



Windows into Children's Thinking

BIALIK COLLEGE, EARLY LEARNING CENTRE JOURNAL 2021

Bialik. *Be your best.*



From the Principal of Bialik

Shalom Kehilla,

“The mind of a child is a beginner's mind and, for them, every idea is fresh, stimulating and leads somewhere special and surprising.”

Which renowned philosopher said this? Was it the great Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of the Reggio Emilia approach to education which inspires our ELC? Or was it Howard Gardner, the articulator of the theory of Multiple Intelligences which is one of the pedagogical backbones to our learning approach at Bialik College.

No!

If you are like me, then as a child of the 70 and 80s you will be familiar with the sage Kermit the Frog. As the leader of Jim Henson's Muppets, Kermit managed a complex theatre comprised of complex personalities, yet his mindset was one of, as he himself put it, **“ridiculous optimism.”**

Given the times we are in – lockdowns, pandemic, mask-wearing and vaccines, we could approach each day with a combination of trepidation and malaise. But this would be a very doleful and adult's way of looking at things!

Children do not get stuck in our grown-up loops. They have embraced our theme of Beginnings, and embraced what Kermit himself said of their brains, that every day is a new day, and every idea is fresh and leads somewhere.

As you leaf through this inspiring journal, I encourage to celebrate your own children if they are here, yet also celebrate the curiosity, positivity and openness of the children's mindsets, the plasticity of their brains, and the open-mindedness with which they embrace every opportunity and beginning.

This optimism has never been needed as it has been this year, with stop-start schooling and campus openings, with restrictions on movement and work, and with the layers of adult concern being at one a protective hug whilst also at times being a grey cloud wrapped around childhood.

Nevertheless, our children find learning in the maths of tram numbers, they find inspiration in the colour of a local park, and they find play in the most mundane of objects. Said Kermit, **“You are all sitting here listening to me – a talking amphibian. That alone is a radical act of creativity. It's what I call a 'conspiracy of craziness'.”**

So read this journal and be inspired by the creativity and passion of our educators during a time when our societal malaise might encourage the reverse. Thank you for sharing our ELC learning journey with us in 2021.

“Movin' right along, footloose and fancy-free. Getting there is half the fun, come share it with me.”¹

B'Shalom, y'all,



Jeremy Stowe-Lindner
Principal

References

1. 'Movin' Right Along', *The Muppet Movie*, 1979



From the Head of the Early Learning Centre

The concept of “beginnings” became the catalyst for our whole ELC investigation during 2021. Any concept or idea we have involves choices. An important consideration with which our educators begin is the motivation behind those choices. Why are they choosing to research a particular aspect of their work?

When initially discussing the concept of beginnings, one of our educators asked **“If we talk about beginnings, does that mean there was nothing there before?”**

As adults, we first explored the concept we were bringing to the children. We predicted and anticipated ideas as well as developed some questions. This research and planning by the adults both prior and throughout the investigation is critical to its success.

The idea behind the whole ELC immersing themselves into one concept “beginnings” was because of a willingness to create relationships and connections amongst the staff, to develop an even stronger community where everyone has a sense of belonging.

The choice of concept 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. The importance of the connection between theory and practice cannot be underestimated. According to Malaguzzi, the separation of practice and theory within education impoverishes both. He uses a metaphor of riding a bicycle: **“to go forward we have to push both pedals and maintain balance: one pedal represents theory: the other practice. Pushing only one pedal does not get us far”**.

Our professional learning and planning allows a complex and interactive process in which teacher reflection and collaboration is viewed with the utmost importance. In fact, the process is parallel to the way that we see our children learning. Our seminar meetings give opportunity for teachers to share their documentation with others and to reflect, question and learn from the different perspectives of the other teachers in the group. This documentation is the foundation for the planning and reflecting that occurs in these meetings.

2021 has again been a year of COVID disruption. At times during the year we have asked ourselves what future we have before us. We know that much will depend on choices we make and, on the awareness we develop as to the values and ethics that guide these choices. Among the many choices to be made, one will be fundamental for the future; the identity, the reality, and the image we give to children and their education. Despite lockdowns rich learning took place through digital Bialik. The results have culminated in our Windows into Children’s Thinking journal.

The investigations in this journal have taken place during 2021. What follows are not investigations in their entirety, but rather small vignettes, part of the process, from each level, as well as cross class groups in the Early Learning Centre. The investigations may have spanned a few weeks, months or even a year and some are still ongoing. Each investigation is 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)

The documentation allows for reflection and revisiting by the teachers and the children who were part of the investigation or by another group of children or teachers. It will reflect the many languages the children use as they describe their theories and make sense of their world such as the written, spoken and expressive languages.

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



Daphne Gaddie

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Serif Italicised Font

Indicates the voice of a child

Serif Bolded Font

Indicates the voice of an adult

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Creche

How do infants approach the unknown?



We place a lot of care, time and attention into creating reassuring environments for new families attending the crèche. Communication being the key to forming trusting relationships with families as they are the child's first teacher and thus open the door for children to explore. This made me question how the children actually feel entering a new environment with unknown people.

Even though the children's routines from home were aligned within the new environment, creating a sense of comfort and understanding, wouldn't it be amazing to know what they are thinking during this transition?

My initial objective was to observe by listening deeply with all of my senses when children arrived, farewelled their families, interacted with the environment and experienced new sleeping spaces. What were they going to tell me?

The children enlightened and shared with me the different tones in their voices that seemed to be communicating their thoughts and feelings. The more I listened and watched, their differing sounds started establishing particular meaning. I began recognising the vocalisation when hungry or tired, the physical movements and changes to appearance, such as a red colour appearing on the forehead or pulling an ear. These actions are often unassuming, but were telling to me.

In the beginning, the children gravitated towards an adult, not the other children in the room. They shared hugs, cuddles, read stories and interacted with me. This told me that they wanted my company, my reassurance, my voice and my time to nurture a relationship.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

In the children's first few days they watched my movements around the room, although some felt more confident in my arms or sitting in my lap. There were times that I was needed in other parts of the room. During these times I could see them watching me, almost spying on my every move! Physically following me, turning their heads and bodies to find me until able to make eye contact.

My natural response to 'being watched' was to offer the sound of my voice as another sensory input that would hopefully offer reassurance and enable the children to continue exploring under my guidance. For some this was enough, but for others the need to be close was stronger.

As young children often hold onto materials, such as soft blankets and toys from home, I wondered, if they had transferred this reliance onto me...had I become a human comforter?

With this question in mind, maybe there was a need to have items from home in the form of photos and memories instead. Housing the children's most valuable people in their new environment, came with some varied results. Some children held their photo tight whilst exploring and became attached, reluctant to let it go, and others recognised their families in their photo and that was enough.

I could see that the beginnings of positive relationships with the children had commenced by observing the children and families at drop offs in the morning. Some children, walking in on their own; others reaching out to me from their parent's arms indicating they were ready to participate. Waiting for the child to show signs of letting their parent go before accepting them into my arms felt like it gave the child the time, respect and permission to make their own decisions.

The fact that no two children are alike, reiterated the need to have differing approaches for each child in the Aleph room.

Trust is a privilege that children bestow upon us!

The children demonstrated that their confidence had grown both with me, other educators and with their new environment, as they turned their interest to the wider community. They started looking out from the windows and the balcony, to the hustle and bustle of students, parents and teachers below.

Outings to the school sparked their curiosity as they observed and initiated interactions with other unfamiliar people. They looked around and listened out for our voices but seemed mesmerised by these new experiences which in turn reinforced their relationship built within the Creche environment. This alone made the opportunity possible.

The children started to approach other parents, greet them unassisted, and freely explore the natural outdoor environment. One of the children's dads works at the school and this enabled us to create a priceless and memorable visit to his classroom and students. The welcome received was emotional and exciting for everyone, sparking involvement, purpose and connections we never dreamt possible.

The concerns and concentration on children connecting and becoming comfortable in the Aleph room expanded astronomically by these driving factors – listening, questioning, responding, and recognising children's unique abilities in extraordinary ways. Children communicate from birth and can be heard and understood if we listen carefully, with all our senses.

Where does learning begin?



Exploring the ways in which children think when they are nonverbal can be a journey. With the idea of us, the Educators, organising the environment to support their learning and curiosity, we somehow overlooked the ways in which children direct and navigate their own learning.

One of our expectations of the Bet room is that outdoor experiences remain outdoors and vice versa. What we observed though, is that children were bringing the outdoor toys into the indoor environment. We soon noticed that we, the educators, were reinforcing our expectations without acknowledgment, as it seemed the children had a different idea.

What were the children trying to tell us?

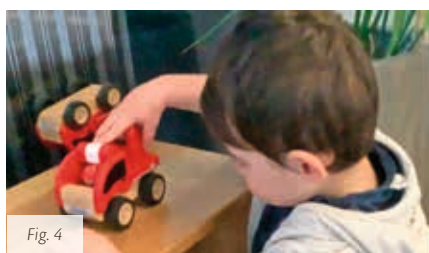
It took us a moment to realise that we truly needed to listen to what they were saying. This meant reflecting on our prior practice and acknowledging the disappointment that we felt. The team immediately joined me by taking action on this pedagogical journey.

Who would have thought that we as Educators would be leaping into the unknown?

We found that the children mostly brought cars, trucks and other vehicles into the room and drove them around while looking for interesting surfaces to explore, with the vehicles in their hands. Interestingly, they were not pushing the cars to see them move rather they kept them close by and held them while moving the cars on different surfaces.



Fig. 1



‘Being open to different ways of seeing... Teachers as well as children are constantly learning. Learning itself is a subject for constant research, and as such must be made visible.’
(Carla Rinaldi and Peter Moss)¹

By changing the learning possibilities and acting on what we have observed we brought the cars, diggers, etc. into the room.

To witness the children begin to do very different things with the vehicles was an indicator that we were on the right track. Some children drove the cars over their bodies, some explored the sound of the wheels against different surfaces and others turned the vehicles upside down, hoping to make connections through their senses.

Maintenance work started to take place on the campus, which brought much excitement, curiosity and attention from the children. It was almost impossible to attract their attention as they were fascinated by the outside world.

With an enlightened view on how we learn, we were taken by the hand of children and led to experiences that would teach them.

This literally meant leaving the Creche to be physically in the presence of the enormous tractors and construction equipment.

We took a step back. Talked less, listened more, avoided asking children direct questions but documented everything we saw and heard. We recorded video footage and analysed it later to seek clarity and gain more understanding.

The children were amazed by the giant tires. *“Big wheels”* they said. *“Wow, look!”* they pointed while jumping up and down. They were scanning the tires from every possible angle and zooming in with their eyes and bodies to get a better look.

The children transferred their own observations back into their learning environment, almost rediscovering the cars and trucks.

They changed the position of their bodies in order to investigate the tires, focusing on the wheels in motion. They turned the vehicles upside down using their fingers on the wheels so as to feel the sensation, and some started driving the cars at different eye levels.

To give the children further perspective we implemented learning through another lens, ‘mark making’. Tire patterns were printed on black paper with white paint by the children. Their eyes widened, their interest grew, and there was a need to see what other tires looked like.

‘There is no set list of things to teach young children. Living is learning and children learn through living.’ (ECA)²

Learning isn’t about specific actions in time. Learning is about enabling ourselves to be open, present, and vulnerable with intention.

References:

1. Rinaldi, C and Moss, P. (2004). *‘What is Reggio?’* in *Children in Europe: Celebrating 40 years of Reggio Emilia-the pedagogical thought and practice underlying the world-renowned early services in Italy*. Available at: Quotes and references – Reggio Australia
2. Davis, B and Degotardi, S. (2021). *Everyday Learning series*. Volume 19 Number 3. Australia: Early Childhood Australia Inc, p 2.

Figures

- Fig. 1 A child brings the outdoor vehicles into the room for a play.
 Fig. 2 Children exploring different surfaces with the vehicles in their hands.
 Fig. 3 Watching tires on our walk to the construction areas.
 Fig. 4 A child brings the track to his eye level, observing the wheels.
 Fig. 5 Printing patterns on a paper.
 Fig. 6 Making marks

What does the concept of movement mean to children?



From the beginning children are able to express themselves and be understood.

From birth children communicate using gestures, sounds, language and directions articulated by adults and demonstrated so that they understand the spoken words. They are social beings motivated to exchange their thoughts and ideas, questions and feelings. Witnessing the interaction and exploration of an enticing object has allowed us to see the children thinking and learning simultaneously.

From prior knowledge, experience and observations as educators, we noticed that children's movement appears to be driven by a need to find out more about themselves and what they can conquer next.

I asked myself why movement is intrinsic in our lives but more so in the lives of children.

To delve further into this question, I looked at why children move.

The first things that came to mind was they move to express themselves, to ask for help, to get closer to something interesting, to be heard and to be present in the eyes and ears of adults and peers.

With children's physical development being one of the biggest contributors to wellbeing, beginning from 'physical dependence and reflex actions at birth' (EYLF), we needed to know more.

Movement offers children the independence to choose environments and people they would like to spend time with. They begin to recognise their body's needs for hunger, thirst, rest, comfort and toileting just to name a few. They are starting to be aware of their internal function and control. This alone raises enormous awareness of the child's own confidence in their abilities.

We noticed that children are either vocally or physically communicating, by taking our hand, crossing their legs and demonstrating their needs; knowing when they need a change or



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 6



Fig. 5

toileting support. This awareness is the children's first steps into control of their bodies, recognising their signs and acting on them.

Curiosity about the world sparks creativity, ingenuity, and an uncontrollable need to find out what happens if? With an insatiable need to create, practice and explore how things work, motivation with mediums such as crayons, fine tipped pens and paint brushes encourage intricate movement and learning dispositions, with increasing integration, skill, and purpose.

Discovering that we have a sixth sense, namely that of proprioception, that provides information to the brain, created further understanding that we are given an extra sense enabling us to know where our different body parts are, how they move and the strength we need to move them.

If this is the case for all children, why are some more confident to move and experiment with their bodies than others? We have observed that some children climb and master obstacles they have never seen before, and others watch from afar or attempt with trepidation and then turn back.

Were they apprehensive or was there a lack of confidence in their own ability, and if so, how did this establish itself?

Through exploration, children may have hurt themselves attempting movement on equipment, fallen over or perhaps not have been provided with the opportunity to slow down and problem solve.

We chose to verbally assist children through obstacles to enable them to control their own bodies, negating the physical assistance from adults. By talking through the process, the children reached a place and skill that they felt comfortable challenging themselves on their own. Often the adult's physical assistance caught them off guard, preventing them from feeling all the sensations it takes to balance and support their own weight.

The concept of movement for children became clear. They were asking and provoking us to provide them with the respect of time, information that would support their growing confidence and a positive and reassuring environment.

