by a small group of children.
 Fig. 6 Small group working on a drawing of the earth, sun and moon explaining day and night.

“It's way too easy when you can see, it is more fun and difficult when you can't.”

After creating various different lanterns and studying the effects of a glimpse of light, the children recognised the importance of a shimmer of light when in the dark. The children were curious about their differing experiences and feelings when they were in light or in darkness. They pondered, is the darkness important? What is important about the dark? And, where does the dark go?

Light is my favourite. Light helps human beings see. I'm sometimes scared of the dark. I only like the dark if I have a little light outside with the door shut a little bit and a big white light shining in my room. Then it might get scary as you might think there was a black monster coming. Light is special because people won't be able to see without light.

At first the children decided to share what they know and understand about the word 'light'. The children experimented with all of their senses using light-tables, paints, dyes and iPads. After some time the investigation turned us back to the intriguing mystery of the darkness and the children pondered about why we need it.

I love the dark because you never know what's going to happen and sometimes you just go 'what is that?' and when you turn the light on you go, 'what?, that was just a book!'. It is so funny when you jump because when I jump it makes me laugh. I jump because it's so strange. I just wonder why you need dark? When there's dark different things happen to when it's light. I like the dark; it is fun because you get to jump around. Because in the light you can actually see where you are going. The dark is spooky and I love spooky. Its way too easy when you can see, it is more fun and difficult when you can't see. Without the dark, you would miss out on sunsets and the stars and the moon, and sleep. At night-time you have to sleep, the dark can be boring. However, when there's a star different things can happen in the light because there are dark things that you can't see and dark can be more beautiful then. There is something that makes it special. I like the dark because there was a wishing star and I wish. Things glow in the dark. I can make reflections on my roof with a torch.

Carla Rinaldi reminds us that, **"Children are searching for the real meaning of life... When your child asks, "why is there a moon?" don't reply with a scientific answer. Ask him, "What do you think?" He will understand that you are telling him, "you have your own mind and your own interpretation and your ideas are important to me". Then you and he can look for the answers together; sharing the wonder, curiosity, pain – everything. It is not the answers that are important, it is the process – that you and he search together'.** (Cadwell, 1997, p.63)¹

The children reflected and drew what they felt about the darkness and the unknown. How does the world change when there is dark? One student commented that Light Festivals need the dark. How is the darkness celebrated by light?

Just when it's dark, it's dark. Pretty much before the dark there is a sunset and in other countries there's like a show; there are people that wear black paint and sticks. There's blue fire or red fire and they just swing it around. They twist it and throw it up. That's what they make for light so you can see in the dark.

Things can look beautiful in the dark



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

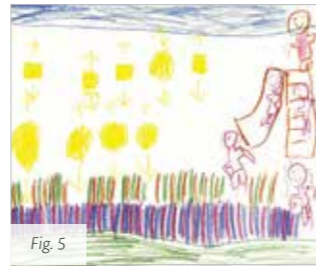


Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

So, we need the darkness to celebrate the light? Where does the darkness go then?

The dark goes to everyone's house. The moon is so big it can darkness everything. The dark actually, it gets darker and darker and darker and then it goes lighter and lighter and lighter and it gets darker and darker and darker and it's like a system. The dark goes down. That's how it makes a sunset. The dark goes to the other side of the world because one side of the world always has to face the sun and one side doesn't. It goes to fun.

I couldn't help but notice the connotations to their imagination being highlighted in the dark and their sight, as we know it, focusing on the light. What is so scary and yet excitingly mysterious about the dark? Does this reflect our own needs to 'see' where we are going? To know what is in front of us? There is paradox in the boredom and security of the known, as in the fear and excitement of the unknown. That shimmer of light from the candle in the dark gives the children that sense of security and excitement rolled into one.

Everything looks black and you say, 'Wow, why is everything black? What's different in the dark?' The very annoying thing about night-time is that I always go into fairy land where the nights are darker than here and it makes it easier to see. It's still easy to see in the dark.

The children started hypothesising about the ability to see in the dark and they suggested that; *If people have bright eyes like light blue then they could see in the dark. Also, the more you eat carrots the more you can see in the dark and because carrots are good for your eyesight. I eat lots of carrots so I can see in the dark.*

So, if there are ways of 'seeing' in the dark, are there also ways of 'seeing' or empowering ourselves in times of fear, loneliness, anger,

disappointment, uncertainty and worry? I questioned the children on what situations create these darker feelings?

Being alone on the playground, not finding my friends, not having a friend, fighting with my family or friends.

These were important concerns to the children so we brought in an expert in human behaviour to work with them. She explained that Courage is the light that we need to always hold within ourselves. The ability to be a courageous warrior in our own lives, even in times of darkness and uncertainty. After, the children discussed how they could be courageous warriors in these times and remove the worry from mystery and keep the excitement of the unknown.

When you're sad and scared you need someone to help you, just say 'please help me'. Just close your eyes and relax, take a big breath and blow it out. Stand tall like a warrior. I cuddle my dog or my dog licks me and it all goes away because it's funny. You can just tap your brain to remind it. All the crazy words will blow out of your brain. If you are angry you can take it out of your mouth and throw it away. Don't yell at them, then they may get your angriness. You can go in a secret spot and yell it out or go in the swimming pool.

As mentors and co-learners in the children's journeys, are you sharing and allowing their wonder, curiosity and pain? As Dr Suess explains so well, **there's a very good chance you'll meet things that scare you right out of your pants. There are some down the road between hither and yon, that can scare you so much that you won't want to go on.** However, **'You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself in any direction you choose.'** What carrots or tools do you think children can develop to help them in times of uncertainty in their lives ahead?²

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Where do shadows go when it's dark?

Shadows go into the ground when it's dark because the sun is not there and the sun makes the shadows. It goes into the ground because it soaks into the soil.

When beginning an investigation one often wonders what path the children will take and follow. While we as the teachers have an intent and set up the environment to facilitate this, we realise that it is important to allow the children time to explore the many possibilities and let them discover things for themselves.

This year, as a year level we began an investigation on 'light'. Our intent in our class was to see how much the children already knew about light and observe the way the children used the tools and items that had been set up in the studio.

