



Windows into Children's Thinking

BIALIK COLLEGE, EARLY LEARNING CENTRE JOURNAL 2019

Bialik. *Be your best.*



Bialik College

From the Principal of Bialik

'What's Your Story?' is a common question, and as a pluralistic Jewish school that celebrates Judaism as a journey that describes different paths for different people, 'Stories' has been an incredible theme for the Bialik College Early Learning Centre in 2019.

At Bialik College we celebrate the diversity of our community, which hails from every corner of the Jewish world and has families who identify with all streams of Judaism as well as none.

Connecting the Stories theme in the ELC to our Bnei Mitzva program, in which every child explores their Jewish and family heritage and creates both a Roots project and a My Family Story art exhibit helps us realise our vision as a genuine community.

With children from 3 months to 18 years on our campus, our ELC has been exploring stories in family, community, history, myth and magic.

As you read through this wonderful journal of learning and growth, explore the stories and themes which complement, contrast, support and challenge your own stories. Consider the learning journey that our children have been enjoying, through text, tradition, image and form.

The Hundred Languages of Children is a foundation text for schools inspired by Reggio Emilia, and when Loris Malaguzzi referred to the Hundred Languages of Children, it was variety, change, research and wondering that he was considering.

Enjoy this journal, with its hundred stories and hundred languages.



Jeremy Stowe-Lindner
Principal

From the Head of the Early Learning Centre

“The narrative becomes a form of thought and gives structure and meaning to a story, thus giving it existence, transforming it into a life story, recreating it and giving it new meaning. ‘There is no life if it is not told,’ said Jerome Bruner. ‘The narrative gives meaning but also liveability to life, bringing synthesis, underscoring the salient features that give meaning to the past; a daily flow that would otherwise get lost in anonymity. It is a time of reflectiveness, of pauses, and interior listening. It is the time of memory.’ ”

The concept of “Stories” became the catalyst for our whole ELC investigation during 2019. This was a collaborative decision made by all educators, which gave them a sense of ownership. Presenting big ideas to children can be the spark that challenges children to reach out from their own understandings and to make connections with the understandings of others. This helps them to see, hear and respect multiple perspectives.

It began with the teachers’ exploration of what “Stories” meant to them. Thoughts, wonderings and ideas were written down. This year, for the first time, we included the parent voice as well. This documentation had a place of visual importance in the ELC where teachers could revisit and reflect on the thoughts and ideas of others. The choice of investigation was chosen for its endless possibilities and not one outcome. We hoped that each investigation would be authentic, a source of deep learning and would offer opportunities for children to engage in joyful ways.

Our professional learning and planning allows a complex and interactive process in which teacher reflection and collaboration is viewed with the utmost importance. Through observation, analysis and reflection the teachers constantly considered why they did what they did. For us research is considered a strategy, a response to curiosity and doubt. The

research is part of our everyday practice. It provides the possibility for critical thinking and constructing new knowledge.

In fact, the process is parallel to the way that we see our children learning. Our seminar meetings held weekly give opportunity for teachers to share their documentation with others and to reflect, question and learn from the different perspectives of other teachers in the group. This shared documentation is the foundation for the planning and reflecting that occurs in these meetings.

The investigations taking place in each classroom with the umbrella focus of “Stories” were seen through different lenses. The sciences, mathematics, language and literacy, geography, Jewish Studies and more.

Another first for us this year is the inclusion of our Creche into the Journal. According to Maddalini Tedeschi an educator from Reggio Emilia **“By their very nature, very young children break with tradition... These very small children propose, or we could almost say, they impose a different way of seeing on the adults.”**

What follows are not investigations in their entirety, but rather small vignettes, part of the process, from each level. The investigations may have spanned a few weeks, months or even a year and some are still ongoing. Each investigation was documented through the recording of discussions and reflections by the children and their teachers, and through photographs and other languages. **“How complex are children’s ways of building knowledge, therefore how complex are the ways of capturing it.”** (Reggio Emilia)



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 2019 – '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



[To access digital content of exhibitions](#)



Creche

Creche

Inhabiting space



Fig. 3

“

Bialik Creche opened its doors in July this year, offering the community a purpose built, carefully designed environment for learning. How was this architectural design going to support the children’s learning, connections and emotional needs? Will they enter with caution or will they be eager to explore?”

We took great care and time to observe all our visitors, families and children as they walked through this new space. Words that described their feelings upon entering were that of a sense of calm, relaxing and inviting, open and inclusive from the ceilings to the floor. The smooth rounded walls added to the combination of being intrigued yet comforted, excited and delighted.

The Fibonacci’s swirl, amongst many other design elements in the space, takes shape throughout the whole building and represents the close connection with nature, science and real life. The tones are light and textures are natural, flowing and subtle; enabling the space to be filled with endless possibilities for all that inhabit.

We have observed children and adults within the Piazza, looking up at the oversized mobile of nature and growth. It is ever moving whilst the leaves quietly and slowly drift around the stairwell, gleaming and reflecting light from the circular skylight above.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

“We think of a school for young children as an integral living organism, as a place of shared lives and relationships among many adults and very many children. We think of a school as a sort of construction in motion, continuously adjusting itself.”
 (Loris Malaguzzi),

Children chose to leave the side of their loved ones when they arrived on their first visit, so they could investigate and follow their senses. They were captured by the sounds, moved toward equipment and experiences that caught their eye and raised their hands to touch, hold objects and feel the walls in order to add another dimension to their understanding. Each step forward was an adventure, just as long as they could look back and see their ‘first teacher’. With their secure anchor they felt safe in our new but exciting space.

We view the environment as much more than a mere space, rather a place to connect with others, to trust and learn alongside each other. A realisation that to truly explore with body and mind, children and adults need faith in one another, and a security built with positive, reassuring interactions and experiences.

Our new beginning exposed more than the physical responses. It relied heavily on warmth that comes from invitation of relationships. This realisation enables us to think about what brings us all together and how the creation of a trusting environment extends a sense of belonging to all that inhabit its Fibonacci walls.



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Children are curious by nature with a thirst for knowledge and understanding. The combination of a space that invites children to enquire, research and experiment, coupled with respectful caring teachers and educators, is a recipe for a welcoming and inspiring environment.

As time has passed and the children's comfort levels have increased, we have discovered independence, confidence and a strong sense of identity. Our youngest children have been seen leaving a community Shabbat to return to their room, all by themselves and of their own choosing.

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- Fig. 1 Curious enough to leave mum's side and explore.
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 Fig.10 Growth for children and environment.



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 7



Fig. 10



3 Year Old Kinder

What is the story of our identity?



“

As a Kinder 3 team of educators, we recognised the need for our children to develop ‘knowledgeable and confident self-identities’, as written in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. With ‘Stories’ being our umbrella idea for Bialik ELC for 2019, we wondered how we could incorporate this idea as well as support the development of each child’s identity.”

We looked at the many facets of the word ‘Identity’. Vygotsky believed that social interaction plays a critical role in children’s learning and through this, children go through a continuous process of learning. Vygotsky noted, however, that culture profoundly influences this process. Imitation, guided learning and collaborative learning all play a critical part in his theory (Cherry K).¹

Wikipedia defines identity as “**the development of a distinct personality defining individuals to others and themselves. Pieces of the person’s actual identity include a sense of continuity, a sense of uniqueness from others, and a sense of affiliation.**”²

Each Kinder class has their own culture and identity. We seek, for both our children and their families, to have a sense of connectedness and belonging, a place where the children feel that these links with their family are recognised and broadened.

Reflecting on Vygotsky’s theories and our Jewish heritage we wondered how we could make a link. As is customary and traditional, Jewish children are given a Hebrew name at birth, often after a grandparent or relative that has passed on, as a way of perpetuating their memory.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 4



Fig. 3



Fig. 5

As part of our research I met with Zachary Gomo, the Head of Jewish Studies at Bialik College, to find out how Hebrew names originated. It was interesting to hear that there is no Halachic rule (Jewish law and jurisprudence based on the Talmud) to give a child a Hebrew name. It is customary but certainly not obligatory. Zachary did however say that for a child to have a Hebrew name connected to an ancestor, gives them a **“powerful sense of identity, to feel part of a legacy, giving more to who they are.”** (Zachary Gomo)³

When children join our three-year-old Kinder class we always ask for their Hebrew names, so as to build on their Jewish connection and identity. As we know a name is a powerful element of who you are, and this acknowledgement of culture reinforces the children's sense of belonging. It builds on their identity, weaving a thread to family, friends and community. The story of their name reflects a deeply thoughtful process that often includes family history and strong cultural values.

This year, as the first step in making the children aware of their Hebrew name we had a beautiful ceremony. Each child dipped a piece of challah (a plaited loaf of white bread) in honey, as they were handed their name written in Hebrew. It is customary in Jewish traditions to connect the sweetness of honey to the sweetness of learning, especially with Hebrew. (Figs. 1 & 2)

Our children's families played a significant role in this project. We asked them to send us the stories behind their children's Hebrew names, together with photos of them as babies and of the people or events they had been named after.

The parents wrote about their family histories with such love, admiration and pride...

“He was a true gentleman... respected member of the community. He prided himself on honesty and kindness.”

“She is named after her great great grandmother... she was a wonderful kind person always happy to help.”

“Her Hebrew name, is drawn from the liturgical poem Lecha Dodi (לכה דודי)...while at the hospital on a Friday morning... and as we awaited the birth, we sang this song that represents the Godly attribute of compassion.”

“She is named after her father's grandmother, who was a warm and loving presence, ... Her nurturing energy... Her name is also associated with a biblical figure, Esther, a strong woman whose pride and wisdom... yet softness...”

“She is named after two leaders in her family. Nana was caring ... We see this in our daughter in the way she cares for her sister. Grandfather... showed incredible strength... we wanted her to have the strength of him in her name and in her heart.”

As this collage of 'The stories behind our Hebrew names' grew on the board, the children would enter kinder each day eager to show their families where their story page appeared. It became a source of pride and affirmation of their heritage. (Fig. 3)

Given the children's unique personalities and families, each child's Hebrew name was celebrated in a way that involved the children themselves presenting and participating. When their day to present arrived, their excitement, joy and pride was palpable.

For these we used the parent's narratives, dramatization of Bible stories, Sabbath and classic Hebrew songs, dances and stories, and even flowers that reflected their Hebrew names. These all contributed to giving the children a frame of reference. It was interesting to see both during and after this research, how the children associated their friends' Hebrew names with one or some of the many elements used, and how a greater awareness of the significance of their name developed. (Figs. 4 & 5)



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

Much attention was focussed on the photos of themselves as babies. They loved comparing and trying to work out who each baby was... (Fig. 6)

We were babies and our mummies put us in our tummies.

I came out of my mummy's tummy.

It was interesting to observe how the children remembered their friends' Hebrew names and the songs and stories associated with them. We wondered what the children thought of the story behind their Hebrew names, and asked why they thought they had been given a Hebrew name...

Because everyone has a Hebrew name here.

Because I'm a big boy. Only big boys have Hebrew names. Little boys can't have Hebrew names. When they go outside, they grow to giants. Giants don't have Hebrew names. Birds don't have Hebrew names.

Because my mommy and daddy wanted me to have a Hebrew name, because if somebody forgets my name, I will just tell them it's Mina.

I have a Hebrew name at Kinder, because I have lots of friends at kinder to play with me.

I was born at the same time as Harlow, but she doesn't have a Hebrew name yet, only when she grows up. When I was born, I didn't have a Hebrew name, but when I was at kinder, I was Chana.

Because I'm Jewish. (What does that mean?) If you're Jewish you dress up like a fireman. I can speak Hebrew you know... achat, shtaim, shalosh, arba, chamesh.

My Hebrew name is Shoshana. It's a rose. Red roses are the queen to the roses. Me and my mumma and dadda called me Shoshana when I was a baby. Rosalie was my dadda's mumma.

One of the highlights of this research project for the children was making and eating biscuits, using Hebrew letters to form their name... *Hebrew letters are so delicious!* (Figs. 7 & 8)

This research project raised some interesting thoughts and questions for us as a team; it appeared that the children understood that they only received their Hebrew names once they came to kinder. It seemed as if the children considered this a rite of passage.

We realised that by simply telling the children what their Hebrew name was, meant that it could have been a stand-alone word. However, when they explored the stories behind their names together with their families, peers and teachers, it gave them a greater insight into the relevance of their name. It also gave them a deeper understanding of their background, strengthening their connection to one another and their unique story. Their pride in their Hebrew names appears to have added another dimension to their sense of self and story of their identity.

“We cannot live without meaning, that would preclude any sense of identity, any hope, any future.” (Carla Rinaldi)⁴

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When the superheroes came to play



“

Superheroes... baddies... and amazing vehicles...”

Our year began with 'story' as our umbrella focus. 'Our story' began when the superheroes came to play.

We need to trust children's play. Play is the concrete expression of children's wonder and it allows them to explore ideas and share it with their friends. (Paley)¹

When a child picks up a stick to be used as a weapon and wears a mask and a cape and proclaims *"I am going to save the day,"* we must realise that this is great dramatic play which can lead to wonderful learning experiences. It is play based child initiated learning. Body language is at the forefront of this play, and is really the first language children learn.

'In the land there was a vehicle- so much vehicles. They rules the whole earth in space. And there was Superheroes which fought baddies. Entrol, no encol, rockout, paycroust and encalow.'

'But there were nests in space.'

'I don't really think that there are nests in space.'

'All of the baddies took one nest and they got run over by a car in space.'

'Star wars is in space. Star Wars lives in space. It is a very scary movie. There are superheroes, baddies and amazing vehicles. They go all around the earth. The people in there in the show are just characters, so they are not real.' (Fig. 1)



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

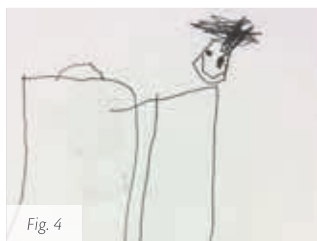


Fig. 4

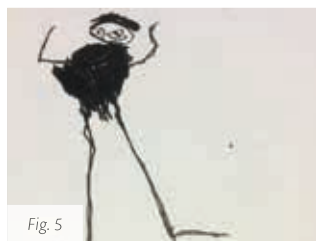


Fig. 5



Fig. 6

My Superhero is wearing a cape. His name is Starrell. But this is me as a superhero, and my name is Rocksh.

The roles children take on during dramatic play may be realistic, such as babies, teachers or doctors or they may be imaginary. (Figs. 2 & 3)

Most of the roles in superhero play are fantasy images such as monsters, dragons, fairies, kings or queens.

This is about Team wolf the teenager. The teenager is a superhero. He saves the world with his super powers. The only powers he has is that he transforms into a wolf to get the baddies with his roar.

Like this, ROAR.

*If that roar does not work then he can do an even bigger roar. Like this **ROAR!!!!*** (Figs. 4 & 5)

This role play allows the children to gain a deeper understanding of what they might have observed or even imagined. This role play provides a way for children to 'think out loud.'

Supergirl is really strange. She puts her arm up and one arm down and then she says 'Supergirl go.' (Fig. 6)

The most prevalent materials used in dramatic play are the use of costumes and props. Superhero props support exploration of more complex aspects of growing up, independence and control.

We asked some of the children a question. What makes someone a superhero?

He saves the day.

They kill monsters

They are so strong

They save the world with their powers.

They can transform.

Upon observing the children at play and even whilst they were drawing or working with clay, the subject of superheroes was almost always present, and particularly with certain children.

We were so interested to find out why and when. Were some of the children gaining information 'osmotically.' Were they made aware of the superheroes through television, marketing or stories?

