

Windows into Children's Thinking

BIALIK COLLEGE, EARLY LEARNING CENTRE JOURNAL 2022

Bialik. *Be your best.*



Dedicated to the loving memory of our
Prep Bet Teacher Karen Sulman ל"ט



From the Principal of Bialik College

What is it to make a genuine connection with someone? This question has been asked through a different lens since we have returned to a full year of on-campus learning following 24 months of disrupted schooling.

Our Creche and ELC children have borne the brunt of the social challenges of the pandemic. In their formative years, their access to campus – whilst less restricted than most – has nevertheless been stop-start, online-offline due to the pandemic.

‘Connection’ is the theme of our ELC and Creche in 2022. We have learnt that connections can be made in so many ways, with so many layers, yet nothing beats interpersonal contact.

Our Creche and Early Learning Centre colleagues have been at the forefront of the community in nurturing our children and in ensuring that connections are meaningful, genuine, flexible and kind. Our children have proved to be resilient, strong and optimistic and crucially ‘living in the moment’, which is one of the many privileges of childhood.

It has been so wonderful to see the return of the Kinder Grandparents’ Shabbat, our reframed Chagiga (Dance Night), our Literacy and Numeracy events and our parents returning to the rooms to celebrate with their, and with other, children.

The challenge for us all is to learn from our children and be inspired by their optimism and resilience to *carpe diem*, to seize the day and

the moment, and to put down the phones and distractions, and to be in that moment. Since it is not about the program or the lesson, but it is about the impact that the experience has on the individual, the group and the relationship.

We can be inspired by Ron Wolfson in *The Spirituality of Welcoming and Relational Judaism* “**There is nothing wrong with programs; every organisation has them. But, if the program designers have given no thought to how the experience will offer participants a deeper connection to each other, with the community and with Judaism itself, then it will likely be another lovely evening, afternoon or morning with little or no lasting impact..... what really matters is that we care about the people we seek to engage. When we genuinely care about people... we will listen to their stories, we will share ours, and we will join together to build a Jewish community that enriches our lives.**”

This is our vision for our community. This is Connection.

B'Shalom,



Jeremy Stowe-Lindner
Principal



From the Head of the Early Learning Centre

Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio approach, believed that the challenge facing children today is to think how to interconnect. He stated that **“this is the watchword for the present and the future – a word that we need to understand deeply and in all its forms. We need to do so keeping in mind that we live in a world made not of separate islands but of networks...”**¹

After the last 2 years of lockdowns, the concept of “Connection” became the catalyst for our whole ELC investigation during 2022. Any concept or idea we have involves choices. The choice of this concept was chosen for its endless possibilities and not one prescribed outcome. We hoped that each investigation in each room would be authentic, a source of deep learning which would offer opportunities for children to engage in thoughtful ways.

Our children come to school asking questions. We observe and listen to the children because when they ask ‘why’ they are not simply expecting an answer from us. They are requesting the opportunity to find out for themselves. This attitude of a child means that they are real researchers. It is possible to destroy this attitude of research of our children with our quick answers and our certainty. We believe children ‘act’ upon the world in order to know it. Knowledge comes from actions which have been internalized. This construction and co-construction of knowledge is central to the Reggio Emilia approach. The role of the educator is to legitimise the children’s curiosity and knowledge.

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.

Our professional learning and planning allow 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. Documentation as well as all the materials produced during observation is also of importance to our children as they can interpret and reinterpret their own experiences. 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.

The investigations in this journal have taken place during 2022. 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. In this journal the children’s words are italicised, and many of the articles are prefaced by their own words.

“How complex are children’s ways of building knowledge, therefore how complex are the ways of capturing it.”²

Daphne Gaddie .

Daphne Gaddie

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1. Edwards, C and Gandini, L and Forman, G. (2012). *The Hundred Languages of Children*. Third edition. Reggio Emilia: Reggio Children
2. Edwards, C and Gandini, L and Forman, G. (2012). *The Hundred Languages of Children*. Third edition. Reggio Emilia: Reggio Children

Contents

Bialik Creche

| | |
|---|----|
| Creche Aleph | 5 |
| <i>How do babies form relationships and connections with one another?</i> | |
| Creche Bet..... | 7 |
| <i>Forming connections with families as the first teacher.</i> | |
| Creche Gimmel..... | 9 |
| <i>How do children connect things that appear to have no obvious connection to one another?</i> | |
| Creche Dalet..... | 13 |
| <i>How do children connect to a new environment and the land on which we live?</i> | |

3 Year Old Kinder

| | |
|--|----|
| Kinder 3 Aleph | 16 |
| <i>You are my friend, and I am your friend.</i> | |
| Kinder 3 Bet..... | 19 |
| <i>It means myself is like that...</i> | |
| Kinder 3 Gimmel..... | 22 |
| <i>Do we connect with those who we share a language with, or do we seek to find those with shared curiosities?</i> | |

The conventions in this book

A number of styles have been used throughout Bialik College Early Learning Centre Journal 2022 – 'Windows into Children's Thinking' to designate different voices.

Serif Italicised Font

Indicates the voice of a child

Serif Bolded Font

Indicates the voice of an adult

[To access digital content of exhibitions](#)



4 Year Old Kinder

| | |
|--|----|
| Kinder 4 Aleph | 26 |
| <i>The crystal has energy to make my power. It makes energy and power in my fingers.</i> | |
| Kinder 4 Bet..... | 29 |
| <i>The power of reflection.</i> | |
| Kinder 4 Gimmel..... | 32 |
| <i>Children and places.</i> | |

Prep

| | |
|--|----|
| Prep Aleph | 36 |
| <i>Imagination is when you meet something that is not in this world.</i> | |
| Prep Bet | 39 |
| <i>It is the people that make places special to us...</i> | |
| Prep Gimmel..... | 42 |
| <i>Our differences make us unique.</i> | |

Year 1

| | |
|---|----|
| Year 1 Aleph..... | 46 |
| <i>We all need to connect to others: we always have and always will.</i> | |
| Year 1 Bet | 49 |
| <i>How does our understanding of what is inside influence our connection?</i> | |
| Year 1 Gimmel..... | 52 |
| <i>Connection with a place is about being loved.</i> | |
| Year 1 Jewish Studies..... | 55 |
| <i>Maybe the magic is life!</i> | |

| | |
|--------------------|----|
| Contributors | 59 |
|--------------------|----|



Creche

How do babies form relationships and connections with one another?

Children are supported by a sense of security and belonging to their environment giving them the confidence to explore and curiously engage in learning. From the very beginning of the year, we noticed children observing each other and even responding to others emotions.

Empathy demonstrated in the form of comforting gestures through body language, pre-verbal language and expressions. Some children moved away from uncomfortable scenarios where voices were louder or high pitched and focused on following their own interests. Children independently made decisions on whether to engage and interact or redirect their movements.

As researchers we ask ourselves questions constantly. Children's connections to one another became a strong focus of our attention. We were curious to know if, how and when young children make connections with one another. Thoughts of a common door connection came into our minds. We wondered whether there was a magical door that was only accessible to the children. Is the key to this door mutual interests and ideas that children share with one another or is it the early formation of relationships with peers through gestures and body language?

There seemed to be an innate disposition that the children displayed that enabled them to create social boundaries from one another when the occasion arose without needing to articulate this to one another.

Observing children's responses to one another in different situations with peers throughout the day could provide answers to these questions.

A nine month old infant directly smiled at the educators, using sounds and pre-verbal vocalisation and body gestures, which made us wonder about children's social capabilities. We observed how children showed interest in viewing their own body movements during tummy time, feeding time, or during nappy changes and that of other children. They noticed when another child moved from one place to another. (Figs. 1 & 2)



Fig. 1

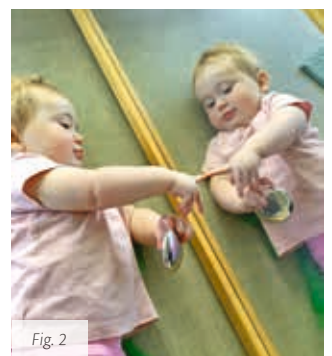


Fig. 2



Therefore, we decided to utilise mirrors throughout the environment so children could view themselves and others. Would we see children making more connections with one another?

All children, no matter their physical ability, were able to view the mirrors that were placed at different levels and spaces. As the children saw their reflection through the mirrors, some identified themselves and started to move and point at their image. They spent time investigating the mirrors, themselves and their own movements which caused different reactions. Some children smiled at themselves in the mirror, returning their gaze to the educator, smiling as if they wanted to share what they had discovered. Some children tried to touch the reflection and take it with them only to see an empty hand. That puzzled them looking for answers and so glanced back at their educator. (Fig. 3)

The mirror images showed other children that shared the space and this raised the children's interest in the other images in the mirror. The communication between the children grew, using sounds, facial expressions and body language; pointing at each other, standing still, touching their peer and then touching the mirror image to gain more meaning from their perspective. There were different responses, some paused their movement, others reluctant to make any further movement whilst navigating the concept and some made sure to move completely away from the situation. The opposite response came from a few children who moved closer to inspect, clap and view themselves alongside others in the reflection. (Fig. 4)

There were differences in the interactions when face to face to when they were interacting through the mirror images. The children's initial responses to seeing others in the mirror was slower and done with caution. When present and watching each other in the room there was an awareness and confidence in their responses that was almost immediate. With the mirror version, they were more likely to imitate each others actions and facial expressions. (Fig. 5)

Children were free to explore what they saw without any physical touch to another person. There was a curiosity and exploration of the image in the mirror that could be observed by the child without anyones space being invaded. The image of another child

reflected in the mirror allowed freedom for the children to interact and to investigate.

“Mirrors on walls, at right angles to one another and arranged in triangular prisms – provide unusual viewpoints and prompt reflection, both literal and metaphorical”¹ (Fig. 6)

The children's mutual interest and curiosity in mirrors was a notable factor for their interactions and association with one another, but was it the only factor for their connection?

Reggio Emilia founder Loris Malaguzzi described the child as having a hundred ways of thinking, a hundred ways of listening, a hundred ways of speaking in their journey to understand.²

We continue to reflect on how children form connections. Focusing on mirrors gave us a new dimension in which to explore the links children have with one another. Through experimenting with the concept that there is a common connection door swung wide open, the key is not just in mutual ideas or gestures; it's in the exploration, time and images they see. A safe and uninterrupted space in which they can observe themselves and others, allows children's interactions and relationships to be richer and more purposeful. (Fig. 7)

References:

1. Thornton, L., & Brunton, P. (2015). *Understanding the Reggio Approach*. London: Routledge.
2. Edwards, C., & Gandini, L. (2011). *The Hundred Languages of Children* (3rd Ed.) Praeger.

Figures:

- Fig. 1 A child lying down in front of a mirror
 Fig. 2 A child pointing a finger and touching the mirror
 Fig. 3 Multi reflections on triangle mirror
 Fig. 4 A child following another child into a mirror space
 Fig. 5 A child following another child into a mirror space
 Fig. 6 Child noticing her reflection
 Fig. 7 Child making different movements in front of a mirror

Forming connections with families as the first teacher



When educators start a year with young children, it is always met with care and reassurance, with a small dose of curiosity and apprehension. Turning toward the families as the child's first teacher will provide us with information that assists with building relationships and knowledge about individual children and their needs.

"In the Reggio approach, the parent is viewed as an essential resource to the child's learning. The exchange of ideas between parents and teachers is vital in creating a more positive and productive learning environment."¹

During initial orientations, we asked parents to share as much information as they could about their child, their interests, and routines, amongst many other things. Families instinctively shared this information discussing their own observations that gave us a picture of how their child functions and involves themselves throughout the day. We knew when the children needed their sleeps, meals and milk bottles, information that supported the children's physiological needs. Abraham Maslow described this a hierarchy of needs, but we know that there is more in relation to belonging and learning.²

Our question thus formed: How can we as educators form strong connections with the children's first teachers in order to enrich children's learning environments?