We began by asking the children what does the word 'light' mean to you?

Electricity doesn't only support light inside, it is everywhere because the atoms are made out of protons and electrons and it gives us energy. It was Albert Einstein.

Light from the sun is hot.

Because the sun is made out of fire.

Then we gave the children time to explore light both inside and outside.

We watched with intrigue as the children started playing, experimenting, formulating and testing their theories.

We wondered in which direction they would go. Would the provocation of a light table, overhead projector and a few objects steer them in a particular direction? Or would their own understandings of light form the precursor to the path they would take? (Fig. 1, 2 & 3)

Louis Malaguzzi, educator and founder of the Reggio Emilia approach, wrote that **"Children do not live - as many still believe - in a mythical and pre-intellectual dimension, but they are capable**



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



of constructing thoughts and reflections because knowledge is with them, right from birth, in the heart of life itself. Children, above all when together with other children, are inventors, “safe-crackers”, and re-builders of theories and behaviors that elude any presumptuousness or predictability of methods. Children do not wait for our permission to think. Indeed, children are bursting with ideas that are always impatient to escape through language (and we say a hundred languages) to connect and communicate with the things of the world.”¹

What we discovered was that there were a group of children who were interested in shadows, where shadows come from and how shadows are formed. They made shadows with their hands using the overhead projector, looked at the shadows made from the light coming through the windows and studied their own shadows. (Fig 4 & 5)

Light makes shadows. I can make shadows with my fingers.

Light is coming through the window, it's coming from the sun, that's what makes the shadows.

When you stand in the light you can make your own shadow.

The children decided that they wanted to know more about their own shadows and that because they felt the sun was an important component of their shadows, chose to go outside to further explore this.

We wondered what made them curious about light and shadows. Was it the mystery that surrounds them?

Was it the fact that shadows seem so magical?

How much did the children already know about shadows and was it this knowledge that created such an interest in shadows?

Loris Malaguzzi stated “**But what are the reasons that make (or can make) shadows so attractive to children, something that they can confront with such fondness and fascination in their play, in their words and in their thoughts? Shadows have a number of**

truly special qualities: They are capable of incredible and amusing paradoxes and mysteries (why is a shadow there but you can't hold it? Why doesn't it weigh anything?). They are extremely evocative and can be found anywhere.”²

My shadow moves when I do and it does the same thing.

You have to look behind you to see your shadow.

When it's sunny everything has a shadow, but not in the shade. The sun causes the shadow

Your shadow is not colour because it's not you; it's just you reflecting.

I think that shadows are magic. (Fig. 6 & 7)

“Exploration of shadows is especially appropriate for young children because children are often intrigued by shadow phenomena. Shadows are mysterious—they come and go; appear sometimes in front of us, sometimes behind, sometimes on the ceiling, sometimes singly, sometimes in pairs; can be tall or short, partial or complete – and yet they are a part of children's everyday experiences.”³

For us this investigation of shadows was a vehicle for a myriad of explorations for the children including:

Formulating their theories.

Testing their theories.

Using a variety of tools to gather data.

Explaining their theories.

Revising their theories based on their explorations.

Documenting their theories and knowledge.

In order for us to give the children every opportunity to explore the phenomena of shadows in great depth, it was important to give them much time and many different experiences and tools.

On this occasion we took photos of the children and their shadows and then gave them time to study these photos. We had many discussions related to the photos, the children's wonderings and the discoveries

they made. We gave them time to explore their wonderings, test their theories and ideas, document their findings and share their discoveries.

Everyone's shadow has no colour.

When you take a photo of your shadow your shadow stays on the camera because it's you.

No shadow is the same size because it's a reflection of you.

My shadow is joined to my hands and feet because my hands and feet are touching the ground. (Fig. 8 & 9)

However, at the same time we didn't want to lose sight of the importance of the children's imagination, creativity and the magical side of shadows.

In her book 'Shadows and Reflections', Tana Hoban clues children into this phenomenon, creating a story that explores the beauty of shadows. “**Shadows and reflections are all around us – under our feet, over our heads, directly in front of us... When we look with our minds and hearts and imaginations our surroundings are forever changed.**”⁴

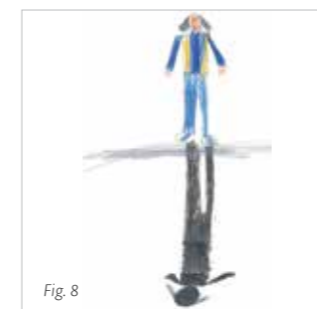
How could we ensure that we did not lose this quality during our investigation?

We began by posing the following question to the children. Where do shadows go at night or when it is dark?

My shadow goes to the moon when it is dark at night because it goes to the moon when you are asleep. Your shadow flies away to sleep on the moon and it comes back to you when you wake up.

Shadows go to Fairy land when it's night because it's night in Fairy land. They go there because I'm asleep and the fairies are awake. In the morning my shadow comes back to me and the fairies go to sleep.

When it's dark my shadow goes to Butterfly land because when it's dark on earth its light in Butterfly land and the shadows want to be able to



see each other. It leaves Butterfly land when it gets dark and comes back to me because when it's dark in Butterfly land I am light.

My shadow goes to the sky when it is dark because when you can't see it it is up in the sky because it's still there you just can't see it because it is dark. You can only see it when there's light or it's sunny.

This investigation continues to engage the children and there are still many questions and wonderings they wish to research. These include the concept of time related to the position of the sun and the earth, measurement related to the size of their shadow in relationship to themselves, and what else has shadows?

This investigation continues to engage the children and there are still many questions and wonderings they wish to research. These include the concept of time related to the position of the sun and the earth; measurement related to the size of their shadow compared to themselves; and what else has shadows? (Fig. 10 & 11)

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Figures

Fig. 1, 2 & 3 Exploring light, shape and colour.

Fig. 4-5 Exploring light and shadows.

Fig. 6-7 Looking at our shadows in relation to the sun.

Fig. 8-9 The children's drawings of their shadows in relation to themselves.

Fig. 10-11 The children's drawings of where they think their shadows go when it's dark or at night.