It appears that most of the children's understanding of these superheroes was from media sources. Clothing, branding, parents interests, television and sometimes movies. Was the superhero play about power and control or was it the desire for friendships?

In my research and observations I found that the need for relationships with other people, and the desire for power were connected and was another aspect underlying superhero play.

Bella approached Joe and asked him, "Do you want to be Superboy?"
No, says Joe I am "octomus prime."

Great, says Bella, you can be octomus prize.

No, says Joe, not octomus prize, octomus prime.

Oh says Bella. I just watched it with my brother on TV. He saves Supergirl. She is dead sometimes.

I know about Superboys power because Bella told me what Superboys power is.

Look I am doing my exercise.

I know Superboys power is "funder" He even has another power. I can tell you the power. Rain and wind.

Yes says Bella you see those little ices (hail) on my leg. Look I have dots. This is what you do with your head.

Joe then says, do you know when Superboy puts all his powers together actually he makes a whirlwind and all the bad guys go up into the sky. It blows them up and they get captured in the whirlwind.

Bellas says, Supergirl says Great!



Fig. 7



Fig. 9



Fig. 8

You can't see Superboy. He is camouflaged so the bad guys can't see who is making the big, big whirlwind. I can draw that.

I noticed that in the superhero scenarios the children were able to develop the ability to predict, plan, and control events in order to support the friendships they had, and they did this by constantly negotiating, cooperating and even compromising.

This is where the challenge of testing their physical limits comes into play. They needed to run and jump, just like superheroes do. It involves strength, co-ordination, balance and accuracy. It is really all about body language. (Figs. 7–9)

When the young child wants to understand their feelings, they turn them into roles and actions that can be investigated through imaginative play. Fantasy monsters are most often symbols that represent children's worry, fear and anger. Magic and weapons and superpowers are the symbolic tools they use to take control of those emotions and feel safe, powerful and alive. Children use superhero play to figure out how to overcome fear, handle anger, create joy, and live with passion. It is a kind of road map of emotions. (Hoffman)²

When the superheroes come out to play they just come to save the world. I don't really know how to jump high to the roof.

I know that Hulk is really angry. I watch him on my television.

Superheroes they punch and smash and do boom and hurt themselves.

We have had an opportunity to engage with Yariv and the Dogs for Life program. We suggested through images and discussions that heroes can also have 4 legs.

This opened a discussion about different kinds of Superheroes. The children mix up their theories with reality and fantasy, obviously trying to make 'sense of the world around them.'



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

Yariv works with a young dog called Maggie and he explained to some of the children, who are very involved in Superhero fantasy play, that Maggie is considered a kind of Superhero. (Figs. 10 & 11)

I know. I can change the dogs into superheroes with my pretend watch. They fly with their pretend wings. They can have kind of capes too.

Look, that dog is wearing a pack so they can protect all the people to come out of the snow.

Look, I wear a shell back pack because it has all my gear in it.

So all these things people can't see because they are camouflaged, so the bad guys can't get my tools.

These tools can get people out of the snow and water.

Yariv explained that Maggie has a very important job and she is trained to help people, and to sometimes save peoples' lives. Maggie works with a young girl who falls asleep a lot and it is Maggies' job to wake her up by licking her face.

Can she lick my face?

Wow, she is a superhero then, but I wouldn't like my face licked by a superhero dog. I would transform.

As children get older and gain experience listening to and creating stories, their play narratives develop more continuity and structure. Children learn to compromise and cooperate within a group to craft a storyline for a game. Superhero narratives need several elements to succeed in group play. There must be powerful characters that children can identify with. At least one, and usually more, have to be considered good guys or heroes that possess superhuman abilities or props. There must be a problem or fear the characters overcome in ways that require physical skill, bravery, magic or clear thinking. Very often, this involves defeating the villain and coming to the aid of the victim. And there is usually some recognition of the hero by other characters at the end of the story. (Hoffman)²

References

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Figures

Fig. 4 This is the teenager as a wolf.

Fig. 5 This is him as a teenager.

Fig. 8 The whirlwind.

Fig. 9 I am supergirl. You can see my brain.

When the leaves came to visit

“

A few months ago, and with great anticipation we opened our doors of Kinder 3 Gimmel to the new children and their families. Our year began with the provocation of ‘Stories’ as a theme. What would our story look like? How will it be shared? These questions offered us the gift of excitedly embarking on a journey of possibilities, a research journey.”

What does STORY mean?

You read it... from the library...

You see pictures...

Stories have words... and letters...

My family photo can tell you a story...

Sometimes it comes from your head...

When you want to read a story, you can...

In our first few weeks together, we were predominantly listening to the children, parents and each other with care and respect. As we know, individual and group learning is interdependent and tightly correlated and the learning is processed by individuals but generated and constructed within a network of relationships in a group. We strongly believed in our role in helping this new group to ‘become both a competent audience and a set of expressive thinkers’ (Carolyn Edwards).¹

On our return from a weekly walk around the school on a windy day, the children made some interesting comments:

How can we get really big leaves? I think I have some at home, but they did not fall off yet... the trees wobble so maybe they will fall soon...

The wind comes from the leaves...

The big branches shake the trees and the wind become strong...

The wind made out of leaves...

If the wind made out of leaves it means that the leaves ARE the wind...

Autumn is windy...

What does AUTUMN mean?

When all the leaves fall off...

You wear something different...

The trees shake the leaves off...

Autumn can't come inside, it stays outside...

The children's theories about nature were evidenced by their interest in researching beyond the norm and their desire to learn about new perspectives. We decided to borrow the idea that autumn cannot come inside and to suggest the use of autumn leaves as a catalyst for investigating the 'relationships between what is known and what is possible' (Cinzia Incerti).²

What will happen if the leaves will come to our kinder?

They would want to play...

Dance with us...

But they can't dance...

We can hold them and shake them and then they can dance...

'When the Leaves Came to Visit' is a story developed about the learning of our children and the adults in this group. Being curious to hear parents' perspectives and to 'encourage them to become more interested in our pedagogical practices' (Lise-Lotte)³, we decided to document our learning journey in the form of mini stories. This idea evolved from one of our parents' query: How can a story be shared?

The Collection

On their return to school for the second term, the children brought bags full of autumn leaves they had collected over the break. We were not sure what to expect but we were prepared to be flexible. After watching the children picking out and studying one leaf after another, commenting on it, looking closely and feeling it on their skin; it became clear to us that the children's main interests were in using their senses, humanising the leaves and inviting them into their fantasy play.

These leaves are magic, they can turn into a fairy...

My leaf is a sailing boat... sail sail... sailing away...

This is a leaf castle for the zebra...

The Visit

The leaves were placed everywhere in our classroom. The children used them in so many ways, each being given value and equal dignity. From small group learning in the studio through to drawing and painting, dancing and singing, pretend play in the 'home corner' as well as sensory experiences outside. 'As human beings, children possess a hundred languages, a hundred ways of thinking, of expressing themselves, of understanding and of encountering others, with a way of thinking that creates connections between the various dimensions of experiences...' (Leslie Morrow).⁴

Look, family leaves... they are not a family yet, I'm making them a family... the leaves need a tree, it's their home... (Fig. 1)

We are thinking about what way to put the leaves cause it's their home, the owl lives with the leaves... it's the Branch-Owl-Leaves' Home... (Fig. 2)

I need to draw on the leaf because it looks beautiful...

I am going to draw a picture of a leaf... (Fig. 3)



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

*The leaves came from the sky.. they fell off the tree...
We can make a circle and they can sing and we can dance...
The song made the leaves fly...*

The leaves are having a rest so they can have fun later...

I'm making a leaf porridge breakfast for my fluff (cat).. he eats with his face down...

It's a baby party, let's get going... the leaves are staying with the leaf-sitter... (Fig. 4)

The Senses

The children brought the leaves into their play. This use of imagination is a 'fundamental part of constructing knowledge' (Claudia Guaduci).⁵ Understanding that children need to be able to practice using multiple senses directed us to provide them with a sensory group experience to explore the perception that autumn leaves will never change colour. (Fig. 5)



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Autumn leaves have different colours because they come from different trees...

They have colour because they dressed up...

*They are not going to change their colour ever... they were born like that...
They don't mix up which is which: if they are yellow, pink, orange, red,
they keep it like that...*

Leaves spin around because they can...

Leaves smell like honey porridge... they feel soft like ice cream and they sound like paper...

When you jump on the leaves they go all over you... it feels kind of ticklish...

When we took our shoes off and threw the leaves up in the sky... it was a leaf party... it was the best day ever... (Fig. 6)

Four months later, the leaves, well used by the children, started to dry up, literally and metaphorically. At this point we decided to pause and look back at all that had happened. We re-read notes, artefacts and children's discussions; re-interpreted and unveiled the thread in the children's learning as 'value is created when you put things together in relationships' (Paula Strozzi – Perth conference 2019). The humanisation of the leaves and the imagination the children used pointed at one significant concept, that of FAMILY. With this discovery we have found a continuing path.

The decision to use autumn leaves as a material opened up a rich, versatile and meaningful learning journey in our kindergarten. The goal was for children and adults to become collaborators as we discover, collect, experiment, humanise and think with materials. The aim was 'to become fluent with it, as if materials were a language' (Cathy Weisman).⁶ The story *When the Leaves Came to Visit* is about how young children learn through opportunities; for exploration and the discovery of possibilities. However, the question is, was it ever about the actual leaves?

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Figures

- Fig. 1 Organising leaves.
Fig. 2 Creating a 'home' for the leaves.
Fig. 3 Drawing with leaves.
Fig. 4 Using the leaves in pretend play.
Fig. 5 Exploring change through communal painting.
Fig. 6 Using the leaves for sensory experiences.



4 Year Old Kinder

Story lines...



“

One line can make another line and another line...”

This year in our Kinder 4 cross class investigation sessions we followed the thread, ‘Each line adds to the story’. The children observed lines they made themselves and lines made by others in the group. What happens when you join these lines? Thin lines, thick lines; lines made with black paint and then adding white lines; thick brushes, thin brushes; thick markers, thin markers. What was the effects of using these tools and materials? The children were given time to revisit, retell, and ‘recreate’ their ‘story lines’.

How would these materials be presented? This would evoke a story. Decisions included individual pieces of paper or a large sheet for the group? Each decision depended on purpose. It began with the children exploring making their own lines and sharing these in a discussion with the group. The group then revisiting these lines on larger sheets of paper.

Each line travelled alongside, met up, overlapped, veered...

Perhaps there was already an expectation of the known when the children used paint. They were familiar with this medium both in their current class and in previous years. However, given this new proposal, with this material, it required further discussion and therefore ‘the unknown’ made for a story to unfold. (Figs. 1–4)

Story lines...

We made a big river we connected.

Would you like to join my line it will be a long river... there is a big flood, so much water...

Oh no, water, water is everywhere...

Revisiting the flood...

After the flood, there were raindrops, drip, drip, drip.

Everything was dark. It was when the sky met the earth. The earth has many layers. Here is the core.

A line of wire, a material proposed to the children, made for a story not easily recognisable. What would be the ‘story line’?



Fig. 1

Rolling up and unravelling wire. Straightening wire. Another line... Was it a path? Did it balance? Could one part bend and the other remain straight? What would happen to a short line, a long line? (Fig. 5)

We understand that developing relationships with materials requires time for us to understand its properties. What can it do, and importantly what do I bring to it? The relationship depends on the person and the material. By oneself or with others.

The children discussed the coldness of wire and yet its warmth when it is held. It could change shape and revert back to its original position. Many were interested in this discovery whilst others experimented with balancing it on their arm, head and nose! Then one line of wire met another line of wire and a story began. Two lines, two horns of an animal, two snakes, two mountains... During the investigation one child held up a line of wire and said *It's a line of history...* (Fig. 6)

Other 'story lines' were offered to the children. Strips of white paper, black paper, thin string and rope...

Lines when multiplied and became richer stories.

In reading the book, *'Sam's Bush Journey'*¹ we focused on the style of illustration and on the use of repetitive lines which told a story about texture and the 'anatomy of nature'. The bark on a tree trunk, the patterns on leaves, the swirls of the sky and the ripples of the land. This was also an opportunity to explore Indigenous storytelling and 'story lines' of strong relationships to the land through the reading of additional picture story books, *'Welcome to Country'*² and *'Why I love Australia'*.³

This was further investigated when revisiting 'story lines' in nature. Each group explored different parts of the school grounds. A kitchen garden, a dry creek bed, trees shedding bark, lines on the wooden sleepers delineating the playground. The children used iPads to take photos of the 'story lines' they observed during their travels. How often do we need to remind ourselves to look up, down and around? What might we have missed? A lone twig lies between the soil joining two brick pavers. The children's photographs were brought back to share with other groups; they discussed what they observed and thought about. Feet or hands, perhaps not intentionally, were captured by the children



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

in their photographs and this offered another layer to their story; being present in witnessing that moment in time. Some of these photographs were used in a discussion at our school's *Cultures of Thinking Conference*.⁴ Many participants were surprised that these photos were captured by these young children. (Figs. 7–9)

On return to the studio, the children drew their observations and discoveries from some of the natural materials they had collected. 'Story lines' of patterns and textures also became memories using clay. (Figs. 10 & 11)

What began as observational stories (based on the children's experiences with materials and via their walks) was now developed further with the introduction of other digital technologies.

Using a Wacom board and stylus attached to a laptop, the children drew 'story lines' which were simultaneously projected onto a screen. Their curiosity was evident as they watched the movement of these lines on the Wacom board and then projected onto a larger screen. The children built on their understanding; a line when multiplied became a 'longer story'. *A racing car is going around and around the track and this is where it stops.*

As we reached the latter part of the year, the children now familiar with each other through groups that rotated during the year, they were offered the provocation of developing stories together that would become short films. One child responded: *you mean a line story.*

Stories were developed in small groups, each building on the other's story line. They used an iPad to digitally draw these stories. The children became increasingly confident in using the design app, Art Set to draw, colour and record their narration. Such was the understanding of the importance of the first line and the building of future lines that many of the groups' stories were about the transformative quality of a line.

There was a line, then the line became a road. Then the line became a car on the road. The line became trees. The trees became a forest. The lines became the grass. The lines became a giraffe. The line became butterflies. In the jungle the line became a bear. The car went home on the line that was a road. And then the line became a house. The lines became night-time. The lines became the stars. The lines became the moon. (Fig. 12)

The children were interested in references to a line in the story 'The Pencil'.⁵ They learnt about the power of a pencil line making its mark in the telling of a story and the adventures and misadventures when erasers were introduced! This conveyed a message about the importance of a mark, a line which can indeed have many dimensions and meanings, depending on one's observation and understanding.

Throughout this investigation the children became their own documenters. Many of the photos in this article were photographed by the children. This empowered the children to represent their observations and reflections using a wide range of tools and materials. This provided one of the most valuable learning strategies and to inculcate good questions and reflective responses using a range of thinking routines.⁶

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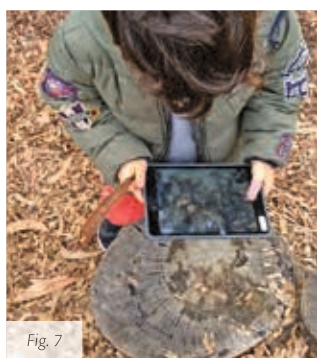


Fig. 7

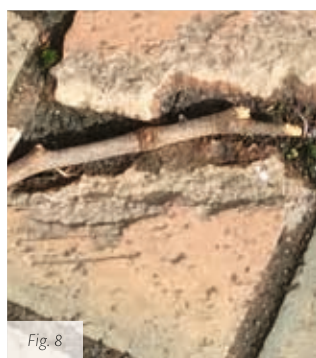


Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

Stories connect one human being to another even if they don't know each other



“

Our year started with a small group of children, from a previous years three-year-old kindergarten class, joining our already established four-year-old group. This was beneficial in providing greater opportunities for collaboration and new friendships.”