In order to gain more perspective and gather information that would promote the children's sense of belonging in the Bet room, we asked families to send pictures of what the children had done over the holiday period. (Fig. 1) We felt this would offer the children something familiar in a new environment. We decided to explore these pictures during group times and were met with smiles and interest when they were displayed on the screen. They pointed at different people and said their names with energy and enthusiasm. (Fig. 2)



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Through these pictures, we were reminded of previous groups of older children who talked to us about their weekends and how we as adults, shared their joy in hearing these experiences. We decided to place these pictures in the piazza on the light table to provoke thoughts and communication with the children. The children pointed to familiar peers and family members and even a dinosaur! (Fig. 3) Other children showed deeper attachment to the pictures and a desire to have these pictures in the Bet room alongside them throughout the day.

Through exploring these family pictures, we found that we were not only creating relationships with the families but getting to know the children on another level. We were not just relying on our own observations of the child in our environment but now gaining very important insight into their family lives. This gave us more to communicate with the children about and respond to their expressions of interest and joy. (Fig. 4)

We sent individual children's portfolios home more often for parents to peruse what their children were doing at creche. Through opening up our door to sharing, parents started to send more pictures but now about what the children were doing at home. (Fig. 5) Stacking up food cans, problem solving and enjoying reading Thomas the Train books, to name a few. We delighted in these moments of sharing as they provided opportunities to implement similar experiences and apply further challenges and learning in the Bet environment. By converting the can stacking from home into larger gross motor cardboard boxes we were able to experiment with several skills initiated from family information.

We had heard one child say an unrecognisable word, "potter" repeatedly throughout the day, only after an information exchange with the family did, we realise what he was attempting to communicate. It was Thomas the Tank Engine! So, we held conversations about trains and different characters' names, adding on to the children's learning from home by stimulating memory and communication about a topic that was not as clearly conveyed by the child. The information about Thomas the Tank Engine opened the avenues of understanding for the educators and enabled us to engage in the child's favourite play and attempts at vocalising the characters. Integrating the first teachers' knowledge into our environment allowed us to enrich the children's learning, in turn reassuring educators that they are aligning with the children's interests.

We were overjoyed when families were able to come back into the children's learning environment post corona virus restrictions. So much so that we invited each family member to come in and

spend time with their child in the environment, either reading a book, singing songs, or interacting. Many families brought their children's favourite books in with them, expanding the exposure to different books and adding to the Jewish curriculum through spoken and written Hebrew. (Fig. 6)

According to American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner's Five ecological systems, a child's development is influenced by microsystems two of which is a child's family and the creche environment. The important element that brings these two together is the mesosystem. **"The mesosystem is where a person's individual microsystems do not function independently but are interconnected and assert influence upon one another."**²³ The more positively a child's microsystems relate (child's family and the creche environment), the more positive effects this will have on a child's development.

By forming connections with parents and families, we began to create stronger learning environments for the children.

How can we as educators form strong connections with the children's first teachers in order to enrich the learning environments?

This experience made us more connected to the children by offering insight in a holistic way. Nurturing the families as much as we did has been an incredibly valuable lesson that reiterates the importance of working together and connecting on a deeper level.

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3. Guy-Evans, O. (2020). *Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory*. Simply Psychology. Available at: www.simplypsychology.org/Bronfenbrenner.html [Accessed on 12 October 2022].

Figures:

- Fig. 1 Pointing at a picture of herself
 Fig. 2 Exploring pictures as a group
 Fig. 3 Dinosaur
 Fig. 4 Mama, Papa, Momo
 Fig. 5 Exploring portfolios
 Fig. 6 Sharing books from home

How do children connect things that appear to have no obvious connection to one another?

It is always a reassuring moment for an educator to witness a child involved and curious.

A long train had become a focal point of exploration. On one particular day, a child looked up from a very long squiggly train to discover a similar shape over the other side of the room. This was in the form of a picture of a rainbow serpent from an aboriginal dreamtime book. The child looked at the train and back at the picture of the serpent, saying out loud, *it looks like a snake*.

When hearing this announcement, others followed the child's hand pointing toward the rainbow serpent book, another child saying, *it looks like a rainbow*. The connections continued to occur. Whilst making challah, rainbow colours appeared on the table from the sun shining through the window. Some of the children announced that they saw a rainbow!

As a team of educators our ears pricked up and instantly we thought of rainbows. A number of science experiments ensued; matching coloured paper and arches and pipe cleaners, representing shapes and colours. Then we stopped! We reflected and realised what really happened. With a different lens we sifted through the hidden but important message the children were giving us. What was thought to be the interest of the children was not the actual display of inquiry.

An assumption and predetermined outcome had been adopted by the educators, however the realisation was that the focus was not that of rainbows but of a greater observed behaviour. Children created their own relationship without a prescribed outcome, they made their own links. **“Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place, technologies and natural processed materials.”¹** (Figs. 1–3)



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

As a team of curious and responsive educators, we revisited the documentation and discovered that the children had connected a train to a rainbow serpent. Things that don't necessarily have a connection.

How do children connect things that have no glaringly obvious purpose to one another?

Only through observation can we truly understand the wonders of children. As educators, a timely reminder of the 'hundred languages'.

“Work and play, reality and fantasy, science and imagination, sky and earth, reason and dream are things that do not belong together.”²

The stage was set, an entire area devoted to an experience involving a variety of loose parts, objects, tools and materials which didn't have any noticeable prescribed outcome. How would the children respond and what items would they place together to form a connection? (Fig. 4)

Observations ensued, listening with all our senses, and noting many interactions and associations to the materials. As individual children entered the space, they were intrigued with the variety of materials available.

One child kept holding up items and calling out, *What's this, is this a peg? It's a key, oh that goes in a door.*

Children reached out to place keys on the hanging shelf, they dropped the key into a space and listened to the sound it made as it dropped through the metal shelf. The action was repeated over and over again whilst the child carefully listened to the sound, calling out *ding* as it fell through.



Fig. 5

Three children secured clamps onto a metal cup stand, gripping the peg and placing it onto the stand until it connected and stayed on. (Fig. 5)

A child observed keys and bolts on the floor under a shelf and said, *oh no!* We asked how they ended up on the floor? The child pointed to the hanging shelf and said *fall*, proceeding to demonstrate how it happened by repeating the action and saying *hole*.

A group of children connected through the variety of colours in the environment. Each of them picking out coloured clamps, matching coloured paper, bolts and keys. One child immediately responded and connected keys and bolts by their colours, holding both in their hand and saying *silver*. (Fig. 6)

One very curious and involved learner took time to focus on some corks, placing them standing up in a row on a wooden board, reaching up to collect these and bringing them back down again to place them perfectly in sequence with one another. (Fig. 7)

A child collected a bolt and clamp and began stroking it through his hair; he smiled and told us that he was having a haircut at the hairdressers.

Each week random items were introduced without mention. A mesh sleeve opening at one end and sealed at the other became useful to place objects inside. Children filled this with keys, corks and many other items. Experimenting openly and confidently, sourcing particular objects and collecting ideas, became the children's endless self-led focus.

We found that with time the children were making their own predictions, such as matching the sounds made as keys fell.



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

Resilience to keep trying without any assistance was a resounding observation. The children sought out challenges on their own and together. Children watched one another, eager to see what happens next, in awe of what they were witnessing. There was an obvious recognition of each other's abilities.

There was an unwritten rule guiding the children carefully around the space, highlighting a natural understanding of the rights of others; valuing and experimenting with turn taking.

Predictions and assumptions were observed, testing their own hypotheses, engaging in scientific experiments such as gravity and cause and effect. Instinctively children lined similar materials up to form shapes. They constructed links between routines and events experienced outside the learning environment and connected them to the materials presented in front of them.

Links were everywhere for the children but in complete contrast to the assumptions made by the educators.

Rainbows? What rainbows? We were planning learning around a rainbow that had no relevance to the children's real provocation and involvement. There was a deeper meaning to the children's actions and thoughts. We had a timely reminder to slow down and be completely present in the learning environment that we share with young people.

"Teachers as well as children are constantly learning. Learning itself is a subject for constant research, and as such must be made visible."³

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1. Department of Education and Training [DET]. (2019). *Belonging, being & becoming – The early years learning framework for Australia*. Retrieved from <https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/belonging-being-becoming-early-years-learning-framework-australia>
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Figures:

Fig. 1 A naturally occurring rainbow on Challah

Fig. 2 Experimenting with mixing colour and water

Fig. 3 Ice water painting, colouring with different mediums

Fig. 4 The environment

Fig. 5 Three children attaching pegs onto the metal cup holder

Fig. 6 Child dropping different elements through the 'hole' or gap between the glass and table

Fig. 7 Child carefully lining up corks on wooden block

How do children connect to a new environment and the land on which we live?



Whilst children were settling in for their first year at Bialik Creche, some requested playing their favourite football anthems. These songs made them feel secure in their new environment and quickly formed a reliable and calming routine that connected them to a familiar sound from their home. This in turn created an interest for the whole group as they listened to the different sounds of the team songs. (Fig. 1)

As the months went by, other children started to share knowledge of their favourite teams, creating a common interest between themselves and their peers. (Fig. 2)

As the educational team discovered the importance of being researchers, we questioned why this was such a strong focus for the children in this group? How did something based on sport that occurred outside of the crèche, become the element that brought everyone together to form a sense of belonging?

We noticed correlations between First People who create and nurture strong bonds, respect, and traditions. Passed down through generations by stories, songs and rituals that tie them together as a community.

We learned that First People stress the importance of kinship and being together. **“Elders need to pass on their stories to**



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

encourage children to know who they are, their identity and to make their culture a lot stronger and to believe in themselves”.¹

The generational connection also influenced the Dalet children’s decisions about which football team they supported. It came from family members stemming down many generations – grandfathers, Mums and Dads, cousins, and very important people in the children’s lives. (Fig. 3)

To make these connections and understand the meaning and true value that the Australian Football League (AFL) had on a new community of children, we began to explore indigenous culture and football as one.

There is a comradery that develops when participating in team sports, activities, or joint interests. Children spoke to one another about their team, the colours, the anthems and initiated their own conversations.

A connection occurred when the children were introduced to a game called Marngrook, which means ‘game of the ball’ in Gunditjamra language, using a possum skin ball. Angie Cleaver, an indigenous member of the community affiliated with Murrundindi (Ngurungaeta) of the Wurundjeri tribe and artist in residence at Bialik College, shared her local traditions and belongings with the

children. After some research, we know that “AFL was definitely influenced by Marngrook.”²

When the possum skin ball was handed to the children, they touched, explored the texture, softness, and visual appearance. When given the Marngrook ball for the first time, their immediate physical reaction was to throw it to one another. Some attempted to catch it with their whole body and others moved away when it came in their direction hoping not to touch it. There was an avoidance and an expression of caution when offered to explore the ball firsthand. (Figs. 4 & 5)

Descriptions were vocalised, children’s imagination and natural observations were creating an opportunity to form questions that inspired them to investigate and explore as a group of learners.

The first investigation as a group was established when the Marngrook ball was placed alongside other balls from different sports. There was a tennis ball, bouncy ball, soccer ball, an AFL football and a spikey ball. These items were placed under a piece of material and unveiled to the children at ‘togetherness’ time. (Fig. 6)

They verbalised their discoveries, it is soft, *it is fluffy, that’s a cat*. They became confident with sharing their observations of all the items including the Marngrook ball which had initially provided



Fig. 7

hesitation when offered to the children to observe with all their senses on its own. (Fig. 7)

This time they could see it alongside other noticeable items that they may have previously engaged and experimented with in the past, such as the bouncy ball. A child labelled it as a ball when aligned to other round and eye-catching objects.

One child remembered a picture of a Marngrook ball in the room, ran to the picture, announcing the similarity to the group. In fact, an exact resemblance to the ball on the floor.