“They may forget what you said – but they will never forget how you made them feel.” (Carl Buehner)²

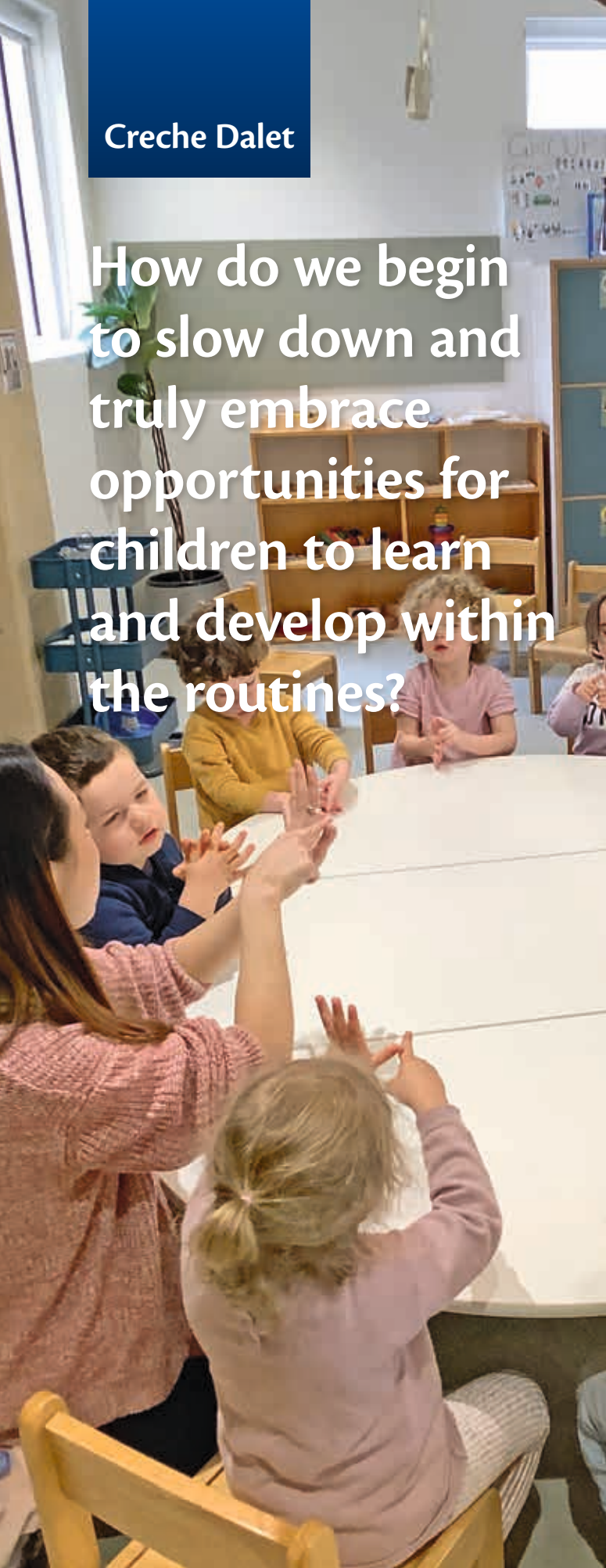
References:

1. *Educators belonging, being and becoming: Educators' guide to the early years learning framework for Australia.* (2009)
2. Carl W. Buehner Quotes. (n.d.). BrainyQuote.com. Retrieved November 18, 2021, from BrainyQuote.com Web site: https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/carl_w_buehner_392897

Figures

- Fig. 1 using sounds, language and directions articulated by adults.
 Fig. 2 They begin to recognise their bodily needs.
 Fig. 3 An insatiable need to create.
 Fig. 4 Movement offers the children the independence to choose.
 Fig. 5 Growing confidence and a positive reassuring environment.
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How do we begin to slow down and truly embrace opportunities for children to learn and develop within the routines?



At the beginning of the year, a group of capable children joined the Dalet room each day. We turned our attention to prioritising the balance of daily routines for this group that would maximise the children’s learning and development. We began investigating how we could adjust our routine to slow down the pace in the room.

Positive change required educators to reflect on routines by asking themselves a series of questions. What have we noticed during routines? How do we provide valuable interactions with children during meals? How do we turn each part of a routine into an irresistible invitation that children can participate with excitement?

Magically, I attended a conference that immediately attracted my attention to a new concept called ‘Rituals’. This encouraged me to rethink routines and practices with our young children.

The thought of creating a space, where educators were not rushed and which provided children with security, predictability and reliability would be a dream come true.

“Rituals are a powerful way of using gestures, actions and behaviours to bring positive energy and intention to our daily interactions, environments and relationships in Early Childhood. Thinking about the differences between routines and rituals can clarify our intentions and the lived experience of young children.” (Toni Christie)¹



Fig. 1

There was a focus on the educators' intention, realising that the actions of the children's teachers have an impact on their lives, knowledge and decision making. This was telling us to be thoughtful, careful and informed about how we delivered and functioned during the routine times, as it impacts the way children respond and interact.

First, we all gathered for 'togetherness time' to discuss with the children about being present, what made them happy and how they could help their peers. The ideas were endless; some children offered cuddles, others thought deeply about what made people sad and recalled first aid procedures as the answer.

This is where the idea was formed to create a caring, responsive and respectful lunch routine involving practises that encouraged participation. A lunch time helper and other strategies were implemented to build meaningful transitions to mealtimes.



We gradually implemented and practised breathing techniques such as 'five fingers'. This initially looked like a performance to the children, but after a few days more and more were joining in, tracing the outline of their hands with their finger. Some concentrated and looked at their fingers, and some looked back at the educators to mimic their actions. The children's confidence and involvement grew as they participated and practised. The atmosphere, tone and environment became quiet, purposeful and relaxed, at times only hearing the whisper of educators' voices. We were surprised and amazed at the level of concentration for so many children sitting together at the same time.

Some of the children's responses were "I finish!" and "I do a fast one".

We were ready to use our breath, in through the nose and out through the mouth, simultaneously while tracing our fingers. Now, we could see the children showing us their five fingers without any reminders. With the children's new found ability to stop, breath and relax, it was time to implement this into the lunch routine.

There was a strong correlation between care and being present. The children had recognised that looking after one another was important to them, so we offered the responsibility of preparing and setting up for lunch. In the beginning, we identified our lunch time helper by observing a child who displayed empathy towards others. We thought we only needed one child and we would present their picture to the group, but the children had other ideas. We witnessed acts of kindness in the form of the other children offering their assistance to the lunch helper, and so it became a group approach. We found they created their own rituals, lining up the bowls, placing bowls in front of each chair, counting the amount of crockery per table and problem-solving together.

When we combined the two rituals, of a breathing routine and a helper, into the lunch time routine, the outcome was impressive. The breathing technique became a symbol of transition and a new state of mind. Children sat at the table with the intention of letting go of the energy and events of the morning. To breath, be present, discover the meal and interact with peers and educators calmly.

Life is not meant to be rushed. With a sequence of activities involving gestures, words and actions, even the busiest children have time to slow down.

Reference:

1. Christie, T. (2021). *Rituals: A Pathway to Self-regulate*. 2021 Early Childhood Australia (ECA) National Conference, Young citizens: The right to play, learn and be heard, [online] Available at: <https://portalapp.eca.eventsair.com/VirtualAttendeePortal/g19-brisbane-national-conference/brisbane2021/> [Accessed on 4 November 2021]

Figures

- Fig. 1 Lining up the bowls
- Fig. 2 Children pushing the lunch trolley together
- Fig. 3 Displaying picture
- Fig. 4 Taking deep breaths
- Fig. 5 Tracing fingers
- Fig. 6 Tracing fingers

How can we learn to respect the earth through exploring our own Bialik grounds?



Opening the Hey room was an event that filled us with excitement, joy and a tinge of apprehension. What did we want to focus on deeply throughout our time in the new environment? Would it be a continuation from our previous learning? The word “Beginning” led us to think about the First Nations of Australia who have looked after the land from the beginning.

Initially, during National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) week, we started a new thinking routine: the “see, think, wonder” routine from Harvard’s Project Zero which instigated deep thinking. The excitement within the children was palpable as they shared their interpretations of Maggie-Jean Douglas’ “Care for Country” poster, which was specially created for NAIDOC week 2021.

The children first saw: *A kangaroo. A lion. A tiger. A snake. Water. A Flower. Yellow and Orange.* As we continued repeating this experience, the children’s answers to “What can you see in this poster?” became more and more complex. *A lion catching a snake. A lion catching a tiger catching a flower.*

We took this learning to another level and tried something new. Before going on our regular walks, we did our “see, think, wonder” routine and went on the lookout for *a tiger, a snake, water, a flower* amongst many other things. It felt as if a switch within the children had been turned on and their level of involvement, enthusiasm had been accelerated. As soon as we left the ELC building, the children were seeing their environment with new eyes.

Look! A dinosaur! Right there! Quick everyone! Jump or else it will catch you!

Where are the lions and the snakes?

Can we find a lion?

Look! There are some lion footprints!

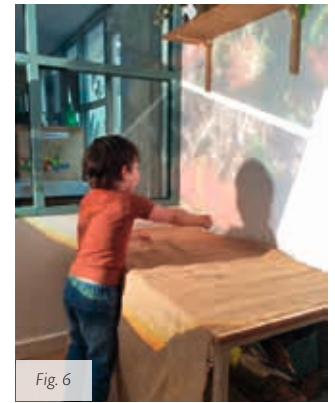
I want to do this again!



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



“No one will protect what they don't care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced”
(David Attenborough)¹

Through this experience of intertwining their imaginations with the tangible world around them, the children seemed to form a special relationship with the land. They were on the search for the wonderfulness in the world and instilled a sense of adventure within them. Although we had explored the kitchen gardens numerous times before, this took on a new light and the world was open to new discoveries and possibilities.

However, on our walks, we observed that the children wanted to bring memories back to the classroom through picking flowers and taking rocks from the garden. This sparked an opportunity to empathise and consider caring for the land more deeply. One of the concepts that the Indigenous people hold dear is respecting the Earth. Our inquiry question was thus formed: “How can we learn to respect the earth through exploring our own Bialik grounds?” How could we form a deeper connection?

This led us to further explore the concept of treading lightly and leaving the earth as we found it. How could we explore this notion when the children instinctively had the desire to pick flowers and bring them back to the classroom? In what ways could the children bring back memories and leave the flowers to grow? This urged us to find an alternative solution to picking flowers and vegetables: using iPads to capture moments.

We use iPads to document children's exploration and learning so, what would the children choose to capture if they had the opportunity?

The children quickly understood the idea of taking pictures rather than picking flowers or taking rocks with them. They took pictures of flowers, carrots, potatoes, strawberries, bugs and snails. Some children took pictures of the same plant but focused the camera on different leaves of the plant. After finding a particularly interesting rock, one child took a picture of the rock before saying: *“The garden will say get it back in my garden. I put it back so the garden can use it.”* The children understood the importance of leaving things untouched in nature because someone else or even something else might need it more. They were seeing nature through a lens of respect.

This experience also led us as educators to surprising discoveries. A child, who had previously said *“I don't want to go in the chicken house because it's scary”* decided to take a picture of the chickens. After this experience, this child grew in bravery and even went into the chicken cage to say hello to the chickens. Being behind the lens provided this child with a strong sense of security and forged a path to new, brave and wonderful exploration.

“Technology enters into the daily life of Reggio Emilia's infant-toddler centres and preschools, not dominating other ‘languages’, or replacing them, but mixing with them. [...] It supports children's ways of knowing and inaugurates new environments of socialisation and sharing where each child's ‘mental’ world – which includes external stimuli and interior representations, at the same time cognitive and emotional – can be expressed and communicated.” (Simona Bonilauri and Maddalena Tedeschi)²

The pictures which the children took reached a different dimension when brought back into the classroom. We explored the pictures using different mediums: on the interactive screens, on the light table and through the projector. Each child remembered which pictures they took, demonstrating their sense of creative ownership and the importance assigned to their creation.

The word “Beginning” led us to many possibilities and allowed us to deeply explore the concept of looking after the land: a concept which is not only beginning but also continuing.

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1. Stubbs, P. (2020). David Attenborough quotes. *The Environment show*, [online] Available at: <https://www.environmentshow.com/david-attenborough-quotes/>
2. Bonilauri, S. & Tedeschi, M. (2018) *Bordercrossings: Encounters with living things/ Digital landscapes*. Italy: Reggio Children publications.

Figures

- Fig. 1 Exploring the “Care for Country” poster.
 Fig. 2 “See, think, wonder” routine.
 Fig. 3 *Where are the lions?*
 Fig. 4 Taking pictures.
 Fig. 5 The carrot- picture taken by Jamie
 Fig. 6 *Look! I'm picking the flower!*



3 Year Old Kinder

A group is where we make some space for friends



Each child has something unique to offer; given their different personalities, histories, life experiences and memories. As educators we asked ourselves how we could apply these elements to create a shared learning culture, where the children showed social responsibility towards each other, in order to create a bank of shared memories. We wanted each child's voice to be heard, opinions valued, differences celebrated and accepted and above all, to engender a feeling of belonging and validation.

As Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of the Reggio Emilia schools, reminds us, **“Among the goals of our approach is to reinforce each child's sense of identity through a recognition that comes from peers and adults, so much so that each one would feel enough sense of belonging and self-confidence to participate in the activities of the school.”**¹

What could unlock the sense of social responsibility of this group? Would encouraging and supporting the notion of 'participation' be the key to achieve what we were seeking for this group? The concept of participation has many definitions, amongst others, **“The act of taking part or sharing in something.”**²

We were keen to follow through with this idea. How to implement it? Does participation then begin when there is an understanding that you are part of a group?

All children entering kindergarten are asked to bring family photos, which are displayed in the room. We photographed each child as well and placed these photos in prominent positions.



Fig. 1

There were animated discussions as the children gathered around these photos, *I can see me, that's my mum. I know him.* This helped give the children a sense of security, a sense of importance and relevance to the group. The psychologist Lev Vygotsky says that **"It is through others that we develop into ourselves."**³

We see this as the children become part of a kinder group. The way they relate to one another and the experiences they share, shapes their view of the world and the role they play in it.

We wondered how the children would view themselves graphically. The children worked in small groups drawing their self-portraits. The self-portraits were all combined and displayed on a wall. (Figs. 1–4)

That's me. See that line here, that's my nose. I know it's me.

That's me because I did it. That's my funny hair.

That's me in in Superman costume.

We all have the same colour of faces.

All of us have bones, but we have different skin colour.

Different people want to do their shape and face different.

Different interests come into your brain at different times.

All people don't want to be the same.

The children acknowledged their similarities and differences. How could we use this information to create an understanding of being part of a group, where everyone could be a participant, whether active or passive? With active participation the child listens and interacts with the others in the group, whilst the passive participant prefers to listen and be an observer. This does not preclude the child from the learning that is occurring.

Rinaldi says that **"From the beginning children demonstrate that they have a voice, know how to listen, and want to be listened to by others."**⁴

We are aware that power dynamics can also occur among children, so many discussions and learning experiences were held in small social groups. In one such group we explored what the concept of a 'group' meant to the children...

A group is a circle.

A group is round.

It can be a bunch.

Look they are a bunch. They are connected. (Pointing to a collection of hexagons)

A group is where we make some space for friends.

A group needs lots and lots of children.

We need groups to take care of children.

The Italian educator, Leila Gandini, maintains that **"Participation depends on creating a culture of social concern."**⁵ How could we inculcate these values and create a sense of 'social concern' with a group of three-year-olds?

Our Bialik School Values include empathy, responsibility, respect, perseverance and integrity. Our class has a weekly Shabbat walk every Friday which has become part of our class culture; and one of these walks entailed a visit to principal Jeremy. As we sat in his office the children noticed a basket of coloured balls, and were curious as to the significance of these. (Fig. 5)



Fig. 2



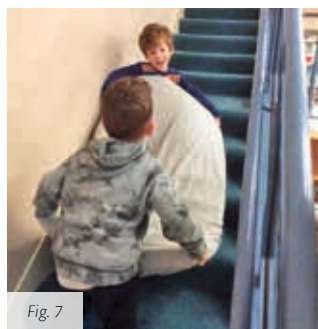
Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Jeremy explained that each of these different coloured balls denoted a school value, the blue for Empathy, the red for Responsibility, the yellow for Respect, the green for Perseverance and the purple for Integrity. He offered them to us to use in our classroom, and this led onto the idea of using something concrete to introduce our school values.

As each kinder day grew to a close, we sat together as a group reviewing the day and the behaviours that represented our values.

We noticed conscious as well as subconscious acts of empathy and a sense of responsibility becoming apparent throughout the day, such as children offering friends sympathy and a wet paper towel for ‘an injury’, tidying the room without being asked to, helping a friend put their mattress away. These particular values of empathy and responsibility seemed to resonate most with the children.

We started to observe that they themselves began to mention others who had demonstrated those acts. They saw the importance of acknowledging these. We initially focussed on these values and presented the relevant balls to the child or children, the red for responsibility or the blue for empathy. In time we introduced the language of the other values. Often just the mere fact that we called out these acts, without giving a ball, elicited huge smiles.