Paola Strozzi writes, “If we need to know the children of this year, we need to do research to stop anonymity.”¹

We thought carefully about how we could research ways the children could make connections that would value the friendships that had already been made but make opportunities for new relationships to grow.

The chosen ELC umbrella focus this year was “Stories”. Through conversations with my colleagues I envisaged the metaphor of an onion where the uncovering of many layers would reveal many mini stories about the children’s connections, learning and friendships.

The parents in our class were asked at our information night what “Stories” meant to them:

Images and words that trigger the imagination. Everyone has a different interpretation about how the story goes and ends.

Stories are inside you and all around you.

We decided to use clay as a medium for making first connections as it lends itself to conversation, exploration and connectedness. The children were encouraged to explore the clay as they interacted with their friends.

The children were very familiar with this medium and it became apparent that the children were more interested in using dry clay pieces made by the children to create patterns and designs, whilst conversing as to how this should look. Small groups of children worked together over many weeks and friendships began. (Fig. 1)



Fig. 1



Three children in one group asked if they could add other natural materials such as corks and pebbles to the clay, so that they could make further patterns. We encouraged all the children to make choices about what natural materials they wanted to use from our resources. We then waited and observed what would happen next. (Fig. 2)

Our intention at first was to research how the children used the natural materials so that we could understand more about the children and their learning styles.

We noticed that the children enjoyed patterning and designing and seemed to enjoy making connections with the natural materials. We felt that the children's familiarity and fluidity with these materials would help further connections amongst the children.

“Play with loose parts increases children’s collaboration, negotiation skills, risk taking, conflict resolution, communication and problem solving. ... Children of all ages, abilities, skill levels and genders can use loose parts successfully. Because there’s no right or wrong way to work with them, all children can achieve competence, build on existing strengths, and feel successful and independent. Loose parts promote language development when children use them as props to engage in rich conversations and storytelling.”²

As the children worked, they shared their stories about the materials, and we listened and wrote these down.

It was when the children changed some of the natural materials by taking some away and adding others that our research question became more apparent.

What stories were the children creating through their interactions with these different materials and/or each other?

We wondered:

Would the children use them in the same way as they had used the corks, stones and pieces of wood?

If the children collected these materials themselves, would this make a difference to how these were used?

Would the children continue to weave stories and imaginings about the materials as they had done previously?

Would these new materials lend themselves to creating friendships between the children?

Small groups of children worked with the materials and we observed as new and different stories appeared. When the children explored the materials, they used their interactions with others as opportunities to co-construct their learning through imitation and practicing the actions of others:

This is a picture of me standing up because I like dancing around.

I’m putting lots of olives together like Harper because it looks nice.

There were imaginative stories about the materials that we had anticipated and heard previously. However, there were other stories that resonated with the parents’ initial thoughts and contributions.

It depends who tells it (the story)...

It depends where it starts and ends...

But the middle may be the most important fact.

Other children used their friends’ thinking as a springboard for their own ideas:

I like that Dylan’s used the olives and the sticks. I’m making a pattern; stick, olives, stick, olives.

We observed children making connections. As one parent commented:

Stories connect one human being to another even if they don’t know each other.

Some children began with the same materials as before and used these to meet in the middle of the table. In having a conversation, they got to know each other better:

What’s your name?

Lucas

What’s your name?

Ari.

You make your line come to me and I will make my line come to you.

They can be snakes and they can say ‘hello’ to each other.

Like we did! (Fig. 3)

The findings of Jane Mereweather, an early childhood teacher who researches young children’s animations of non-animal entities such as rocks, clouds and trees, resonated with our research.



She writes, “**Non-human entities help us to understand the world and lend themselves to telling new kinds of stories. How do they speak to the children? How are they entangled with the children, and how do they make themselves known?**”³

As some of the children created, they would attribute human behaviour and emotion to their design through storytelling;

The big olive trees are looking after the little olive tree and they helped him to be safe by looking after each other.

They are all different families and they love each other. They are all hugging and kissing each other.

Another story that unfolded was that the children scaffolded and supported each other’s learning using their prior knowledge of the materials:

You can use the leaves to connect. See their stalks? They are good for standing on things.

If you put the seeds on top of each other they will fall off because they are small and round.

When you put all the olives in a circle it looks like a big pool. (Fig. 4)

One child didn’t consider the materials for patterning at all. To her, they were a ‘family of princesses’. Her encounters with other children created a story which made the princesses come to life with dancing balls and daily life happenings.

We have some children whose strengths are using nonverbal language to make themselves understood. We wondered what strategies they would use in their encounters with the materials and other children, and what stories would emerge as a result?

After giving the children many opportunities to use the natural materials and to get to know each other, we reflected on our journey thus far.

We wanted them to be challenged further in building relationships through their encounters with each other.

At the same time as the children were using the natural materials, another investigation was occurring. Some children were drawing three dimensional structures of what they had created from Lego, straws and magnets and others were drawing what their structures would look like before they created them. We observed that these children were very interested in the mathematical concepts of

height, measurement and length and drawing these images was very familiar and comfortable for them.

We considered that we could relaunch our research by bridging these two interests to create a new investigation.

Initially when the children were seated at a table together, they were working on their own.

We wondered:

Could the children create a design or pattern with the natural materials if they were part of a small group of three?

How would they decide whose idea was the one they all wanted to create?

What strategies and language would the children use in their encounters with each other?

Could the children use drawings to plan what they wanted to create?

How would the representation in their drawings change before and after construction?

The children now seem to be interested in exploring pattern and design. It is a story that seems to appear again and again in their conversations, explorations with materials and representations. We recognise it often in our endeavours to make the children and their encounters with each other visible. (Figs. 5 & 6)

Now that the children have come together and are sharing their stories of connection, we will need to consider other ways of collaboration:

Could the children collaborate as a whole group with the natural materials?

Could the children use other creative languages such as patterning and paint to collaborate in other ways?

“I have never believed, nor do I believe now that a story belongs to only one person. Stories are always plural and their origins are infinite.”⁴

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Figures

- Fig. 1 The children using the dry clay for patterning.
 Fig. 2 Combining the dry clay with other natural materials for patterning.
 Fig. 3 Using the natural materials to create friendships.
 Fig. 4 Using the natural materials to explain ideas.
 Fig. 5 Small group collaborations using the natural materials.
 Fig. 6 Children drawing the design from their collaborations using the natural materials.

This is a good story...



“

When we look at each other what do we see? We each see something different dependent on our culture and what stories we know. Culture is passed on, one generation to the next, by the vehicle of a story. This is about connection – connection with belief, connection with culture and connection with each other.”

“We are all story tellers, we all live in a network of stories. There isn't a stronger connection between people then story telling”
Jimmy Neil Smith¹

At the beginning of the year, through circumstance, three previous three year old kindergarten classes became two four year old kindergarten classes. The children were put in a position of having to build relationships with a larger group of children and with some new educators. What would help these children make connections with each other and form a strong learning community?

We researched and looked towards the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concept of yarning. Yarning is about using narratives, stories and storytelling to build connections and strong relationships.

“The yarning circle has been used by Indigenous peoples from around the world for centuries to learn from a collective group, build respectful relationships, and to preserve and pass on cultural knowledge.”² (Fig. 1)



Fig. 1

The children sourced two sticks from the outdoor area and painted them to make them visible as the 'Yarning Sticks'. The children implemented the Yarning Sticks in our morning meeting times, where we sit in a whole group circle and use the time to discuss what we, as a group, deem important at this time. Sometimes the discussion is on the running of the day, sometimes it is reflecting on what is happening or happened in the Kindergarten room. (Fig. 2)

They are for knitting.....

Knitting us together as a group with the words 'knitted together as stories'.

Prior to the Yarning Sticks it had been observed that some of the children avoided these interactions and discussions. Would the introduction of this tool of a stick assist these children to find their voice and participate? Will they be able to contribute and develop the connections to form a strong learning community and a place of culture? And to tell their stories?

We began with stories about what happened on the weekend...

There was more talking and the quiet children were becoming active participants. We were beginning to build our new community of learners and form stronger relationships with each other. **"Relationships are recognised as essential to learning, and dialogue and participation facilitate learning"**³

"Children discover how communication enhances the autonomy of the individual and the peer group. The group forms a special entity tied together through exchange and conversation, reliant on its own of thinking, communicating and acting"⁴

The children moved forward with their story telling, creating narratives. Connecting to their culture and their context through story.

I once saw a grown up reading a kid a story without a book...

This is a good story...

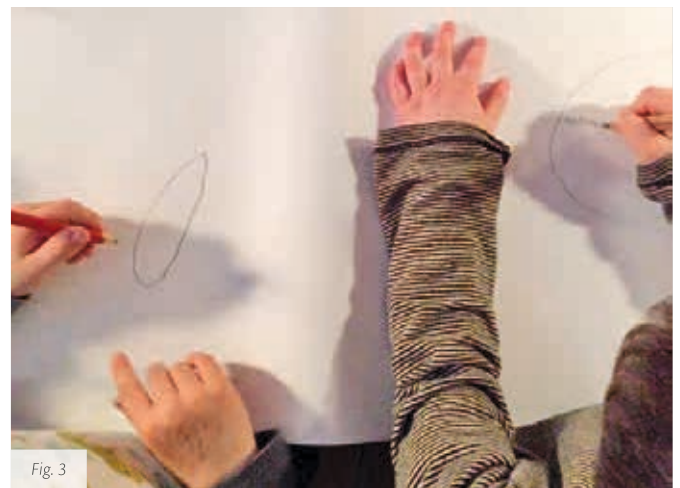
Could we make connections to other cultures through story and acknowledge others perspectives? Could we see more than our own stories? Reflecting on our use of the process of Yarning, the children were introduced to the story of Bunjil, the Eagle Hawk.⁵ Bunjil being the Kulin Nations creator spirit and the Kulin Nation being the land on which the children meet each day to yarn.

We read "Welcome to Country" by Aunty Joy Murphy and Lisa Kennedy.⁶ Where, through a story passed down from Elder to Elder, we learnt about Bunjil according to the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation

"Bunjil created the birds, the animals, the mountains, the rivers. Bunjil created all things natural from the land."⁷

The children wished to deepen their learning about Bunjil and the dreaming story was told, again reflecting on the passing of culture through story. As Australian Aboriginals passed the majority of their culture from one generation to the next through this oral tradition of the Dreaming.⁸

He has lots of feathers and a long beak.



Bunjil is a eagle, which is a prey. Which means he eats worms and everything.

He made the world and he soars to the stars, the Southern Cross with his sons.

In the Dreaming story the children also met Waa. Waa is the best friend of Bunjil and a black crow. The children became immediately fascinated with their friendship. The friendship between Waa and Bunjil resonated with the children's ideas for friendship and connection.

The children told their own stories. This story was authored by two children who choose to collaborate and draw one drawing. They told the story as they drew. (Fig. 3)

Bunjil and Waa and eggs and a family and the babies are hatching

Bunjil and Waa, they need each other. When they met each other their Mum and Dad had dinner and then Waa said "Can I call my friend?" Then Bunjil went to Waa's nest and they played and had dinner and played.



Fig. 4

At the end Bunjil went to the sky and Waa and his sons... To the Southern Cross, in the night sky. (Fig. 4)

The children were developing and consolidating their friendship through the friendship of Waa and Bunjil. All of the children came to the studio, in small groups, and created the night sky for Bunjil and Waa to fly in. They drew Bunjil, they drew Waa. There were other materials offered and Bunjil and Waa were made from clay, wire and eventually laser cut from a piece of timber. Whilst using the variety of materials the children told their own stories of Bunjil and Waa. The children also used the iPad to record their stories of Bunjil and Waa. (Fig. 5)

Bunjil is picking up a worm and Waa is picking up a spider for eating. They are going to share.

Bunjil is grabbing a spider and Waa is grabbing an ant and they are going home to eat them.



Fig. 5

Through the conveyance of the Bunjil and Waa story the children were developing the culture of their classroom. They were making the strong connections required for a collaborative learning community by reflecting on the culture and customs of others, others being the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. (Fig. 6)

“Developing a community of learners requires the participation of the people involved in inventing and adapting the customs and traditions, who learn from their efforts to develop the principles and practices for themselves.”⁹

The children continue to thank the Wurundjeri people each week, during their Yarning circle time, for looking after country so they have somewhere to come to Kinder. Do these children realise through acknowledging the culture of the Aboriginal Australians they have created their own culture and connections with each other? Possibly not, but the joy the children bring each day to the classroom reflects on how strong our community has become.

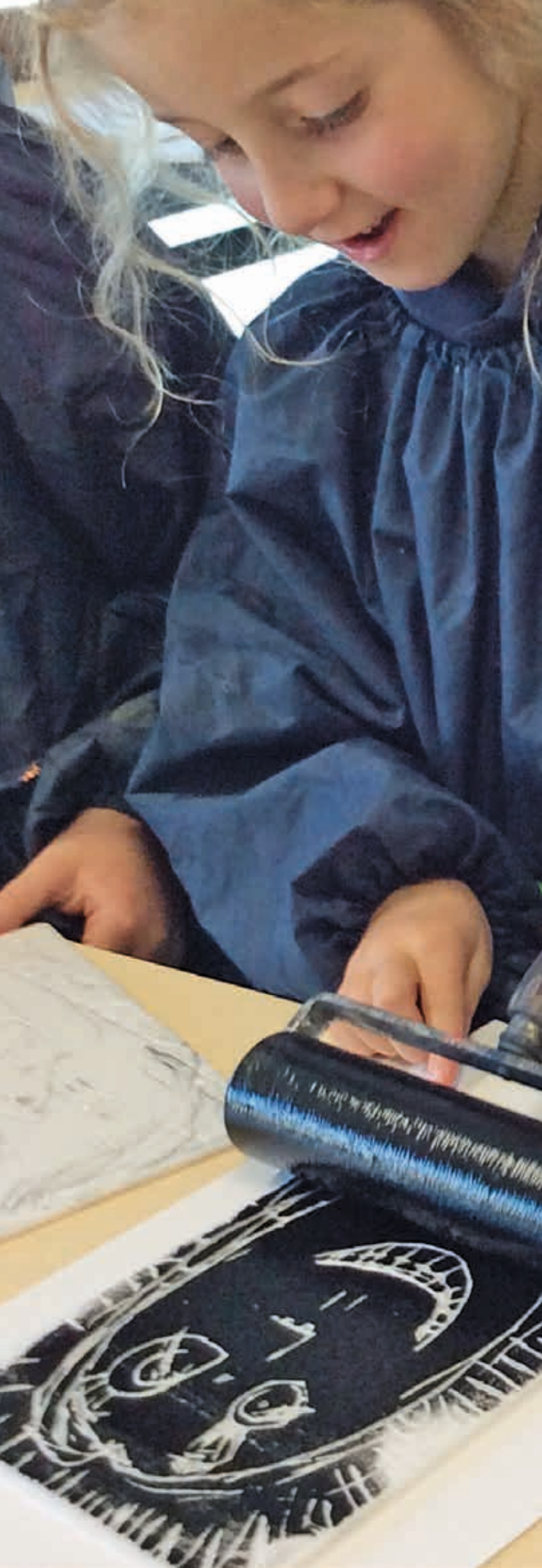
As Loris Malaguzzi says, **“There is nothing without joy”¹⁰**...