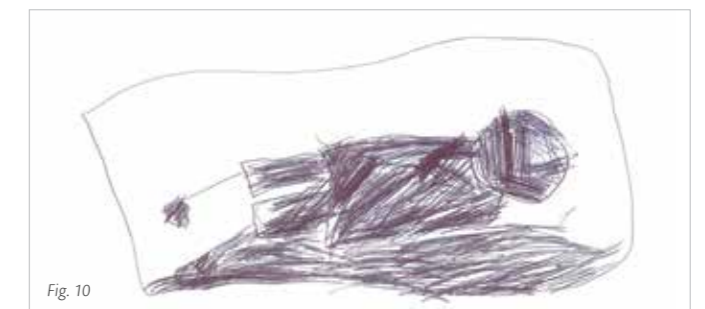




Fig. 25

Year 1

Year 1
Cross Class

We are making history now at this moment...



Fig. 2

“
Teacher as Researcher... A sense of history... A sense of place...developing relationships... A sense of land - The land and its resources, Stories unfold... Mark making meaning...The past, present and future...”

Looking back on our learning and research at the beginning of this year, our second school year with our now Year 1 cohort, we contended that reflecting on the past, awareness of our identity and culture in the present and projections for the future would continue to be our ongoing investigation.

For us, it is the constant discussion of exploring the intent, the questions, the provocations we would employ to uncover, go ‘beyond the obvious’, support many responses, wonderings, suppositions and developing theories.

The following Year 1 articles focus on time, memory, traditions, culture and families and how these elements espouse and strengthen our bonds of communication.

We continued to listen to family stories and traditions and the importance of handing down to the next generation, which has through research and experience formed and continues to form one’s sense of identity and community. Our families and their ancestors stem from many different countries and cultures and here in our school at least one branch of each family resides in Melbourne embedded within the multi-cultural Australia. We would also highlight and explore Indigenous Australian culture and history during the year. We pondered over the fact that we could easily obtain readily available literature and view artefacts for this focus however, we asked ourselves in what way would this further our own learning alongside the children? What were the elements when discussing country, culture and communication?

Earlier this year, together with some of my colleagues, we attended a professional learning seminar ‘Connecting to Country - Sharing the Stories.’¹ Three artists shared their expertise one of whom, as a sculptor, workshopped with us. We gained an understanding of community installations representing history and the creation of structures using natural materials which in some cases were not

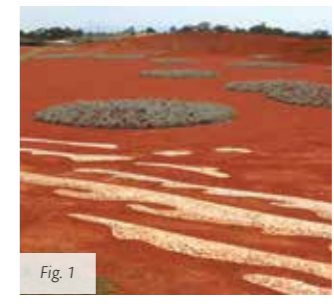
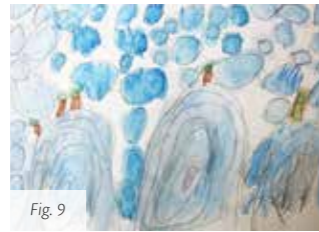


Fig. 1



Fig. 3



permanent but ephemeral. This concept was one we would pursue during our investigation this year.

We also set out to view the opening of the new Australian Gardens at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Cranbourne.² The array of coloured soils, plant and tree species related to climate regions and cultural significance were extensive and provoked questions about the links between culture and land. In listening to the education officer, the value of sharing oral stories was powerful as was the education officer at the Royal Botanic Gardens (RBC) in Melbourne where, together with the children, we participated in an Indigenous Resource Trail that highlighted the history and resources of this area. (Fig. 1) After visiting both gardens the impact of what had been shared was significant to previous visits we may have made with family and friends.³

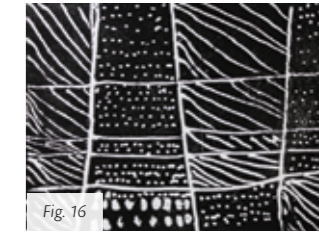
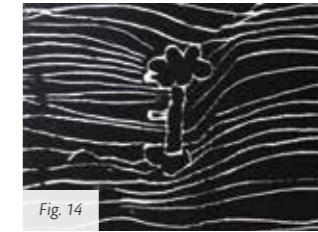
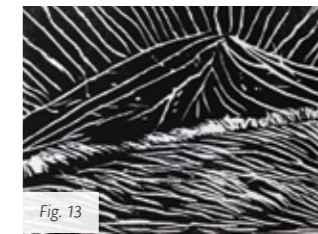
We discussed ways of sharing history and culture, as narratives and as story tellers.

Following our visit to the RBC the children were asked to recall a place they had travelled to and a memory of this time and place. The impact of our time with Trevor (the facilitator of our experience at the RBC) gave the children another reference point when retelling their memories. (Fig. 2)

We also viewed photographs by renowned photographer Yann Arthus-Bertrand who in sharing his observations and memories of places he has visited offered another lens, the 'land from above' using aerial photography.⁴ This was a further provocation for the children to share new ways of telling a story. The children marvelled at Yann's photographic stories in each singular photo. The phenomena of nature in the formation of patterns of the landscape in these photographs caused great discussion that these patterns were created and not naturally occurring. The extensive travels this photographer has embarked on as part of his work and passion for nature deepened the children's understandings of the many ways of communicating and storytelling. The children discussed their memories of places that they had visited with their families. What aspect of this memory would they make visible and remain with them after returning. This was an opportunity to facilitate different way of seeing and making visible one's thoughts as well as exploring

how groups made visible their thinking through a collective experience. The children shared their memories through painting and drawings as they discussed their recollections with the group. (Fig 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 & 10)

We continued to read Indigenous Australian stories and noted the spiritual links to the land and the morals behind the stories. Paintings by Indigenous Australian artists focusing on ancestral stories of the land also featured in our research with the children. We explored ideas about colour, shape and pattern as elements that reflected a particular style and cultural significance. This research, as teachers, continued to inform our own understandings and the building of our shared knowledge. A new exhibition of Indigenous art from Australia and the Tiwi and Torres Strait Islands at the Ian Potter Centre NGV Australia, focusing on four elements of nature, Fire, Earth, Wind and Water was for us an important opportunity to view story telling in other forms and for different purposes.⁵ The diversity of materials used and the significance of both the material and the purpose evoked rich discussion amongst the children, teachers and parent volunteers who joined us for this excursion. Children's discussions and conjectures continued back at school, in particular the idea of what does a story share, for what purpose and who and how many will share it? For us it was also continuing to build on our knowledge of Indigenous history being informed and looking at the breadth of this history and the many peoples, languages and stories shared in many forms and styles.