We were hoping that in time, by internalising these values it would help lead the children to an understanding of their significance and the role these played in a participatory culture.

“The creation of any group culture is ongoing and evolving. As educators, we construct culture over time with the active participation and input of those around us.” (R. Ritchhardt)⁶

Over time we have seen how the children have learnt not only how to support one another during group learning experiences, but how they have also become responsible for their individual learning paths, *I can show you how to do it. I can help you with your puzzle.* (Figs. 6–8)

The ‘values language’ has become part of our class culture. The coloured value balls have brought about a positive change in behaviours, and created a greater sense of accountability and group participation. (Fig. 9)

This was evident when we had a further group discussion how we could create a happy group.

We are talking.

Be good. Be kind to your friends

Sharing, sharing everything.

We need to have responsibility.

We need to have empathy.

You need to listen to the teacher.

When somebody talks you have to be very quiet.

You need to work really hard. You don't give up; you try very hard.

Respect means stop when they ask you to stop, respect!

As we move towards the end of Kinder Three, we hope that we have achieved in some small but significant way a **“Culture that nourishes our educational experience and puts all of us into the role of constructing human decency, spreading hope and promoting emancipation.”** (Leila Ghandini)⁷ A culture of participation.

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Figures

- Fig. 1 Small group face drawing
 Fig. 2 Small group face drawing
 Fig. 3 Discussing their faces
 Fig. 4 Face collage
 Fig. 5 The Bialik Value Balls
 Fig. 6 Showing how to put on socks
 Fig. 7 Helping carry a mattress
 Fig. 8 Teaching a friend how to do a puzzle
 Fig. 9 Sharing responsibility for packing up

*When you close
your eyes, you see
things differently...*
(4yo)



Having a new group of three-years-old children made us think about the value of different perspectives in relation to our group and our ELC's 2021 focus on 'Beginning'.

We started with establishing the furniture arrangements, classroom routines and small group composition that encouraged the children to talk among themselves. The goal was to help the children to become a cohesive, collaborative group that learn and grow together. Just like a candle that loses none of its light by lighting another candle, we can become this beautiful image of sharing the flame of learning, and one day we will look up and realise, we are so much brighter than we were at the beginning. As the year progressed, we continued to encourage the children to interact, listen and accept each other despite the different perspectives each of them carries.

Ella's voice is different than my voice, but we can hold hands... (3yo)

We wondered how a digital device could be used to support this journey, and how children's drawings can become an expression of these relationships? How could the dialogue, between the two 'intelligences' of human and digital reciprocally shape and co evolve the group? How could a digital device enable unexpected perceptions, dimensions, points of view and visibility? How could the use of digital technology produce new ways of investigating and understanding different perspectives?

We began with a focus on portraits. We placed the artwork MATES by Cadd¹ as a provocation.

This is a dark person, he is a boy...

He looks like he is happy, he puts his hand on 'Gali'...

I think they are stuck in the aquarium because it is very dark...

This is a little girl and this one is another girl...

They look very different...



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

*There is a rainbow everywhere, it means that they are nice to each other...
They have their arm around each other because if they are feeling sad,
they can make each other happy...*

It's hard and smooth in the picture... (Fig. 2)

Drawing the children's attention to the details, required us to slow down. Choosing novelty versus long term learning through the use of an iPad; introducing specific digital language and thinking of how to provide learning opportunities without them being teacher directed only, were all questions in the forefront of our pedagogical decisions.

In collaboration with Natalie, our innovation and eLearning coordinator, the children were introduced to digital photography in small groups. Exploring themselves through 'selfies', then taking photographs of each other using different angles, distance and the choice of items to zoom in on, enlighten the different perspectives each child carries. (Fig. 3)



Fig. 3

Photographs taken by the children were used as a base for their drawing. Others, in transparent form, were placed on the light table to encourage interaction between the children. Conversations commenced and relationships started to form. The group formation began. (Fig. 4)

Children's points of view were broadening and their perspective changed as they looked through different lenses. Perspective is an attitude which gets richer, more complex and deeper when it is open to multiple viewpoints. In the Reggio Emilia approach, '**multiple perspectives promote both a sense of group membership and the uniqueness of self**' (Edwards, Gandini & Forman 2012)². (Fig. 5)



Fig. 4

I see blurriness and not blurriness...

I think that the glasses make the trees green, they are magic...

The leaves look different in the glasses...

How can the sky be white? It's different to the colour of the glasses...

In the process of exploring portraits, eyes in particular, through digital photographs and drawings, each representation was unique. Just like every child is different, it is this diversity that we seek and celebrate, "**it's those differences that are very important because differences are strengths**" (Cagliari 2021)³.



Fig. 5

Adding to the challenge of the portrait experience and aiding in the process of understanding perspectives, was the use of technology. By expending the iPad as a camera and using light tables and projectors for displaying provocations, we were able to increase perspective taking. With the language of digital photography, we could push toward new thinking processes. Furthermore, in combination with drawing, we gave voice to children's powerful desire to invent the world and to immerse their minds in the magic of reality.

Pound (2009)⁴ helps early childhood educators grasp the complexities of postmodern theories and describes a key element as 'seeing what is visible from a different light', which aligns with



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

the metaphor of 'lenses' or 'glasses', used by many postmodernists. (Figs. 6 & 7)

Moving the learning forward, we decided to use mirrors on a large scale, knowing there is something alluring about them, particularly to children. We combined mirrors to reflect reflections, and explore perspectives infinitely.

'...learning to wonder, wondering out loud, and wondering together are powerful ways in which curiosity and a desire to research phenomena [e.g. mirrors] can be encouraged in young children' (McLachlan 2015 p. 75)⁵:

Inside the glass it's only pretend...

When it's up it's real, I can touch it, see?...

I can see the ceiling...

I can see the ceiling from the ground...

Hey, the clock is inside now... it's upside down...

There is one of me here, one of me there and one there...

According to the Cambridge dictionary, perspective means 'a particular way of considering something'⁶. Borrowing Layla's (4yo) idea of 'when you close your eyes, you see things differently', we wondered whether children's perspectives of themselves were different when they drew with their eyes closed. Without making visual sense, according to what adults perceive as 'realistic', we carefully listened to children's interpretations of this non-representational creation. This exercise aimed to provide children

an additional opportunity for experimenting with multiple visual perspectives, with eyes open and closed.

My brain can't do anything because my eyes are closed...

I see colours inside my head...

If I close my eyes, I need to wait for the morning to open them up...

When my eyes are closed, my hands want to draw...

Using the work of the Reggio educators as a lens for looking at our own practice, we can make the invisible visible. Any situation can be interpreted in a number of ways and we should try out different perspectives or 'glasses' in order to broaden our own. Furthermore, it is impossible to compare our children, nor their points of view. They are very different in so many ways. Like the sun, the moon and the stars, all shine when it's their time to do so, all within their own perspective.

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4 Year Old Kinder



Friends like playing together like the leaves did



We see the children in our class as strong, confident learners who are full of potential, and capable of constructing their own knowledge. We know that one of the ways that children construct their own learning is through their connections and interactions with their educators, other children and the environment.

This year our ELC umbrella topic was 'Beginnings'. Looking through the lens of the Reggio Approach and our understanding that making connections is at the heart of learning, our intentions for the children were to begin to develop positive relationships and friendships in our classroom.

In considering Loris Malaguzzi's words, "**I understand myself through my interactions with people and objects around me and the way I am reflected in the eyes of other people**", we as a team considered our research questions;

What familiar aspects of our environment could we use as a common ground to start conversations amongst the children?

How does acknowledging each child's identity give importance to developing relationships?

Was there a difference in making connections if the children had knowledge about each other as opposed to just being familiar with each other?

Our investigation during three-year-old kindergarten had involved weaving the children's indoor experiences with the outdoors, and connecting the investigations in the classroom with Jewish studies. It was represented both physically in the children's explorations of their environment and metaphorically through our conversations with the children.

At the time of our 'weaving investigations' in three year old kindergarten, we were gifted a weaving loom to use in the classroom. The children were very excited about using it but due to the many lockdowns occurring during that year, they never had the opportunity to weave.

As we were 'beginning again' in four year old kindergarten, it was a perfect opportunity to revisit the loom and use it to relaunch the children's interest and conversations.

Small groups of children were invited to weave together at the loom and share their stories about their families and what they did during the holidays. Working in small groups gave the children opportunities to learn from and about others, to develop respect and acceptance, and to broaden their social competence.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Beginning with something familiar was our path to developing strong connections. (Fig. 1)

Loris Malaguzzi states, “...a child’s self-identity is constructed out of relationships formed with people and things in the environment.”²

Based on this theory, each child was asked to share a carefully prepared box of items that the child believed would tell the other children about themselves. We considered that if the children shared something personal about themselves, this would strengthen the relationships between the children. It was also a way of acknowledging the importance of each child’s identity and voice in the group.

Ron Richart, an educator and researcher at Harvard University states, “Thinking routines can not only scaffold and support students in thinking, but also can help to make that thinking more visible to both students and teachers. We want to create powerful learning opportunities in our class.”³

Each child was given the opportunity to share their box; what did they see, think and wonder? (Fig. 2)

When we listened to the children’s reflections about these experiences, the word ‘friends’ came up continuously in their conversations. The children used this word independently as it seemed that now that they knew each other better, they considered each other as friends rather than just as children in the same class.

Telling our friends what you like is good so they get to know you better.

We put out the things and pass them around because it is about us.

We wanted to show our friends what we do.

Some things are the same. Like lots of children like to swim. They are friends because they like the same thing.

You have to tell everyone so they know.

“We have to understand that the children are moving and working with many ideas, but their most important task is to build relationships with friends. They are trying to understand what friendship is. Children grow in many directions together, but a child is always in search of relationships.” (Loris Malaguzzi)⁴

Whilst we were exploring the concept of relationships amongst the children, we were also considering other opportunities that the environment presented for developing relationships. According to the Reggio Emilia approach, children interpret ideas and represent them through a hundred ways of thinking, expressing, understanding and encountering; therefore the metaphor of ‘the hundred languages’ helps us to value the extraordinary potentials of our children. (Jan Millikan)⁵

The concept of using leaves of plants was introduced. The children’s explorations and experiences with various types of leaves provided opportunities for them to further develop connections and friendship through other languages.

The children had the opportunity to dance with big palm leaves, to observe the changing colours of leaves during the seasons, to lie down and play in a pile of dried out leaves, and to eat the leaves of various vegetables growing in our playground garden. The children represented the leaves and their experiences through observational drawing, movement and in three dimensional forms. (Figs. 3 & 4)



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Whilst working with clay in small groups the children conversed;

The leaves are friends because they are dancing in the wind going round and round.

The leaves are friends. They are falling off the trees and floating down together.

The girl is smiling because the leaves were floating and smiling at each other. The girl is their friend.

On reflecting and analysing the children's conversations we were able to interpret their thinking. Whilst imagination was at play here, there was also a connection with friendship and community. We were curious about these connections and we decided to explore the children's conversations further.

We used the Thinking Routine 'Step Inside' to support the children's reflections about why autumn leaves fall off trees; (Fig. 5)

What makes you think that the leaves are friends? (Fig. 6)

What do they do to show they are friends?

When people find a leaf and they pick it up and drop it off, it joins the other ones. Its friends.

If they are floating and one gets stuck, they can't be friends. Because friends have fun together.

If there are lots of leaves on the tree and it's Autumn, when they fall down together, they can be friends.

The children showed us the movement as they described the leaves' actions;

They were dancing and prancing.

They flipped and flopped together.

We questioned further;

Do leaves do the same things as children to show they are friends?

Well friends like playing together like the leaves did.

When friends want to sit next to each other they shuffle together to be close to each other. The leaves move together on the tree.

You play with friends with things in the playground. The leaves play together in the tree with the branches and the flowers.

Teachers are partners and co- collaborators in the children's pursuit of understanding. The educators' research and growth are just as important as that of the child's. The author, Joanne Hendrick states, **"Growth for both the adult and child is important. As children investigate and reflect on their experiences, they are growing toward a more expanded and organised view of these experiences as well as gaining understanding of how their investigations relate to diverse subject matter. Adults are growing in other ways-in openness of mind, curiosity and responsiveness."**⁶

In considering our own research and growth, our team gave much thought as to how to weave all of the rich threads of these new beginnings, friendships and connections together. Both the children and educators have documented this investigation



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

through photographs, drawings and written notes. The intent was to provide an opportunity to share how the investigation has developed, but also to continue to revisit and to think about where it will go next.

Could we possibly make the children's understandings more visible using the children's conversations about leaves as a metaphor for friendship?

What celebrations would we create that could share the beauty of the children's weaving, and the stories of the children about this journey?

"Children are rooted by their self-understandings and relationships to others. They take in the culture around them and weave their own autobiographical narrative to find a sense of belonging." (Joanne Hendrick)⁷

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Figures

- Fig. 1 Small groups of children were invited to weave together at the loom and share their stories.
- Fig. 2 Each child was given the opportunity to share their box; what did they See, Think and Wonder?
- Fig. 3 & 4 The children's explorations and experiences with various types of leaves provided opportunities for them to further develop connections and friendship through other languages.
- Fig. 5 We used the Thinking Routine 'Step Inside' to support the children's reflections about why autumn leaves fall off trees.
- Fig. 6 We asked the children; **What makes you think that the leaves are friends?**

To listen with your whole body – eyes, ears and face...

What happens when we listen, really listen? What do we hear? Do we listen with just our ears or are all our senses involved? What are the beginnings of deep listening? How do we sharpen our senses to be able to listen, hear and develop our communication?

We, in Kinder 4Bet are a community of individuals. We can make noise. We can participate in discussion and we can play. All of these activities require a certain level of listening skill and a certain amount of concentration. If we begin a journey of deep listening can this be cause for change, the development of a respectful community?

Where to begin before we begin... We, as educators, wanted to ascertain what the children already knew. Children are viewed as **“strong, powerful and rich in potential and resources right from the moment of birth”** (Rinaldi, C)¹. Children come to the discussion with previous knowledge and this is where we needed to begin.

What does it mean to listen?

It means we need to listen with our ears.

Listen in your room.

Stop and listen.

Your brain makes you listen.

Your brain makes you clever.

We have to listen and be quiet.

What can we listen to?

Birds.

Videos.

Wind.

You can listen with your heart.

The children listened to the story “Listen” by Holly McGhee² (Roaring Book Press, 2019) and reflected. This is a story about using all our senses to pay attention to the world around us.

You have to listen to music.

Fill your heart with your hands.

Thinking.

We listened to sounds of rain and wind.

It sounds like fresh air.

That I am being rained on.

Makes me feel sad...

The children were making connections between their emotions and listening. Paying attention to sounds and what they could hear and what they could feel.

“Listening is not the same as hearing and in order to listen effectively you need to use more than just hearing the words spoken”³

To delve deeper into the depths of listening, and the connectedness to emotion, the children were given the opportunity to create and listen at the same time. Would different sounds change what the children drew? We know, through researching the pedagogy of the Reggio Emilia Approach of “The One Hundred Languages”, that children possess a hundred languages, a hundred ways of thinking that create connections between various experiences (Rinaldi, C)⁴. (Fig. 1)

Small groups of four children came into the studio, put on a pair of headphones, listened and drew. The first sounds they experienced were the sounds of a city, New York City.

I can hear a busy road.

It makes me think it is the beach. But I can't hear the waves so it is not the beach.

I can hear the rain..... But I can't hear the umbrellas.

I can hear the city.... Because cities have lots of stuff in it.

I can hear the people, they are walking around the shops.

I am making lots of people. (Fig. 2)

The children drew wheels, cars, people, horns and when asked what colours they felt went with the drawing and listening they requested red, blue, orange and green. Making what they were listening to visible to us.