Fig. 6

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Prep

What is my story?



“

During an excursion with a class of Prep group of students to a sports museum, one item on display was a well-worn sporting shoe where one could see the impression of toes on the exterior of the shoe mesh. The shoelace was indented where it had been tied and untied. This shoe ‘revealed’ a story of a sports player, one whose achievements included the greatest marks taken and the ‘best and fairest’ award for his club and other accolades.”¹

Another story, later presented to the students back at school, was a painting of a pair of shoes by artist Vincent Van Gogh. Again, a well-worn pair of shoes and laces, with impression of the feet and worn leather; clues of the person who these shoes had belonged to.² *Not sports shoes* one student responded *but they look old, maybe they belonged to a builder, my dad wears very strong shoes, he is a builder.*

In both instances, the ‘portrait’ of these shoes told a story. However, we could question the term ‘portrait’ in relation to shoes, perhaps something we are not as familiar with, such as the ‘portrait’ of a face of a person, as in drawings, paintings, photographs or other mediums?

A ‘portrait’ that conveyed a story featured in the intent of this investigation.

What is my story? How do others see or know me and what is their story about me?

How do I learn from others’ stories to inform my story?

Where do stories come from?

How do you share your stories?

From the outset these particular investigation sessions took place each week with groups of students from each of our three Prep classes. Intentional opportunities for students from each Prep class to become acquainted with each other and in turn learn more about their stories.

And to explore and develop their ‘toolbox’ in representing visually their stories from different viewpoints. How could one medium convey the same subject, yet the story could change with the use of another medium? The surprises in the discovering of visual clues in the uncovering of a story captured the student’s interest throughout this investigation, particularly the understanding of how different points of view could in fact inform their own.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

In an introductory session students were paired and asked to share using a thinking routine, 'Think, Pair, Share'.³ about what they felt was important that others should know about themselves. During these discussions each pair was asked to share back with the group on behalf of what they had heard from their partner. Not only was the intent 'active' listening, it was also to think about what may not be immediately visible about their partner and in turn to learn more about them. What was shared included preferences for activities such as sports and sporting clubs, places they have travelled, their families and what they enjoy. Some were quick to inform the group that there was in fact more to share about themselves when they heard what others had shared, hence the purpose of this initiative.

During this session the students took 'selfies' choosing a particular angle of their face to photograph and experiment with filters and editing of their image. As photos were shared, the students discussed the effects of their editing and how this could change the story.

Using a stylus and a digital drawing app named Art Set, the students now added to what they had shared in earlier discussions about their story through a self-portrait. This was done by thinking about the devices they had seen in a series of self-portraits by artists represented in paintings, drawings and engravings, both historical

and contemporary. They discussed what they thought these portraits revealed, the story about the person or about where they might live. What and how time, place and person were represented. The students observed the differences in mediums used and the resulting effects in the creating of subject matter. (Figs. 1–3)

To deepen the focus on other elements, such as how these visual stories could evoke memories, events and time, the students participated in a virtual online session with a facilitator from the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra.⁴ They were familiar with the context of a gallery and museum but now learnt about a gallery dedicated to exhibiting portraits of individuals that have made a significant contribution to Australia. During this virtual session, the facilitator used technology to show the students how Australian artist Ken Done included both his profile and a frontal view of his face at the same time in a painting.⁵ This was a surprise for the students who no longer viewed this self-portrait as a face with three eyes. Now they were able to follow the outlines of both views of Done's face, one superimposed over the other. This type of evaluation within each portrait acted as a provocation, with the expectation for the students to use a thinking model and with the purpose that there was always more to see, to uncover, rather than leave their thinking and understanding to a first glance. (Figs. 4 & 5)



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Sporting identities were also featured in this gallery and during the session the students were able to ask the gallery facilitator questions based on their observations. One student observed and remarked on what appeared to him as a *speech/thinking bubble*, where the sportsperson was in a team uniform and next to this bubble another portrait of the person in everyday clothes. The student remarked that *maybe he was thinking about his team*.

A portrait of the artist Emily Kame Kngwarreye by the artist Jenny Sages⁶, was presented as a tribute to and respect for this Indigenous artist. What captured the student's interest was the detailed study of Emily's hands in this painting as well as the choice of landscape; depicted sitting under the 'talking tree' the students were curious



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

about what she was thinking. We looked at some of the paintings Emily had created and this furthered discussion about what was beyond the story, beyond a first glance at an image.

Students were introduced to the 'story about ourselves', beyond a portrait study, and to view the whole body including gestures and features.

"Gesturing helps you understand other people. We gather information from others' body language, as well as from their specific words. Hand gestures often underscore the important points someone is making."⁷ The students viewed several sketches of hands, drawn in preparation for final works, such as those created by artists Jenny Sage⁸ and M.C. Escher, who is well known for depiction of hands⁹ They also viewed preliminary sketches by Renaissance artists who drew these in preparation for large frescoes.¹⁰

Our focus was on what these hands could reveal about a person and why and this generated a discussion about what is real and not real, in relation to the illusion of 'real' in these works.

The students observed how different effects and using a range of materials could evoke a particular feeling.

Those hands must be old you can see the veins and the wrinkles. There are shadows under the hands that makes it look real.

There is a hand of a child, it looks like mine. The other hand looks old, it looks a bit smoky

They used charcoal like us.

The students then drew from observation their own hands. They looked closely at the details of their hand in relation to others in their group. It requires an act of courage to 'make the marks', to represent your observations. Is it because of age that a few began to trace their hand? This would give one view, however what of the subtleties of each hand? Their uniqueness? These students were encouraged to draw what they saw... (Figs. 6–7)

"Research demonstrates that the movements we make with our hands when we talk constitute a kind of second language, adding information that's absent from our words..."¹¹

What shifted in the students' interpretation of their own drawings? That of their shoes, their hands and their self-portraits? This was evident as the students explored various tools to represent their observations; in each line, be it in pencil, an engraved line or a painted line. All expressed a story. In the sharing and discussing of different viewpoints, the constant unpacking of stories and threads generated much interest and contributions from the students.

The students then viewed a series of sculptures by sculptors who focused on the human form and movement. These included pieces by Henry Moore, Edgar Degas and Giacomo Giacometti. The students looked for clues to support the story they imagined, told by the artists and represented in the images. In Henry Moore's sculpture shape of three people, depicted without detailed features, the students nevertheless came to decisions about the story.¹²

They are caring.

They are holding a baby.

They are both holding a baby.



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

Maybe they are a family.

They are keeping the baby safe.

The students were asked to think about how they would portray themselves in clay. They problem solved firstly about proportions and stabilising the stance they had chosen. Each mark and gesture told a story about themselves. (Fig. 8)

Throughout this investigation the students reflected on provocations presented to them and in turn shared their thoughts with each other adding to their own understanding of 'how do I see myself and how do others see me? How do I represent my thinking and understandings about myself and others?'

A portrait of shoes became a metaphor about themselves. Their drawings of their shoes and recording of their voices told stories about their interests. The students titled their collaborative animation 'Our shoes, Our stories'.

Some shoes like to play footy.

My shoes like to play tiggy. You're it.

My shoes like to run. They like to run on the playground. They run very fast.

My shoes like to dance and hang from the monkey bars. (Figs. 9–11)

How do we 'read' stories and how do we understand the intent of a story? What are the clues that help us understand a story?

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The stories of the past influence where we go next

“

This year our Early Learning Centre embraced the umbrella focus of ‘stories.’ I was excited at being given this investigation opportunity as part of my teaching journey at Bialik College. As the Prep Aleph children settled into their new classroom, they were posed with the question: ‘what is a story?’ As a class, we discussed our thoughts.”

Debbie Miller states, “**The strategies of questioning and conjecturing are particularly helpful in teaching children how to take the conversation deeper.**”¹

A story is something from long ago and you tell everybody.

It can be something about the olden days and something that happened in the olden days.

Is somewhere you see pictures and you don't have to read it – you can just look at the pictures?

The initial dialogue demonstrated the different point of views within our community and started the journey about stories. When unpacking the children’s dialogue we saw how their understandings of the ‘olden days’ was a key attribute as to what is a story.

The children used fineliner and pencil to capture their initial thoughts about what they thought the olden days may have looked like and to emphasise the detail they wanted to share. **“Thinking about what you already know is called using your schema, or using your prior knowledge. It is all the stuff that’s already inside your head, like places you have been, things you have done, books you have read, or stories that you get told – all the experiences you have had that make up who you are, your connection to your world and what you know and believe to be true.”** (Debbie Miller)²

We then came together as a class and discussed what the children had written.

A car had wooden wheels.

In the olden days there was no internet.

There is a man walking to his house because there are no cars.

It seemed evident that the children had some form of exposure to interpretations of the olden days, possibly through reading folklore and fairy tales or having stories shared with them about family by parents and grandparents. **“We tell one another stories in order to learn how to live... There is a hierarchy to it, a sense of passing down, from elders to youngers, and also an awareness that some have a special gifts for that sort of thing.”** (Marion Halligan, 2001)³



To extend further and as a provocation, I brought in an old black and white photo of a family sitting around a dining table. The children were fascinated that the photo was not in colour.

Are all their clothes black and white?

I see a family.

I think the picture is from the olden days. It looks like an old picture.

I think this is Pesach because the whole family is there like Shabbat. On special festivals your whole family comes and that's why I think it is Pesach.

Following this provocation, we went to visit the Bialik College Archive. The archives were created seven years when Bialik celebrated its 70th Birthday. The children met with Fiona, the historian who works in the archives. Fiona explained that she tells stories from the past through everything that has been collected such as artefacts, photos and memorabilia. **“I use all of these things to understand what happened in the past, and to tell stories.”**⁴ The children were intrigued at the notion of Fiona describing herself as a ‘history detective’ where **“I look for clues to tell stories.”**⁵ The children enjoyed looking at all the different uniforms, photos and objects that were from Bialik’s yesteryear. When looking at the old photos, Fiona also discussed that cameras could only take black and white photos in the olden days as technology was very different. (Figs. 1 & 2)

Again, the children made connections to their own world.

I have a picture of my grandfather when he was young.

I have a photo of my dad, he looks different. Different clothes.

This is like the Bialik Museum.

After our visit to the Archive there were two directions of thought. Firstly, for the children to write what they thought their family looked like in the olden days and also to extend the notion of a ‘Bialik Museum’ by visiting the Melbourne Museum’s exhibition ‘The Melbourne Story.’

“When a child comes into the classroom they are already in an existing relationship with their family and community.” (Joanne Hendrick, 1997)⁶ In small groups the children were asked the question, **“What do you think your family might have looked like in the olden days?”**

In the olden days my mum was a baby. She was in her cot and she was playing. Her mum, my grandmother, was caring for my mum. The cot was made out of wood and wool. My mum was wearing olden day clothes. It was a long white baby dress. My grandmother was watching her so she did not fall out of the cot. My grandmother had long hair and wore a dress. (Fig. 3)

My dad is outside playing. My dad is five years old. He was little. He looked like a kid. His shoes were yellow because that was his favourite colour. It still is his favourite colour. He lived with his mum and dad.

The Museum provided the children with the opportunity to be immersed in the ‘olden days.’ There were many installations and artefacts for the children to explore in the exhibit.

The children thoroughly enjoyed the excursion to the Melbourne Museum. (Fig. 4)



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

I discovered olden days' football on a movie. They had different uniforms.

I discovered an old house. There was a little kitchen and a bucket for the toilet.

We listened to a teacher who talked about toys. The toys were from an old toy box.

After our excursion, a mysterious black box was delivered to the Prep Aleph classroom. As a class the children were asked to comment on what they could see, think and wonder.

I can see a label and some ropes on the box.

I think there is a toy bunny and some old clothes in the box.

I wonder if someone put the box on a plane to come to Australia. (Fig. 5)

Then the moment arrived and we opened the mysterious black box to discover some toys and objects from the olden days. The children discovered that it was from the Melbourne Museum. Inside the box it retold the story of Melbourne through the experiences and play objects of children who had grown up during different periods of Melbourne's rich history. **“For many people, toys hold memories of their childhood and reflect the world in which they grew up.”** (Museums Victoria, 2019)⁷ Amongst the treasures were marbles, the game Knuckles, a paper football, a spinning top and a boomerang. (Fig. 6)

Each group picked an object from the box and discussed what they thought they knew about the object they had chosen, whom they thought it belonged to and if they had any questions about it. Glenda MacNaughton and Gillian Williams state, **“Collaboration provides the opportunity for considering different points of view, is essential to interpretation and provides the possibility to move closer to reality. Interpreting children's learning is a collaborative process within the Reggio philosophy.”**⁸ (Fig. 7)

It is a Rubik's Cube, my dad has told me about them!

I wonder if my Zaida played with the Jacks when she was younger.

How do people make boomerangs?

This focus has led to rich learning experiences whereby the children became authors and illustrators; writing about their own fictional stories about the 'olden days.' We continue to ask ourselves how stories of the past influence where we go next.



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

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Figures

1. Visit to Bialik archive.
2. Harvey holding back and white photo.
3. Shahar draws a picture of her family in the olden days.
4. Ruby and Max at the Melbourne Museum.
5. Prep Aleph discussing the black box.
6. Class discussion.
7. Oscar and his Rubik's Cube.

Stories are like puzzle pieces that fit together



“

As part of our ELC focus on ‘Stories’ this year I posed the question to my class of Prep students – What are stories?”

Stories are like what you can tell from your imagination or what you read from a book. You find something, and you make it up.

This brings to mind how stories so often begin, Once upon a time...

“What of our stories? What belongs to us, what have we made, what borrowed? How reliably do we quote and recount the past? How consciously should we reconstruct it?” (Halligan)¹

Do children consider that stories come only from our imagination ‘making it up’? How do we engage the children towards considering the question; is it a story if it is based on factual evidence?

So, when one of the children brought into the classroom three bones that he had found in a dry dam I decided to rephrase the question: What is a story? To – What is the story of the bones?

The ground was dry and dusty. The bones were on top of the ground. There was water there before, but it was dry now. It looked like there had been no rain for a long time because it was dry and dusty.

Using their curiosity as a springboard, I wanted the children to deepen their thinking, to reason with evidence in order to uncover the history behind the story. Asking questions, sifting through evidence while searching for clues, and reconstructing a story of the past, helps them to understand the present and perhaps the impact on the future.

Using the thinking routine, ‘Think, Puzzle, Explore’ while inspecting the bones, the children began to pose these questions and formulate their ideas towards finding their answers. (Fig. 1)



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

What shapes can we see in the bones?

We need to find more bones.

How long did this creature live?

We can try to make a skeleton and see what it could be.

Lots of tiny bones put together like a fossil.

The children were making connections to their previous knowledge. They were fascinated by the bones and now used magnifying glasses to inspect the bones further. (Fig. 2)

The long bone looks like a joint.

What is a joint?

A joint is when two things are attached, it can be an elbow or a knee.

On the end of the long bone, it looks like a toe.

How long is this bone? (Fig. 3)

Their curiosity and imagination continued to develop as did their theories.

They would be underground if they were dinosaur bones. Dinosaur bones got buried after a long time ago.

The dust blew over the dinosaur bones.

Some people dig holes because you can find animals in the sand.

I think he is talking about a palaeontologist.

The children were making connections between the environment, climate, nature and animals. They were now considering the impact of the environment and extinction.

Dinosaurs are not alive anymore because they are extinct.