The balls were taken outdoors, and the children commenced kicking, throwing, and passing the balls to one another. An educator began to sing and within an instant a few children placed their balls on the ground, sat on them, bouncing to the music, smiling at one another, involved in the experience. (Fig. 8)

“Children have ‘special rights’ with strategies throughout the day that include peers’ interactions and supports collaboration fostering respect, sharing different points of view and ideas together.”³ Team sport brings people together, connecting them on another level. Football in this case is the catalyst that connects children, families and people to one another and the world around them. Children are exposed to sport and traditions in their homes, life and families which influences and reinforces their sense of belonging. This creates links to the present and past life just as we do when we acknowledge our elders, past, present, and future.

We approached this investigation expecting to observe the differences in the Marngrook ball, a ball used many years ago, compared to the balls used in present time. What we realised was the children were emphasising the similarities. The shape, the action



Fig. 8

of throwing, catching and holding it in their hands. They seemed eager to engage naturally into a team game where they smiled, encouraged, and directed one another to throw it, catch it or pass it.

The fundamentals of creating a safe and secure environment for new families and children ended up being a sprouting of a seed of knowledge that each of us were honoured to explore. This connected us all together, in a way that was not expected or planned. The children guided us to a tradition that enabled new and rich relationships to form.

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1. Atkinson S. (2017) *Possum skin pedagogy: A guide for Early Childhood Practitioners*. Available at: [possum-skin-pedagogy--a-guide-for-early-childhood-practitioners--journeys-and-outcomes.pdf](https://possum-skin-pedagogy-a-guide-for-early-childhood-practitioners--journeys-and-outcomes.pdf) (fka.org.au)
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Figures:

- Fig. 1 Children dancing to a football anthem
 Fig. 2 Sharing Team colours to peers
 Fig. 3 Group time
 Fig. 4 An indigenous member introducing and passing the Marngrook to children
 Fig. 5 A child exploring the Marngrook
 Fig. 6 Different types of balls placed under a black fabric
 Fig. 7 Investigating with the whole body
 Fig. 8 Children and the balls outdoors



3 Year Old Kinder

*You are my friend,
and I am your
friend.*

Every year the ELC team at Bialik goes through a process of developing an umbrella concept which guides the learning in each classroom. Every classroom has a unique program, and this is one way that brings us all together. This year the concept chosen was 'Connection'.

The first thing that came to mind for my team is the connection we have between each other – a social connection. Research defines social connection as the feeling of belonging to a group or generally feeling close to other people. Scientific evidence strongly suggests that social connection is a core psychological need, essential to life satisfaction.¹ Founder of the Reggio Emilia approach, Loris Malaguzzi believed that social learning preceded cognitive development. Therefore, relationships are at the very heart of his philosophy.²

According to the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality and Authority (ACECQA), **"Good relationships developed early in life help children learn to connect with others"**³, a skill which will have an ongoing benefit. At an early age, children develop social connections through their friendships. Research has established that navigating friendships helps support children's emotional and social development, increases their capacity for empathy, happiness, wellbeing and confidence. Friendships help reduce stress and promote communication skills and good behaviour.⁴ Research also indicates that friendships **"are central to children developing acceptance, self-esteem and higher functioning thinking skills that contribute to positive learning and life outcomes"**.⁵

According to Kinder three Aleph, a friend is... (Fig. 1)

Playing and reading to together.

We are friends.



Fig. 1

Friends play together.

Sharing is caring.

Nice.

Holding hands.

Kissing each other.

When someone is sad, you can kiss and cuddle them to make them feel better.

You are my friend, and I am your friend.

Paying close attention to the children's early interactions with each other offered an opportunity to reflect and study connections. As we observed, we noticed that those who were more familiar with each other, having come from the same childcare facility, gravitated towards each other almost immediately, whilst those who were new to the group walked around observing, wanting to initiate an interaction but needing support to do so. How do we help a child form a social connection?

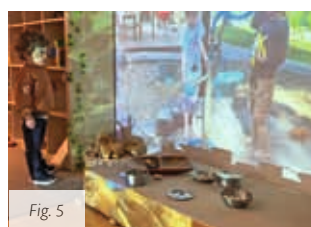
This is where the educators and the environment came in. Together, these two components took on a crucial role of providing the children with tools to initiate play and interactions. The teachers used strategies such as purposefully grouping children together and role modelling social skills. Once this objective was achieved and we had children feeling more confident and connected, we reflected and asked ourselves, how we could adjust the environment to develop and grow peer connections? What impact does the environment play in supporting a child's social connection?

The Reggio Emilia philosophy has identified the environment as one of three key teachers involved in a child's development and learning, alongside the parent and the classroom teacher. The education of the child is optimised when these three teachers work together. Malaguzzi emphasized that the environment plays a central role in the process of making learning meaningful. Through **"shared experiences and exchanges, aspects of knowledge, skills, and strategies are modified, negated, consolidated, connected, interconnected, refined, and revised"**.⁶ (Fig. 2)

The Reggio Emilia approach describes several principles which distinguishes it from other child-centred philosophies on education. The focus of this project relates to the principle that children are collaborators and learn through interaction within their communities.

Malaguzzi emphasized that **"it was not so much that we need to think of the child who develops himself by himself but rather of a child who develops himself interacting and developing with others"**.⁷

This was evident in an example of the children's interactions in a water play experience. The children were given the opportunity to venture to another area of the outdoor playground where the water pump is. They were able to take of their shoes and investigate. Together they helped each other pump the water into bowls to water the garden, and use the water to also clean their feet. Smiles and laughter filled the air. (Fig. 3)



Your turn and then my turn.

Up and down.

Wash my feet.

Can I have a little... no a lot.

My feet are dirty.

No thank you.

Hold it a bit closer.

Now it's your turn.

Wash my hands. Now the bowl.

An environment, such as the water play area set up to engage children in a sensory experience, encouraged social connections. This not only facilitated happiness but reduced stress, promoted communication skills, inclusion and positive behaviour.

We next asked ourselves, how can we extend the children's learning and development from the outdoor environment? We decided to mimic a similar situation indoors. We projected images of their water play in a section of the room with other materials that were similar to the outdoor space – water-like pebbles, stones, tanbark-like corks and kitchen bowls. The children's reactions to the change of environment was immediate and exciting. A stronger connection was forming. (Figs. 4–6)

How does the teacher facilitate social connection at a young age?
"Educators who give priority to nurturing relationships and



providing children with consistent emotional support can assist children to develop the skills and understandings they need to interact positively with others. They also help children to learn about their responsibilities to others, to appreciate their connectedness and interdependence as learners, and to value collaboration and teamwork.”⁸

So, we asked the children, how do you make friends?

Play.

Give them a hug.

You give them a toy.

Sharing.

You do a sleep over.

When it was my birthday I shared my toys with my friends. They were happy... because I shared.

We followed this discussion by showing the children examples of friendships through books and film which presented them with a variety of social skills. We then had a discussion and reflected on what they had seen.

That night, I received an email from one parent;

‘Thank you for the conversation today about how to make friends. I feel like it was very timely for (my child) after he struggled yesterday when (his friend) was away’. In person, the parent provided greater detail on the discussion they had had with their child which the child was able to relay the knowledge they had gained from the film. This highlights the importance of providing children with the tools to develop social skills and explicit language.

In order to deepen their learning from this experience, the children were next asked to take on the role of a ‘researcher’ and use the iPad to take pictures of what friendship looks like, within and outside of our kinder room. Tasking the children with responsibility empowered them and made them feel important. It involved them and gave them the opportunity to extend their own personal learning. We paired children together to begin with.

We watched as the children looked around the room for signs of ‘friendship’ and then went to capture these moments. This continued throughout the week where individual children would ask to use the iPad to continue taking pictures. (Figs. 7–9)

Looking back at the pictures we noticed common themes. Most were taken of small groups of two to five children. They all appeared to show children playing together, communicating or helping each other. All children seemed to be cooperating and appeared happy in the pictures as evidenced by their smiles. This is what friendship looked like for Kinder Three Aleph children.

We then had all the children look at a selection of the pictures on the interactive whiteboard and reflect on their experience. We asked them what they saw: (Fig. 10)

They’re playing.

They are together... they’re friends.

They are playing together in the mud.

They are being nice.

I see love.

I see friendship.

So how will this experience, which explicitly looks at friendship, manifest and how does a child’s view of friendships develop and change over time? Will they become more meaningful or more complex? We do know that supporting and laying foundations for a child’s social connection at a young age is crucial to their social and emotional development. We believe that when a child has a connection to their peers, they are happy; and a child that is happy is a child that is learning, developing, and growing.

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*It means myself is
like that...*



Fig. 1

From the moment a child is born they are connected. There is a connection to family, community and environment. When does a child connect to who they are? When do they develop their identity?

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the definition of identity is “the distinguishing character or personality of an individual”. There is also an aspect of identity that is related to the psychological identification – in other words “**the psychological orientation of the self in regard to something, such as a person or group, with a resulting feeling of close emotional association.**”¹

Reflecting on these definitions does a child develop a connection to their own identity? Do they see themselves as an individual or does their connection to their kindergarten class, family, environment and community create their identity? (Fig. 1)

The children of Kinder three Bet were presented with images of themselves deconstructed into individual features, for them to create their own self-portrait. Using the self-portrait as a vehicle because of the connection it has to children’s identity perceptions.² In the studio there was a mirror, a collection of the children’s photos of their features and some loose parts; using loose parts as “**reclaimed materials obtained from community with the intent to reinvent their use and meaning.**”³ Small groups of the children were given the opportunity to interact with these materials. Would the children make a connection to their own image, their own identity? (Fig. 2)

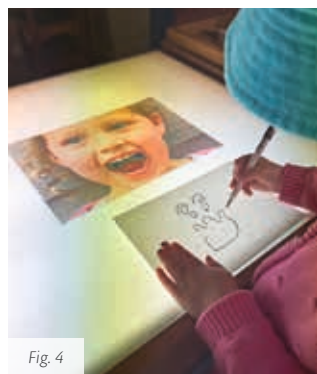
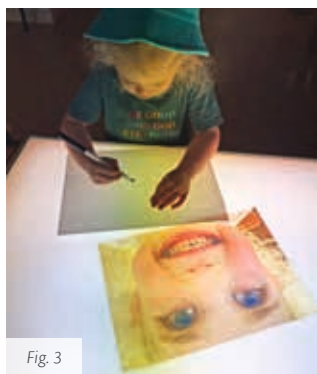
What can you see?

Eyes, nose, teeth, glass, sticks, keys.

Is this me?



Fig. 2



I can't find me?

With more searching and time given to the children.

This is my nose – 'cause I have a nose here.

Using the mirror to confirm their own image.

That is me...

The intended outcome of the children making their self-portraits did not occur. The children were not all convinced that they could see themselves. We reflected on this. What other materials could be offered to the children to help them see their self? (Fig. 3) Self being **“a distinct individual whose body, mind and actions are separate from those of other people.”**⁴

Using the children's images and the light table we stepped back into our research. Each child had a complete detailed transparent image of their own face. They had to find their face within a collection of their peers. They used the images on the light table as a reference to draw from.

That's not me... It is not my face. I got blue eyes. I got coloured eyes.

Sorting through the images.

That's me... That's my cheek.

That looks like my nose...

That's me... Don't forget I need eyelashes. I need teeth so I can crunch anything.

The children could see themselves as a whole. (Fig.4)

We returned to the initial provocation, the provocation being **“deliberate and thoughtful decisions made by the teacher to extend the ideas of the children.”**⁵

The children used the original materials from the initial provocation – the individual features. They worked as individuals, not as a group. The children constructed themselves, this time with more confidence and this time with the process being recorded by video.

They reused the loose parts as well as their photographs, giving the children the opportunity to build relationships with themselves as well as **“between things, between thoughts and with the environment.”**⁶

The children were identifying their individual and unique features, like the freckles on their noses.

I need to match the colours of my nose. They need dots. I have dots on my nose. I have so many dots. I have dots everywhere. That's not the right one... I chose this one.

I have keys on my eyes. I am not supposed to have keys on my eyes...