The children's developing understanding of literacies beyond the book was one of our key intents as well as cultural diversities and modes of sharing was another element.

When looking at Art history the concept of narratives and storytelling in paintings, sculptures and varying installations continued to broaden both the children and our own understandings.

Through this investigation the children also learnt new skills, explored new materials and applied this to documenting their observations and imagination. At the core was one of our main tenets inspired by the renowned poem by Loris Malaguzzi, The Hundred Languages which highlights as a metaphor they many ways children think and learn and as a reminder to us as educators.⁶ The offering of many materials during this investigation and the developing of relationships with these materials would be an important element throughout the year and beyond.

The idea of 'mark making meaning' was ever present as both the teachers and the children documented their understandings during this investigation. Marks in paint, print, natural materials... the children became detectives in search of the detail, recording their findings and their thinking about its meaning. The children were curious in exploring the technique of engraving 'lines of meaning' to share their ideas from the naturally occurring patterns of the land. They were further surprised by the effects of these lines when using a printing press to print off copies of their design. The moment of suspense when turning the wheel of the press and then printing their design, to be admired and reviewed by their peers was visible. As too, the children's realisation that one could add another layer of lines to the design and reprint with additional information.

Initially the prints were in black ink, an effect which focused on the lines as a determinate of the intent of their design. Later experiments with coloured printing inks was employed, however it was interesting to note the children's return to the black and white image for reprinting. (Fig. 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 & 16)

The sensory nature of these materials and the children's more deep rooted understanding would empower their knowledge back to recall on specific materials or skills for future explorations.

We wonder about children's intrinsic desire to connect to nature. Our previous workshop with an environmental artist and sculptor, for us as teachers provided us with a strong refocus on what conveys meaning and for what purpose.

In the previous year the children had explored the local areas and parkland, observing the natural surrounds, both flora and fauna and we wondered what was different about their collaboration at the RBC when asked to think about the surrounds they were in. Was it the retelling of the Indigenous history of the area and the resources found there? Was it the highlighting of the sense of smell, touch, taste and sound that we were asked to experience and understand the importance of survival and nurture? What followed was the creation of stories. What was the basis? The children's collection of natural materials; touching, smelling comparing could have been enough.



However instinctively they began to sort and discuss and so too stories were created. Some based on the materials themselves. Others used the natural materials, similar to the drawing with a pencil where natural materials became the outline for the canvas. And then for some it was important to retell orally their story. (Fig. 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 & 22)

So what makes history? *As one child so eloquently shared during our discussion at the RBG whilst making these installations, we are making history now at this moment...*

So from the past, to the present now what of the future? It appears it is the constant going back if not far then from recent history to assist us to problem solve, to dig deeper...

At the Ian Potter Centre looking back at the concept of leaving one's mark or marks was revisited by looking into traditional and ceremonial objects and large paintings based on ancestral stories made by Indigenous Australian artists and Artists from the Tiwi and Torres Strait Islands. Marks engraved, marks painted, marks woven, marks sculptured. In some instances marks made by individuals, but largely marks shared by a group. The idea of collaboration and community were for us a major factor.

The painting by the 22 women was very detailed. It inspired me and made me think. In response to the children listening to a story about one of the collaborative paintings in the exhibition one child responded; If I had known when I was young there I would have looked for it too. At the end of their two years together our classes traditionally leave a memory for the school and for themselves of their time together. Leaving their mark... The idea of a 'story pole' as named by one of the children instilled in this group our philosophy of group learning, support and collaboration. The planning and sharing of ideas began with the class and teachers. The teachers shared these story ideas in many meetings and together with teachers and children experimented with the use of clay in this instance for the purpose of creating pole like structures. One could sense the momentum and focus of this intent. The final poles will remain in the ELC with this groups stories revisited by many groups of children, teachers and families who will follow these groups as they leave the ELC to continue into Year 2. The strength of an individual's identity is dependent on their connected and shared group identity. An individual is as strong as the group. (Fig. 23, 24 & 25)

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Fig. 18



Fig. 20



Fig. 19



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24

Year 1E

What is our footprint?

“

During travel we have the opportunity to observe the world through different eyes. Different cultures, different perspectives, different ways of surviving. In my recent travels to Africa, I witnessed many lifestyles and perspectives different from my own.”

Within the communities I engaged with, I observed rich cultures of history and tradition, stories, skills and lifestyles that had been handed down from one generation to the next. It was while on safari in South Africa that I was really struck by the skills of our tracker as he spotted tiny chameleons by torchlight, 10 metres off the road in lush foliage because of a slight difference in the green of its skin from the leaves; animals from hundreds of metres away from an out of place hair that was otherwise completely camouflaged to the untrained eye; and identify and follow many different tracks or marks left by wild animals, deciphering how recently they were there and in which direction they might be headed. I became interested in how he seemed so easily intuitive when it came to tracking the animal kingdom. How did he develop these skills? In presenting my wonderings, he quite simply stated “My father taught me and my grandfather taught him. It is a part of my family. I have been tracking for five years, but long before that”.

As I continued my travels, I found that my experiences in Africa were in fact giving me another opportunity to explore some of the concepts that we had been researching in our year 1 ongoing investigation, that of traditions and skills that are passed down through families and cultures. I began observing these ideas everywhere, through the different cultures I observed, the stories I heard and the lifestyles that were led. It made me begin to wonder what had been passed down in my family.

Upon returning to school, we began to research and explore ways in which history, traditions and understandings were passed down in our Indigenous Australian culture through stories, rock art, paintings, weavings, upright logs, tools, lifestyle and the dreaming for future generations to share.