Orange for lots of people. (Fig. 3)

It was a very busy piece of work.

The sounds of the city then changed to a different one, Mexico City.

I can hear birds, chickens.

Some cities are very quiet and some cities are very noisy.

It's a noisy, quiet city. (Fig. 4)

The children were observed to slow down their drawing and their conversation also slowed, reflecting on what they were listening to.

Another small group of children were invited to the studio to listen to music and draw.

We began with pop music – “Uptown Funk” by Bruno Mars. The children responded with simultaneous dancing and drawing (video of children).

The music was then changed to “The Nutcracker” by Tchaikovsky. Would we observe changes in the children?

Did the music change?

Yep. (Fig. 5)

Does it make you want to draw differently?

Yes.

I love this music.

Makes me want to dance.

Rainbow.

Because it is beautiful and magical and rainbowish, loveheartish and flowerish.

I feel happy.

Happy and I draw happy. (Fig. 6)



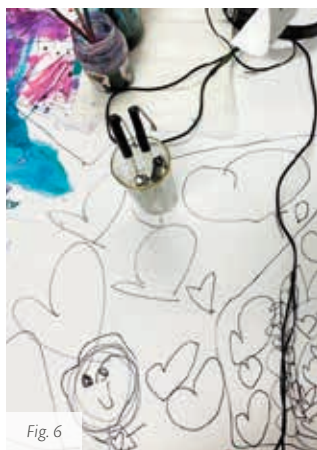


Fig. 6



Fig. 6

The children were beginning to listen with their senses; they were beginning to listen with depth, beyond just hearing. (Fig. 7)

We came together to further research the idea of deep listening. The children watched a video on Didirri, the name used by the Aboriginal people from the Daly River region of the Northern Territory to refer to the Indigenous concept of deep listening. **“It means listening not only with our ears. It’s deep listening with our eyes, deep listening with all the senses.”** (Brealey, L)⁵ (Fig. 8)

The Didirri video, narrated by Dr Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr Baumann⁶, was viewed multiple times. With each viewing we focused on using a different sense to listen with; separating the senses to allow the children to focus deeply on one at a time. They first listened with their ears.

I heard the wind.

I heard the rain.

I heard music.

“To know me”.

“Listen”.

“Take a deep breath”.

What does this mean?

Calm down.

Be calm.

Stop.

The children viewed the video a second time and were then asked to listen with their eyes.

I heard, with my eyes, the sea.

I heard her.

People jumping in the water.

The little fish.

I saw the lady walk into the sea.

I saw the butterflies.

The children came and jumped in the water.

We watched the video one more time to bring the two senses together and to understand what connections the children had made.

What did the lady want us to hear?

To be calm and listen to her words.

To listen with your eyes and her breath.

If you are not calm you can’t listen.

To listen to her story and listen to what she is saying. And she wanted us to watch her story.

To listen with your whole body – eyes, ears and face...

To be kind.

The children were engaging with the skills required to deep listen. They were beginning to listen with their whole being. We were becoming a community with communication and respect for each other’s voices.

For the children to be able to develop the skill of deep listening is also enabling them to develop a gift. The gift of being able to give themselves and their peers time, attention, compassion and empathy. To be able to hear each other, to slow down and to be present within their communities. The skill of listening is something that needs practice and needs to be built, a bit like learning to read and write. Deep listening is an art and is counter – intuitive to where our society is. We, as a collective, need to stop the quick fixes, the phone scrolling and start being present... and listen.

Our listening skills are developed and built on each day. The children continue to play and we continue to engage in discussion whilst developing our deep listening skills. Listening is a skill that does not require perfection. It is a journey and one of our beginning steps, as educators, is to honour the children and to listen to their voice as their voice deserves the respect of deep listening.

Deep Listening – it’s feeling the words

Feeling the pictures

Feeling the conversations (Weightman, 2009)

(Brearley, L)

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“I want to go
inside my body”



“

A provocation is the beginning of a journey for a curious mind that is primed for learning.¹”

Curiosity in many ways comes from intentional pauses. Human beings are creatures of habit and can get caught up in habitual behaviours that lead them down the same old path and routine. Making time to be more curious and to explore new ways of doing things can be the catalyst to fresh thinking, new discoveries and exciting adventures. (Lisa Daly et al)²

Being passionate about recycling, we set up a collection of recycled materials that had been collected over the years. We wondered how we could introduce these materials to the children that would arouse their curiosity. How would the children react? Would they embrace the challenges of interacting with the materials?

What were these recycling materials in the beginning? And what would they become as the children began to use them in their play?

Knowing that we had an older group of children we were ready for the challenge. We wanted to create a space where children could have the freedom of choosing the materials which would be available to them at all times. The Piazza area in front of our classroom gave us the perfect opportunity to spread our wings. The children helped set up this area as we believed that ownership of the space would enhance how the children engaged with the materials.

In the beginning, the children were puzzled and said *We don't know what to do with them*. These recycled materials didn't make any sense to them because they were used to having readymade pre purchased materials which they knew how to use. In order to support the children, we took a step back and had a discussion with them about recycling and sustainability.

What does it mean to be sustainable? *It means you take only what you need, don't waste and leave some for others.*

Where do you think these materials come from?

Maybe you bought them in the shop, maybe somebody gave it to you, did you buy them?

Most of the materials were packing materials. The children questioned why we kept them, and we explained it is because we want to reduce the waste and reuse what we can. Otherwise, there will be rubbish everywhere and we won't have a place to live or to play. *What are you going to do with them?* What do you think we can do with them? *We don't know what to do with them.*

Powerful provocations can become a support system for children's learning. This learning has to be meaningful for the children to hold their interest. Focus and attention are the keys to developing strong pathways to learning. The magic lies in the fact that these materials support the creation of a new language in the way children interact. They must work together, solve problems, and name the materials in order to understand them more.

“When ideas meet with hands, extraordinary things happen. Thoughts give shape to the materials and the materials remodel

the thoughts and then the things we do grow along with our own growing.”³

The children had been showing an interest in their own bodies. We wondered if we could connect these varied passions. The children decided to collect two litre empty milk bottles from home. Collecting their own recycled material gave them ownership and empowerment. They wanted to join the milk bottles with glue in the shape of their bodies. This presented us with some serious challenges. (Figs. 1–3)

*They are not sticking together because they are standing,
We need to lie them down and leave them like that until tomorrow.*

The children closed off the area where the bottles were glued together and had a sign saying, ‘this area is closed’. The next day when the children returned, they noticed that the glue had dried off, but the bottles did not stick together. (Figs. 4–6)

The children decided to continue to use the bottles as a single piece. Some of the children also included other recycled materials to trace their body shapes.

You need to lie down still. Don't move, or else we can't trace your body shape

We need a face for inside the body

I want to make my face happy

This is a hard work to go around the whole body

I am getting tired

I can help you to do more

Leave my arms open I will add five fingers on each side

I need small sticks for fingers

I want to go inside my body

I want to go inside his body shape. I am bigger than him, so you need to make his body bigger for me when I lie down inside his body shape. (Figs. 7 & 8)

The children had a choice of choosing materials such as solid cardboard triangles, wooden cylinders, small cardboard cylinders, chopsticks, and foam cups for their own body tracing. Soon we noticed the children had developed a relationship with the materials and were beginning to enjoy their exploration. They were able to leave their work to show their parents at the end of each day. Every time they traced each other's body shape, they worked together supporting each other in sorting and packing away the materials during and after play. The recycled materials offered endless possibilities for the children to explore and experiment. There was no right or wrong way to use them. The children had forgotten how, in the beginning, they were unsure of how to use the recycled material. They had the imagination to create something and then recreate something else. This experience with recycled material has opened many doors for the children to think outside the box, supporting their STEM experience in a creative way. **Curiosity and creativity is facilitated when children use their skills to design and innovate. Children are encouraged to think and find creative and divergent ways to make and create. Creativity leads to invention and discovery, opening the door to so many wonderful possibilities.⁴**

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Prep

Re-beginning



What impact does re-beginning again and again have on the way young children develop their interpersonal skills, relationships and friendships?

When we as an ELC staff chose 'Beginnings' as our umbrella theme for 2021 little did we know that the Covid 19 pandemic that had had such an impact on education in 2020, would continue in 2021 and once again influence the education and socialisation of the Prep and Year One children in our ELC.

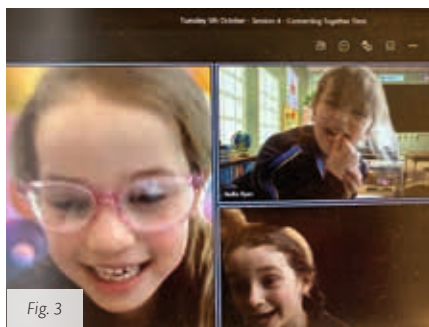
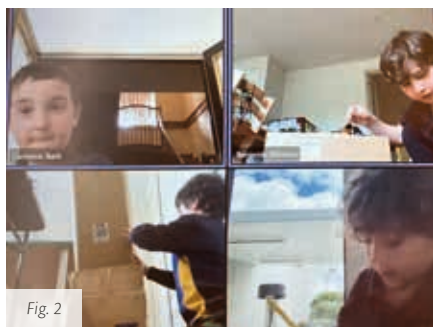
The word 'Beginning' has many definitions that interconnect with each other. **It is the point in time or space at which something begins from a particular time onwards, the first part or earliest stage of something, an act or instance of commencing, the forming or devising of a plan or idea, or something new that one hasn't experienced before.**¹

Initially when the year began my immediate thoughts in relation to 'Beginnings' was to look at how we would begin our investigation in our class and what would influence the direction our project would take as the year unfolded. Nine days into our year we went into our first (of what would be many) lockdowns where the children had to switch from on campus learning and socialising to online learning and interactions. This meant that the children had to 'begin' again. They had to, with literally no notice, learn how to use Microsoft Teams, learn digitally and cope with technical issues as they arose. We as teachers had to 'begin' the process of teaching the daily routines, expectations, interpersonal skills and curriculum again, albeit in a totally different learning environment.

To begin again is to continue after a pause or interruption, to start doing something again after not doing it for a period of time, to start something again from the point where you stopped or to return to do something again in a similar way.²



Fig. 1



As a result we all had to reimagine the way we would teach, learn, support each other and make the children's learning visible online, as well as ensure that those very early relationships that the children had begun to create with each other and the adults in the class continued.

Once back in the classroom the children had to 'begin' again. What we noticed was that while they had a growing understanding of our classroom routines and expectations, which helped them to settle back into the classroom learning environment, many of the children had to rediscover the friendships that they had just started to develop at the beginning of the year. This was an important focus for us as a key aspect of Prep is the development of interpersonal skills, relationships and friendships. This is particularly significant to me as the social and emotional wellbeing of the children in my class is paramount.

The Reggio Emilia approach focuses on learning in small groups that fosters social development. They strongly believe that a child's skill set is fundamental to the formation of friendships.

Their behavioural, cognitive and social skills will dictate their success in getting on with others in their peer group – and of course, there needs to be opportunity. Young children need to be around other young children in order to learn to socialise and develop their social interactions.³

The Reggio Emilia approach teaches us the importance of interactions at the earliest of age. With this in mind we couldn't help but wonder how the restrictions and limitations of the lockdowns, and constant back and forth from on campus to online, would impact on these interactions and the development of the children's friendships.

We began looking closely at the ways in which the children interacted with each other and the teachers online; the ways in which they stayed connected, continued to form, build on and develop their friendships and relationships with each other and how they communicated.

What we noticed was the ways in which the children began using the technology available on Microsoft Teams to communicate and interact with each other the longer the lockdown continued. They would use different emojis in the 'chat' section to communicate their thoughts or feelings, post a sticker or 'GIF' to a friend or communicate specifically with another child in the class by posting

a comment. When a child shared their work with the class, many of the children would use emojis such as hands clapping, or a heart or a thumbs up to communicate their thoughts. This was wonderful positive feedback.

Emoji are an integral visual symbol in computer-mediated-communication and because they are non-verbal cues with rich emotional meanings, emoji are an important medium for interaction and emotional communication on the internet. Emoji can express or enhance emotions and interactions.⁴

See you soon guys can't wait to hop on the meeting because I want to see you all xxxxx

Hi everyone, I just wanted you to know that I am having a wonderful time with everyone today hope you're having a wonderful time as well.

Hello everybody I'm excited to see you.

I hope you had a beautiful day everyone. Have you had a beautiful day teacher Roz?

Hi Maya.

Hi Milla, how's your day going?

We also looked at what impacts, both positive and negative, this was having on their social and emotional wellbeing and made a concerted effort to work out what things we could do to make sure that the children continued to forge/maintain these friendships/relationships, including adapting the children's interactions online.

To try and ensure that the children had opportunities to stay connected and continue to develop their friendships we set aside time, at least once a week, for the children to interact in small groups of 3 or 4 children (with the focus being to ensure the children interacted and spoke with each other throughout the session).

Sometimes each child would choose something to share with the rest of the group and the other children would ask them questions about it. On other occasions the children would choose to build something out of Lego, or draw, or play a game.

Given that the children only interacted with the teachers and very occasionally with their peers during our online lessons, we were curious to see whether the children would interact with each other in these small groups

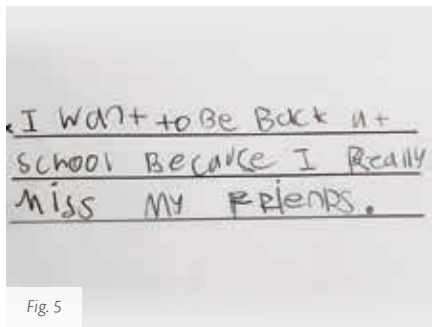


Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

What we found was that most of the children didn't communicate with each other even in a small group of three. We observed that the children building with Lego were focussed solely on their own Lego creation.

The same happened in the group that were drawing. The only time they communicated with each other was to share what they had done so far, but most of the time they were drawing and colouring in silence.

In fact finally towards the end of the session we had to facilitate the interactions by stepping in and asking each child to share what they had made.

I've made a maze using the claw of doom... Do you like my building?

Yes I do like your building.

In fact only one of the groups seemed to be able to interact with each other online. This group were making things using a variety of materials but spent most of the session laughing, chatting, showing each other how to make faces and copying each other and giving each other ideas of what to do.

Do you want to build something and then show each other?

Yeah, great idea, like what?

We can make anything we want.

Mmmm, okay let's make a cubby house

However, as the length of 'Lockdown Six' dragged on, we began to observe a change in the children's emotions, thoughts and conversations. Some became more emotional, some became more withdrawn and some expressed to us that they were missing their friends and teachers and really wanted to be back at school (particularly when the playgrounds were closed).

Yes I'm having a wonderful day with everyone else online but I can't wait to see you all back at school really soon.

I hope to see you soon everyone at school and you too Roz!

Parents were also contacting us to let us know that their child was finding the lockdown and isolation from their friends more difficult and that their child kept asking when they could see their friends and when were they going back to school.

While researching the impacts that continuous lockdowns have on children, it was identified that social isolation as a result of the restrictions was one of the top concerns raised by children of all ages. This highlights the importance for many of friendships and relationships outside of the family.

School is a primary place for children to socialise. Many children said that they missed seeing their friends at school and were worried about being unable to connect with these friends because of social distancing measures. They felt sad because they couldn't see them and felt that talking to them online just isn't the same.⁵

On the first day back on campus we observed with joy how quickly each child reacquainted themselves with their closest friends, hugging and laughing with sheer delight. Watching these interactions only highlighted for us how important it is that the children continue to reconnect with each other. With this in mind it is crucial for us to ensure the children have as many opportunities as possible to further develop their interpersonal skills, relationships and friendships. We will continue to do this by making time during the day for the children to play and interact both in the classroom and the playground. We will also continue to give them opportunities to learn, discover and share in small groups over time so that they can strengthen their relationships with each other.