This will be my mouth [a cork]. (Fig. 5)

Observing the children, through the lens of the Reggio Emilia approach, we see them as **“active participants rather than as passive recipients of instruction, as authors rather than readers, as producers rather than consumers.”**⁷

The children were creating their own version of self through the manipulation of the materials offered. They were given more than one opportunity to revisit their work, to rethink, to add on, to change the outcome or to completely re-do the portrait. Once they felt they had finished, a photo was taken to record the portrait, as the materials were packed away to be used again by another child.

The children were then asked if they could draw the image using the photograph; with a black marker and a piece of white paper. **“Drawing the image allows the child to deepen their understanding of the concept, to be able to further interpret their identity.”**⁸ Also reflecting on the potential of the child to be able to express themselves in multiple ways, or languages as they are referred to in the Reggio Emilia Approach.⁹

That is my cheek... I am going to be fantastic.

That looks like me... Like a Doctor.

In a Dialogue with Reggio Emilia, Carla Rinaldi discusses the importance of being able to use multiple languages for the children to research ideas as it creates opportunity for the children to represent themselves to others. It is a child's innate predisposition to develop relationships and to want to communicate.¹⁰

“Moving from one language to another, from one field of experience to another, children can grow in the idea that others are indispensable for their own identity and existence.”¹¹ (Fig. 6)

The Early Years Learning Framework acknowledges the importance of connection in Outcome One: Children have a strong sense of identity, when it states **“relationships are the foundations for the construction of identity.”**¹² What place does this connection to peers, and the class community, play in the development of the individual child's identity?

Two children entered the self-portrait experience, they worked together and they co-constructed a portrait. (Fig. 7)

I connect to yours.

You said you have sticks like me but you are not like me.

We are making a chatter together.

It's our face.

Because we are together.

Because we made it together.

We made it at the same time.

Could we extend this experience, of working together to create one identity, to create one piece that represented our connected class community?

We discussed how we could use the materials, we have been using, to create a collaborative piece, a piece where the children could represent themselves within the context of their peers.

We could make ourselves.

Us.

Australian and Melbourne people.

We are connected.

We all stick together.

All of us...

By working together on a collaborative piece, we are acknowledging that each child holds a unique point of view but this also acknowledges that identity is formed from a relationship in community.¹³ (Fig. 8)

The children came to the studio in small groups, they made themselves, again from the initial provocation of the photos of individual features. Some used just eyes to make their self-portrait and some omitted features but they all believed they had made themselves.

It means myself is like that...

We reflected on the outcome of the collaborative piece.

It is all of us and it is connected to each person.

We are connected to ourselves and each person next to us.

“Identity simultaneously covers two core human motives, the need to belong and the need to be unique. Each person is a unique constellation of traits and characteristics.”¹⁴

The children journeyed through their individual self-portraits and discovered it doesn't matter what materials you make yourself from, if you make it you are you, you are unique. You also maintain your unique identity when you construct yourself in a collaborative class piece, but you are where you belong as well. You have a connection; a social identity and are part of 'us'.



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

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Do we connect
with those who we
share a language
with, or do we seek
to find those with
shared curiosities?

As we started our journey as a new group in Kinder three Gimmel, we strived to establish a sense of belonging. Developing a connection and understanding of our individual families supported the children as they settled into their new environment.

“Experiencing belonging – knowing where and with whom you belong – is integral to human existence.”¹

How do we communicate without a shared language? How do we, as a group, ensure everyone’s voice is heard?

“The desire to communicate and share is innate, and from birth, humans seek companions.”²

As a group we set out to find our shared language.

How will we communicate with each other? What does that look like for a group of three year olds with a range of expressive language skills?

As we began to share our space and investigate our garden, it was our connection to nature that brought our group together.

“The formation of a group is important for the learning dynamics that can take place inside it. The children compare



Fig. 1

their theories, developing a strong sense of respect for the thoughts of the others and also the idea that some parts can coexist and create together a more complex group theory.”³

One of the children exclaimed: *Butterfly, Butterfly!*

See the green one I think maybe it's a moth.

I see some butterflies but I like bees.

I like moths and butterflies. Did you know moths are butterflies in the dark.

Some of the children found their voice as they explored the garden. Our questions and wonderings continued...

How do the butterflies know where to go? Do they have a family?

They are friends, sometimes they fly around and find friends.

They talk with their wings.

They don't have voices.

They eat flowers.

They flap their wings to talk to each other.

They have to find a friend to meet.

They have eyes on their wings.

We took our investigation into the studio to gain a close-up look at the butterflies and bugs, looking at them through magnifying glasses. (Figs. 1 & 2) The children were offered black markers and watercolours to express themselves. (Figs. 3 & 4)

This is what you put your eyes through, you can see everything.

That one is the Mummy butterfly and this one is the baby. They are family. It's the green that makes them family. They look a little bit similar.

“Children learn more deeply when they represent the same concept in different media.”⁴

We continued to explore the butterflies through different media, now using plasticine and wire. (Figs. 5–7)

I felt butterflies. It was in my home.

How can there be butterflies in the houses?

Where do the butterflies go at night?

They go with the sun.

Where is that? I don't know.

How do they fly?



Fig. 2

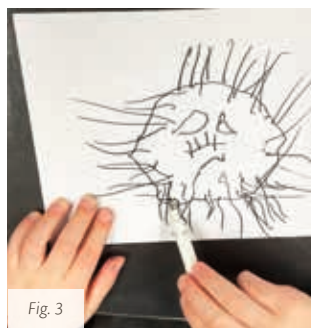


Fig. 3

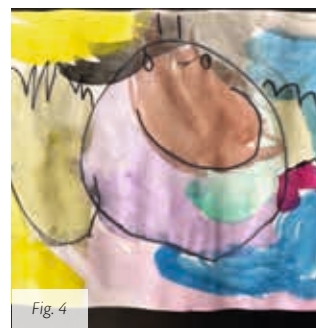


Fig. 4



Fig. 5

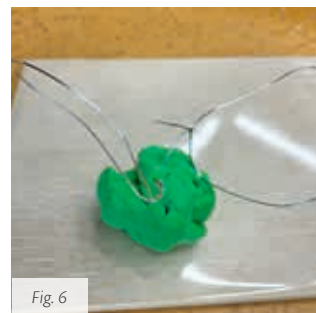
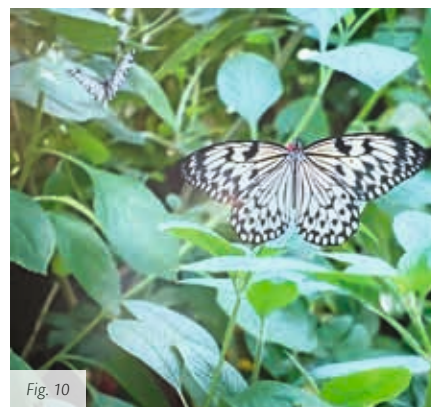


Fig. 6



Fig. 7



The children were excited to document the journey of the butterflies, using the iPads to take photographs of them and of the garden they were attracted to. (Fig. 8) It was through their curiosity and investigating that the children started to connect as a group, accepting each other into their shared exploration. The butterflies became the vehicle for their learning; the common ground for the children to communicate with each other.

As the children created their own families of butterflies from plasticine and wire, they began to communicate; to engage in imaginative role playing and storytelling with their creations.

They were flying out of their flight. A little caterpillar slid down to say hello. They saw a little funny bug. Then the little one said; 'Mummy, Daddy.' He was very lonely.

Yet, we still had more questions; why are the butterflies only in our part of the garden? We consulted our Bialik gardener, Peter, and he informed us that the butterflies are attracted to the Daisy plant. The children created a space to plant another Daisy plant in the hope that we would attract even more butterflies.

The children's connection with their environment continued as they discovered that we share our garden with more creatures.

I can see a spider web.

If they have skinny legs they are bad spiders, but sometimes they protect us from the bugs that land on our face. (Fig. 9)

The spider web is growing.

I can see it better on this side because the sun is shining through it.

If you move the tree, it will fall off.

You know the spiders use the spider webs to talk to each other and they talk to each other with their legs and they eat bugs.

Because they are so little we can't hear them. They do have voices, we just can't hear them.

"Of course, meaningful communication happens not just when there is shared language but when there is the desire to communicate and understand it."⁵

As our identity as a group was unfolding, we discovered our shared language. We now began to wonder... Could the butterflies be friends with the other creatures in our garden? How do they communicate with each other?

We continued our investigation, viewing a short documentary on butterflies flying in slow motion.⁶

Maybe they can do some flapping and that is their talking... (Fig. 10)

The bees have wings and they can flap and I think that's how they talk. All the ones with wings talk to each other but the spiders just talk to other spiders, the spider's friends.

They talk with their mouths, it's kind of round, the legs are big and the arms are a little bit straight.

Sometimes the spiders do talk but sometimes they don't talk. I have seen them talking to the butterflies and do you know the bees talk to them as well. I did see their ears but they are little tiny ears. I don't know how they can hear? They can hear loud voices but they have small ears.

I just hear the love.

"It is fundamental to be aware of the role of language as a tool through which we make sense of our own experience and assumptions, and of its value as a tool through which we enter into relationship."⁷

It's not so much what the language is we are speaking, it's about developing a shared language where communication is possible.

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4 Year Old Kinder

The crystal has energy to make my power. It makes energy and power in my fingers.

“Younger children are more receptive and spiritual by nature, which allows them to use their imagination to build an energetic relationship between the crystal and themselves by stimulating their imagination with magical thinking.”¹

It's (the crystal) so playful. It makes me feel beautiful, smiling and kind.

Exploring crystals and their properties created feelings of wellbeing, kindness and empathy amongst the children who connected with them. In order to understand the journey and research that the children and their educators took, we need to go back to the very beginning...

This year, our ELC focus was 'Connection'.

We had noticed that the children showed joy in the moment when dancing. They seemed to express their feelings and emotions with clarity and showed an appreciation for the nature and beauty around them.

I feel 'goodness' when I look at the trees.

It is good to see everyone when I come to kinder.

Nature and butterflies make me happy.

Researcher of the Reggio Emilia approach Stefania Giammuniti says, **“Beauty is so often in the words of the children, in their choices, and in their reflections of the world that surrounds them. How often in fact do children justify their choices in terms of what they perceive to be ‘more beautiful’? To imagine the future as a beautiful day enables children to live life and learning as inextricably connected and to experience cognition as linked to emotion.”²**

On a personal level, walking amongst nature's beauty has always given me a sense of calm, a serenity, and a feeling of wellbeing. As a team of researchers, we were curious to pursue the children's concepts of beauty and how these connected to their emotions and sense of wellbeing.

As educators our image of the child is; **“a child who, right from the moment of birth, is so engaged in developing a relationship with the world that he develops a complex system of abilities, learning strategies and ways of organising relationships.”³**

Our investigation began when a child's knowledge about fossils lead to many in depth conversations about the existence and longevity of fossils as the children explored and shared their theories together.

During the children's investigation of fossils, their initial questions were revisited, revised, and redefined by both themselves and their teachers. In the process, the children began to make connections between fossils and crystals. (Fig. 1)

When a man sees a rock, he turns it over and he sees crystals and takes it to his collection. He studies them.

I think a dinosaur accidentally damaged an egg and it turned into crystals.

As we continued to follow the children's interests and provoke their thinking, the focus of the investigation shifted to the children's perpetual interest in crystals and precious stones. We provided rocks, crystals, and precious stones, as well as books about these to support the children in making connections.

As we listened to the children's conversations and documented their thoughts and ideas, we considered Professor Carla Rinaldi's thoughts about a **"pedagogy of listening, which focuses on the ideas and theories, questions and answers of children and adults, it means treating thought seriously and with respect, it means struggling to make meaning from what is said, without preconceived ideas of what is correct or appropriate."**⁴

We observed the children's wonder and appreciation of peering into ordinary rocks and discovering the extraordinary beauty of the treasures within them.

I think when you hammer the rock the colours explode, and a rainbow comes.

You look inside the crystal, and you see more and more inside the crystal.