One particular part of our research struck us as quite incredible. While watching an episode of ‘First Footprints’ on the ABC, the excavation of an area in the Kimberley’s revealed over 450 fossilised footprints from the ice age 20,000 years ago. These footprints were able to be interpreted by two Pindiby trackers with the most incredible acknowledgements about our Australian ancestors. “These men are among the last people with the traditional skills to understand the subtle marks in the sand and clay. What the trackers revealed was an intimate snap shot of life 20,000 years ago”.²

It struck us that there is so much in our history that is still relevant and useful today and made us wonder again what skills we have that have been handed down. In fact, more specifically, it made us

wonder what it is that we will leave behind for future generations. What mark or footprint do we want to leave?

"To be able to look back and say, well you know, those prints were left there by my ancestors..."³ is quite a remarkable thing as "a footprint is a very personal signature of an individual... It's like your hand shake or your smile".⁴ What therefore do our children think is their mark?

We asked the children to consider some of the things that had been passed down in their families and what made them important to keep as a tradition.

Music, because my great Aunt was famous for the violin. My dad plays the bassoon and the clarinet, my nana plays the piano and I can play the clarinet. It is important because it makes people happy. (Fig. 1)

I learn French. My whole family speaks French because they come from France. We sing a song at bedtime called 'Fait do do'. It is important because it is a special way to communicate with each other.

Cooking and baking. We have special recipes for cakes and cupcakes. Some recipes we use are special secret recipes which only our family knows. It is important that I learn these recipes so I can keep passing these traditions on in the future. (Fig. 2)

We found that many of the children shared similar traditions or skills that were passed down. Many had 'secret' recipes, sporting obsessions, heirlooms or festivals they celebrated and that were important to their family. This turned our focus to the question 'what do we all therefore have in common?' What is it that bonds us as a culture that is important for others to know about us? As the children have now been together for nearly two years, they have many shared experiences such as their first day of school, friendship groups, likes and dislikes and their learning. Last year each Prep class created a flag to represent their class community. They discussed what was important to them and what made them a cohesive group. We continued this idea of a shared understanding this year. What is it then that they now feel is important for others to know about us as they move on to new experiences and opportunities, new class groups and friendships? What will they take with them from their experiences over the last two years? What do they think about themselves as learners and as people?

As a part of our research, together with our Arts Educator, we visited the Australian Indigenous Collection at the Ian Potter Centre. One particular painting struck us as being quite unique in that it was created by 22 Pintupi female artists. This painting represented the intersecting narratives of the women, their kin and their country as they journeyed across the land. How could we as a group of 24 children, leave our narrative, or footprint as a collective? The second work in the gallery that both fascinated and resonated with both the children and the teachers were the upright logs. In each region, these were used in different ways for ceremonial purposes.

In our discussions with the children about how we might present ourselves to others, they explored the different works that we had observed and decided that they would like to leave a memory of

themselves on a story pole in the form of an upright log. These would then be placed somewhere in the grounds where the school community would be able to view them and know who we are.

In creating our clay story poles, the children brainstormed concepts that they felt were important in making us who we are as a group and what they wanted others to know about them. The children wrote down their ideas and then identified similarities between them. They were then asked to think about how they might represent these ideas through symbols and illustrations, like the Indigenous people had. After much exploration we discussed five concepts that the children wanted to hand on for the school community to know about them,



with two interconnecting ideas. (Fig. 3) Much time was then spent creating their stories using clay. (Fig. 4 & 5)

We are unique.

We are a team.

We are kind and caring.

We are problem solvers.

We are thinkers and learners.

We are Jewish.

We are Australian.

“ The children have developed a strong sense of who they are now. They have shared many experiences with one another. They have developed a strong bond with one another that they can call upon in the future. They have created many lasting memories. These have made big impacts in their growth as a group and as individuals with many interconnecting stories. They have presented how they would like to be remembered. The question now is how will they remember themselves? ”

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Stories matter.
Many stories
matter...
So what will be
our story in this
land to which we
belong?

The questions we faced with our big idea this year, "We are all part of one land" were how do we help our children to understand that this is so and what do we mean by one land? "How does understanding another culture help you understand your own?" For the benefit of our students, the land we wanted to investigate is the land we inhabit, our country of Australia. We thought to answer the questions we posed by considering them through the frameworks of Community, Culture and Communication. Having looked at our local neighbourhood the previous year, the children had a sense of community and location that was relevant to them. How to extend their sense of community and their appreciation of the history of their land? We needed to expand their outlook from the local to the larger community.

With this in mind, we took the Aboriginal Heritage Trail at the Melbourne Royal Botanic Gardens with Trevor, an indigenous educator and the children were fascinated by the knowledge he imparted. They tasted indigenous plants that tasted like peas. They rubbed their backs on the massage tree. They learnt from Trevor how the first people made and used many pieces of the equipment he showed us. They were intrigued for he had opened up a new world for them and stirred their imaginations. (Fig. 1, 2, 3 & 4) Thus the question,

“
If the indigenous people have lived in
Australia for more than 50,000 years,
how does Trevor know all about the
things he told us?”

His grandfather told him all about it. My grandfather tells me lots of things. Maybe he used his schema and he was an aboriginal.

It's like a train, passing on how he knew all the words that his dad told him.

Maybe when he was born he was still in the culture and his parents told him about the culture and boomerangs and weapons...they taught him all the ways of the aboriginals and all the things they do.

What were the implications of this question? Where would it lead us? The children in our class are descendants of migrants from all over the world, bringing their own traditions and flavours to our community. They bring their shared Jewish history, the rituals they hold sacred as well as their own individual stories. **What has been passed down to us?** We asked them to share what had been passed on to them from their heritage, their ancestors.

My Buba is teaching me to cook traditional Jewish foods. She learnt from her family a long time ago and I will teach this to my children.

Supporting the Geelong Football Club. My grandfather taught my dad and he taught me and my sisters. My Ganga used to take us to all the games and I will take my children. (Fig. 5 & 6)



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

The sharing of our stories about what has been handed down has added another rich layer to the culture of our class as the children drew conclusions from the question "Why might it be important to pass things down, like stories and traditions and all the things that have been passed down to you?"

Every Friday you wouldn't know how to do Friday nights if you're Jewish. When you pass things down you can learn about other people from the things that have been passed down to them.