Looking ahead it will be interesting to review the research being done by the Australian Institute of Family Studies in conjunction with Melbourne University to see what the long term effects of the lockdowns might be in relation to young children's emotional well-being and what impacts there may be on their social interactions and friendships.

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Figures

- Fig. 1 Emojis designed by the children
 Fig. 2 Children focused on their own creations
 Fig. 3 Children interacting during online social connection time
 Figs. 4 & 5 Child's drawing and writing about missing their friends
 Fig. 6 Child's drawing of playing together at school
 Fig. 7 Children back at school

The Beginnings of Giving



'Beginnings' was our overarching theme for this year.

During the December/January holidays, before the school year began, Melbourne and Geelong became a landscape for artworks created to mark the 150th anniversary of The Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) Melbourne. The RCH Foundation spread colour and creativity with a spectacular public art trail.

We began our first day in our Prep class sharing experiences we had during the holidays. UooUoo Artworks had popped up all over Melbourne and the children and I had spotted them in different places.

The children shared their thoughts about these curious creatures. We couldn't help but wonder about the impact these artworks were having on them.

They are UooUoos. They look a bit like painted wombats. I saw one at the Prahran Market and it is actually knitted, and it has people on top of it. You are not allowed to touch it. (Fig. 1)

I have seen one too, it was close to Luna Park. It was like a rainbow one.

There is one near the bus near my house. It is painted like a bus.

I found this UooUoo, it has blue flowers on it and it has lots of pretty flowers. It helps the kids get better. (Fig. 2)

There are 100 UooUoos. They are painted to sell, to make a lot of money.

The money is for the children in the Royal Children's Hospital for them to get better. (Fig. 3)



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Would these UooUoo artworks spark wonderings and questions linked to why these artists had chosen to be part of this project and why the works were so important to the RCH?

As the children's interest grew, we shared this project with their parents. Many of the families took the opportunity to go on their own UooUoo hunt, exploring the city while looking for the artworks. The children excitedly shared their experiences of spotting these UooUoo artworks.

The parents expressed that our project seemed to align wonderfully with an initiative that they were developing, where on a child's birthday, the children would nominate a charity in lieu of receiving gifts.

We hoped to gain insight into the children's thinking about what the concept of 'Giving' meant to them.

The artists thought that they wanted to make something for the children's hospital.

To get money for the Royal Children's hospital.

And because they are celebrating the Royal Children's Hospital's Birthday.

They want to raise money and they can get more money for the RCH. They give the money for the children to feel better.

I went to the Royal Children's Hospital when I needed a doctor to fix my eye.

If it is scary for the kids at the Royal Children's Hospital the UooUoos give laughter to the kids in the RCH. It makes kids happy.

They made so many UooUoos to show all the people.

We noticed that the children could identify with the feelings and needs of other children and that their experiences helped to bring about their sense of empathy and compassion. It became clear to us that rather than just a search for UooUoos it became an exploration of the concept of giving.

This provocation opened discussions and collaborations of ideas as they found out more about the artists' intentions and involvement towards creativity, charity and giving to others. We began reading some of the explanations that the artists had written on the base of their artwork.

We introduced a Cultures of Thinking routine called 'Step Inside'. The children chose a UooUoo artwork and imagined stepping inside the heart and mind of the artist – sharing their thoughts.

This 'Step Inside' routine enabled them to develop a deeper understanding of the intent of the artist and project in general.

I think the children will see the beautiful colours of the flowers. They will enjoy seeing the colourful flowers. I think this will remind them of a garden and they will feel happy. (Fig. 4)

I think this UooUoo will remind the children of Luna Park and the colours and patterns on the UooUoo they will never forget. The children will feel happy.

I think the children will see painted people who are sleeping. It will be comfortable. If you are sick, you will lie down and get better. I would like the children to see it. I think the children will see it is a beautiful UooUoo because it has lots of people on it. I think the children will feel happy and if you are sick, you can lie down and feel better. (Fig. 5)

When considering the children's experiences of giving to a charity on their birthday and now finding out about the artists link to the RCH Charity, we wanted to gain an insight into what the children thought about charity and what charity means to them.

Charity gives things to other people. This is me; I am giving this doll to him because he did not have anything to play with. He did not have any friends, so I asked him if he wanted to be my friend. (Fig. 6)

The little girl is giving a teddy to the other girl because that is what I think is happening at the Royal Children's Hospital. The mum is giving a rose to the other mum because I think that is charity. (Fig. 7)

We wondered about the use of the word 'charity'; the definition of charity being 'generous actions or donations to aid the poor, ill or needy'.

Giving can make positive changes in the world. By modelling the act of giving and helping others, can we nurture generosity and a greater appreciation of what we have?

Lorris Malaguzzi, psychologist and educator who founded the Reggio Emilia Approach says, **"When you enter the school in the morning, you carry with you pieces of your life — your happiness, your sadness, your hopes, your pleasures, the stresses from your life. You never come in an isolated way; you always come with pieces of the world attached to you. So the meetings that we have are always contaminated with the experiences that we bring with us."**¹

We wondered what pieces of the world are attached to the children in our class, and how their experiences and perceptions would contribute to their thinking?



This school year, impacted by the Covid pandemic and our learning online, particularly highlighted the importance of community, wellbeing and giving to others as well as ourselves.

Our intention now was clear, to guide the children towards thinking about the many aspects of ‘giving’.

What can you give that you cannot hold?

LOVE! You're giving things that you have more of and that is called giving love. We give love by giving people things and love comes with it. But not always giving with things. We can hug people and that gives love too. (Fig. 8)

Sometimes when my dad is getting mad, sometimes I take over and say it was my fault. I try to keep everyone happy.

I think we give kindness.

With social distancing and the lack of physical contact of friends and perhaps family, the need to express love and care is greater now than ever.

We were increasingly aware that ‘giving’ had taken on new meaning in our changing world and we were keen to nurture it.

Roy Bennett, an author who is well known for sharing his positive thoughts and creative insight says, **“When you start giving, instead of getting, you make a difference. You can always give a warm smile, a sincere hello, a positive vibe... your attention, your time, your love, and kindness to those around you.”**²

Through discussion, observation and experience, the children gained insight into the importance of giving to others.

When you give it makes you feel good because it's a nice thing to do. On Father's Day dad felt good and we went fishing together.

We could see how shared experiences of giving and creating quality time together nurtures the bond of relationships.

I was feeding the neighbours horses for them. It makes me feel happy because it was giving them what they needed. After you give something, you feel very happy and good.

Give other people kindness and then they know that you care for them.

We give ourselves care then we can give to other people. Then we get confidence to care for other people.

We need to give ourselves love. Helping the world. Helping older people carry their groceries and cross the road. (Fig. 9)

When you are learning online you can ask your friend to help you do it with you. When your mum is busy with work, we don't ask her, we can ask our friends and teachers.

When you help your friends, you are showing kindness and caring.

We are giving each other time to think.

When we are listening, we give kindness.

You don't just give one thing. You can give lots of things like food and money. I have 3 money boxes. One for charity, one for saving, one for spending. I'm saving my money to buy more things for me. You can give in different ways.

The children are eager to use their creativity to collectively select and create their legacy of giving from the heart.

By helping children to recognise that they can be competent, positive participators in society, and that their actions can make a difference through their own efforts, we guide them towards choosing their authentic pathway as they consider their own needs, as well as the gift of giving to others.

As our discussions with the children continue – listening and observing becomes even greater; beginning further wonderings of what this will look like, as our two-year program together continues.

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Figures

Fig. 1 Name: Woohoo! Location: Prahran Market. Created by: The Glad Rappers

Fig. 2 Name: Hiatus. Location: Malvern Square (Stonnington Civic Centre). Created by: Caelene D'arcy

Fig. 3 UooUoo outside the Royal Children's Hospital

Fig. 4 Name: Chaskell. Location: Greville Street, Prahran. Created by: Anna Blatman

Fig. 5 Name: You're Not Alone. Location: Prahran Square. Created by: Nani Puspasari

Fig. 6 Charity gives things to other people...

Fig. 7 The little girl giving a teddy to the other girl...

Fig. 8 We can hug people that gives love too

Fig. 9 Helping older people carry their groceries and cross the road

*“...if we celebrated
everyday, it would
not be as special.”*



2021 begins with excitement. A group of children come together to begin their Prep journey. Their Kinder 4 year was filled with lockdowns that interrupted their time in the physical Kinder room. The lives that they knew were impacted significantly by the pandemic that swept across the world. The new year was filled with hope and expectation for a return to the normality that they remembered. A new beginning.

On the 17th of March, one of the children brought a special card to school. A card for St Patrick's Day. (Fig. 1) She enthusiastically explained that it is a special day celebrated in Ireland. The children were eager to discuss this special day and very quickly, they made a connection to their own lives and experiences.

There is a special day for every country.

In Melbourne, we have lots of special days.

If we celebrate everything, it is special. But if we celebrated everyday, it would not be as special.

The children's eagerness to talk about special days and traditions is apparent. They make many connections to their own lives – their birthdays, Earth Day, Australia Day, Yom Ha'atzmaut and all the chagim (Jewish festivals). We could not help but recognise the children's eagerness to share and talk about these experiences. They spoke with authority and confidence, connecting to what they had experienced – as individuals, as a family group and as part of the Bialik community.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

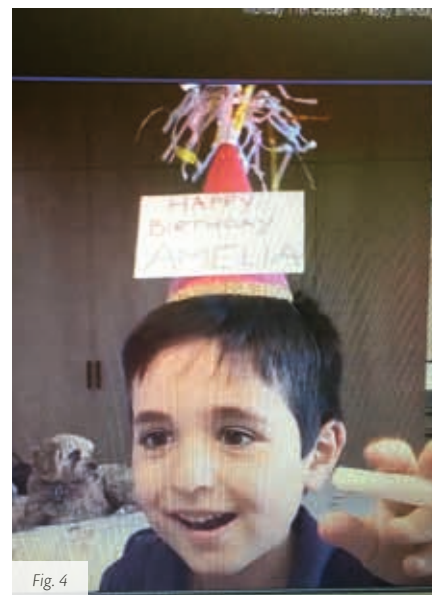


Fig. 4

Shabbat is special, we eat special food, we eat challah and grape juice. We celebrate every Friday. (Fig. 2)

We celebrate all the Pesach... We eat Matzah.

On Shavuot we have cheese cake.

We celebrate seasons.

We celebrate people's birthdays.

We celebrate other countries.

We celebrate where we live. We want to say thank you to G-d for how the world works and living in the world.

We feel a bit loving and a bit sad. Some celebrations bring out big emotions.

They articulately identified many of the traditions and rituals associated with these events. We exposed the children to other cultures and their traditions as a means of opening their eyes to the world around them and simultaneously encouraging them to see the similarities and differences between us all.

In order to pay respects to our Indigenous history and to uncover some of the other traditions that exist in other cultures, we shared the book 'Welcome to Country' by Aunty Joy Murphy and Lisa Kennedy! Through this story, the children quickly identified the importance of a Welcome Ceremony in Indigenous culture and were keen to create their own Acknowledgement to Country. They carefully considered and discussed what they felt should be included in this Acknowledgement. They created designs to accompany the Acknowledgement, carefully considering the colours, symbols and images that were appropriate for their design. (Fig. 3)

As the year progressed and the children became accustomed to the juggle between on campus schooling and the world of online learning, they were keen to continue the conversations about this Acknowledgement. They read their Acknowledgement in both the physical and online classroom. It provided consistency across

these two contexts and, despite the enforced distancing, a sense of belonging to our Prep community developed.

With the extended lockdown in Term Three, the children amazed us with their dedication and focus despite the uncertainty in their lives. The routine of our online learning merged with the routine in each household to provide the children with stability during these unprecedented times. The children's enthusiasm to log on to the lessons each day, to share their learning and their home experiences ensured connection and a continuity to the Prep community that had been built this year.

The words of renowned educator, Jim Greenman were evident in our online classroom on a daily basis. **"Ritual joins routine and the physical order as the secure skeleton that holds individuals and groups together in those times of stress, against the uncertainties of teachers and children who come and go... These [rituals] are marked by symbolic acts that have great meaning and emotional power. Group daily rites [rituals] – ie. Sharing the same song and the same story day after day – reassure against the unknown void. Individual rituals between children and caregivers can become pinions of security – a special touch, a shared joke, any regular exchange."**²

The stability of Digital Bialik provided a framework for our children's relationships. They learnt to grow and develop despite the physical distance between them. What became clear in their conversations was their eagerness to share the events happening in their lives and the importance of their own traditions in this time of ambiguity.

Whether it was a family birthday celebration, apple dipped in honey on Rosh Hashana or the celebration of an AFL grand final, the children shared their experiences. (Fig. 4) They talked about their own lives and shared the rituals within their own houses to celebrate special events. As the pandemic continued to impact day to day lives, the children shared the new ways of celebrating – sending films

for birthday celebrations, lighting candles for Shabbat via Zoom, posting letters or dropping off parcels to help with celebrations.

It became clear to the children that although the events themselves did not vary significantly between households, the rituals and traditions that each individual and their family associated with these events did. In order to share some of these experiences, the children were asked to bring along a special object, picture or item that is used at home as part of their family celebrations or traditions. The online forum enabled the children to share objects from their family rituals in their home. The children could see the physical objects and where they lived – the table cloth used on Chagim, the Pesach Haggadah, the Hanukkiah or the special scarf.

This book is over 60 years old. It's like a Haggadah. I can't believe it's over 60 years old! It was a gift from Israel and it was my dad's dad's. I use it for Pesach, My Dad usually reads the prayers. I love it because it's got the picture of Moses in it. (Fig. 5)

My family bought my Hanukkiah before I was born. It has a Magen David on it and a little Hanukkiah and the Aleph Bet. It makes me feel happy.

I have a tablecloth. It's very special because it was bought in Israel. We can wash it in the washing machine. We use it for Rosh Hashanah and for Pesach.

I have this Shabbat scarf I wear on my head. My Safta gave it to me. My mum has one too. It also has a crown on it. It says my name on it in Hebrew and I think my name means 'hard worker'.

The children began to identify the importance of celebrations to differentiate time and acknowledge the precious moments. They identified the importance of not only the traditions but the stories behind the traditions and how they are passed down from one generation to another.

“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



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

youngers, and also an awareness that some have a special gift for that sort of thing.”³

While we reflected on our own experiences and the importance of these objects and rituals as part of our celebrations, we continued to discuss and reflect on other cultures and the role that traditions have played in these communities over thousands of years.

We wondered how Indigenous people celebrated their special occasions long ago. The children were asked to consider the traditions and celebrations that might have begun long ago? What might their celebrations have looked like? What are the important parts of these traditions and how do they differ in current times?

As part of our Rosh Hashana celebrations we shared a special online ceremony. Murrindindi, Head Man from the Wurundjeri Tribe completed a Welcome to Country with a traditional smoking ceremony. (Fig. 6) This meaningful experience linked our Indigenous history with our Jewish tradition of marking the Jewish Year 5781. It enabled the children to make authentic connections between their own traditions and that of Indigenous culture.

When people come to our home, we welcome them in.

We also sings songs in a special language like he does.

They practise their language a lot so it does not die, just like we have our special language – Hebrew.

Through these discussions what became evident was the importance of rituals in bringing community together. The importance of the Shabbat table in bringing people together each week was always clear, however, what the pandemic taught us was that even in times when we can't physically be together, there are always ways to connect. (Fig. 7) These connections help us remember, reflect and understand that we are part of something greater and this feeling of belonging can ground us in times of certainty and uncertainty.

As educators Diane Kashin and Nicole Pierce acknowledged in their article titled *'The Importance of Rituals and Traditions in Early Learning: Now More Than Ever!'*, **“These moments of ritual can be just that, “tools to help us remember”, that we ARE connected, we DO belong, and we CHOOSE to belong here, now, together in this community.”⁴**

If this time of ambiguity has taught us and our children to value these connections and traditions, then we are all the better for it.