You open it carefully and you see all the colours. You see space, and the stars, and the sun and the world inside.

I think this is water inside. It makes the rock glow. Look how beautiful and sparkly it is. (Fig. 2)

We wondered about the fascination that the children had about the crystals, and as a team we considered what our own wonderings about crystals were, as this was unfamiliar territory for us too.

In the REAIE Webinar: Navigating Human Rights, Malaguzzi talks about educators having the right to uncertainty: **"The right to uncertainty is a consciousness of complexity."**⁵

We welcomed the children as co-constructors of our research knowing this would open up new discoveries and knowledge for all of us.

How do the children use crystals to connect with their emotions?

Do the crystals connect the children to each other?

Do children feel a power or energy from the crystals, and if so, how do they verbalise this?

Rebecca Keating writes, **"Crystals are wonderful spiritual allies. They help the user unlock their spiritual senses, allowing them to elevate their consciousness. When you introduce crystals to children at a very young age, they are more likely to preserve their spiritual faculties and their awareness of higher dimensions."**⁶

We provided opportunities for the children to explore ideas that were rich and valuable. Ideas that allowed children to make connections and share theories and interpretations in ways that made sense to them. By bringing the children together in small groups we were already connecting them through a common interest.

Rinaldi states, **"The relationships between children become a context in which the co-construction of theories, interpretations and understandings of reality can take place."**⁷

"The hundred languages of children is not only a metaphor for crediting children with a hundred, a thousand creative and communicative potentials. In our opinion (it) represents a strategy for the construction of concepts and the consolidation of all understanding."⁸

As a group of educators participating in our own research, we decided to use the crystals as the connection between the children's thoughts and their dialogue. This was a language that was not familiar to us, and so we were making our own journey alongside the children.

We set up various provocations for the children and they explored and experienced the crystals in small groups; through their senses and conversations. (Fig. 3)

With the potential that children have for constructing their own knowledge, their resourcefulness and depth of thinking, they began to make sense of the concept of connection.

As they played, the children began to invent and develop a descriptive 'crystal vocabulary' to more clearly differentiate and communicate obvious and subtle differences. There were the sparkly ones, the volcanic ones, the rainbow ones, the diamonds and the fire crystals that came from other planets.

They look like a connection because they are all crystals.

We can connect all of them. We made earth with crystals and diamonds.

Thinking together in these ways helped the children to build deeper understandings and allowed them to develop a scaffold on which to build more meaningful connections.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



In order to dig deeper and unearth how the children connected their emotions with the crystals, we asked them; **can crystals dance?** (Fig. 4)

Yes! Was the unanimous answer. With this answer came a plethora of emotion that was expressed through movements such as swaying, moving up and down, fluttering, tiptoeing and humming. There was more of a connection with visible movement and gestures rather than with conversation and verbal dialogue. The children also connected with each other and the crystals through dance, smiling, non-verbal gestures and singing.

After many conversations as a team, we proceeded to relaunch the investigation by providing small group opportunities for the children to interact with the crystals and each other.

We noticed that the children's wonderings and conversations seemed to return to the idea of something being so beautiful that it contained a power or energy.

I feel like a Superhero because I feel like I have power in the rock.

It makes me feel strong because it feels heavy.

It's good for being brave.

It looks like fire. It will make you feel very hot because it's red.

The rainbow in the crystal makes me feel powerful.

The crystal has energy to make my power. It makes energy and power in my fingers. (Fig. 5)

By listening carefully to the children as they asked questions and talked together, we supported the children by asking further open-ended questions, documenting their conversations, and revisiting questions and ideas.

Rebecca Keating writes, **"It is natural and common for a child to talk and communicate with a crystal and see it as a living being. Most young children have a natural affinity for crystals and minerals, but some children may be able to demonstrate proficient skills with crystals right away if they are allowed to explore them freely."**⁹

We were intrigued as we watched the children give character and dimension to the crystals they were holding. Some children made up imaginative stories as they held the crystals and conversed with each other.

The crystal looks like unicorns. It makes all kinds of magic... happy, sad, angry. The magic gets worse, and you go to places you don't want to go.

It's called an 'earth diamond'. You put on the light and the rainbow will come. It's a normal rainbow like in an arch.

Maybe the Moonstone lives on the moon. Maybe it was glowing the earth.

Maybe the crystal has fire in it then you can give it as a gift and a surprise.

Other children verbalised emotions when holding or interacting with the crystals.

It feels shiny. It's beautiful and it makes my heart beat.

The crystal makes me feel like the colours of the rainbow and it makes me happy.

The crystal has energy to make you strong.

It makes me feel happy because it is glittery.

We noticed that the emotion that the crystals created amongst the children developed into further feelings of reciprocity, kindness, compassion and empathy.

The crystal makes me feel happy and to be nice to other people and to give people flowers.

The crystal makes me feel powerful and kind to others.

As educators, we were privileged to see how the crystals opened up a world of imagination amongst the children. We noticed compassion, sensitivity and vulnerability as the children connected with the crystals and made them part of their world. (Fig. 6)

Allowing the children to give their words dimension and to make visible what they were seeing in their minds, honours the words of Carla Rinaldi in Reimagining the Child when she says, **"A child is always open to what is new and different. A possessor and builder of the future, not only because children are the future but because they constantly re-interpret reality and continuously give it new meaning."**¹⁰

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The power of reflection

As professionals working in a Reggio Emilia inspired environment, we strive to view the learning experience through the prism of the rights of the child, the rights of the teacher and the rights of the family.

Founder of the Reggio Emilia approach Loris Malaguzzi states “Children have the right to be recognised as subjects of individual, legal, civil, and social rights; as both source and constructors of their own experience, and thus active participants in the organisation of their identities, abilities, and autonomy, through relationships and interaction with their peers, with adults, with ideas, with objects, and with the real and imaginary events of intercommunicating worlds”.¹

Superficially this seems obvious and fair but, how do we ensure those rights are being upheld and encouraged in the classroom? How do we secure the rights of each child within the context of learning and developing concepts, language, and skills? Are we securing the rights of the child by providing different provocations that attempt to support their learning and experiences?

Early in the year the children were observed asking questions about shapes, namely their form and name. A few children were drawing shapes on the interactive whiteboard, sharing the names of the shapes they were attempting to draw. One child announced that she wanted to learn how to draw a triangle. The other children offered to teach her and began to show her by drawing rectangles. This instigated a whole class investigation into the mathematical concept of shape. The children were passionate and curious about the properties and formation of shapes.

It has 4 sides.

It has 4 corners and the corner at the bottom on the side doesn't connect with the one up here, and the one on the other side bottom doesn't connect with the other one. The bottom one connects with this top one.

The square has straight lines and corners. (Fig. 1)



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Following their interests, we explored these maths concepts further through both whole class and small group investigations. We investigated shape in different ways including scavenger hunts, tactile experiences and using technology to create shapes and to further investigate them. At this point we wanted to extend their thinking and connect the mathematical concepts to the world around them. (Fig. 2) We introduced a provocation, a film (with no sound) about architecture found around the world; designs based on simple shape. To facilitate their learning and unpack their understanding of shape in a real-world context we provided different writing materials like paper, pens, and textas. We stood back and observed how the children expressed and engaged with the film. Some of the children responded verbally, through the following conversation.

That place is Israel.

OMG that's an old city in Israel. The Romans destroyed it.

That was a roman house.

No, only if it was brown or red.

Although verbal language is recognised as being very important, particularly in negotiating, Reggio Emilia educators believe that many educational systems restrict children to the verbal/linguist means of communication. By contrast the Reggio Emilia pedagogy recognises and supports **"The Hundred Languages... and a hundred, hundred more."**²

We saw the children engage with some of the drawing materials provided, however we wanted to offer opportunities for exploration, extension, or further discovery. Once the provocation ended so did their interest. We wondered how we could engage more deeply in the learning? We began to research how we could scaffold the film provocation and how we could provide materials that allowed for more exploration of materials to demonstrate their thinking. (Fig. 3)



Fig. 3

We raised this with other educators to explore the purpose and role of a provocation, which in turn brought up questions about the materials provided for the children. Our discussions were focused on the interplay between the provocation, the children, and the materials. We value the importance of providing more time and opportunities, so we provided a second viewing of the architectural film. This time we provided a larger variety of materials for the children to engage with to share their ideas. (Fig. 4) We also intended to scaffold a variety of learning processes. Our hypothesis was that we had not provided the right materials to allow the children to approach the learning in greater depth. The concepts we thought they might explore were shape, size, design, building design, and/or home or community.

On second viewing we observed the children interacting with the materials and the video in more varied ways. Some watched the provocation and then began to draw the simple shapes, others began to design buildings and houses, some children brought wooden blocks near the provocation and began to build their houses. Yet, we observed once again that when the provocation was removed, their interest and curiosity in these concepts



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

stopped. The materials we provided were left out for the children to continue to use and explore, however without encouragement from the teachers the children returned to other pursuits.

Differentiation is always a difficult line we walk as educators, ensuring we provide enough materials and experiences for all individuals in a group, instead of thinking about a group of individuals. Following discussions, a seemingly simple question was posed by a fellow educator, 'have you reflected with the class about the provocation and the mediums provided?' This was such a significant question and an important place to continue our research.

We wondered what role reflection can play in ensuring the child is an active and even a proactive partner in the learning process? With this in mind, we sat as a whole class for our first guided reflection.

I didn't draw but when I looked at it, it looked beautiful. People can do new things and do things that they don't know.

I loved how someone drew pictures. I didn't.

I want to paint.

Me too.

I want a picture building and to paint it.

I will build with Lego.

"Children are not considered as empty plates to be filled with knowledge in Reggio Emilia schools. They are considered to be ready to learn when the best and the most appropriate opportunities are presented."³

The reflection gave the children the opportunity to engage with the provocation and the materials in a more meaningful way. The reflection provided a space for the children to become partners with the educators in the learning journey. Exploring construction, building, shape, and formation began to take on many forms and paths with the children, determining the parameters and the form of exploration. We were interested to note that many of the children's' choices were challenging and/or new. (Fig. 5)

I would like to design it and build it. With clay.

I want to trace it and then colour with textas.

I want to trace too, paint it.

Can I do it?

Over weeks we continued to reflect with the children both in small groups and as a whole class on different ways they could engage with the learning and show their thinking. They continued to

develop their proficiency and understanding through new materials using clay, projection and shadow and animation. Others took to old and familiar ways of expressing themselves, through drawing shapes and buildings but transferred their new understanding of shape, building, design, and construction to extend their skills and knowledge. The children demonstrated motivation to explore new avenues. Some of the children took on leadership roles with other children, teaching and inspiring their peers with new ideas. The children also connected their understanding and knowledge of these concepts to their own world and experiences, by recreating their homes or community. (Fig. 6)

It's a person going out of a building where someone can work.

I'm making two famous buildings... it might look like a castle but it has Olympic things inside.

I'm making a house for my family. (Fig. 7)

"Learning in a group supports a quality of learning that is different from individual learning. A focus on collective understanding – requiring constant comparison, discussion, and modification of ideas – makes possible learning that is not accessible to individuals working alone."⁴

Reflecting on the learning is an essential part of being a teacher and we often engage in reflection and feedback with other adults and educators. Reflecting with the children brought us back to the Reggio Emilia approach, remembering the importance of learning with and from others. Reggio Emilia places importance on understanding the potential of the child, the rights of the child, not just in theory while planning, but actively with the children through reflection and planning. As we continue our journey together and we purposely incorporate reflection into our learning processes, we are left wondering how this will impact the children's sense of participation and ownership in their learning.

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Children and places



Australia is the second smallest country after Israel...

Our curiosity about places and the way children use a familiar phenomenon to relate to the new, guided us into the 2022 Connection investigation. Our classroom was organised in interconnected forms that foster interaction, exploration, curiosity and communication. Our intent was to design a learning space for the children and adults to research together. Our space invited the children to respond and connect to the people, places and things that are important to them.