Maybe the earth shook and that is how it died.

A big rock fell on the dinosaur and that is how it died.

The rock made the earth shake and it started a volcano and that is how they died.

A big, big meteor hit the earth so the dinosaurs died.

The children drew their theories of which creature they thought the bones belonged to and drew its skeleton.

As most of the children had come to the conclusion that the bones found were dinosaur bones, a discussion on what we could

do with the bones to confirm their theories ensued. I wanted to guide the children towards reasoning with evidence, which the children had been familiar with before. (Fig. 4)

What should we do with the bones to find out what they belong to?

We could put the bones together, take a picture, they might look like something.

At the museum we can ask people questions.

What questions could we ask people at the museum?

If the ground was hard would they sink in?

We could ask people at the museum if they were dinosaur bones or not?

My intention was to provide the children with further opportunities and new experiences so that they could integrate their previous knowledge and gain new understandings.

We decided to contact the Melbourne Museum's 'Curious Team' with the children's questions. We provided the team with the limited information we had gathered of where the bones were found and we sent them photographs of the bones. This was a wonderful opportunity for authentic investigation and research, challenging the children to ask pertinent questions that would further their thinking and reasoning with evidence.

How old are the bones?

What did the creature eat?

How did the animal get its name?

Did the creature play?

Do you know if the bones belong to a dinosaur?

The resident palaeontologist from the Melbourne Museum replied to the children's questions and he was able to identify the animal to which the bones belonged. We could have chosen to divulge this information to the children straight away, to satisfy their curiosity, or we could further their exploration of the story of the bones, by fuelling their interest in fossils and giving them the tools for deeper investigation.

Our excursion to the Melbourne Museum was an opportunity for the children to immerse themselves in the 'history' of going back in time, in order to form connections and create their own links expanding their experiences as seen through the eyes of a palaeontologist and learning more about fossils and dinosaurs.

Through hands on experience, the children were able to identify animal and plant fossils. Stepping inside the life of a palaeontologist, they were able to appreciate the process of looking closely, persevering, having patience while forming links and making connections. (Fig. 5)

Bones have turned into fossils.

How would they work out what they ate?

These are flat teeth so it must be a plant eater.

The rocks have shapes in them.

These are fossil footprints.

It's a carnivore because they have sharp ends, the teeth are too big to eat leaves.

We can see that through these observations the children were able to look closely, noting detail, while considering the context when reasoning with evidence.

Finally the children met with the resident palaeontologist to whom they had emailed their questions and wonderings. He explained that when considering the environment it was noted that large dinosaur bones have not been found in Victoria.

Through their hands on investigation and observations the children were able to see that "The story of the bones" involved the process of enquiry and close examination. This did not detract from their imagination, instead it helped them to fit the puzzle pieces together to create the story behind the bones.

"The art of research already exists in the hands of children acutely sensitive to the pleasure of surprise. The wonder of learning, of knowing, of understanding is one of the first fundamental sensations each human being expects from experiences faced alone or with others." (Halligan)²

By fostering this curiosity, through providing opportunities involving small group interactions, the children were able to share their ideas and experiment with their theories as they applied the knowledge they gained. Back in the classroom the children embraced the Cultures of Thinking routine 'Step Inside', to create their own stories. Each group decided on the characters they would 'step inside' for example a palaeontologist or a dinosaur. They drew on their previous knowledge and their new experiences and formulated a narrative constructed by their imagination as well as their informed, evidence based thinking.

When asked; how do you think your thinking changed through what you have learnt from this investigation? It became evident that the children had furthered their learning in other parts of the curriculum.

My thinking has changed because I have started to think more about bones and Maths, bones is kind of like Maths with measurement.

I have learnt more in measurement. It helped me know more about length.

We looked at the bones closely with magnifying glasses. I learnt how to use a magnifying glass. Now I look for lots of detail, like when I look for fossils and bones.

I have discovered we should be using detail to draw.

We get our ideas from our schema and it helps us know what we are doing.

You sometimes have to guess and then if you know a place or people that know the correct answer you can go to them and ask questions.

We have a chat about what we are doing, we are sharing our information.

We work as a team.

We use our thinking and we help each other. (Figs. 6 & 7)

My observations through this process have been the importance of providing children with research opportunities that spark curiosity, further questioning and collaboration. Empowering the children towards making their own discoveries and scaffolding them towards a deeper level of thinking, through research and reasoning with evidence.

"Stories form part of an ongoing conversation between ourselves and our past. Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? Who keeps these stories for us? What stories will we pass on to the next generation?" (Malaguzzi)³

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Figures

Fig 1. Children inspecting bones found in a dry dam.

Fig 2. Using a magnifying glass to observe detail when looking closer at the bones.

Fig 3. Measuring the bones.

Fig 4. Representing which creature or animal the bones belong to.

Fig 5. Inspecting and identifying fossils at the Melbourne Museum.

Fig 6. Collaboration while creating the group story.

Fig 7. Working together to paint the group story.



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

How a common interest created our class story



“

Being part of a community can make us feel as though we are a part of something greater than ourselves.”

“Communities play an important role in every aspect of our lives. Having a sense of community unites us. Being part of a community can make us feel as though we are a part of something greater than ourselves. It can give us opportunities to connect with people, to reach for our goals, and makes us feel safe and secure.”¹

When we began the school year we had already decided as an ELC staff group that our umbrella focus would be ‘stories’. With that in mind, starting in a new Prep group, we decided to look at each child’s background story as a way for the children to discover similarities they might have with other children in the group. We started by asking the children to share, using their family photo as a provocation. In addition, we asked each family to choose some photos with their child to make an ‘About Me’ book to share with the class. From the initial discussions the children had with each other, as well as their ‘About Me’ books, it became apparent that Australian Football League (AFL) was a common thread amongst the majority of the group.

I am at the footy Grand Final, my family all go for Collingwood.

Here I am dressed up in my footy clothes. I barrack for North Melbourne.

I go to Auskick in winter. I barrack for Hawthorn.

I love footy.

As a result the direction for our investigation changed and we started looking at football as a pathway into our ‘Stories’ investigation. We wondered whether using the children’s interest in AFL would impact on how they came together as a group, how they interacted with each other, their relationships and their daily conversations. Would this catalyst shape our story? Did following a football team as a family through the generations form part of their family’s story?

Research shows that having a common interest brings groups of people together. It is quite often this aspect that helps shape and form a community, particularly when people migrate to a new country with different backgrounds, languages, cultures and interests.

My football team is Melbourne. My mum goes for Melbourne like me and so does my sister. My papa and my bubby and my cousins go for the Demons too. We like to watch the football together.

I go for Carlton. Everyone in my family goes for Carlton except my grandma, she goes for Bulldogs. Sometimes I go to watch the footy matches and we all like it when Carlton wins. When my dad was little Carlton was a really good team.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

... Do you know that most Jewish people who came to live in Australia went to live in Carlton, and Melbourne, St Kilda, Collingwood and Carlton have got a big Jewish supporter base. (Figs. 1 & 2)

The common interest of football appeared to bring this group of children together. In small groups they began to research different things about their teams, the history of the AFL and the Indigenous football game called 'Marngrook'. During our continuing discussions the children had many questions.

Why did they choose theme songs?

Why do the teams have symbols?

Why do they have mascots?

To explore their puzzles the children borrowed books from the library, looked at newspaper articles, explored the official websites of the AFL and football clubs and had discussions with their extended families.

I learnt that Kenny Hunter is related to my family on my mum's side. He played 99 games for Carlton and he is in the AFL hall of fame.

I found out that footy was invented in Victoria in the late 1850's and that my team (Carlton) and Essendon have won the most premierships.

To give the children an opportunity to explore this further we organised an excursion to the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) and the National Sports Museum. The children went on a guided tour of the MCG, learnt about the history of the ground and how the oval is maintained during the football season. At the National Sports Museum they discovered many interesting things not only about the AFL but about their own football teams.

I really enjoyed the excursion because I learnt so many things. Like in the olden days the players wore woolly jumpers and there were no seats for people to sit on when they watched the matches...

The excursion served to further heighten their interest in this investigation. They wanted to find out everything they could about football, not just about their teams. At playtime they played footy, talked about Auskick, watched the football highlights and discussed their observations with each other. They decided which teams they were going to tip in our footy tipping competition. This continuing focus allowed us to use an interdisciplinary approach

which gave the children a chance to use their strengths and skilled them up in other areas of the curriculum. (Fig. 3)

As part of a speech given at the 5th Annual Human Rights Oration, Andrew Demetriou (CEO of the AFL) stated that **"Football brings together people from all cultural backgrounds and all walks of life. Everyone is equal – united by their love of the game. Australian football is a strange paradox – for a game that is played almost exclusively in one part of the globe it is able to transcend cultural barriers and ethnic divides and bring communities together."**²

After one of the AFL rounds of football I overheard a group of children discussing some of the games and how they wanted to play a class footy game. We decided to bring the idea of playing a class football game to the whole group to see how they felt. While many of the children went to Auskick program on weekends, some of the children knew very little about footy and had never seen or played the game. Despite this the majority of them were very excited about the prospect of playing a match and were keen to try and learn the skills needed.

We need to have the same amount of people in each team.

Each team needs to be fair, you need people who have played footy on each team.

How will I know how to play, I've never played before?

I don't know how to handball or kick the footy.

Maybe if we know how to do it we can teach the people who don't know how to play.

For the next few days the children came to us with their ideas for the match, they spoke to the sports teacher about getting some bibs to differentiate the two teams and two of the children brought whistles from home for the umpires to use. The children discussed who should be on each team and why. They decided to rotate the coaches, captains and umpires for each game because so many of the children wanted a turn. They also chose the day for the first game.

Finally, after a few delays due to bad weather, the children played their first class football game. Two of the children were umpires and each team had a coach and captain. After the game we asked



Fig. 4

the children to tell us how they felt the game had gone, what went well, what didn't and what improvements we could make for the next game. (Figs. 4 & 5)

I liked it because I kicked the ball a few times and I liked trying to kick a goal.

I didn't like it because lots of the good football players kept getting the ball and so lots of us didn't get the ball very much. I liked that my team won the game.

So what could we do to make it fairer for everyone?

Maybe we should have a bench so that there are not so many people in each team on the field, maybe two on each bench.

We should look at positions, like forwards, midfielders and backs.

After this discussion the children sat together in their teams and chose children for each of the positions for the next game to be played.

We noticed that not only were the children forming close bonds with each other, creating a strong class community, but they were using our school values in their daily interactions with each other. The values of respect, empathy, perseverance, responsibility and integrity had become an everyday part of the fabric of our classroom community. (Fig. 6)

“It does not matter where you live, how long or how often you are involved in a football club, or what role you have (player, coach, volunteer, supporter) in the club, people associated with a football club experience greater social connectedness, wellbeing and self-reported physical and mental health. Football clubs provide an environment where people are more socially connected at every age group.”³

While our investigation has focused on AFL football and the ways in which it has brought the children together as a community, and in turn shaped the story of our class so far, the idea that belonging to a sporting club brings people together is not only related to Melbourne or to AFL football. People from all over the world follow teams in a variety of sports such as soccer, basketball, netball, baseball and many more.

So where to next? The children have decided as a group that they would like to continue playing class football games. They are currently writing a class football song and are then going to design and create a class flag and mascot that represents their class community. We're interested to see what words they will choose for the song and why. We wonder whether this will relate to who they think they are now as a class community.



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

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Year 1

Dialogue with architecture, place, time, people



“

The places we inhabit in the communities we live in around the world, have been documented in history's archives and these records continue to be a source of research and storytelling, then and now.”

How did and do these places reflect time, architecture, culture and people? What is each story about and the interrelationship/interdependence between them?

Travel these days is far easier than long ago when those that could, had to travel for many weeks until they reached the places and sites they had chosen to see. Today travel is an expectation with fast vehicles, fast planes and of course 'armchair travel' with the many platforms to access media and live viewing of these places.

Yet wonder has not waned for us as we continue to be amazed, enthralled by architectural feats, culture and people in a place and time. Each of us can recount at least one of the great wonders of the world which could relate to, a natural phenomenon, an architectural structure or identify a specific and spectacular cultural event within a country.

The intent within our Year 1 cross class investigation this year was to explore our dialogue with architecture, place, time and people and the stories we could uncover and create that describe these relationships. And to acknowledge these stories, as stories being shared in many forms/mediums which convey different effects and meanings as used by the storyteller/s.

What to choose as an initial provocation for the students, of which there could be many?

I shared a slide with a statement; 'there's a story about everything... between observation and imagination.'

This would be an investigation that would traverse history, geography, arts and culture within several learning areas. It would include the students documenting from direct observation, engaging in Skype learning sessions with various galleries and gallery educators; having discussions with architects and landscape architects and listening to experts speaking about the future via Ted Talks. Together the students would apply and represent their thinking, observations and exploration of materials and effects created. What had been used 'there, then' and 'here now' in the designing and construction within a place and time.

At the beginning of this year our school began the building of a creche. The previous year, together with their teachers, the prep students visited the designated site, read plans and learnt about the mathematical concepts of location and data. This year, these students in a cross-class investigation focused on stories which 'dug deeper' with the intent and opportunity of watching each stage of the creche construction. To understand further stories as

they evolved; with the completion of the skin of the structure, the interiors, and with those who would be inhabiting these spaces.

The first stories would focus on the stark skeletal like steel structure that would support the creche building. How did these structures 'change' the landscape? This provocation lent itself to students visiting the site, viewing it from different vantage points, zooming in, photographing sections and learning about editing their photographs to create a multiplicity of effects; which in turn could tell another story. Steel and wood, vertical and horizontal lines became reconceptualised leaving the known, when the images were edited by the students, becoming a pattern of darks and lights and tonal changes revealing new stories to the viewer. (Figs. 1–3)

This interplay and juxtaposition of edited images would also be aligned in the planning of this investigation with several exhibitions we would view throughout the year. During a Skype session with the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) educators about the Escher x Nendo: Between Two Worlds exhibition, the students observed the use of devices by M.C. Escher in his subject matter.¹ Each work conveyed several stories between the possible and impossible. This included tessellation and the creation of optical illusions. This was a dual exhibition with illusions created around 'the minimalist forms of a house' by Nendo, a design studio in Tokyo. The studio was founded in 2002 by Oki Sato, one of the world's most well-known and prolific designers.²

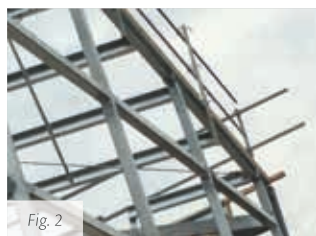
I saw a house in black and white and it looked like you could go through it and from the same person more drawings and I heard that the person like to trick people's minds. I think the person made lots of optical illusions and the person has a really good skill for tricking people in his drawings.

For our students to see the 'play' of a singular and perhaps stereotypical shape of a house, unpacking its features and reassembling was insightful for them and their interest in the use of patterns already embedded in the mathematics curriculum. However, the effects of creating optical illusions within patterns, as seen in this exhibition, seemed to empower the students to return to patterning with a different purpose. They explored patterning with tessellation blocks, hand drawn grids and the App Geoboard to investigate further tessellation using repetition of colour and shape. (Fig. 4)

The students also viewed a series of photographs by an Israeli architectural photographer, Erieta Attali. The collection of works was titled Archaeology of Light at NGV.³ Students observed the effects of black and white photography and the different perspectives in each photograph. The students continue to discuss and wonder about these detailed works based on the relationships between the land, the structures and the power of these images to convey many stories.