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Year 1

Biography of an idea



Often we read the biography of the individual; the story of a person's life and how they were inspired by those around them. Yet, Edward Clapp, a principal investigator from Harvard University's Project Zero challenges us to think about the 'biography of an idea', rather than the individual.¹

And with that a seed was planted for us in our Year One classroom.

Clapp's research in to the 'biography of an idea' focuses greatly on the role that the group plays in innovation. He argues that creativity comes from the interaction between people so that ideas are a 'social phenomenon' and not individual pursuits. In his theory of 'distributed creativity', he argues that ideas grow from diverse thinking and shared contributions. He believes that even individual invention interacts with tools, technologies and thought processes from the past. In this sense, all ideas require some interaction and collaboration with others.²

In line with Clapp's thinking, American psychologist R Keith Sawyer argues that educators must shift pedagogical practices to align with the social nature and core of innovation. Sawyer claims that **"creativity is deeply social; the most important creative insights typically emerge from collaborative teams and creative circles."**³ He outlines the impact that these interactions in the wider world.

Sawyer reminds us that **"most of what we've heard about famous inventions is wrong because it's based on the myth of the lone genius... Forget the myths about historical inventors; the truth is always a story of group genius."**⁴ This prompted us to consider how can we nurture and uncover the story of the 'group genius'?

From the early days of Year One, the children shared their thinking and learning collaboratively to create the collective culture of our classroom. In a year of multiple lockdowns where the children were forced into new beginnings online then back on campus and online again, the role of our classroom community and our investigation to unite and guide us was more important than ever.

Our students are social beings and this is evident on a daily basis in the physical classroom and the online classroom of recent times. Research from Reggio Emilia supports this concept and highlights the enhancement of learning experiences when children play and learn alongside others from a very young age. They encourage us to think of these interactions, along with other learning resources, as a way of enhancing and enriching the learning experiences of our children.

Renowned Reggio Emilia educator Loris Malaguzzi writes: “**There is an inner voice that pushes children on, but this force is greatly multiplied when they are convinced that facts and ideas are resources, just as their friends and the adults in their lives are precious resources.**”⁵

Clapp himself acknowledges the Reggio Emilia approach’s inherent pedagogical perspective that ideas come from group learning. He asserts: “**As we have learnt from our friends at Reggio Emilia; if we have an individual focus of creativity, we deny young people the opportunity to learn from and invent with others.**”⁶

As part of our investigation, and in line with Clapp’s thinking, the exploration of the origin of ideas was an exciting opportunity within our classroom. Under the ELC umbrella topic of ‘beginnings’, we were curious about the child’s perspective of where ideas come from. The children unpacked this notion by using their senses – what does an idea look, smell, taste, sound and feel like? (Fig. 1)

An idea sounds like birds chirping in cool weather, hiking in the woods and the trees blowing in the wind brushing on your arms.

I think it [an idea] smells like watermelon if it is good and lemon if it is bad.

An idea sounds like you breathe in and breathe out.

An idea feels like your heart beating when your eyes are closed.

The children explored the concept of ideas more deeply by looking at the ideas in the world around them and by theorising what a world without ideas would look like.

Simultaneously, the children were reading biographies and drawing portraits in the classroom. (Figs. 2–6) They were surrounding themselves with those who had been inspired and the faces of history. (Fig. 7) Using the children’s documentation of a world with ideas, the children chose one idea to investigate even further. Their ideas were based on a concept in the world around them. They imagined the ‘idea-maker’ behind the idea. (Fig. 8) They drew his/her portrait and created a character profile of this imaginary, yet, in their mind inspirational, figure.

What do idea-makers look like? Are they the beginning of an idea?



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 6



Fig. 9

In keeping with Clapp's theoretical framework, the children documented the biography of the idea that they had chosen. They drew a timeline of their idea, they used the 'Step Inside' thinking routine to feel a moment in the development of this idea. They wrote and published narratives that unravelled the story of the idea. (Fig. 9)

As the investigation grew, the beginning of the idea and the single person behind the idea, was no longer at the centre of our thinking. Indeed, our idea had grown, as had the collective consciousness around ideas. Some of the children were beginning to identify other people that played a role in the development of their idea maker's idea.

It seemed fitting to ask the children; How does an idea grow? The children used the Project Zero 'Thinking Routine' of 'Colour, Symbol, Image' to answer this question. This routine focuses on identifying the essence of an idea using a non-verbal medium.

My colour is green because trees are green and an idea grows like a tree. My symbol swirls like the earth because people on earth are passing an idea on and on. My picture is people passing an idea on.

I chose blue because blue represents the sky and for me when it turns night it starts growing like an idea.

I chose peach because when I think in my brain it is peach. My picture is things that grow.

Clapp implores educators to use the 'biography of an idea' concept to understand the way in which we view student thinking. In this way, all students are able to contribute to the development of an idea through collaboration. Author Andrea Beatty's children's book series highlights the 'idea-maker' qualities in all children. As the children continued their learning online, these characters began to inspire, encourage and ignite the 'idea maker' qualities inside our Year One children – individually and collectively.

By unpacking these narratives and making their characters come alive on screen using a range of digital learning tools, the children's focus continued transition from genesis of the idea to the community of people that contributed to the idea. Beatty's stories

encapsulated the theoretical perspective of Clapp, of Malazguzzi, of Sawyer – by looking at the story of an idea, we understand that exciting innovation and creativity only occurs through the power of the collective. And this had been made visible in our classroom in a multitude of ways.

As teachers, the documentation of this journey allowed us to reflect upon our own pedagogy. How do we encourage authentic learning opportunities which are benefited by the contributions of many? How can we raise the bar of thinking by truly understanding the potential of group learning? How do we achieve an effective and powerful 'group culture' both in the physical classroom and online? How do we celebrate and make visible all of the efforts involved in an idea and not, just, those that thought of it at the beginning?

Daniel Wilson, the Director of Project Zero at Harvard, spoke at a recent conference at Bialik College. He reminded us that so often collaborative learning falls apart when students are asked to do something that can or should be done by a single person. This has been a constant reminder to us to carefully create learning experiences that nurture true collaboration and those that are enhanced by the power of the group. When our children learn the value of these collaborations, they learn a skill that will no doubt enhance their learning and creativity both within the classroom and beyond.

As we near the end of this investigation and our journey with these children, we cannot help but wonder, how does the biography of our collective ideas grow from here? What impact will these collective ideas have on each individual as they continue to grow and move in different directions?

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Figures

- Fig. 1 Drawing of an idea. A good idea tastes like hot chocolate and a bad idea tastes like a rotten sandwich.
- Fig. 2 Children drawing their self-portraits.
- Fig. 3 Child painting self-portrait.
- Fig. 4 Children painting self-portraits with photographs as reference.
- Fig. 5 Children painting self-portraits discussing personal attributes as they paint.
- Fig. 6 A completed self-portrait.
- Fig. 7 Children exploring the faces of history.
- Fig. 8 Drawing of the idea-maker behind the idea. This is a boy or a girl thinking of making instruments.
- Fig. 9 Planning the narrative behind the story of an idea-maker.

Big Ideas have Small Beginnings



Fig. 1

“

By knowledge we mean not the mastery of masses of information and learning but an understanding of the true nature of things.” Ricard, M¹

I write this as Melbourne has become the most locked down city in the world. Children have yet again spent a significant part of their schooling at home. At such a time, they have become resilient, adaptive, and perhaps, the most technologically advanced group of all time.

Lockdowns have enabled children (and adults) of all ages to learn new skills. As we move towards an era of hybrid work and learning spaces, skills learnt during this phase have been identified by various agencies as crucial to success in the 21st century.^{2,3,4} The Jobs Reset Summit hosted by The World Economic Forum (WEF) early this year used the platform to discuss responses to the ever-changing work landscape and the need for accelerating education as part of economic recovery.⁵ Analysing the report by David Elliot, a senior reporter at WEF, it identified resilience and digital fluency as the most important skills for the future, along with the upskilling and developing emotional intelligence for an unfamiliar future.⁶

This directly affects the teaching process and environment in schools. Content based teaching needs to be replaced by teaching for understanding to provide opportunities for developing the above-mentioned skills. Prof. Perkins et al. use the metaphor of wild and tame gardens to emphasise the difference between teaching for knowledge and teaching for understanding.⁷ As educators, we are often urged to reflect if we are teaching for understanding; are we empowering students to move from ‘knowing’ to ‘applying’? How can we ‘future proof’ our curriculum?

Research on the importance of teaching for understanding indicates application to be the ultimate proof of understanding.^{8,9} Application often requires collaboration, testing, problem solving, and, in many cases, rethinking traditional models. As an educator, I often ruminate, “Am I facilitating an environment that teaches for understanding?” “Am I balancing the ‘wild’ and the ‘tame’ of education?” “How does one best fit creativity and curiosity in a crowded curriculum?”

Stuck in traffic one morning, I heard of a space rover named *Perseverance* landing on Mars and sending its first grainy picture to Earth.¹⁰ Fascinated, I decided to share it with the class. We used the See-Think-Wonder thinking routine of Project Zero (PZ) to unpack our initial thoughts of the image of Mars taken by *Perseverance*. (Fig. 1) Children were fascinated by the name *Perseverance* and discussions and questioning led to the purpose of the name. We realised that all rovers on Mars have inspirational names such as *Curiosity* and *Opportunity*. Further discussion led to the conclusion that NASA’s names for the rovers had meaning that went beyond its sojourn into space. Children identified what perseverance meant to them by unpacking the NASA tweet, “**Perseverance will get you anywhere.**” (@NASAPersevere)¹²



This short session led to our class exploring the umbrella idea of ‘Beginnings’ for 2021. Eager to learn more about the rover and the mission, we questioned the purpose behind sending rovers beyond Earth. Curious to know the reasoning behind the name, we questioned the choice of name for the rovers. Children recognised that purpose was central to most actions in life; be it writing the date every morning or sending rovers to Mars.

By brainstorming possible purposes for sending the rover, children found opportunities for deep thinking. We learnt it takes years of trials and failures to get close to success in areas of science and engineering. Fascinated, the children wanted to build their own prototypes of a rover and we decided that purpose would be central to our project. Why were we building one? What parts will it have? What purpose will each part have? How will it enable the rover to function better? How will the better functioning of the rover help *me* as a scientist or an engineer, understand Mars better?

These questions enabled children to dig deeper into their own ideas and understanding. But I wondered what could the purpose be for 7-year-olds building a ‘rover to Mars’? Not busy work without purpose! Certainly not sending the rover to Mars!

Principal Investigator at Project Zero Tina Grotzer believes that as educators we need to “... **help learners look beyond layers of the obvious, ... also help inspire sensitivity and inclination to uncover complexity**”¹³ Building rovers enabled students to dig deeper into their own ideas and understanding of the need for purpose. It provided me with opportunities to address my own concerns of teaching for understanding and striking a balance between curriculum and creativity. Here was an opportunity to explore what supports children to develop the stamina to persist with little changes to transform them into a big idea.

The seemingly modest discussion of a grainy picture from Mars was leading to exploring big concepts. Big ideas have small beginnings!

Children were learning to brainstorm respectfully and with open minds. They were beginning to collaborate, question, problem solve and display growing emotional and social intelligence. Children put their thoughts to paper and made labelled drawings of their prototype. The Centre for Hidden Treasures at our school provided ‘raw materials’ for their prototypes. (Fig. 2)

The ‘project’ was becoming big. What started off as an innocent sharing of a picture became the seed of a big idea. Children were passionate about the rover. While not every child in 1 Bet fancied

going to Mars or become an engineer, they all saw themselves as problem solvers. The dispositions of organisation, investigation, and interaction were becoming engrained in them as individuals. When collaborating to build their rovers, children were invested in the application of their understanding, building new connections, and creating something new. They were trying to create a machine that could charge itself, run on an uneven landscape, dig out and store rock samples and use technology to communicate with Earth. They were working towards finding value in discomfort! (Figs. 3 & 3a)

The power of engaging questions was enabling children to look deeper – complexity was no longer unpleasant but refreshing!

Building the rover was providing opportunities for children to step outside their comfort zone, make numerous mistakes, and go through emotions that the stages of attempts and failures were providing. There was newfound respect for the perseverance of an engineer! A news podcast Squiz Kids introduced the class to the engineers and scientists working to navigate *Perseverance* from behind the scenes.¹⁴ An upcoming Q & A with a scientist led us to think about our own wonderings about Mars. The children excitedly sent their questions to Professor Flannery, hoping to hear some answers. This was their first experience of failure despite best intentions. None of their questions were shortlisted for the program. We expected children to be disheartened but they proved they were still the superheroes from last year!¹⁵

With the rover project exceeding curriculum requirements in Science and Personal Capabilities, we worked towards addressing other learning areas. We found resources to explore mathematical and literacy concepts, but none seemed to strike a chord with the students. That is until we met Rosie.

Rosie Revere Engineer, a picture book by Andrea Beaty, is about an eight-year-old girl passionate about all forms of engineering, and persistent despite failures.¹⁶ She works to problem solve, hence looking at purpose over aesthetics. As Rosie’s aunty gifts her a journal to document her ideas and failures, we the teachers, gifted our children journals to document their ideas, failures, and engineering ambitions. Setting aside time each week to work on our rovers provided opportunities to reflect on our many collateral outcomes like new friendships, identifying strengths in peers and problem-solving by brainstorming. [Figs. 4 & 5]. It was impressive to see children identifying themselves as engineers. The batman effect from last year that helped children learn about perseverance was still working as we often wondered, “what would Rosie do?”¹⁶

Batman had paved way for Rosie.



Rosie gave the children a learning focus – that passion is central to learning, and that learning involves failure. Rosie and her friends made resilience and perseverance tangible. They made mistakes not just acceptable, but a joyous celebration! Author Ken Robinson (2009) identifies passion over aptitude as the greatest source of achievement quoting **“Aptitude matters, but passion often matters more... If you love doing something, you’ll be constantly drawn to get better at it.”**¹⁷

The presence of passion and interest in learning made mistakes less intimidating and we observed varying degrees of resilience in our classroom. But we were equally interested in the application of this trait outside of the classroom. A student survey and parent conversations showed a gap in how some students perceived themselves and what their parents saw at home. It was interesting to note that while some students believed themselves to have a growth mindset, we did not necessarily see it in the classrooms, and their parents certainly did not see that at home! While some children were taking their learning beyond the classroom and making labelled diagrams before creating toys at home, others were coming undone at the slightest of reasons. We were learning that not only do children learn at their own pace, but they also internalise experiences at their own pace.

Lockdowns in Melbourne put brakes on our attempts to use the school’s Maker Space to design our rover. However, we did not want to sacrifice opportunities for deep thinking and problem-solving. We regularly reflected upon our progress using the statement, “Big Ideas have Small Beginnings”. Peeling the Fruit and Headlines thinking routines from PZ were used to anchor our progress and reflect on our journey. (Fig. 6)

Using Headlines made us realise that we had begun to move from the concrete to the abstract. While the Batman Effect from last year continued in the concrete form of Rosie, the rover *Perseverance* had ensured it was now present in the abstract form of perseverance the disposition.