The Reggio Emilia approach identifies eight principles as key to the environment as third teacher: aesthetics, transparency, active learning, flexibility, collaboration, reciprocity, bringing the outdoors in and relationships. If we interpret these principles in light of research on children and places, we find that the Reggio Emilia approach to the role of the environment in teaching and learning draws deeply on how young children perceive the knowledge and the use of space and place to create meaning. Educator Julia Ellise stated that, **“Places is a source of meaning, belonging and identity largely because of the relationships facilitated by bonds to place.”**¹. This idea aligns with our findings on what children value most about their favourite places, the opportunities for social affirmation and creative exploration.

This investigation began when a collection of maps and globes were brought into the classroom at the beginning of the year. (Fig.1) Some of children's early comments were:

A globe is something that shows you all the countries, if you don't know where you are, you can look on the globe...

A map is something that takes you places... someone holds it up and then you go brm brm brm where you want to go...

I can see Australia, because it's the shape of Australia...

All the blue is the sea, and the colour is the land...

South America is on the other side of the world, like Israel and Japan...

There is a line on earth [equator] that is where earth splits in half...

My Mum has a driving map, it's on her phone and it shows you a colour dot or shape for your car...



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Documentation of the childrens' family origins is our living testimony to meaningful relationships between the most important places for the children, school and home; and the connection between generations. These stories have been told by the children through drawings, three-dimensional structures, words and photographs. (Fig. 2)

The resources that were available around the room, continued to provoke conversations among the children and during group meetings. (Fig. 3) We listened carefully and respectfully to children's conversations as they engaged with their surroundings. According to Reggio Emilia founder Loris Malaguzzi **"it is not possible to listen to someone without respecting that person, and it is not possible to respect someone without listening to that person."**² We documented the learning and created a visible trace of the learning process.

This investigation created a context in which we, the teachers, became more thoughtful about how we can provoke children's thinking. Using everyday objects can promote relationships with one another within the classroom as they carry messages that invite children and families to connect. A particularly interesting way of deepening children's understanding of places was through collectively drawing a map. This experience included the children's representation of people and places that are important to them. (Fig. 4) According to educator and artist Ursula Kolbe **"drawing is the most direct way of making ideas visible. It is an incredibly powerful tool, language that enables children to explain things to themselves and to others."**³



Fig. 4

When a collaborative project is the fruit of earlier explorations, it contains memories of things children have experienced and discovered.

We can cut out the shape of Australia and stick it here...

I want to put myself on the map...

I can draw myself...

Me too...

We can put people at the bottom of the map and more people after them and after them until the map is full...

Culminating in a four month long research into the connection and places important to the children, a large map was documented by the children:

We need the shape of the countries...

It doesn't matter that we don't know the names of all the countries, we only need Australia and Israel...

If we make all places map, we can remember all the countries...

We really need the map to show where we actually are...

Maybe we can do a map only with Australia...

Over time, the children explored the colours, shapes and symbols of a large world map. They discussed and shared their knowledge of countries and places and how they all connect by water around them:

If you go from here to here [points at the map], you get to different planets...

This is earth and this is Australia, because there is more water around it...

Some discoveries were made following a weeklong digging in the sand pit, creating a path for the water to run between destinations. (Fig. 5)

The water just knows where to go, the water at the back can push the water at the front...

We need to draw Australia and we need lots of blue for the ocean all around it... there is also water around all the countries...

The children used paint, black fine liners, oil pastels and water colours together with a light table, an interactive board and an iPad to illustrate their thinking about how places connect. They were exploring the notion of the importance of places, in particular the meaning of all of us being here on one land. This finding pointed us in the right direction at this stage of our research and we started to look at our connection to the land of Australia. (Figs. 6 & 7)

Our classroom space evolved along with the learning and became a “**relational space**”⁴, where the different identities of adults and children came together. These connections contributed to creating an awareness of the value of understanding diversity and relationships. Tiziana Filippini speaks about space as “**a ‘container’ that favours social interaction, exploration and learning.**”⁵

During this research, we discovered that our school is not only a place where education takes place, rather a place for cultural connections. A place that fosters relationships within and outside of school. According to Loris Malaguzzi these “**relationships with others allow children to be aware of their own identity, their similarities and differences and lead to new discoveries**”⁶, which in our context is the relation to the history and people of the land on which we all live together.



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

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Prep

*Imagination is
when you meet
something that is
not in this world*

Connection is everywhere. How do we truly connect our community through a learning experience that is rich, deep and authentic? How do we connect our students to learning in a way that will nurture intrigue, curiosity and learning beyond our four walls?

As we focused on developing a thinking culture within our classroom, we observed and watched the children. They loved imaginative play; they whispered secrets to their toy bears, they created puppet shows and dressed up to perform thoughtful plays and share their stories.

They embraced our author study in Jeannie Baker and her creative narratives.¹ They were captivated by her collage illustrations of forest, beach and sea. This inspired the creation of a class collage of different environments. We wondered how we might bring our collage to life. The children used their imaginations to create their own creatures which they animated on top of the collage and composed their own music to accompany it. As one child accurately reflected, *Fiction just makes your imagination bigger.* (Figs. 1 & 2)

Throughout these various experiences, we often overheard the children say to each other “imagine if...” followed by a whimsical possibility of events. They laughed together in these conversations of imagining. (Fig. 3)

Imagine if humans could fly.

Imagine if people could talk to animals.

Imagine if the world was made of ice-cream.

This made us wonder how we could harness this imagination for learning?

We unpacked the word imagination with the children. We wondered how they would connect to this concept and if they could identify the role of imagination in their lives. The children quickly identified that imagination was the unreal world; *the ideas in their head.* We wanted our children to immerse themselves in



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

experiences that would promote the power of imagination. The children engaged with provocations and opportunities to explore this big concept.

Imagination is when you meet something that is not in this world.

It gives us the power to learn more.

The imagination power lets you think about more things and if you have forgotten what to do then the imagination power may help you remember.

We discovered that during our Learning Lab sessions our students connected with their imaginations more freely and engaged with their learning in a meaningful way.

Our Learning Lab is an opportunity for students to respond to a diverse range of provocations carefully planned by the educators. The provocations are connected to the different areas of learning in the classroom using a variety of media. During Learning Lab the children sign a contract of where they will spend their time. They are continuously scaffolded to take learning to a deeper level and the educator takes time to engage with different small groups to scaffold the learning. The children are given opportunities to reflect in order to name and notice the learning taking place. They are given time to return to tasks on numerous occasions so they can make changes according to suggestions and feedback in reflection times.

They created imaginary worlds using paint, built a 3D imaginary world from paper and wood, created puppet shows about faraway

places, brought characters to life with animation and performed plays inspired by the literature that surrounded them. It was, in these moments, that we as educators could stand back, listen, document and note the true learning in our classroom taking place. It was, in these moments, that we saw the merging of imagination, creativity and innovation. (Figs. 4–6)

We were reminded of Ken Robinson's work in *Out of our Mind* where he discusses the role of imagination. He explains three related ideas that are vital to learning, working and living in the 21st Century.

"They are imagination, which is the process of bringing to mind things that are not present to our senses; creativity which is the process of developing original ideas that have value, and innovation which is the process of putting new ideas into practice."²

With this in mind, we considered: how can we use the concept of imagination to develop a higher order of thinking as 21st century learners? We began to bring the students' attention to the skills required for imagination, creativity and innovation.

Robinson writes that, **"Innovation is the child of imagination."**³ If we connect this to our young learners, we can make sense of how enabling every child to connect to their imagination, allows our students to identify the endless possibilities of how they make sense of the world and the skills that they need to do this.

Finally, our role becomes clearer. By giving our students opportunities to bring their imagination to life, we wondered what learning skills they would acquire along the way? Through the concept of



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



imagination, how can we support the children to notice and name these skills so they become a part of them as learners? (Fig. 7)

Isn't this learning at its best? When educators and students reach the deeper levels of metacognition taking place – not learning for content but learning to learn. We identified some of the skills that we prioritised in thoughtful learners such as learning together, designing, questioning, developing hypotheses, risk taking, problem solving, sharing ideas, listening, persevering, reasoning with evidence, building connections and uncovering complexity. This fits seamlessly with Bialik's Cultures of Thinking pedagogy which works in collaboration with Harvard Graduate School of Education's *Project Zero*.⁴

We immersed the students even further into different ways that we can explore imagination. The experiences became more diverse such as flying dragons using paper and wire, then bringing them to life. **"We have imaginations. As a result we have unlimited powers of creativity."**⁵ (Fig. 8)

We provided opportunities for reflection and facilitated conversations about the skills we used and the challenges we faced. We established skill-based foci for our Learning Lab, such as team work and problem solving, so the children were actively searching for these learning dispositions as they engaged in their learning task. We nurtured it, named it and used it in our classroom time and time again. (Fig. 9)

In a team I helped her and she helped me.

In a team I listened to my team and I had a good idea and it came out good.

Robinson reminds us that imagination is something to be cherished. He says, **"Imagination is the primary gift of human consciousness."**⁶

He elaborates, **"By imagination I mean the power to see beyond the present moment and our immediate environment. In imagination we can bring to mind things that are not present to our senses. We can visit the past, and not just a single view of the past. We can enhance our sense of the present by seeing with other people's eyes. And we can anticipate many possible futures. We may not be able to predict the future but we can help to shape it."**⁷

This sentiment was echoed so eloquently by one of our students in a reflective moment, *When you imagine, it lets you do whatever you want – things from a long time ago, things from now, new things to do and there is always new things to do everyday.*

It is our hope that by providing these experiences now, our children will grow as thinkers and be better equipped to engage in a world that is truly beyond our wildest imagination.

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It is the people that make places special to us...

Prior to the start of term one, the ELC team met together, welcoming new staff members and reflecting upon potential concepts for the upcoming year. Through the sharing of experiences and ideas our new concept was born: Connection.

Having recently arrived in Australia and joining the Bialik team, I was beginning to make many new connections myself alongside the Prep children who were at the very start of their own school journey, also forming new connections. Over the first term we would be supporting the children to express their own identities, interests, beliefs and feelings; helping to establish a warm and welcoming class community where everyone feels safe and valued.

Our investigation ignited when one of the children chose to share his fascination with famous world landmarks, sparking a sense of intrigue and desire in our class to discover more. The children thoroughly enjoyed exploring these unique places and pieces of architecture, learning more about the countries within which they belong. They were inspired to share their own connections to different landmarks both near and far.

My special place is the Great Barrier Reef because I journeyed down to the bottom of the sea when I was on holiday.

I am connected to Uluru because my Mummy told me that she walked around there with me when I was a baby.

I feel connected to the Great Wall of China as I went there when I was little with my family.

I feel connected to the Statue of Liberty because I've been there with my family.

Our subsequent, deeper discussions led to children reflecting further on their personal connections to different countries and places – often where they were born or where their parents and siblings were born.

I am connected to Israel because I was born there. My Granny and Grandpa are there now and my Mum, Dad and brother were born there too.

I am connected to South Korea because my grandma lives there and my Mum was born there. (Fig. 1)



My home is important because my family are there. I also feel connected to the Ukraine because my parents used to live there.

I am connected to Australia because I was born here and my Mum was born here too.

Their thinking clearly reflected the strong connections felt between their family identities and backgrounds and the different places. Interestingly, at this stage some children with similar backgrounds began to connect and form new friendships based on shared experiences and special places they had spoken about. In turn, this increased the confidence of those children to share more about themselves, further strengthening the connections within our blossoming class community. Two children with a connection to South Korea became close friends and began asking to share their family backgrounds with their peers who were keen to ask questions and discover more. Another two children realised that their parents both speak Russian to them at home and enjoyed sharing their language together. They bonded over how their parents say 'I love you' at bedtime.

A clear message ran through the children's contributions as they explored the places most special to them. This was highlighted by one of the children:

It is the people that make the places special to us. Everyone mentioned people – their families and friends.

We began to wonder if this knowledge could help us enhance the learning environment further by nurturing new connections through shared positive experiences.