We can teach our own children and pass it way down to the future. If it didn't happen you wouldn't know your culture and you wouldn't learn it.

If it is passed down to you then you can teach other people that thing and you'll always know it when you grow up.

Realising the importance of passing on traditions helped the children value their traditions. It has also helped them realise the importance of aboriginal rock drawings in the sense that they were a means of preserving valuable messages. We watched segments of the television show, "Footprints" which showed the rock art of Arnhem land.

Reflecting on an aboriginal art work by Betty Club Mpetanye also made the children's thinking visible and showed their growing understanding of how and why indigenous people continue to paint to document their stories.

Maybe she wants to tell us something on a picture. She wanted to paint a message with symbols. Maybe it's about what she has done as the years have passed. Maybe she wanted to share her dreams.

After a visit to the Ian Potter Centre to view the Indigenous collection, we reflected on the many ways traditions can be passed on, such as through dance, drawings, song and rituals. Following

several discussions we decided to pass on our story to the coming generations of the ELC, to leave our mark, to hand our story on. But what is our story? The Nigerian author, Chimamanda Adichie talks about the danger of one story, how one story limits us and does not do us justice. She discusses how when only one story of a people is presented it creates a stereotype, which is then perpetuated and seen to be a truth.¹ How then do our stories fit into the story of our land? How does our community express and communicate the culture we have developed? We all bring our own story to this collective story. Our heritage, our connection to the land, the relationships we have forged over the past two years together need to gel into our story. We felt it was time to revisit our class flag, which we had made the previous year. In small groups the children tried to piece this narrative together. They spent several meetings reflecting on their journey as friends and learners until they were satisfied with their accounts.

We are a team. We never give up. We are a group of friends. We help each other. We share. We share our thoughts. We let people play and there is always room for one more. We are happy and every day we get better. We have great teachers. We are playful. We do our best. We are strong of heart. We love reading and writing and we are smart.

The well known adage, "How do you know where you are going if you don't know where you have been?"² holds a strong significance and message for us as well. It is important for us to realise the collective story of our community, to take it with us as we move forward, to feel a part of the narrative that has formed us for the past two years. As the writer Chinua Achebe tells us, "We need a balance of stories where every person will be able to contribute to a definition of themselves."³



Fig. 4

“ Reading the thinking behind what these children feel has been their journey, is truly heartening. Their story is one of positivity, of optimism about themselves and tells us that their time together has allowed them to grow into the cast of a story which will stand them in good stead. It will contribute to our land in many ways which will be beneficial to its future. It is a collective tapestry, pieced together from many perspectives which found their basis in the fundamentals of what has been passed down to them. It is a story one is proud to read and one which we know has not yet finished. It will be exciting to see where this story will take these children as they continue to grow into the future. After all, stories matter.”

References:

1. Chimamanda Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," TED talks. 7.10.2009
2. Cicero
3. Chinua Achebe, "Things Fall Apart", 1958, Heineman Ltd. as told by Chimamanda Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," TED talks. 7.10.2009



Fig 5



Fig 6

Year 1R

Why is it so important to teach our students about the past? If we know about the past does this change our perspective of the present? How does the past shape our present identity? These three questions have been an important provocation to help guide our investigation.

“ History provides us a context from which to understand ourselves and others.”

The idea of the importance of knowing about our past resonates very closely to my own personal belief and pedagogy. My own studies at high school of the Holocaust had a profound effect on me and taught me how important it was to teach about the past and how it is integral in forming the people we are today. I am a true believer that in order to understand our present identity we need to know where we have come from.

From another perspective I believe knowing about the past helps us learn and grow. The importance of learning from the mistakes of our near past and from long ago is something that we talk about and emphasise in the class regularly. The children understand that it is okay to make mistakes as long as you use them to learn even if it takes you a while.

Our on-going investigation this year has focused on the children discovering their identity based on learning about aspects of their past and how this shapes their developing identity. There was a particular focus on how different traditions, customs and cultural aspects of their families have shaped their identity.

This journey began when students visited the Royal Botanic Gardens. During this visit the children met Trevor. Trevor is the Indigenous Education Officer at the Royal Botanical Gardens. Trevor shared with the children stories about how he learnt from his older generations to do certain things. He spoke about how he used different tools and about how he learnt to use different plants. Furthermore he explained how his elders had learnt from their elders.

The children also took part in a Tanderrum, an Indigenous welcoming ceremony to the land. The ceremony highlighted the respect the Indigenous people have for their land and their shared responsibility in sustaining our environment. Trevor explained how this ceremony has been handed down from one generation to another for thousands of years and how it forms a very important part of his identity. (Fig. 1)

In the classroom students reflected on these conversations. The children wondered how if Indigenous people have lived in Australia for more than 50,000 years how does Trevor know all these things?

Maybe the first two people who were born sent it down to the next people who were born until it got to Trevor.

“History provides us a context from which to understand ourselves and others.”¹



Fig. 1

The children also investigated how such traditions form an important part of Trevor's life and how they have made him the person he is.

To give a greater context to this understanding, as a teaching team we thought it was important for the children to investigate what traditions and customs have had been handed down in their families and what role this has taken in forming their own developing identities. As a teaching team we compiled a survey that was sent home to students' families. The children were encouraged to fill out the survey together with their families. They were asked:

What has been handed down to you?

Who taught you?

How did they learn this?

How did they teach you?

Do you teach anyone else this?

The children were encouraged to document this information with text, photographs, video and drawings.

On completing the survey with their families, the children shared their findings with their peers. The children spoke about a range of experiences that had been passed down to them. Some children

shared how certain "Jewish traditions" had been passed down to them .

My Mum and Grandma have taught me about Jewish Festivals and Traditions. They are important to our family.

Mummy taught me the rituals of Shabbat by showing me and doing them with me. She learnt from her parents, and they learnt from their parents and they learnt from their parents... (Fig. 2)

Many children spoke about how food was an important part of their family's traditions and how this has been passed down from one generation to another

My Great-grandmother has taught me to make the perfect Matzah Ball. It is perfectly round and they just melt in your mouth. She took it very seriously. Each Passover she would do the honours of making the Matzah balls. My Mum now makes them and I now watch her in the kitchen

My grandma has shown me how to make Gefilte Fish. We make it every week. It is an important Russian dish.