The student's ongoing documentation of their observations of the creche construction included the unique vantage point of our elevated studio, with large windows and on the first floor opposite the construction site. They noted times of the day and observed the effects of the reflective materials used and the features of a rammed earth wall. (Figs. 5 & 6)

To further explore the interplay between architecture, place and people we invited one of our parents, a landscape architect, to share insights into her profession. Naomi presented plans for two spaces which she had worked on with a team that would provide areas for community use.⁴ A space which was





developed to be environmentally sustainable including reusing and filtration of water as a natural habitat for wildlife. The other space for a community garden was designed within a new housing development which would be used by residents to plant and harvest produce and as a social activity. This timely presentation linked with the progress of the creche playground and the students' close observation of these design features.

As the students photographed and filmed these developments, they wrote their reflection using a 'See, Think, Wonder' thinking routine, noting the materials used in the construction and the design features of this construction.

I think it is round so the kids can look out.

I wonder why they made it have curves?

I wonder why they have an igloo?

The students relooked at their reference to a 'steel igloo' shaped structure in the creche outdoor area. It had changed from the previous week. It was now being covered. A group of students went to the site and conducted an interview with the designer of this area who spoke to them about his role as a landscape architect. Another group interviewed one of the team involved in the covering of the 'igloo' over a sandpit

When back in the studio the group shared what they had heard with other students.

They used bamboo to weave the igloo because it is very strong. They made a swimming pool in the igloo and put the bamboo in it for a few days and then they can use it. The bamboo comes from Bali.

The group themselves explored the properties of this material, learning about the soaking process to enable bendability of the bamboo to construct 2D shapes and 3D forms. (Fig. 7)

Always keeping in mind our focus on our relationship with architecture, place and people the students viewed a Ted Talk presentation by Elora Hardy. Elora works with a team who designs and makes bespoke houses using the bamboo plant from Bali. For the students their wonder and curiosity were evident with their concentration and questions while listening to Elora convey the many properties of bamboo for construction. In particular, its strength and fast-growing properties making it a sustainable

material. Some of the students, who with their families, had visited Bali were familiar with bamboo and the style of these houses reflecting cultural designs and specific features in response to this country's climate.

At this time, we invited Paige, a former student of our school now studying architecture, to share with the group her insights and awareness of the stories about architecture, design and construction.⁵ She discussed some of the methods she used to develop her ideas, including the use of grids and handmade models to display 3D views of her designs. She showed the students how she developed her ideas and designs using computer software, explained some of the grids she used to show various views of the models she created and spoke about the importance of mathematics in her course. For the students to view the handmade models and listen to the constraints and also opportunities to work within a brief was of great interest. This included the consideration of the positioning of the structure, lighting and the area of land, one of the threads of our investigation. Paige introduced the term historical architecture, explaining to the students that she had been looking at architecture from different countries throughout history as well as the landscape where the architecture was situated. (Fig. 8)

In addition to the students documenting their observations and ideas through graphic mediums they also visited an area in our school 'Maker Space' where eLearning staff prepared a presentation for the students to learn about the purpose and possibilities of using a laser cutter and a 3D printer. This added to the students 'toolbox' of materials and techniques that they could use to develop their ideas.

In anticipation of designing their own structures with a continual reference to purpose, space and landscape; and having had many experiences of viewing exterior structures, I was mindful of what was beyond 'the skin'. This included the students viewing examples of underground housing (as in Cooper Pedy) and a discussion about the purpose, due to the climate of this area of Australia. They viewed interiors of different shaped buildings such as the circular design as seen in the Guggenheim museum in New York. As the interiors of the creche were now completed the students



were able to access this area, writing, drawing and photographing their observations.

I wonder what a lot of things are wood?

I wonder why there is so much glass?

I wonder why there is so many mirrors?

I wonder how they use these chairs?

I wonder why there are rails inside the classrooms?

The students themselves were able to respond to each other's wonderings as they tested the furniture and observed how the youngest children were using both the inside and outside spaces. Interview sessions were set up for the students to pose questions to the creche manager who was indeed surprised by their detailed questions and observations.

For us it was also the metaphors the students conveyed about the design and space in this construction, both poetic and symbolic. When viewing a contemporary mobile suspended in the stairwell of the creche, several children wondered about its purpose.

I wonder why they have a chandelier of leaves.

Maybe because it brings nature inside.

As the students walked through each of the creche rooms, each with a wall of glass looking out to the playground area, when asked about the features of the windows several commented on the decal of leaves on each window.

Those leaves on the window are the children and their families, it tells you who is here. (Figs. 9 & 10)

Having traversed many areas of exploration with the students, from the perspectives of the stories of ideas to the stories of processes of developing ideas into designs and construction, I now shared a clip from a Ted Talk, presented by Marc Kushner titled 'Why buildings of the future will be shaped... by you'.⁶ I asked the students to consider what contribution they thought they would make to the 'landscape and architecture' within a place and time and there was a pause. Why?

We can ask ourselves as educators, as parents, how does learning empower our youngest to understand the impact of what they can do now and for the future?

I might build a house when I am older.

I will be the architect

I am going to be the scientist that has a laboratory under the ground

What should our buildings and cities look like and how can these designs make a better world? (Fig. 11)

There are stories that describe the relationships between the architecture, people, place and time. These stories can be shared in many forms/mediums and can relate to a particular time, place and with cultural and religious significance. At the invitation of our school Principal this group of students were invited to leave their mark on the history of the school, inside the creche. The students were invited to design and make Mezuzah cases that would be affixed on each door post in the creche. Within Jewish tradition inside the cases would be a small scroll of parchment (*k'laf*) on which is written a Jewish prayer from the Shema. As each was attached to the doorpost, the students recited a special prayer together with our Principal. (Fig. 12)

As we come to the end of our year, or rather a pause in this lifelong investigation focus, the students were reminded of their contribution by the Principal to life now and in the future; **"you are part of this history..."**

And so we can continue to ask ourselves:

What is the reciprocal relationships of stories between ourselves and the spaces we inhabit within the places we live?

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“...nothing but memories...”



“

Thinking feels like a memory that is going to run wild. It can be an idea that is amazing. Like history... it changed the world.”

The beginning of a new school year is filled with excitement and possibility. This year our students entered the Year One classroom as a community of learners ready to continue their learning. We began the year unpacking what we know about thinking to continue to develop a thinking culture within our classroom.

The children articulately shared their thoughts and recognised the importance of thinking in their own lives and in the world around them. The importance of history and learning about times before them was identified as a vital influence in the world today. We wondered if the children linked this importance to their own lives? Did they recognise that the stories of people before them helped shape who they are? We also wondered if understanding someone else's story could help us to better understand our own?

The chance conversation with a friend and colleague at Wooranna Park Primary¹ gave us the perfect provocation to begin exploring stories and specifically the stories of times before us. She had discovered a rusty, brown suitcase and intended to write its story with her group of Year One students, who became known as the 'mystery authors'. It gave us the opportunity to consider where might it have been? What might be inside? Is this a window into history? We also felt this could be a provocation to link our learning with others.

We were given the beginning of a story.

Once upon a time there was an old rusty brown suitcase. It was buried underground in Serbia. Maybe it was buried 100 years ago in olden times.

We gave time to the students to carefully analyse the image of the written story. (Fig. 1) They were very curious to learn more about the mysterious authors and to have a go at continuing this story. We asked the children what they may need to learn in order to write a story about the 'olden times'. The children made the link to their grandparents and considered their lives as children at school. They interviewed their grandparents and looked closely at objects from the past. (Fig. 2) Using the thinking routine, 'Parts, Purposes and Complexities', the children reflected upon the world around them and what might have changed in the last 100 years. They deepened their thinking and understanding about time and change by drawing objects in a suitcase from the past, present and future.

The children, still unaware that the authors of their story came from a multi-cultural Year One class at Wooranna Park Primary School in North Dandenong, were encouraged to email the authors with further questions. During these initial interactions we could see the scope for learning by bringing these worlds together. Throughout the year, the children continued to communicate

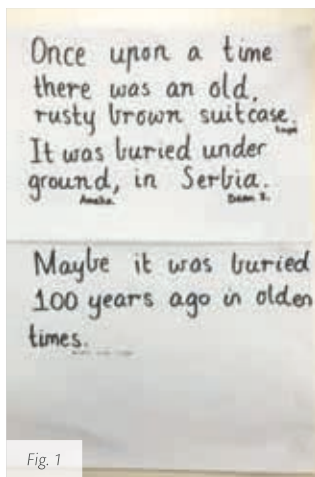


Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

with their new friends using different media – email, letter writing, Skype and Vlogs (Fig. 3). This collaboration and connection allowed for the greatest learning for our children – developing their own independent learning skills whilst connecting to and learning about other children in an extremely rich, authentic and purposeful way.

“Children can be encouraged to respond to difference with empathy, understanding and even delight. Making friends with people from diverse cultures and faiths, and activities such as learning a new language or skill, enables children to be curious and open to different experiences.”²²

We wondered, could the suitcase from the story become a symbol for the children to gain a greater understanding of the stories of individuals in the world around them? In ‘Learning Lab’, negotiated learning time, the children began to design and create a suitcase out of clay. (Fig. 4) We decided to invite Zana, our friend and Year One teacher at Wooranna Park Primary School, to our classroom so that the children could ask more questions and see the actual suitcase which provoked the initial story. The children were full of questions, wonderings, theories and excitement. They began to uncover who began the story – their story and, now, our story.

We asked the children, what they thought may be inside the suitcase? One of the children, encapsulated the discussion with the remark, *nothing but memories*. (Fig. 5)

This idea led us to the power of metaphors to gain a deeper understanding of the symbolism of a suitcase. During a workshop session, we read the book ‘A fruit is a suitcase for seeds.’¹³ The children thought of their own metaphors for the world around them. (Fig. 6)

A person is a suitcase for their heart.

A brain is a suitcase for ideas.

A clock is a suitcase for adventures.

If a suitcase represents memories, what could we learn from the real experiences and stories of families who have travelled to Australia from afar? The children were captivated when another mysterious suitcase arrived at our classroom door. The suitcase from the Immigration Museum gave us an insight into the stories of five individuals who migrated to Australia and now call Australia home. The children were given many opportunities to look for



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

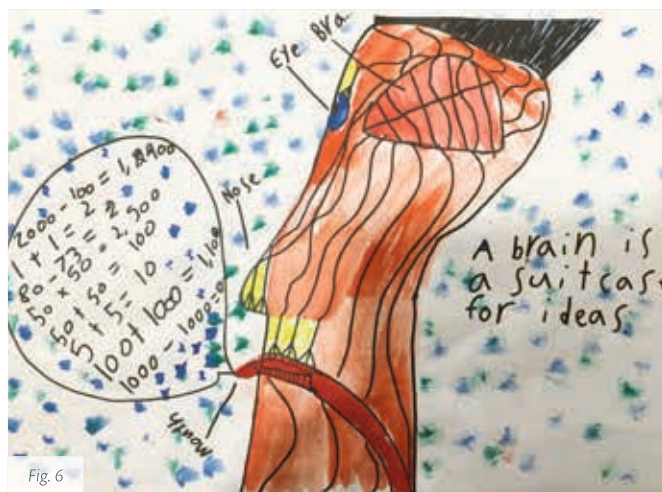


Fig. 6

clues about these individuals as they analysed the artefacts in the suitcase. From a wooden sculpture to baking moulds to a Japanese dictionary and a Hijab, the children learnt about other people and their cultures. They learnt about the countries from which they came such as Japan, China, Germany, Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In doing so, they also learnt about Australia and the reasons people move to Australia. (Fig. 7) They raised questions about migration, refugees and asylum seekers and they grappled with issues and politics that exist in Australia today.

We wondered whether the children could connect to these stories by researching their own family's story of coming to Australia. The children interviewed members of their family to gather information and documented their journeys using wool and a world map. (Fig. 8) They shared their family stories and discussed the challenges and triumphs of coming to Australia. (Fig. 9) The children focused upon the reasons why immigrants come to Australia, using poetry and imagery to capture the beauty of their home.

'What is home?' we asked. A rich conversation about the difference between a house and a home followed.

Home is where I can be safe and warm and I don't have to worry about being lost.

Home is a softer word like where your home is and house is where someone else's house is.

Throughout this whole investigation, at the back of our minds we were cognisant that it is important to recognise and share the story of those who called Australia home long before. We asked the children to consider, has everyone come to Australia from somewhere (as they had discovered) or were there people who have always been here? Who were the First People? Through these conversations, we hoped it would provide another opportunity to highlight the importance of understanding someone else's story to truly understand their own.

"Children are curious. Life is a series of discoveries and questions. Noticing difference in skin, hair, clothes, voices and names is part of working out who they are and where they fit. Who we become, and the way we see the world depends on the people around us."⁴

Our collaboration with Wooranna Park Primary School continued and included an excursion to visit our Year One friends. (Fig. 10) This meeting enabled our children to truly see beyond our context here at Bialik. We watched the children connect and collaborate, grow and learn, laugh and play, all of which demonstrated the strength of a shared learning experience and the power of stories coming together. It was also apparent that the universal language of play enabled the children to quickly develop bonds and an awareness of their similarities. As one of the children said, *"We may all be different, but we all have the same hearts."*

As these children continue their learning journey, we hope that they will carry with them the stories that they have heard, those that they have shared and those that are yet to be discovered. These stories should act as a constant reminder of not only who they are but the shared experience of all people.



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

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Beyond the bounds of a book's leaves



Fig. 1

“
Reading brings us unknown friends.”

(Honoré de Balzac)¹

There is a special camaraderie amongst the children of Year 1 Bet. Now that they have acquired the skills to read new texts and stories with one another, it was not surprising to observe the connections they made when asked to think about stories. (Fig. 1)

A story is something you can read.

Some of them are from long ago.

Some are real and some are not real. (Fig. 2)

You don't have to make a book, you can make it [a story] in your mind.

As we are a community of learners, I was curious to know what our parents thought of when they heard the word “Stories”. Our



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 5



Fig. 4

parents recorded their ideas, drawing upon personal connections, which ranged from “**sitting in Granny’s lap**” to knowing they can be “**real or imagined**” to believing “**everyone has one**”. With these insights shared through the language of speech, I wanted to delve deeper into our children’s awareness by referring back to a comment made in our initial discussion “**I liked how everyone read my book. That changed my day.**” (Loris Malaguzzi)³

I wondered whether others had a similar experience. Could a book leave the impression of really changing one’s day? Was it important to highlight this? So I asked the children to think about this and to draw their reflections to deepen their understandings.

It makes my day because when I read some books it makes me feel calm.

I liked reading that book because there is a lot of information. It’s about flying.

It’s like if a person is sad, then a person can read a happy book and he likes books.

Books change my day because they help you know new words.

Wanting to learn more, the children began to research ways in which they could share and leave books with others. Could we go to the poor and give them books? Would they like the ones we had to give? Could we give books to our friends?

While sharing my documentation with my colleagues, one told me the story about Ali and Michelle the founders of Books on the Rail. I soon learned that these past students of Bialik College, recruit book “Ninjas” who share donated books on public transport. Lucky commuters can then read, enjoy and return these books so others too can read others’ stories. (Ali Berg & Michelle Kalus)²

Wanting to share stories with others like Ali and Michelle, Year 1 Bet began to notice and to name when they saw others sharing books in their local community. Some found mini libraries around

the corner from their house and we wondered if perhaps we could design and construct our own mini library for the Bialik community.