“The identity of a place, such as a school for young children, must come not from formal codes but from the quality and intensity of the links established and the experiences activated within that place: links with other friends of knowledge, other ways of thinking and other identities.”¹

The children's unique identities, interests and contributions informed the creation of exciting, new provocations and opportunities, encouraging the children to work collaboratively and fostering a strong sense of an inclusive community. A variety of investigative experiences allowed the children to explore their connections to places together and share experiences whilst developing their social communication skills and strengthening our class community.

Over time, new friendships developed as children became eager to share activities and information about their own special places. One group of children became thrilled with the idea of becoming architects – designing and creating their own landmarks and special places using a variety of materials and loose parts. The children thought about what architecture is and reflected on its significance in their special places.

Architecture is when you build something. You draw something, create it, and it comes to life.

I am connected to the Statue of Liberty because when we go on holiday to New York I see it.

I am connected to my houses because my family are there.



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

After creating a representation of his special place from wooden blocks, one child reflected on why we connect to places.

If you have a special memory in a place, you feel connected to it.

This prompted deeper exploration and discussion with a focus on how memories and experiences can affect how we feel about a place. As children shared their memories together, they noticed that recalling memories can make you feel all kinds of different emotions. We explored this further using the thinking routine 'Colour, Symbol, Image'.² Children considered how they feel when they are in their special place, shared their memory and created a symbol and image to represent this.

This is Port Douglas and my holiday house. It's special to me because I'm with my family and every day is sunny. I feel calm there.

My special place is the Great Barrier Reef because there are lots of fish there and I love swimming. My Mum, Dad and my Poppa kept me safe. I feel very happy there.

My special place is in my garden with my brother. I feel happy there.

My special place is the ice cream shop. It's special to me because I get to eat ice cream with my Dad. I feel happy there and I feel love.

After reflecting on and further developing their symbols, the children experimented with clay before creating their own tile to represent their special place. (Figs. 2 & 3) These will be linked together to represent the connections between us within our Bialik class community.

Within their special places, children described how they feel happy, calm, safe and loved. Their special places are all linked to their happiest memories.

Author Jim Greenman stated that **“We build images of places, meaningful spaces, out of fragments of experiences, experiences significant to us for reasons of our own. Our memories, imaginings, hopes and dreams transform places and things.”³**

Over the year, through collaboration and engagement in shared positive experiences and the creation of happy memories, children have made strong connections within their new community which

are reflected clearly within their learning environment. (Fig. 4)
Our classroom has been transformed into a new special place for the children. Their connections were highlighted in their recent discussion about Bialik College:

Bialik is a special place for me because I like to play with my friends. We learn together and are always kind to each other.

I like playing games at school with my friends. I love playing with my Year 12 buddy.

I love school. At Bialik I work together with my friends to build things. (Fig. 5)

School is a special place for me because we do sports and we can have fun with our friends. We have good times.

Bialik is special to me because my Year 12 buddies help us. (Figs. 6 & 7)

As we continue our two-year journey together, it will be important to keep listening to and observing the children and their interactions within their classroom, school community and beyond. It will be important for children to continue to share their wonderings and changing interests together, enabling their environment to evolve, creating new learning experiences to reflect their changing needs and curiosities. It has been incredible to see the children's bonds grow over the year, as they explored their identities, expressed themselves and established new friendships.

Relationships remain at the centre of our learning experience and as our investigation illustrated, nurturing our class community is key in ensuring school continues to be a place where our children love to learn, grow and achieve their full potential.

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Figures:

Fig. 1 Children drew and wrote about places that are special to them

Fig. 2 The children created a clay tile to display their symbol to represent their special place

Fig. 3 Working with tools to create a clay tile

Fig. 4 Exploring special places using water colour paints

Fig. 5 The children enjoyed creating representations of landmarks together

Fig. 6 Reflection on why Bialik is special to us

Fig. 7 Passover with our Year 12 buddies



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

Our differences make us unique



The umbrella concept for this year's ELC investigation was 'Connection'. This immediately made us wonder about our new group of learners and what they have connected to and with, over the last few years. The pandemic had interrupted the children's social experiences during the last two years. As a result, they had missed out on opportunities for social growth. We wondered if this 'pause' in opportunities, would pose a problem for some of our young school-aged learners.

Our experience working in schools highlighted that social isolation, because of the restrictions, was a concern raised by children of all ages and their families.

Young learners, starting school for the first time and potentially not equipped with skills required for early years learning, such as communication and collaboration, was something to consider. Analysing a report by David Elliot, a senior reporter at the World's Economic Forum, he identified resilience as one of the most important skills for the future, along with emotional intelligence.¹ We considered what impact this time apart would have on the way young children developed interpersonal skills and how they would reconnect when returning to a social-heavy world.

Each year Prep students are given the opportunity to introduce themselves to their peers, teachers and families, by making an 'About Me' book. This book is a culmination of images of the student and all things that make them who they are. The children displayed a desire to connect and share these books. During



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

reading time, students would eagerly visit the 'About Me' books and share their stories with one another. After listening to many of the stories and discussions, students focused a lot on shared interests, experiences and similarities.

I have also been there.

Are they your cousins? My cousins are older.

As educators, we wondered if young people's relationships are generally based on similarities and how these similarities support the development of communities? We were curious to explore this, and it inspired us to delve into the impact of these similarities and differences on our classroom community. Can children form connections with others by identifying both similarities and differences? Can these similarities and differences bring young people closer? We thought that a good place to start was to discuss 'how' we all learn. What are the different ways we learn? We are all learning so much every week in Prep, but how does this happen?

Your body sends messages to your brain and your brain thinks lots of things that then gets sent to your body to learn and get stronger.

As a way of unpacking this further, the children reflected upon themselves as learners, using the five senses as a prompt – sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. They were asked to imagine what our brain does when we learn. The children conducted a 'gallery walk' to look closely at each other's reflections through drawings. (Fig. 1) It was clear from these images that all of us learn differently.

By now, the children had created a respectful community. Through ongoing conversations and other social experiences, the children

enjoyed learning about each other and highlighting what makes them the same, but also celebrating their differences.

Following the holidays, children brought into class some coral and shells that they had collected. In an attempt to continue highlighting the beauty of difference and uniqueness, these artefacts allowed for rich exploration. We began by zooming in on these objects to elicit the children's initial thoughts and knowledge.²

The children then used magnifying glasses to slowly look at these artefacts. (Figs. 2 & 3) Research conducted by Shani Tishman, 'Slow Looking' has been described as observing something closely to **"appreciate the richness of the world we live in"** and to **"create a more immersive experience with any kind of object"**.³

What do you see and what does it make you wonder?

It is bumpy.

I think I can hear the ocean in this one.

This is my favourite, it has beautiful colours.

Is it something alive or dead?

I can see a baby shell inside if you look closely.

I think it dried up from the sun.

I wonder if it moves when no one is looking.

The children took a keen interest in the coral pieces. They connected the pieces with their past experiences and previous knowledge. To allow for further investigation, children used clay to mould their own pieces of coral. **"Clay is a wonderfully malleable**



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

material. It is a language for exploring and communicating ideas and enables children to make their ideas visible.”⁴ Using toothpicks and the clay, the children were able to focus closely on the details and create their own unique pieces. (Figs. 4 & 5)

Upon reflection of these clay creations, we quickly realised that each piece of coral was unique with its own markings and patterns. This became a metaphor for each of them as individuals. Working with a partner, the children were given opportunities to connect this metaphor to their own lives and identify the uniqueness within each of them.

My partner knows how to do lots of things with dogs and I know lots of different things.

My partner knows how to balance rocks.

Me and my partner both can do different stuff, same maths but different types of maths.

All the things my partner can do and are good at, look very cool and I can ask them how to do that.

If I can't do what someone else can do, it's good to know so I can go up to them and ask them to teach me.

We can learn and see what other people like to do.

We are not all good at the same things.

The dialogue within the classroom continued to develop and expand in a way that reflects respect for others' strengths, weaknesses, and an understanding that we are all different.

So grew our new discovery – can children connect with others based on differences? In our minds, the concept of difference had opened our thinking to exciting possibilities and opportunities to learn and grow with one another. What can we learn from each other? What makes us special? How can our differences help us?

It is hoped that this is only the beginning of our children displaying a respect for the similarities and differences amongst us.

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Year 1

We all need to connect to others: we always have and always will



In 2021 we had spent time as a Prep cohort looking at the very strong connection our ‘First Nations People’ have to the land, to their past and the respect they show towards the land and everything in it.

“Dreaming stories pass on important knowledge and culture through families. Through song, dance, painting and storytelling, which express the dreaming stories, Aboriginal People have kept a link with the Dreaming from ancient times to today, keeping these connections alive.”¹

When the ELC decided on ‘Connection’ as our umbrella concept for 2022 we wondered about the connection our Indigenous people have to the land and how they pass this connection down through the generations.

To ascertain what the children thought about this idea, we began by asking the children: **How do you think the next generation of ‘First Nations People’ know about the connection their ancestors had to the land?**

The ancestors told their children and their children told their children and that kept going on until now.

Their children learn about this through stories. The first Nations People share their stories with us which teaches us what happened back in the past.

We wondered whether the children would be able to make a connection about how the Aboriginal people passed down their knowledge to themselves and their past. With that in mind we asked them how they might learn about their own families.

We learn by watching what other people do like your parents and your grandparents or anyone in your family.

We learn by listening to our family, so they might know something we don’t and so we learn it from them.

Connecting to our past can shape how we understand ourselves today. The stories passed down from our parents and grandparents and generations before can deeply influence our perspectives.

When researching how different cultures share the history of their past, we are reminded that “**Whenever Jews gather, the story is at the center. In Hebrew, there is no word for history; we borrow historia (היסטוריה) from English. History is HIS (or her or their!) story. What we do have is memory – zikaron (זיכרון).**”²

We thought about our own connections to the past and how we have learnt about people, places and experiences; particularly since many of our ancestors migrated to so many different parts of the world throughout the generations. For many of us the sharing of stories from our past has always been important and we still share the memories we have, especially when we are together.

As adults sharing information from our past is a way that creates an emotional connection. Would this be the same for the children?

To discover what they thought about this, we asked the children what they have a connection with that came from their ancestors?

My great grandmother on my Dad's side has handed down a charm bracelet. First it went to my cousin, then it went to my sister and now I have it. It is very delicate because it is so old and it is also very special.

In my family we have candlesticks that have been handed down from one generation to another. I have a connection to my Nana who is dead now because the candlesticks I use on Shabbat belonged to her.

There is a diamond necklace that belonged to my great grandmother, she gave it to my grandmother and it will be passed down to the first born, so it will go to my Dad and he will give it to my Mum and then it will probably be passed down to my sister because she is the oldest. (Figs. 1 & 2)

While the children recalled mainly physical items we wondered if they had any knowledge of stories or events from their past.

My grandparents show me photos of them when they were young. They show me photos of when my Dad was really young and they tell me about what they are doing in the photos and then they show me pictures that tell their story.

My Dad's Mum who comes from Japan tells me lots of stories of how she grew up in Japan and how she came to Australia and met my Zaida and they got married.

My grandparents on my Mum's side tell me about my Nana and how she is Polish. They tell me about what kinds of food they ate like 'Perogen', which is meat wrapped in a pancake, it is delicious.

We were fortunate enough to have an Indigenous Aunty, Angie Cleaver, visit us to explain how her 'people' share and hand down their stories. She showed us kangaroo and possum skins that she had etched pictures on by using a stick that had been heated in a fire. Angie explained that when her children were born they were each given their own possum skin that told their story. They will keep these skins and then pass them down to the next generation. The children were fascinated by not only the drawings on the skins, but also the amazing stories these etchings told. (Figs. 3 & 4)

"Stories transcend generations. They create connections with others. It is through stories that we experience rich emotions and feelings."³

Following on from Angie's visit, we looked at the stories we share with the children in relation to all the different Jewish festivals and why we celebrate these.