Other children spoke about how language was something that has been passed down to them and formed an important part of their identity.

My Mum, Dad, Grandpa and Grandma have taught me Russian. We speak it at home. I read Russian books and watch movies in Russian. We celebrate Russian festivals (Maslinita). I am going to teach my children one day.



Fig. 2

Other students spoke about how their older generations have inspired their passions and interests.

My Safta has taught me to appreciate Music and Art. Everyone always sung to me and my Safta took me to galleries. I am teaching this to my friends now. (Fig. 3)

My passion for football has been passed down from my Dad and from his Dad before him. There is a culture of football obsession in his family. He (grandpa) has always bought me footy cards and it is always very exciting to share in the opening of the packet.

In discussing the information from the surveys the children realised how different they all were and that they all had come from different pasts and backgrounds. We later pondered if they had been taught or handed down different traditions or skills would they be different people.

We would be a different family if we didn't build together.

I would be a different culture if my parents hadn't taught me Russian.

This part of our ongoing investigation has now lead me to some further questions; Does history naturally occur or do certain events facilitate history? Furthermore if we had not provoked certain questions with the children would they have come to the same realisation about the link between their past and present and their developing identity? (Fig. 4)



Fig. 3

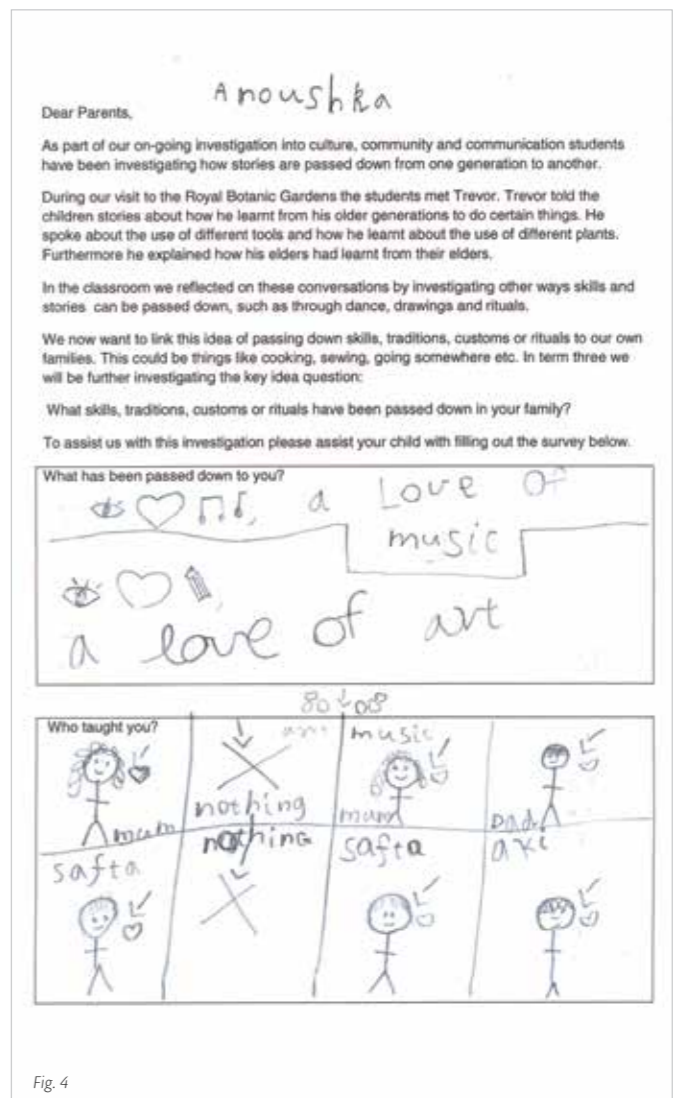


Fig. 4

References

1. <http://www.dltk-kids.com/articles/whyhistory.html>

Contributors

3 Year Old Kinder

Kinder 3G

You can't see what I am telling you, it's in my head. I am thinking before I start drawing...

Toby Adeney, Samuel Aldworth, Jerome Braun, Jacob Burrows, Yhonatan Carmeli, Evie Finkel, Saskia Fischer-Wolf, Eligh Harris, Zabi Kalbstein, Coco Koronczyk, Ava Levin, Lior Mazer, Maddy Nussbaum, Edith Schluter, Jesse Stowe-Lindner, Jade Swart, Abby Unglik, Noa Whytcross, Eli Wolkenberg, Ashton Zohar

with

Gali Sommer, Dana Elayev, Megan Jay, Rosemary Barry

Kinder 3J

What's in a potato?

How a potato became a catalyst for enquiry

Harlow Birner, Ella Carmeli, Jason Dodge, True Drezner, Emilia Engelman, Orli Erenboim, Luka Federman, Saskia Gelbak, Amber Goldberg, Mia Grossman, Luca Heelan, Noah Herszfeld, Jack Jolson, Lyla Krasnostein, Remy Krasnostein, Shane Kravietz, Annabel Naphtali, Archie Rosenberg, Sophie Sztar, Hugo Wise, Zac Yates

with

Judy Blumberg, Pazit Landau, Arlene Meyerowitz, Leh-Anne Engel

Kinder 3L

A pedagogy of belonging... and the significance of a Hebrew name.

Darcy Arrow, Jack Barnett, Luella Besen, Chloe Freund, Gabriel Harrison, Zoe Janover, Sunny Kister, Joel Krause, Harlow Lewin, Evie Lichtenstein, Lielle Liderman, Harry Lurie, Pablo Magid, Albie Munz, Yarin Peretz, Samuel Razbash, Harvey Ryan, Joah Scher, Zac Steedman, Gabrielle Zimmet

with

Lindsay Miller, Adi Barzilay, Caroline Morrow, Julia Levine

4 Year Old Kinder

Kinder 4E

I want to do my eyes, my ears, my cheeks, my hair, my helmet, my nose... but I can't fit it all on!