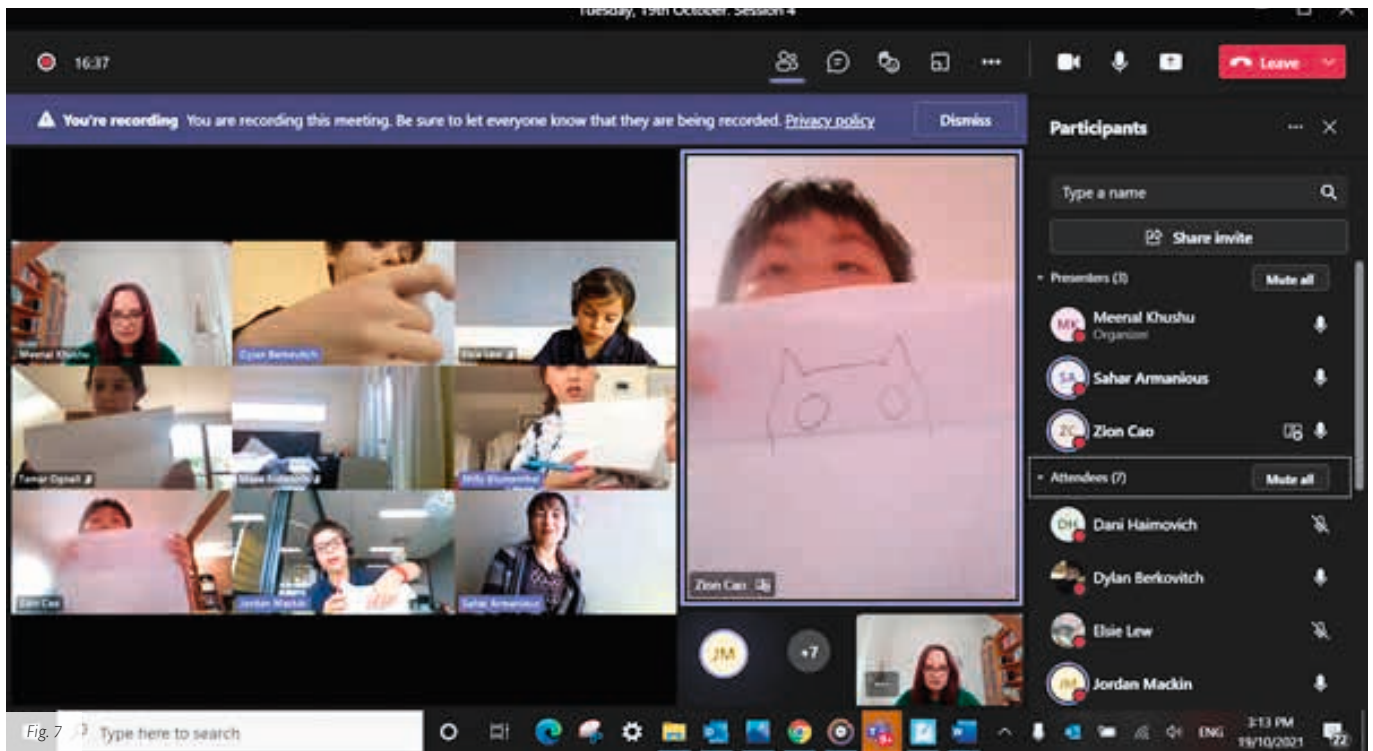
The rover was affecting us in many ways. It enabled a culture of thinking and questioning in our class. Naming, noticing, and reasoning with evidence have become second nature to students in 1 Bet. ‘Because’ has become the “class word” as no statement is acceptable in discussions without plausible evidence. While this has helped make children’s thinking visible, it has also strengthened their inferential skills and given opportunities for metacognition. The quest for purpose and reasoning has helped children see the merits of discrimination when questioning. Questions have become

one of our cornerstones that define our class. Author Andrea Beaty calls Rosie Revere and her curious friends the *Questioneers*; much to the admiration of 1 Bet!¹⁶ Being called curious is worn as a badge of honour by our children. As a class, we often reflect, “What is a ‘good’ question? Which questions give me greater clarity about my wonderings? Where can I seek answers for my questions?” Children are beginning to see that not all questions are the same. While some questions have clear answers, some don’t but they help grow our understanding. Some questions have answers that lead to more questions. By raising questions that I don’t have answers to, children view their teachers as their co-learners. Principal Investigator at Project Zero, Ritchhart views such intellectually engaging questions as “... **allowing students to see teachers as learners while allowing a community of inquiry.**”¹⁸

Looking beyond themselves, the class used PZ thinking routines ‘Unveiling Stories’ and ‘4Cs’ to unpack big messages and ideas behind seemingly innocent moves.⁹ They explored the ‘big ideas’ behind footballer Ronaldo moving Coke bottles aside during a press conference and two Olympic athletes sharing a gold medal, allowing sportsmanship to triumph over competition. Students were identifying that simple gestures had the power to make big statements. This understanding was made possible by providing opportunities and documenting conversations, experiences, and reflections. Returning to the documentation at regular intervals to identify changes in our own thinking and understanding helped the process of metacognition.

Predominantly negative media coverage holds remote learning as the culprit of many downfalls over the past two years. However, it has also provided us with many opportunities to grow. Remote learning presented opportunities to test our perseverance and problem-solving skills. Students’ restlessness and their growing digital fluency became opportunities for educators, not excuses. We used this time to introduce new features of online learning and discussion platforms to not only keep the students engaged, but also continue our rich conversations. While some features were challenging and uncomfortable at first, children reminded themselves and each other that their “brains were growing with all these challenges and mistakes”. Indeed, as we educators agreed, we are all evolving together in this age of online learning.

Rather than view online learning as a drawback, one can view it as a controlled experiment to test the degrees of skills that have been predicted to become the gamechangers of the future workforce. Children have moved from being passive online audience to active



participants. There is a sense of agency in children as they take charge of their own learning and trouble shooting. It is rewarding to see that they no longer see the teacher as the font of knowledge but discuss and help each other when trying to tackle technology glitches or sharing their understanding. (Fig. 7)

Children have unknowingly realised that although we are all viewing each other as little squares on a screen, we can still connect, collaborate, and communicate to problem solve.

These habits or organisation, communication etiquette, and reasoning with evidence are sure to last longer than this academic year. The Agency by Design Framework created by PZ encourages offering multiple ways to engage students and blur the disciplinary boundaries.¹⁹ This controlled experiment is proving that the children can work towards exploring complexity and finding opportunities for growth in myriad ways.

2020 was a year of sourdough starters and DIY home projects. 2021 is proving to be a year of perseverance and adaptability. It is proving to be a year of celebrating messy flops, of complexity, of balancing the 'wild' and 'tame' of education and of allowing for creativity in a crowded curriculum. 2021 is proving to be a heady year!

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*'Just because
you can't see the
change, it doesn't
mean it's not there'*

Our umbrella focus this year in the Early Learning Centre was 'Beginnings'. We initially asked the children what they think about when they hear this word. Using markers on butcher paper, the students documented what came to mind through illustrations and text. They produced a range of responses.

Beginning of a story

Starting something new

The start of the world at the beginning

When we were all babies

After brainstorming our ideas in relation to this topic it quickly became clear that this concept of beginnings provided us with opportunities to follow many different pathways. We wondered what areas of beginnings would capture the children's interest and imagination.

To find this out, we began our investigation using a Gallery Walk from Harvard's Project Zero, and asked students to write what was worth noticing or what they connected with most.

When I was a baby, I had no hair

I couldn't walk when I was a baby

This led to a discussion about us as babies. The students rather enjoyed telling stories from their memories and listened eagerly to one another. As the educator this reminded me of the age of my students and their need for personal connection and relativity to what they are doing. It was interesting that they gravitated to the comment about *'being a baby at the beginning'*. This was relatable to them, this is what was interesting for them, something that they could all participate in and contribute to, something they all had in common – we were all babies once.

From this, the students used personal images and fine liner pens on card strips, to create personal timelines that documented and recorded the changes they have gone through since birth. (Fig. 1)

You get older and as you get older you get bigger and bigger

We behave differently when we get older

With the support of my colleagues during our fortnightly seminar meetings, we collaborated and shared ideas about where this could go. It was suggested to share timelapse videos with the students to explicitly highlight change. These timelapse videos could be of anything. *'What is worth noticing from these videos?'*

The man looked better at the end when he had his haircut

The leaves changed because they became hard and fell

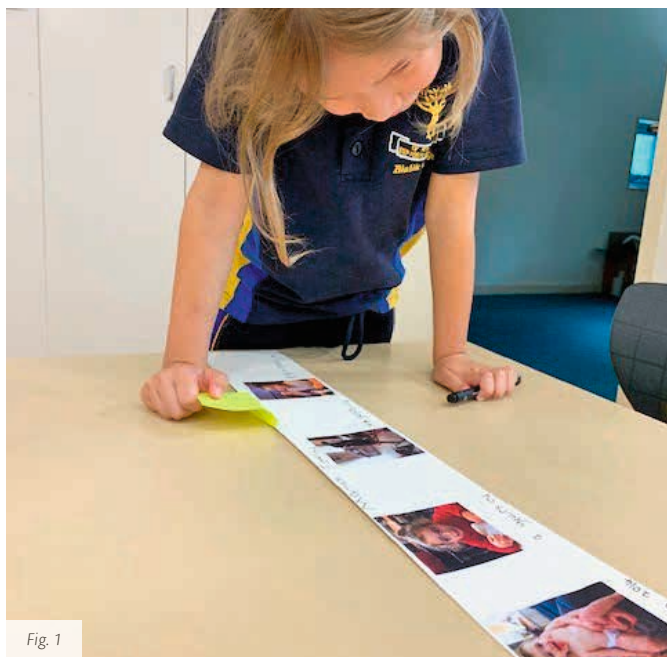


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

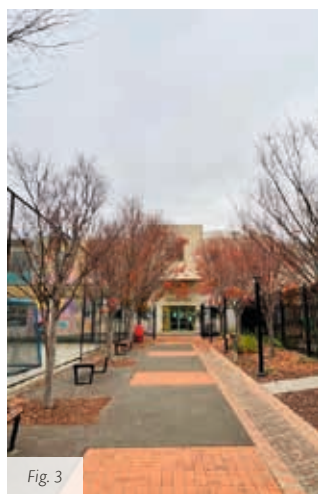


Fig. 3

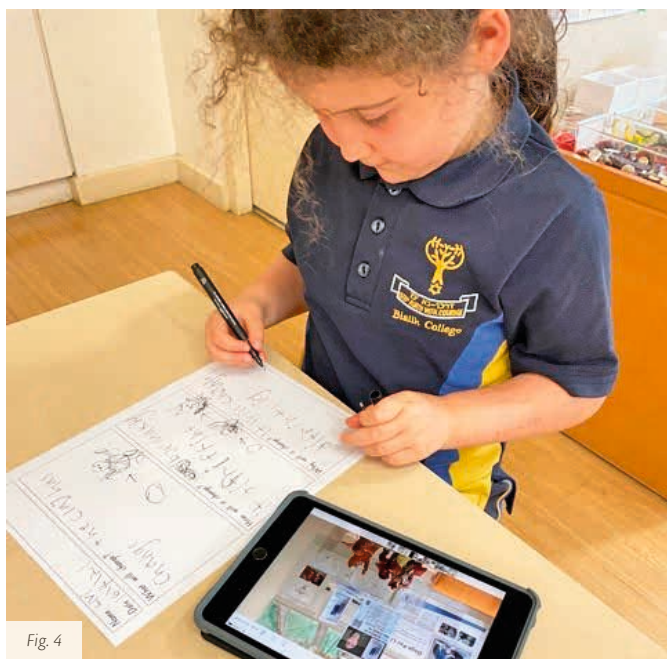


Fig. 4

Some of these things we can change and some we can't

The children's interest continued to grow, actively looking for change in the world around them. Even a simple walk to the gymnasium sparked discussion about the change in the trees along the path. (Figs. 2 & 3)

These looked different last week

The trees are the same, but different colours

There is no sun there so there are no leaves

You need water, light, and soil for things to grow

As the 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. The students participated in an 'iPad Walk' where they were asked to take images of things around the school that they think goes through change. This helped encourage the children to observe and focus on other things rather than themselves. Many interesting photos returned for sharing and discussion. To further extend the conclusions made by students, they were prompted to think about *how* their object changes and *why* it changes. (Fig. 4)

“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.”¹

Through the discussion, the students came to a new conclusion about the things that they had captured that go through change. Some of these things can be changed by people, and some of these things can't be changed by us; it's from nature. This began a new exploration into being researchers and 'observing change' around us in the natural world.

In the classroom, it was important to first practise and unpack the skill of 'observing'. What does this mean to young learners? Using our snack fruit or vegetable, the students engaged in what has been termed 'slow looking'. They observed their object, activating all their senses – sight, touch, smell, taste, and sound.

My orange is lumpy

The cucumber is long and sounds kind of crunchy

Apples are hard and smooth

When I look at my banana it's rough, but it feels smooth

Research conducted on the learning benefits of *slow looking* comes from Shani Tishman (Project Zero, Harvard University). Slow looking has been described as **“the practice of observing detail over time to move beyond a first impression and create a more immersive experience with a text, an idea, a piece of art, or any other kind of object. It's a practice that clears a space for students to hold and appreciate the richness of the world we live in.”²**

Using Observation Journals, the students observed, recorded, and gave reasons for the change of an object or space in nature. Fine liners were made available to first record and label what was being



seen, felt and heard. Including colour was the next layer for adding texture and depth to the illustrations. Each week the students recorded their object with an illustration and reported on what had changed that week, why it had changed or not changed, and made predictions on how it will continue to change. (Figs. 5 & 6)

The weather is getting colder so there is more wind to blow the leaves off

The strawberry is now more red and less green bits

I can see it is taller than last time

Just because you can't see the change, it doesn't mean it's not there

After looking over the documentation of conversations, writing and drawings we debated how we could deepen their explorations and curiosity. I have personally always been interested in the relationship between the causes of change but also the impacts of change. Students seem to have a positive connotation with the concept of change. Does the world need so much change? Is change always helpful? After reading the text by Shel Silverstein, *The Giving Tree*, a wondering was posed... *is change good?*

When people have no reason to cut down trees it's a bad thing

Change can be bad if trees die because part of nature can die, and we need nature

People can grow and change and sometimes it can hurt to grow

Sometimes change is good and sometimes change is bad

Maybe because the boy liked it but maybe the tree didn't

This discussion demonstrated the different lenses students had when answering this question. Tishman says, **“When you look for a while, you become aware of how a thing might look to**

somebody else; you also become aware of your own lens.”³ In this case, students took on new perspectives to share and analyse the change that was being seen in the story. If we looked at it from the boy, the change was positive and from the tree, not so positive.

Through our investigation, some questions are intended to not be final or answered. According to the Reggio Emilia Approach, what is important is the process in which the children learn to be critical observers and thinkers about the world around them. **“Our task is to help children communicate with the world using all their potential, strengths and languages, and to overcome any obstacle presented by our culture.”**⁴

Our investigation has enabled an extraordinary growth of the children's thinking about the ever-changing nature of our world. The different forces of change and analysing the impacts of change. These are lifelong questions that we will continue to discuss and will challenge us as a community into the future.

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The Beginning of Everything



Let's start at the very beginning A very good place to start...

And we wondered... What is the very beginning? Maybe, it's the beginning of everything. There is not just one beginning, there are many beginnings. And the thought occurred: What do we mean by beginnings? Does a beginning imply that there has to be an ending or could it be constant renewal, of a journey in the life, or of anything? So many questions... So many beginnings, like the beginning of the world, the beginning of life itself, the beginning of a new chapter in life, the beginning of a thought, the beginning of anything and the beginning of everything. So where to start? At the beginning, of course!

'Once upon a time...' As soon as we read these words, the beginning of a story, we are entering a world of make-believe, and 'forever after' is always a happy ending. This is different with the Bible and many of our Jewish Studies lessons. It doesn't begin with 'once upon a time' and many a hero lives 'unhappily ever after'. Lewis Carroll in his story 'Alice in Wonderland'¹ had a very final way of describing beginnings and endings: "**The White Rabbit put on his spectacles. 'Where shall I begin, please your Majesty?' 'Begin at the beginning,' the king said gravely, 'and go on till you come to the end: then stop.'**" But we are not living in a fantasy world of Alice in Wonderland, nor in the life of Lewis Carroll in the nineteenth century. Our children have a strong desire to understand truth and sincerity, to be problem-solvers; they have a strong instinct to question and dissect the truth.