Our investigation took on a new pathway with students experimenting with designs and measuring their proposed layouts. They used clay, paper and recycled materials to create their ideas using different languages. (Loris Malaguzzi)³ They worked together as a class to consider the need of different shelf heights allowing room for larger picture books, alongside smaller chapter books. They sketched their three dimensional perspectives and used ratio to record measurements. As a group they then made a life size paper model. Together we shared our plans with senior leaders of Bialik College, and we are now in the process of constructing and erecting our very own community library. (Figs. 3 & 4)

Interestingly though, once we could see our plan becoming a reality, our thoughts began to shift slightly.

The book isn’t going to read itself. So we need to know the path of the reader.

In order to better understand the path a book might travel along, we set upon designing our own journey, a new story, one where we could stop by the State Library along the way. The schools of Reggio Emilia remind us of the importance of providing children with real lifelong learning opportunities. With this in mind, our intention was for our children to draw upon what they learned together in their investigation and to see that there are many paths we can take; just as books move from the place of publication to the reader’s hands. This authentic experience provided the perfect opportunity for our children to be researchers. (Fig. 5)

Our children kept voicing the desire to be “book ninjas” like Ali and Michelle. We planned to travel by rail so we too could donate a book of our own to this growing book sharing community. From there we would walk from Flinders Street station to the State



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 9



Fig. 8

Library, tour the library together and then catch a coach back to school. (Figs. 6 & 7)

Avid narrative writers appreciate the recipe for a good short story needs a complication. One which challenges the characters to think a little differently, to problem solve and to come together to change the predicted ending. Our story did just that.

From the moment we left the school grounds, we were all actively taking moving photographs of the landscape we traversed. We noticed the creek beneath the bridge before we crossed the highway. We gazed upon images at the train station from the windows of the train looking out and as we navigated the city streets of Melbourne, both large and small. We talked as we walked up Russel Street towards the library when we heard “*Neenor-neenor*”, the loud sound of a fire alarm. We saw a red fire truck parked outside the State Library alongside the security guards who told us that the library was closed due to a burst water pipe inside the building.

Authors Fleet, Patterson and Robertson (2009) described in their book called *Insights. Behind Early Childhood Pedagogical Documentation* that a child is a reader of images, knowing this they are empowered to be an “**active receptor of text or image**”. So, while I had planned for our students to walk through the library with the lens of curiosity, they now were challenged to receive the images they gazed upon beyond the boundaries of the State Library. Broadening their perspective allowed students to recognise learning and sharing stories are not bound to the confines of institutions, instead we can gain them from any location.

“A real book is not one that’s read, but one that reads us.”
(W. H Auden)⁵

Empowering our children with a fine line pen, a clipboard and cartridge paper, Year 1 Bet began to record what they could see,

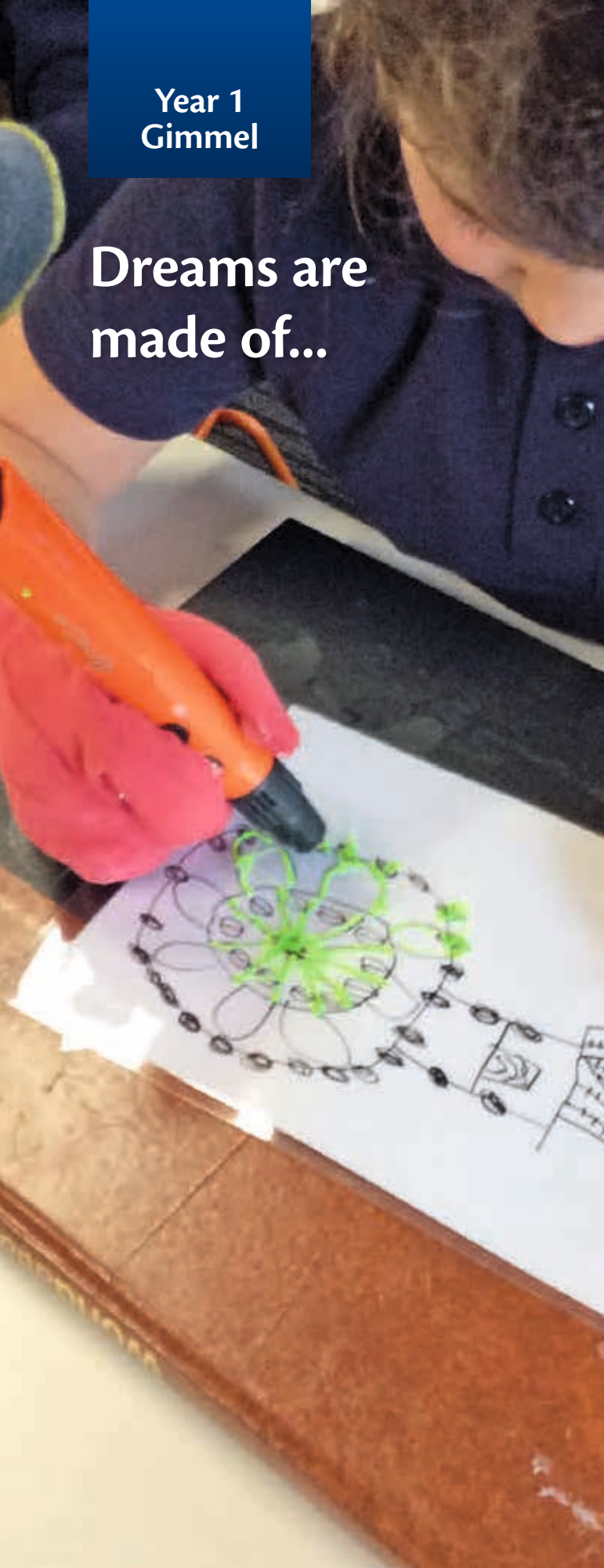
what they thought and what they wondered about, not inside the library as planned, but from the grass area outside the front of the State Library. This Cultures of Thinking routine allowed students to capture their perspective of a trailer selling delicious crepes, another drew a bicycle tied up while another drew the French sculptor Emmanuel Fremiet’s statue of Joan of Arc. (Harvard Project Zero)⁶ (Figs. 8 & 9)

Their excitement was palpable. While we did not go into the State Library on this occasion, our students eagerly shared their stories of discovery with those around them. Together they trekked beyond the bounds of expectations and shared a new story one of resilience, creativity and deep thinking. (Phillip Harris & Donovan Walling)⁷ Year 1 Bet’s investigation is ongoing as each child continues to write and rewrite their own books’ leaves.

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Dreams are made of...



“

Young children are natural scientists. They are curious about their world and they engage in scientific practices to learn about and explore their world. Current research has demonstrated that even infants engage in processes similar to scientists. They are curious, ask many questions and are continually testing their ideas. **“Questioning is a key mechanism through which children engage in science and is one of the scientific practices in the science framework. Even before they are verbal, infants ask questions about how their world works by pointing and gesturing.”**

(Daryl B. Greenfield, Alexandra Alexander and Elizabeth Frechette)¹

Our investigation this year sought to capture and enhance these capabilities in our children by giving them opportunities to test claims and questions through experimentation, documentation and collaboration with their peers, just as scientists would.

Our umbrella focus this year in the Early Learning Centre was 'Stories'. We initially asked the children what they think of when they think about stories. They came up with a range of responses.

Everything has a story.

You can learn from stories.

Stories are also when people are telling you stuff. It doesn't have to be a book.

Each night I dream of many stories.

The idea that dreams and stories were connected captured the imagination and curiosity of the children and teachers alike. The children began discussing this link and proposing different theories and questions.

I think when you sleep you can add onto your stories from your day. This is what dreams are.

As the teachers looked over the documentation of conversations, writing and drawings we debated how we could further their explorations and curiosity. The questions continued to pour in.

Do unborn babies dream the same as their mothers?



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Do animals have dreams?

Are there chemicals in your head that make more dreams?

How do dreams work?

Given our previous investigation into cognition and the brain, we decided to further explore this idea of how dreams work. Initially the children spoke as a group. They debated different theories and ideas of how dreams worked. Some children drew whereas others wrote.

I think I know what dreams are made of. I think they are made of memories that are made into weird things.

I also think I know what dreams are made of. I think it is what happens during the day you have a dream about it.

I think dreams exist because they help you learn and might come true one day.

I think dreams happen because when your brain is asleep, and they take over your brain. You might have a memory and then it escapes.

I think that dreams don't only come from your brain. They can come from different parts of your body, like your ear. You can dream about things that happen at night and you hear them.

The children's interest continued to grow into how dreams worked. As a teacher I was aware of the importance of giving the children the opportunity to explore ideas and come to their own conclusions rather than giving them the answers.

Psychologist Jean Piaget stresses in his theory of cognitive development how the role of teachers is very important to learning. The teacher's role is not to tell information but rather as a facilitators whose role is to aid the student when it comes to their own understanding. This creates a much deeper level of understanding.

We asked the children how they might investigate their claims about how dreams work. In small groups they began to discuss different modes of how they could collect evidence to support their claims. We discussed the difference between weak evidence and strong evidence. We spoke about how they would need to prove their claims.

After much discussion they came up with their idea of creating a 'Dream Journal'. In their journal, each child would proposed a claim and research method.

I think I can control my dreams. I am going to look at books about dinosaurs before bed and then see if I dream about dinosaurs.

I think if I watch a scary movie before bed it will make me have a scary dream.

They took their journal home for several weeks and collected their evidence. Upon returning their journals they shared their discoveries with their peers and compared with others who were researching a similar claim. Many discoveries were made, and further questions emerged.

I discovered that if you watch a scary dream you don't get nightmares. It is weird.

My friend and I did the same experiment, but we discovered different things. I wonder why?

From this initial experiment many other experiments and investigations emerged. Some of the children wanted to see if dreams could be caught and they began to build and design 'Dream Catchers'. Some children explored other meanings of dreaming. They explored the meaning behind Martin Luther King's, 'I Have a Dream' speech. Others continued to research their initial question "how do dreams work" by interviewing some experts in our community.

Some of the questions remain unanswered but this is not important. What is important is the process in which the children learn. The questioning, the debating, the experimenting and the collaborating.

References

1. Greenfield, D.B., Alexander, A. and Frechette, E., (2017). *Unleashing the Power of Science in Early Childhood. Zero to Three*; May2017, Vol. 37 Issue 5, p13-21, 9p Available at <http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=8&sid=0f134fdb-bf59-425d-8c9a-a0c812e880ce%40sessionmgr4008> [Accessed on 24 September 2019]

Figures

- Fig. 1 Drawing of what child thought of when thinking of stories.
- Fig. 2 Children reviewing and comparing their evidence collected.
- Fig. 3 Creating dream catchers using wire.
- Fig. 4 Children brainstorming ideas about stories.
- Fig. 5 Drawing of what child thought of when thinking of stories.
- Fig. 6 Drawing of how dreams work.
- Fig. 7 Drawing of how dreams work.
- Fig. 8 Creating Dream Catchers using 3D Pens.
- Fig. 9 Children reviewing and comparing their evidence collected.



Fig. 4

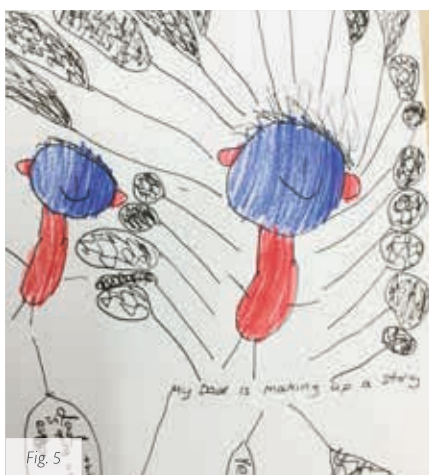


Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

Once upon a time in 'Gan Eden



“

Humans cannot live without stories. We surround ourselves with them; we make them up in our sleep; we tell them to our children: There's a reason storytelling has endured as a medium – the best stories are never just that: they connect us to something deeper, they explain our most deeply held beliefs.”

(Stephen Greenblatt; *the Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve*)¹

The story of Adam and Eve, one of the first in the book of Genesis, is one of the most globally recognised tales of all time. It is told to many children before they are old enough to read and it has inspired some of the most iconic artwork in history, in surprising and dramatic ways.

And God looked down on his world and He saw that it was very good. He made sure that The Garden of Eden ('Gan Eden' in Hebrew) was perfect for man and animals to live in. The children were asked: **How do you imagine a perfect Garden?**

With trees and flowers and ponds.

With everyone living in perfect harmony.

God making sure that everyone gets on well.

There will be plenty of food there. God will made sure of that.

Then, how come in Gan Eden the lions didn't eat other animals?

It wouldn't have been a perfect place to live if man and animals hunted each other.

Following this conversation, the children drew The Garden of Eden according to their own imagination. Each child viewing Gan Eden from their own perspective of perfection. After all, the Garden of Eden has been described by some as eternal paradise. (Figs. 1 & 2)

A short film clip of the Garden of Eden was shown to the children and a natural interest was evident by their comments while they were watching.²



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Is this a real story anyway? Does Gan Eden (The Garden of Eden) still exist?

The weather was always perfect – not too cold, not too hot.

How does Adam know stuff?

What stuff?

Well, he's just been born, I don't think that he was a baby, he knows what to do – he named the animals.

Yes, because God told him what to do.

God created this perfect world for Adam, for mankind and for the animals. Adam was nominated to name the animals and the trees in the garden. This job, as you can imagine was laborious as there were so many different kinds of animals and plants. We tried to demonstrate how difficult it would be for Adam to come up with so many different names, so we played a game where the children sat in a circle and had to name a tree, fruit or vegetable without hesitating. The children found this more difficult than they thought as they were not permitted to repeat what their friends had already said. They acknowledged that Adam's task was harder than they thought. The children realised that Adam had responsibilities towards the animals as well as towards mankind. Even though the land was naturally rich in minerals, Adam still had to look after it.

A discussion took place about the responsibilities that we have in our daily lives for our world today; our obligations at home, at school and in the world. The children were asked to document this.

We had now reached the point in our story where we revealed a key component that would result in the climax of our story. This included The Tree of Knowledge, representing good and evil, and the Tree of Life; their location in the middle of the Garden; and the affect that these trees would have on Adam, Eve and finally on mankind. God told Adam that he could eat fruit from all the trees except the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge.

'...of every tree of the garden you may eat, but from the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you shall not eat: for the day that you eat thereof, you shall surely die.' (Genesis 2: vs. 15–17) (Fig. 3)

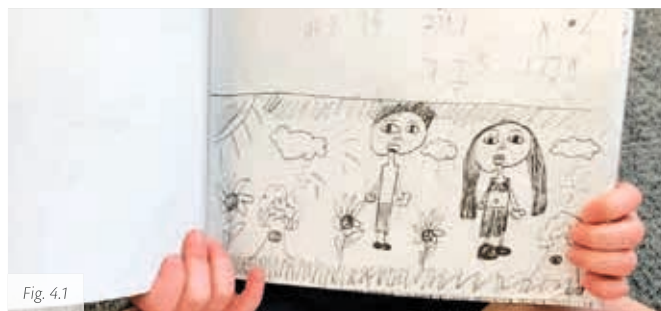


Fig. 4.1



Fig. 4.2

God repeated this not once, but twice to Adam which emphasised the seriousness of this command. A question was sent home for the children to discuss with their parents. **What repetitive rules occur in your family in order to keep you safe?**

The children kept returning to the question and deliberating why God had placed this tree in the middle of the garden just to be told NOT to eat the fruit thereof. What was the purpose of this tree?

I don't think that God wants Adam to know stuff.

Maybe God wanted to show Adam that he can't just do whatever he likes.

I think it was a warning.

No, it wasn't, it was a command!