Ryder Arrow, Dana Blecher, Samuel Brover, Nicholas Bursztyn, Lola Dabscheck, Asher Engel, Sam Engelman, Saffron Fischl, Jacob Hansen, Jonty Israel, Billy Joachim, Gisele Joske, Harley Karro, Emma Kulbak, Zoe Lasky, Jessie Levin, Jonty Litwinow, Joshua Morley, Leon Pratt, Jake Rosenbaum, Leo Shaw, Suede Solomon, Joey Somers, Remy Stimson, Eden Voskovsoynik, Joshua Zimmet

with

Elise Rotstayn, Miri Sheffer-Watson, Chris Georgalas, Julia Levine

Kinder 4M

The words outside us come from our brains...

Lex Amira, Eden Castelan, Zahara Dvir, Jesse Felman, Toby Gelbart, Hayden Goldberg, Olivia Hershan, Lachlan Keddie, Ori Kleifeld, Claudia Kutner, Sienna Levin, Arel Liderman, Asher Lifszyc, Gaby Nussbaum, Emilie Posner, Ethan Rabinowitz, Nadav Ryan, Raphael Sable, Yoni Shagan, Alexandra Southwick, Mia Szmulewicz, Tom Tamir, Lola Upiter, Dean Waterson, Ashton Zalcmán

with

Megan Miller, Ilana Cohen, Rosemay Barry, Merylin Sternstain

Kinder 4R

You have to be born to belong to the country.

Peri Afranco, Ori Brod, Amelie Ciddor, Charlie Davis, Ella Davis, Lara Dodge, Arthur Edwards, Tara Filer, Felix Fink, Noah Goldberg, Joshua Holzer, Max Israelsohn, Blake James-Wurzel, Mia Kanevsky, Ella Kapper, Halle Krasnostein, Jaiden Kulawiec, Joshua Leighton, Isabel Levy, Ashley Podlubny, Benji Rosenbaum, Nick Rosenbaum, Jacob Rosin, Ishan Venkat

with

Ranjina Najat, Tamar Herman, Margaret Todd, Ayana Shavit

Prep

Prep Cross Class

How do we interpret light?

Prep L, Prep R and Prep N children and teachers

with

Helene Oberman

Prep Jewish Studies Cross Class

And there was light!

Prep L, Prep R and Prep N

with

Sigal Tirosh, Desre Kaye and Ety Azikri

Prep L

Encouraging creative thinking and process rather than transmitting and seeking out circumscribed truths.

Grace Brott, Noah Burrows, Lexi Bursztyn, James Degen, Bailey Freund, Tali Gold, Nathan Gomo, Raffy Kallenbach, Hugo Krasnostein, Liran Liderman, Jazmin Mahemoff, Jay Marabel-Whitburn, Mika Mihalovski, Sascha Sable, Toby Snyder, Jonah Stowe-Lindner, Dylan Swart, Willow Thurston, Ava Wilson, Dion Zukerman

with

Linda Baise, Desre Kaye, Nikki Kausman, Zia Freeman

Prep N

Things can look beautiful in the dark

Zara Amira, Noah Bardas, Romy Broons, Peaches Cohen, Rochelle Fishman, Liam Gaspar, Asha Goldberg, Nicholas Gomo, Dean Gorski, Jonah Harrison, Tilly Heelan, Hope Krongold, Jeremy Levy, Ethan Lust, Michael Mashchenko, Helena Mazer, Harry Naphtali, Dylan Sormann

with

Nicole Huxtable, Zoe Winograd, Ety Azikri, Rajitha Subasinghe

Prep R

Where do shadows go when it's dark?

Benji Better, Lola Fisher, Aerin Gaspar, Noa Hansen, Ruby Held, Teal Jacobson, Charlie Kinda, Noah Klein, Justin Kohn, Abigail Krause, Zak Kutner, Rockford Levine, Erica Malet, Eden Mihalovski, Toby Mooseek, Alex Munz, Phoebe Ryan, Lisa Vainer, Woody Weissman, Sophia Wolff

with

Roz Marks, Desre Kaye, Amanda Teperman, Bella Besser

Year 1

Year 1 Cross Class

We are making history now at this moment...

Year 1E, Year 1K, Year 1R children and teachers

with

Helene Oberman

Year 1E

What is our footprint?

Darielle Alter, Dana Bagle-Zevin, Nicholas Baring, Sharni Blumenthal, Evan Delanoy, Bronte Feldman, Benjamin Felman, Tyla Fibishenko, Tiara Givoni, Chloe Gold, Stephanie Hadad, Aaron Kulawiec, Taylor Levin, Bailey Lewin, Ariel McGillivray, Gabriel Miller, Zoe Munz, Rebecca Paratz, Ricky Schwartz, Lyla Southwick, Jasmine Spiegel, Jennifer Troski, Jesse Wrobel, Jason Zufi

with

Emily Minter, Desre Kaye, Deb Braitberg, Tonia Barolsky

Year 1K

Stories matter. Many stories matter...

So what will be our story in this land to which we belong?

Amielle Asseraf, Ethan Cohen, Josh Davies, Layla Dvir, Aiden Gelbart, Hanna Goldberg, Jada Goldstat-Joffe, Sarah Greiman, Tiffany Hadad, Lexi Herszfeld, Adam Kallenbach, Abby Levin, Raphael Liberman, Rafael Lifszyc, Sunny Perelberg, Tiger Robenstone, Millie Rosenberg, Joshua Shaw, Sienna Shostak, Jack Szulanski, Ella Wilson, Jemma Wise

with

Kathleen Georgiou, Ety Azikri, Anne Budlender, Sandy Sher

Year 1R

History provides us a context from which to understand ourselves and others.

Sivan Barsheshet, Ashley Birner, Mika Erenboim, Tashi Federman, Jasmine Filer, Mark Genin, Nathan Held, Ruby Herzel, Ella Holzer, Isaac Morley, Bailey Nussbaum, Aaron Patishman, Zac Podlubny, Noa Poratt, Mia Priestler, Celine Razbash, Anoushka Russell, Bradley Shostak, Joshua Spiegel, Oscar Strauch, Romy Szmulewicz, Ethan Tanner, Georgia Troski, Mia Waislitz

with

Rachel Machlin, Robyn Winograd, Sigal Tirosh





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