We have divided our 'beginnings' into 4 parts; the beginning of the world; the beginning of the first Man (Adam); the beginning of choice and the beginning of a new day.

'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was *tohu vavohu*'² nothingness and chaos, empty and dark. This describes the formlessness, emptiness, chaos. God's creation is a process of bringing order to chaos, dividing and naming the elements of the world. The first question that we asked was: **'Have you ever created anything and what prompted your creation?'**

I paint a lot, but sometimes I don't know what to paint and then I feel confused.

I created pictures on my wall of a unicorn.

I created the experiment that you told us to try about the two cups of water and the one with the sugar. I told my dad to look at the differences and then to drink the water. He asked me what the point of the experiment was and I explained to him that the same way that we feel that God is inside us, but we can't see him, we can taste the sugar in the one cup and not see it. (Fig.1)

So what does that prove?

That we can feel God, just like we can taste the sugar, but they are both invisible.

I builded a rocket ship. You had to draw it and there were doors and windows, and you could go in it.

I sewed a llama with my grandma.

I created a robot from batteries.

I created a pop stick house. I collected the sticks and glued them together.

How did your creations actually start?

Mine started in my brain.

I started with an idea.

I was thinking about it and then I did it.

So your creations started with a *thought*...

Neale Donald Walsch, an American screenwriter, actor and author of the series 'Conversations with God' said: "**Thought is the first level of creation. Next comes the word. Everything you say is a thought expressed. It is creative and sends forth creative energy into the universe. Words are the second level of creation.**"³ Dr Joe Dispenza, a well-known neuroscientist, chiropractor, teacher and author, states that "**All creation begins with a thought. When we become aware that we don't have something we want, we naturally experienced the emotion of lack from not having what we desire. This is how we begin creating through our imagination.**"⁴ Accordingly, nothing ever turns into something without a thought. This would place thoughts pretty high up on the list of important things. Does this mean that we are all creators? After all, we all have thoughts and desires. A thought can also be an emotion. Bob Proctor and Greg Reid in their book 'Thoughts are Things',⁵ talk about 'Directive thoughts.' These are thoughts that set an intention or a goal. A thought can spark a creation and can make our children aware of the power that they have to shape their world. Their thoughts and ideas matter and are part of the constant cycle of creation.

Back to our classroom... whilst discussing different theories about thoughts and unpacking the layers that lead to Creation, one child said:

I don't want to discuss any more of this until I know who created God?

He was quite adamant that nothing more would make any sense to him until he knew the answer to that question. There have been many times in our teaching career that we have had to say to a child, 'I'm not sure, I don't know, I'll look it up, or I'll think about it and come back to you.' But this; How does one answer this philosophical question that even the philosophers and theologians have no direct answer? This one question led to some interesting lessons. We took that very question and asked the children: 'So who do you think created God?'

At the very beginning it was dark, so I think that darkness created God.

In a book that I read it said that Bunjil created every man, woman, and child. He is an eagle... maybe Bunjil was God's helper.

The children had been learning about Aboriginal culture and one of their stories was about Bunjil, the eagle, that created all living things. (Fig. 2)

God created his own self... He actually did... my mum told me when I was little and her mum told my mum.



Fig. 2

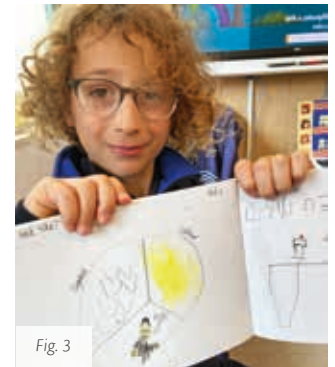


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

I don't agree with Indi. Nothing was created before God otherwise there would be an eagle at the very beginning.

I think that God created Bunjil, the eagle.

I think that a person created God because God is obviously a spirit, and a spirit is made by people. God was a big person and He died, and his gigantic spirit came out of him and saw darkness and made things lighter and lighter.

I think that God created Bunjil and Bunjil created Aboriginal people and God created the rest of people.

What impressed us most was the clarity of the children's thinking and how strong their convictions were. It was agreed that we can believe different theories and beliefs about 'who created God' and that all of our theories need to be acknowledged and respected because in reality no one is able to categorically prove who God is or who created God. We decided on a routine from Harvard University's *Project Zero Cultures of Thinking* to try and fathom out this question in a more concrete way. We thought that if the children actually saw this in the form of a colour, a symbol and an image, it would clarify what God means to them. After explaining this routine (Colour, Symbol, Image) we asked the children to draw a circle and to divide it into three parts. The children had many ideas. One child used yellow as his colour, representing light and then his symbol was flying birds, showing that God has wings and his image is in the form of a man wearing black. (Fig. 3)

Coming back to Beginnings. In a different class we were learning about 'The Garden of Eden' in our Jewish Studies lessons. (Figs. 4 & 5) There were many 'beginnings' in this story. Each day of The Creation was the beginning of a new creation, the sun, the moon and stars,



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

nature, the birds, the sea creatures, animals and finally Adam and Eve. The children were fascinated and asked:

“God created Adam and Eve, and the animals, how did the beginning of the rest of the world happen?”

God had a special order. When some people died, then other people came to life.

Is God creating all the babies?

No, you have cells in your body. The woman has special cells and they grow and grow until has eyes and a nose and a mouth and it grows until it is born.

I know exactly how babies are created, but my mum says I can't tell.

Does it work the same way with the animals?

Animals have pouches and the babies pop out of the pouch.

You need a boy and a girl around – it's the same with the animals.

God created Adam and Eve and he made something happen and then she had a big tummy and was thinking what's this (because she never had a big tummy before) and then it came out and they found out that it was another one of them.

Everyone is related to each other. It keeps going on and on and now we are all related to each other, like one big family.

We asked: **‘From what you have learnt about the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve, what else can you think of that was new and considered to be the beginning of something that wasn't there before?’**

The children had many opinions and so they were divided into groups in order to discuss this further.

They came up with the concept of ‘responsibility’.

Adam was the first person in the world that was given responsibilities.

He had to name all the animals and see that everyone was happy. He was also in charge of the Garden of Eden.

It was also acknowledged that this was the first time of the concept of ‘free choice.’ The children clarified this by relating a part of the story where God told Adam not to eat of the fruit from the tree of good and evil. It was up to Adam to see that this wish of

God's was carried out. (Fig. 6) The first time, the snake appeared and the concept of temptation, punishment and consequences were introduced. (Fig. 7)

When Eve was created, she found out about the Tree of Knowledge, the Tree of good and evil, it was the first time that she realised that she was naked. I think that Eve died – that was her punishment. Then God found another part of the world and created it with other people, and houses and other stuff. (Fig. 8)

The children gave examples of their own responsibilities at home, at school and their responsibilities to the environment. They came up with things like keeping their rooms tidy, loading the dishwasher, feeding the family pet. For the environment: *Don't ever litter; save water and recycle things.*

So how do we conclude, especially that conclusions can lead to new beginnings and not all beginnings have endings, but most endings have new beginnings. In life, one thing ends and a new one starts, it's a cycle, it just goes on and on and on...

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Figures

Fig. 1 A child demonstrating the experiment to prove that God exists.

Fig. 2 A child finding a picture of Bungil, the eagle and making a connection to the image of God.

Fig. 3 A child's impression – The image of God – using a routine from Harvard University's Project Zero Cultures of Thinking.

Fig. 4. Children's impressions of The Garden of Eden.

Fig. 5. Children's impressions of images of The Garden of Eden.

Fig. 6. A child's impression of Adam and the woman eating the forbidden fruit.

Fig. 7. A child's impression of the snake in the Garden of Eden.

Fig. 8. A child's impression of the punishments of Adam, the woman and the snake.

Bialik Creche

Creche Aleph

How do infants approach the unknown?

Maya Benn, Elli Blecher, Adira Germon, Mila Kaufman, Francesca Kemp, Ezra Kugel, Jaxon Miller, Indiana Rosenwald

with

Shalika Haliyinga, Meg Johnston, Mariana Kat, Sara Starr

Creche Bet

Where does learning begin?

Patrick Barr, Oskar Eden, Harley Fehily-Lewis, Ryder Joachim-Niles, Lara Levi, Noah Lipshut, Bowie Peters, Lily Ritz, Romeo Toniolo, Tal Wilkinson, Ryan Zuriel

with

Ori Binder, Martina Romano, Meg Johnston, Sara Starr, Dan Nguyen, Mariana Kat

Creche Gimmel

What does the concept of movement mean to children?

Hazel Ausbruch, Elijah Ciddor, Lulu Givoni, Owen Grof, Aidan Guberek, Judah Harrison, Thomas Holtzman, Judd Kestenberg, Ezra Kochen, Olivia Morris, Ruby Rosenberg, Zoe Rutman, Imani Ryan, Rafaella Seeman, Oliver Spilkin, Lia Spira

with

Melania Patrassi, Kristine Parina, Stephanie Faiman, Meg Johnston, Sara Starr, Dan Nguyen, Mariana Kat, Meshie Bargil

Creche Dalet

How do we begin to slow down and truly embrace opportunities for children to learn and develop within the routines?

Rafael Blankfield, Shaya Dahan, Ayleen Fatikov, Adam Hilzenrat, Chloe Irlight, James Jolson, Chloe Kirzner, Ethan Mac, Ava Mordech, Sebastian Peden, Jaxon Raleigh, Eitan Razvag, Tobi Shalev, Noah Shave, Eden Sher, Lauren Solomon, Solomon Spektor

with

Toby Chan, Dani Peipert, Meg Johnston, Sara Starr, Dan Nguyen, Mariana Kat, Meshie Bargil

Creche Hey

How can we learn to respect the earth through exploring our own Bialik grounds?

Maya Ben Artzi, Ruby Broder, Ella Carp, Cara Degen, Sadie Edelstein, Amelia Freilich, Sienna Freilich, Huxley Frid, Alice Goodrich, Edward Green, Harlow Jackson, Clementine Kemp

with

Teresa Li Mow Chew, Cassie Mcgreggor, Dan Nguyen, Meg Johnston, Sara Starr, Mariana Kat, Meshie Bargil

3 Year Old Kinder

Kinder 3 Bet

A group is where we make some space for friends

Olive Ausbruch, Keshet Brami, Alexander Cartoon, Gabriel Elton, Levi Fink, Jagger Fridburg, Asher Harris, Daniel Holtzman, Noam Novak, Nina Peters, Hayden Roitman, Maayan Sadoff, Lara Shamir, Gabriel Sherwin, Leo Smorgon, Eden Spira, Eden Susman, Esther Wilkie, Zak Wilkinson, Gal Ziv

with

Judy Blumberg, Ortal Erez Bennett, Deb Nirens, Mandie Teperman, Robyn Winograd, Sandy Sher, Chris Georgalas

Kinder 3 Gimmel

When you close your eyes, you see things differently... (4yo)

Shye Ambar, Issac Asher, Annabelle Barit, Layla Benn, Theo Coppel, Gabriel Gomo, Wolf Harrison, Ada Kelly, Jemiah Kuzmicich, Henry Mansfield, Ariella O'neill, Benjamin Putnins, Ella Sternstain, Eyal Sztrajt, Jesse Trepper, Mason Volchek, Miles White, Billy Yates, Elior Zaga

with

Gali Sommer, Tali Carmi, Megan Jay, Nikki Kausman, Shira David, Deb Nirens, Sandy Sher, Chris Georgalas

4 Year Old Kinder

Kinder 4 Aleph

Friends like playing together like the leaves did

Elijah Bennett, Romy Bloom, Heidi Clements, Oscar Freilich, Maxwell Frid, Chloe Gelfand, Abigail Green, Naomi Hanuka, Arlo Hechtman, Noam Jacobs, Samuel Lowe, Yahli Masin, Lielle Naor, Aviel Razvag, Benji Schwartz, Caleb Snyder

with

Elise Rotstain, Pazit Landau, Julia Rogers, Deb Nirens

Kinder 4 Bet

To listen with your whole body – eyes, ears and face...

Noa Ben-Atar, Ariah Dahan, Alice Fatikov, Blake Frydenberg, Netta Golan, Chloe Goldman, Raphael Gomo, Ben Herman, Oliver Jolson, Darcy Kaplan-Cox, Zohara Sadeh, Jack Scher, Yasmin Shalev, Elliot Sherwin, Liri Shurman, Arielle Simhon, Oscar Smorgon, Ellie Weiskop

with

Megan Miller, Adi Barzilay, Rosemary Barry

Kinder 4 Gimmel

"I want to go inside my body"

Tobi Blecher, Lennard Breskin, Jack Carp, Lara Freund, Jake Fried, Ariana Granovskaia, Chavez Lam, Emunah Malka-Shilo, Noga Landau, Austin Peden, Joshua Polyakov, Ronny Rabba Erez, Nathan Sela, Jonathan Shinnars, Summer Spektor, Sophie Teperson, Ayla Yerusalimsky

with

Ranjna Najat, Mireille Krasnostein, Zia Freeman, Ayana Shavit, Gail Bousi, Deb Nirens

Prep

Prep Aleph

Re-beginning

Cameron Barit, Dov Crossley, Maya Dabscheck, Angus Grof, Milla Israelsohn, Evie Peters, Finn Rogers, Nellie Ryan, Matisse Seeman, Leni Serry, Benjamin Shinnars, Finn Solomon, Maxwell Steele

with

Roz Marks, Shlomit Rubinstein, Nikki Kausman, Shira David

Prep Bet

The Beginnings of Giving

Tom Ambar, Katie Barabash, Minnie Dunne, Minnie Grosman, Cindy Li, Remy Meltzer Burns, Edward Reid, Nina Rozenchwajg, Tiferet Sadoff, Ruiwen Tang, Eva Tobias, Jed Trepper, Eden Zaga

with

Linda Baise, Ety Ben Artzi, Robyn Winograd, Mandie Teperman

Prep Gimmel

“...if we celebrated everyday, it would not be as special.”

Zoe Cao, Leo Cartoon, Jacob Degen, Tal Falkov, Indi Jackson, Halle Lasky, Ellis Mahemoff, Charlie Mansfield, Phoebe Marks, Amelia Mordech, Alexa Pohl, Elijah Silverman, Georgina Samuel, Ava Yahalom, Emilia Zuriel

with

Melanie Woolhouse, Desre Kaye, Des Kaye, Deb Nirens, Zia Freeman

Year 1

Year 1 Aleph

Biography of an idea

Jethro Blecher, Kayden Briskin, Grace Broder, Jimmy Clements, Reuben Eydlish, Olive Fischl, Mackenzie Matthews, Ruth Sadeh, Elliot Segal, Reuben Sher, Raphy Silverman, Ella Simhon, Isabel Susman

with

Zoe Winograd, Natalie Kluska, Shlomit Rubinstein, Yael Shaul

Year 1 Bet

Big Ideas have Small Beginnings

Maya Aldworth, Dylan Berkovitch, Summer Blashki, Zion Cao, Indiana Frid, Dani Haimovich, Tommy Hunter, Alon Lall, Elsie Lew, Reef Lipa, Jordan Mackin, Tamar Ognall

with

Meenal Khushu, Ety Azikri, Chris Geogalas, Sandy Sher

Year 1 Gimmel

‘Just because you can’t see the change, it doesn’t mean it’s not there’

Olivia Aloni, Gemma Frydenberg, Olivia Gold, Ava Goldman, Louie Israel, Ryder Janover, Georgie Jolson, Jesse Mac, Sofia Raleigh, Alex Schneider, Mayan Sztrajt, Ariella White, Alphy Zhang

with

Leah Mand, Desre Kaye, Mandie Teperman, Yael Shaul

Jewish Studies

Prep & Year 1

The Beginning of Everything

Prep Aleph, Prep Bet, Prep Gimmel, Year 1 Aleph, Year 1 Bet, Year 1 Gimmel

with

Ety Ben-Artzi, Desre Kaye, Shlomit Rubinstein, Prep and Year 1 Teachers



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