I love that God first told Adam what he was allowed to do, because it's much nicer to know what you can do... but it's important as well to know what you can't do.

At this stage of the story, the children were split into groups. The topic of discussion was: 'What are you not allowed to do at home, at school and in the world?' The children shared their thoughts:

At Home:

You can't make your own rules.

If you mess in your room, you can't just leave it.

At School:

You can't interrupt other peoples' learning.

You can't hurt people.

In the World:

You shouldn't litter.

You shouldn't chop down trees.

You can't light fires on purpose

You shouldn't use plastic.

This comment led to an intense discussion about our responsibility to keep our world beautiful and safe, to avoid using plastic and the effect it is having on our eco-system.

Rudyard Kipling wrote: “If history were taught in the form of stories it would never be forgotten.”³ Our story of Adam and Eve was unfolding and the children were engaged and fascinated by the fact that the past is so relevant in influencing our present and our future.

לא טוב היות האדם לבדו – No man is an island

While naming the animals, Adam realised that all the animals had partners and he understood that he was alone and the only one without a companion in Gan Eden. This is the first time in the Bible that pathos is used to enhance the story. It is appealing to our emotions and causing us to sympathise with Adam, a lonely soul in paradise. Adam’s task was complete and now he had the time to contemplate his aloneness. Who could Adam talk to? The children empathised:

He would be feeling sad.

The animals were his friends but it wasn't enough for him.

It's not good to be alone.

Sometimes it is good – when you need space.

Even if Adam did understand the animals, he couldn't do things like climb trees like the monkeys.

But man comes from monkeys, so we had the same language.

Adam wanted his own species, another human. (Figs. 4.1 & 4.2)

It was at this point in the story that ‘The Woman’ was introduced. Finally Adam’s dream came true. He now had his own kind. This fact contributed to a discussion about what constitutes a family. Some of the children said that Adam and Eve needed more time to get to know each other in order to build a relationship and to be called a family. Others added that without children they could not be called a family.

This prompted a conversation about different types of families. Families, with or without children, families with two mothers or two fathers or single parent families.

One of the children declared:

God was the father, and Adam and Eve were his children.

It's like God owns a company, Adam is the 'UFO' (he meant CEO) of the company and Eve is the helper.

Yes but a company is not a family!

We all need to belong to a family.

My family makes me feel special and loves me no matter what I do. My family will support me in every situation.

The children’s awareness of the value attached to being a part of a family was confirmed.

Finally the children were introduced to the character of the **snake** and the role it played in the story. How can a story hold one’s interest without the villain? After listening to the verse from the Bible, the children described the snake as being sneaky, manipulative, and scary. It was also pointed out that to liken one to a snake, has a negative connotation. Another important fact is that the story in the Torah is lacking in details about the conversation between the snake and Eve, allowing us to ask questions regarding this covert meeting between the woman and the snake.



So many questions: What do you think that Eve will do? Where did they meet? When did they meet? Did they meet by the Tree of Knowledge or did the snake bring the fruit to the woman as a means of taunting her to commit the ultimate transgression?

I think that they met at the tree, but they didn't plan to meet, the woman was just passing by.

I don't think that she will eat from this tree.

She should have just said: NO!

I think that the woman will ask permission from Adam to eat from the tree.

Maybe the woman will ask the snake to eat from the tree first and see if he dies like God said.

The women should pretend that she ate from the fruit, so the snake will leave her alone.

Maybe the snake was sent by God to test if she would follow God's rules.

The children deliberated and recognised that Eve had been persuaded by the snake. They shared stories about similar situations that they had found themselves in, where they were misled by someone else to do the wrong thing, and how they felt afterwards about their bad choice.

Some of the children chose to draw the snake and the woman having a conversation using speech bubbles, whilst others got into groups and using Bibliodrama (dramatising a biblical text) acted out a scene in front of the class. (Fig. 5)

Most of the children agreed that the snake influenced the woman to eat from the tree. The biblical text continues to explain that the woman came to Adam and shared the fruit with him, and he too ate the fruit from the tree.

The children’s reactions were interesting.

God was lying, the woman ate from the tree and she didn't die.

I can't believe that Adam ate and didn't listen to God after everything that He (God) did for him.

I thought Adam will ignore the woman and walk away from her.

The role of the storyteller cannot be underestimated. The drama unfolded and our story continued with background music of the wind, as if God was walking in the Garden. **“Suddenly God said to Adam: ‘Where art thou?’ And Adam said, ‘I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.’”** (Genesis 3: vs. 9–10)

At this point the children were wondering why God had to ask Adam where he was in the Garden.

Didn't God know where Adam was? Didn't He know and see everything?

Perhaps God was giving Adam an opportunity to confess his big mistake?

God asked Adam if he had eaten the fruit from the forbidden tree. Adam, then shifted the blame onto the woman and the woman blamed the snake. Once more, Bibliodrama was used as a tool for the children to relive the scene.

The children were intrigued by the fact that Adam and Eve blamed each other and did not take responsibility for their own actions. We agreed that the moment one takes responsibility for what he has done, only then can he feel remorse. God had high expectations of Adam and it was evident that God was more disappointed with Adam than He was with Eve and the snake.

We asked the children why they thought that God was more upset with Adam than with anyone else?

Adam was the first human to be created, he had the garden to himself, God trusted him and he disappointed Him.

Repercussions can cause a ripple effect...

Adam, Eve and the snake were present in God's 'court'. Nervously they waited for the verdict of their transgressions.

“And God said to the serpent: ‘Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat All the days of your life;’” (Genesis 3: vs. 14)

The children identified that God used the word 'go' instead of 'crawl' and they came to a conclusion that snakes in the past looked different from the snakes of today:

The snake probably had many legs.

He probably looked like a lizard.

To the woman He said: **“I will make your pains in childbearing very severe....your husband will rule over you.”**

The fact of man controlling woman became an issue for the children and they needed clarification and examples of this phenomena. We spoke about women and their roles, past and present, and how women have fought for their rights to become equal participants.

To Adam:

“By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you will return.” (Genesis 3: vs. 19).



Fig. 6

We listed the punishments that were bestowed on each of the characters and focused only on the punishments that held the children's interest. We felt that concentrating on all of them would be undesirable and could possibly instill fear.

The children focused on the fact that God withdrew the gift of eternal life from Adam and just like he came from the ground, he will return to it. They added that his punishment was related to the land, the hard work and the concept of death. The final and the most severe punishment, being that Adam and Eve were banished from Gan Eden, from their home that they had previously called paradise.

The children understood Adam's sorrow, fear and trepidation regarding moving to unfamiliar territory and innocently asked:

Why did God punish all of mankind because of Adam's mistake?

This profound question could lead to a whole new investigation in itself.

Stories have beginnings, a middle and a conclusion. The five components of stories are: the characters, the setting, the plot, the conflict and the resolution. Biblical stories have all of the above; and as one story ends another one begins. So... Once upon a time, at Bialik College, another story from our heritage provided us the opportunity to enrich our children's knowledge; to connect our past with our present and to develop in our children a curiosity and a passion to revisit stories from our past. (Fig. 6)

References

1. Stephen Greenblatt – Published by Vintage Publishing 2017. *“The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve.”*
2. Video clip; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OBqLFdcVnGo>
4. Rudyard Kipling, *The Collected Works* – Published by Pinnacle Press 2017.

Figures

Fig. 1 A group of children drawing their version of Gan Eden (The Garden of Eden).

Fig. 2 Children presenting artwork of Gan Eden.

Fig. 3 The children looking up to the 'forbidden tree'.

Fig. 4.1 & Fig. 4.2 - לא טוב היות האדם לבדו – No man is an island.

Fig. 5 The children's artwork of the meeting between the snake and the woman.

Fig. 6 The children perusing a map representing Gan Eden as described in the book of Genesis.

Bialik Creche

Inhabiting space

Bet Room

Maya Ben Artzi, Ruby Broder, Sadie Edelstein, Gabriel Eydlish, Huxley Frid, Louisa Holmes Aisenberg, Sorelle Howitt, Jemiah Kuzmicich, Sebastian Peden, Jaxon Raleigh, Esther Wilke

with

Isle Thomssen, Inbar Sadeh & Jessica Wellington

Dalet Room

Shye Ambar, Annabelle Barit, Layla Benn, Alexander Cartoon, Ava Kamil, Ada Kelly, Harrison Lipshut, Jacob Morris, Nina Peters, Maayan Sadoff, Benjamin Schwartz, Ella Sternstain, Eden Susman, Eyal Sztrajt, Jesse Trepper, Ori Tutsch, Chloe Unger, Romy Unger, Abel Woolf, Gal Ziv

with

Melania Patrassi, Shuli Yitzhaki, Marissa Nisic & Jamilla McCoy

3 Year Old Kinder

Kinder 3 Aleph

What is the story of our identity?

Katelyn Barabash, Jack Carp, Minnie Dunne, Barnaby Gauvin, Angus Grof, Milla Israelsohn, Indi Jackson, Chavez Lam, Amelia Mordech, Evie Peters, Joshua Polyakov, Finn Rogers, Tiferet Sadoff, Elijah Silverman, Summer Spektor, Sophie Teperson, Eva Tobias, Eden Zaga

with

Judy Blumberg, Ayana Shavit, Di Thornton, Nikki Kausman, Robyn Winograd

Kinder 3 Bet

When the superheroes came to play

Tom Ambar, Cameron Barit, Tobias Blecher, Zoe Cao, Leonardo Cartoon, Joseph Elton, Eve Harris, Isabella Jacob, Ellis Mahemoff, Emunah Malka-Shilo, Remy Meltzer-Burns, Alexa Pohl, Nina Rozenwajg, Nellie Ryan, Jasper Sham, Ellie Weiskop, Asher Yedid

with

Lindsay Miller, Adi Barzilay, Megan Jay, Zia Freeman, Aliza Deutsch, Ortal Errez, Mandie Teperman

Kinder 3 Gimmel

When the leaves came to visit

Joshua Ciddor, Heidi Clements, Jake Fried, Minnie Grosman, Avielle Howitt, Leo Kuzmicich, Halle Lasky, Samuel Lowe, Phoebe Marks, Yahli Masin, Edward Reid, Matisse Seeman, Leni Serry, Ava Yahalom

with

Gali Sommer, Pazit Landau, Megan Jay, Sandy Sher, Deb Nirens

4 Year Old Kinder

Kinder 4 Cross Class

Story lines...

Kinder 4 Aleph, Kinder 4 Bet

with

Helene Oberman and Kinder teachers

Kinder 4 Aleph

Stories connect one human being to another even if they don't know each other

Maya Aldworth, Olivia Aloni, Juliet Auster, Dylan Berkovitch, Grace Broder, Maya Dabscheck, Jacob Degen, Tommy Hunter, Louie Israel, Alon Lall, Ari Landau, Reef Lipa, Ira Marks, Mackenzie Matthews, Alexander Schneider, Reuben Sher, Raphael Silverman, Victoria Tevelson, Alphy Zhang

with

Elise Rotstayn, Ranjna Najat, Miri Waterson, Tamar Herman, Anne Budlender, Shira David, Chris Georgalas, Julia Rogers

Kinder 4 Bet

This is a good story...

Thomas Alperstein, Summer Blashki, Jethro Blecher, Kayden Briskin, Zion Cheng Ge Cao, James Clements, Reuben Eydlish, Olive Fischl, Indiana Frid, Gemma Frydenberg, James Helfenbaum, Ryder Janover, Georgia Jolson, Elsie Lew, Jesse Mac, Jordan Mackin, James Ryan, Elliot Segal, Isabel Susman, Mayan Sztrajt, Ruiwen Tang, Jed Trepper

with

Megan Miller, Ranjna Najat, Danielle Cohen, Tamar Herman, Anne Budlender, Shira David, Rosemary Barry

Prep

Prep Cross Class

What is my story?

Prep Aleph, Prep Bet, Prep Gimmel

with

Helene Oberman and Prep teachers

Prep Aleph

The stories of the past influence where we go next

Libi Ben Artzi, Lani Blecher, Zac Burns, Ruby Fink, Aerin Goldberg, Sunday Grosman, Evie Haworth, Oscar Herzl, Ilai Kapper, Rebecca Kotler, Max Naphtali, Audrey Polyakov, Harvey Rozencwajg, Ruben Sable, Isaiah Seeman, Blake Swart, Ayala Tal, Shahar Tutsch, Harry Zimmet

with

Melissa Gough, Ariella Rushniak, Zia Freeman, Nikki Kausman

Prep Bet

Stories are like puzzle pieces that fit together

Suri Alon, Chloe Cherny, Noa Deane, Ethan Dodge, Mai Golan, Jack Hirsch-Solman, Noah Kirszbaum, Adelaide Klepfisz, Jasper Moszkowicz, Charlie Nussbaum, Allie Pura, Leo Reid, Eliza Roitman, Angela Shtern, Benjamin Shulman, Adam Skalicky, Abbey Somerville, Leah Teperson

with

Linda Baise, Ety Ben-Artzi, Shira David, Mandie Teperman

Prep Gimmel

How a common interest created our class story

Vanessa Aloni, Jude Beggs, Scarlett Bram, Joseph Dunne, Noah Eydlish, Mika Feldman, Milla Fried, Lexi Furman, Nathan Goldberg, Alma Hechtman, Chloe Israelsohn, Amber Kamil, Toby Levy, Jack Lew, Ness Shurman, Sunshine Stimson, Maayan Wolkenberg, Noam Ziv

with

Roz Marks, Desre Kaye, Aliza Deutsch, Robyn Winograd

Year 1

Year 1 Cross Class

Dialogue with architecture, place, time, people

Year 1 Aleph, Year 1 Bet, Year 1 Gimmel

with

Helene Oberman and Year 1 teachers

Year 1 Aleph

"...nothing but memories..."

Daniel Apter, Leo Blashki, Stella Fink, Emily Firestein, Rocklan Fischl, Adele Fisher, Miller Janover, Matia Krasnostein, Olivia Lurie, Theodore Marks, Noah Meltzer-Burns, Alice Rom, Ayla Roseman, Lucinda Rosenberg, Sasha Southwick, Olivia Susman, Nate Zukerman

with

Natalie Kluska & Zoe Winograd, Desre Kaye, Sandy Sher, Miri Waterson

Year 1 Bet

Beyond the bounds of a book's leaves

Luca Dahan, Ethan Goldberg, Marc Goldberg, Amalya Kalbstein, Gabe Mac, Max Pohl, Coby Pura, Liora Reider, Jackson Rose, Alon Rushiniak, Yasmin Samuel, Alexia Scher, Aiden Serry, Charlotte Sham, Jay Weiskop, Alexis Whine, Ella Yahalom

with

Jacinta Murray, Ety Ben-Artzi, Deb Nirens, Miri Waterson

Year 1 Gimmel

Dreams are made of...

Gia Altman, Gaia Bennett, Noah Burman, Wilbur Gauvin, Kai Glazer, Yoav Hanuka, William Holzer, Eve Israelsohn, Asher Landau, Noam Lifszyc, Eitan Masin, Sara Mazer, Maybelle Razbash, Alexandra Samuel, Hannah Seidner, Ben Sheezel, Nadav Sztrajt, Nathan Tian, Zadie Wodak

with

Rachel Machlin, Ariella Rushniak, Anne Budlender, Miri Waterson

Year 1 Jewish Studies Cross Class

Once upon a time in 'Gan Eden

Year 1 Aleph, Year 1 Bet, Year 1 Gimmel

with

Ety Ben-Artzi, Desre Kaye, Ariella Rushiniak and Year 1 teachers



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