For the Jewish people it is also extremely important to pass down traditions and stories from the past so that these are never forgotten. In order to keep these traditions going, the Jewish people share many stories during Shabbat and the festivals, particularly over Passover, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. These traditions and stories help us recall the most significant events in our history.

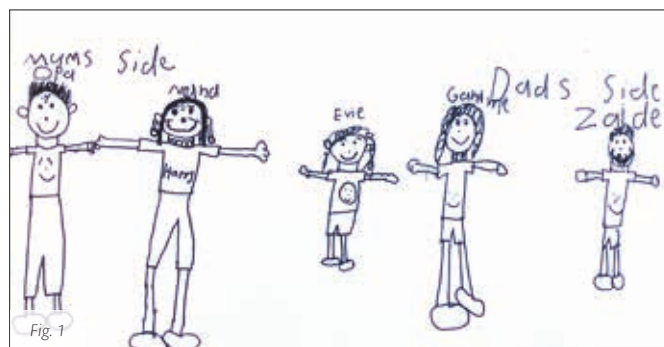


Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

For many modern Jews, the greatest value in keeping Jewish traditions is how it helps keep families and communities together.⁴

During the discussions that occurred we asked the children why it is important to pass down stories from our past to the next generation.

It is important so when somebody dies their stories are passed on and on so that they are not forgotten.

I think that if you don't keep traditions going then they disappear. So they start off by telling the future generations the stories and traditions so that we can keep the traditions going.

To give the children an opportunity to delve deeper into the history of their families and learn more about their past, the parents were asked to film their children interviewing their grandparents or great grandparents about stories from their childhood. (Figs. 5–7)

It is hoped that by interviewing their grandparents and great grandparents the children will recognise the importance of these stories as a connection to the past and a guide to the future.

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Figures:

Fig. 1 Child's drawing of the candlesticks passed down from her Great Grandmother

Fig. 2 Child's drawing of necklace passed down through the generations

Fig. 3 Children looking at etchings created by Angie Cleaver (an Indigenous Aunty) on a possum skin

Fig. 4 Stories etched on a kangaroo skin using the end of a stick that had been heated in the fire

Fig. 5 A child sharing photos and stories with his grandmother

Fig. 6 A child sharing stories with her grandmother and writing and drawing one of the stories

Fig. 7 A child sharing stories with her grandmother

How does our understanding of what is inside influence our connection?

It is not just the skill of zooming in and zooming out that enhances and enriches our perceptions and explorations, but the benefit of collaborative research that creates the connections for deeper research and uncovering layers of complexity.

“Exploring complexity develops general thinking skills and dispositions that are important to learning more broadly, such as close observation, systems thinking, perspective taking, empathy, and a tolerance for uncertainty.”¹

Children are naturally curious and open to seeing what we may sometimes think is ubiquitous – such as a common sunflower. At the beginning of the year this happened when one of the children brought in a photograph of her on a farm in a field of sunflowers.

The sunflowers were a springboard for discussion, questioning and wonder. As educators we can recognise the significance of the moment as a spark that ignites curiosity and opportunity for learning. This is often the starting point for hypotheses, thoughtful inquiry and collaborative discourse. Looking at this photo a discussion began.

These are the sunflowers on the farm. Each sunflower grows from one seed. They painted the seeds to get the flowers all bright and yellow.

They don't paint the seeds because they grow in the sun and that makes them bright yellow.

They grow in rain and sunlight.

To grow a plant, you need to start to grow them in the best weather, in autumn or spring. Not too dark and not too sunny.

As the children's interest grew, they were excited to test their theories.

To further their thinking, we brought sunflowers into the classroom and asked them what they saw, what they thought and what they wondered. By examining the sunflowers up close, perhaps the children's observations would inspire new connections and wonderings. (Fig. 1)



Fig. 1

I see brightness.

There is seeds in it.

Maybe the middle flower is green in the middle because they grew that one when it was raining, and the others grew when it was sunny.

Applying their theories, the children wrote stories of how the sunflowers got their bright yellow colour.

When reading their stories, the consensus of the children was that the sunflowers got their bright yellow colour from the sun. Some of the children accepted that perhaps the seeds in the photo were painted to get their bright yellow colour.

We posed the question – **If the sunflowers got their bright yellow colour from the sun, then why are all flowers not yellow?**

I think inside the sunflowers there are seeds in the circle and other flowers don't have a circle, so the other flowers don't get enough of the sun.

I think that the seeds of sunflowers have yellow in them, and the other seeds of other flowers have other colours in them.

I think that the sunflowers get their colour from the sun, but the other flowers get their colour from the rain. Like we drink water the plants get the water, and they grow better, and the colour comes.

We could see how the children were making connections to their own life source and needs. They were also beginning to delve deeper and ask questions.

How does the colour touch the flower and absorb to all the petals?

Is the inside of the seed the same colour as the flower inside?

Through questioning, they were learning to adjust their viewpoints and gain understanding, which helped them create further connections.

I think we could get the middle bit of the sunflower out – we can get the seeds and we can plant them in the ground and then we can see how they grow and get their colour.

We decided to delay planting the seeds so that the children could gain another perspective through a different lens – 'literally and figuratively'. From their conversations it had become apparent that the children had identified that it was what was inside the sunflower that made it what it was. This seemed the perfect opportunity to delve into the complexity we were searching for.

We introduced the digital microscope and brought in more sunflowers so that the children could 'zoom in' to see the various parts of the sunflower they were interested in exploring. (Figs. 2 & 3)

We observed how the children's thinking deepened. Peeling the layers, uncovering complexity along the way; we noticed how over a length of time, the children continued to share new connections and understandings.

When you zoom in it gets smaller and when you zoom in it can also get bigger.

It's like you are stepping inside something big that you want to investigate and discover.

You can have a closer look at what's inside the thing you want to know.

When you get very close it starts to get inside.

When you step inside you feel like you are in a flower world.

It looks like octopus tentacles.

Like upside down grass.

I can see white bits inside.

I want to see what the back of the sunflower looks like.

I want to see the stem.

We can draw it.

We can take a picture of the leaves to draw.

By providing the children with opportunities to revisit, observe, listen to others and use the digital microscope to take photos to

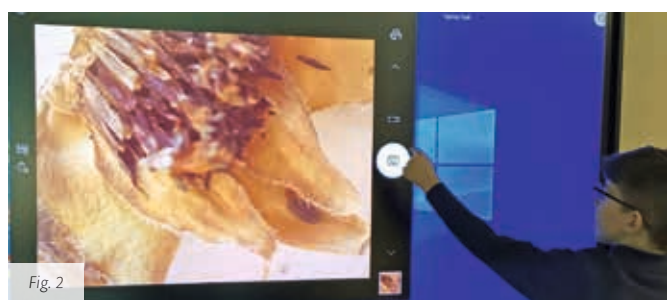


Fig. 2



Fig. 4



Fig. 3



Fig. 5

draw and document their observations, they began to reflect on their hypotheses. (Fig. 4)

I think the seeds matter. I think it's because the sunflowers have bigger seeds than any other flower in the world. I think that because yellow is the brightest colour the seeds are the biggest, and the darker the colour of the flower it does not catch the sunlight more. The sun is light, and the darker ones don't catch the sun.

The other flowers grow in other places. Sometimes they get the same colour as the sunflowers from the sun and sometimes they get their colour from the rain.

The answer is in my head – In the core of the sun there is a drop of every colour in the rainbow which makes the colours of the flowers, so half of the colour of the rainbow gets absorbed to the earth and makes the colour of the flowers.

Individual investigation would not have given rise to the same scope of questioning and wondering, so we looked to the experts to help further our learning alongside the children. Together we deepened our thinking and research into colour, seeds, and the process of growth.

The children posed a myriad of questions to Peter, Bialik's gardener, who shared his expertise as we explored the many plants and trees in the school gardens. Discovering how to look for the seeds, to compare, connect and build on prior knowledge to further our understandings. (Fig. 5)

The children's interest continued to come back to the question of colour. Their curiosity led us to another expert who we were privileged to connect with Emily, the Head of Science at Bialik. Gaining another perspective through sharing the children's documentation and conversations was affirming and helped to dig deeper into the complexity we were looking for. We decided to add another provocation that highlighted the connection to colour, exploring the role of DNA in colour.

The children's excitement in being invited into the Science Laboratory to further their investigation into colour was palpable.

Emily was able to guide the children by extending their thinking through the comparison of what the children were able to connect with – looking at the similarities and differences they could see in



Fig. 6

each other. The colour of their eyes and the colour of their hair. The children became aware of the role DNA plays as the determining factor, learning that the flowers too have their own DNA.

Providing the children with the tools to dissect a flower, the children were able to zoom in and find the pollen and seeds. (Fig. 6)

We wondered if the opportunities for the children to look closely, zoom in and connect with a sunflower, will influence their learning and view of the world? We wonder how the role of zooming in enables us to understand what is inside and as a result to have a better understanding of the world around us.

We are now looking at what happens when we zoom out to see the bigger picture and how this skill helps us in our learning and problem solving.

“Some people prefer to see things up close, others from afar. Both perspectives – worm’s-eye and bird’s-eye – have virtues and pathologies. But they should be vantage points, not fixed positions. Leaders need multiple perspectives to get a complete picture. Effective leaders zoom in and zoom out.”²

Looking at the children as our future leaders, it is wonderful to learn alongside them, creating vital opportunities to further their thinking that reflects learning from multiple perspectives.

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Figures:

Fig. 1 Sunflowers in the classroom

Fig. 2 Using the Digital Microscope

Fig. 3 Using the Digital Microscope

Fig. 4 Drawing sunflowers using the digital microscope photos

Fig. 5 Peter the gardener and the children exploring seeds and plants the garden

Fig. 6 Children in the Science Lab dissecting flowers

Connection with a place is about being loved

This year's ELC concept of 'Connection' brought about many questions and wonderings when presented to the children. Who, what, why and how do we connect with people, things and places.

When investigating the concept of 'Connection' with the children, we had many conversations, giving the children the opportunity to share their understandings and curiosities. When first discussing this, the children interpreted the word literally and their responses were based solely on the physical things they could touch or feel. (Figs. 1 & 2)

I drew me patting my dog on the head and I was touching him so me and my dog were connected.

I drew me making a tower of Lego bricks because I am actually making an actual tower in the Lego area. Lego bricks do connect together.

As we continued to build connections to both each other and our new physical environment, we wondered how we could use the physical environment to strengthen connections between us. How could we move away from the literal meaning of connection, to the feelings created when we are with others, or being in a specific place?

Loris Malaguzzi states, "...a child's self-identity is constructed out of relationships formed with people and things in the environment."¹

We started to look at ourselves and how we connect. Is it through shared interests, experiences or just being together that connects us? Through the use of mind maps the children were able to identify with whom and what they felt connected. (Fig. 3) Upon reflection the children quickly identified that family members and friends were most important. The children started to scaffold their ideas as their conversations and thoughts allowed them to look inside themselves and to think about how they connect with others.

You can feel connected by caring about the person and helping them.

We can think about each other, but we can see them in our mind.

If you know people then you can remember them and feel them and not forget them because you know them and can still feel connected.

Through these conversations we were able to uncover the understanding that one does not need to physically be next to, or even in the same room as someone to feel a connection.

What is it that connects us or helps us feel our connection to others/family even if they are not next to us?

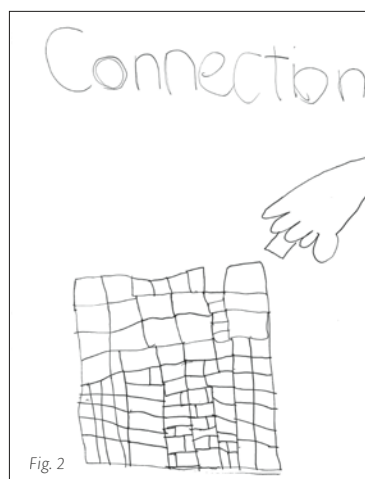
I can feel my brother in my heart.

I feel connected to my brother, but I get mad at him.

I can feel my brother because I love him.

I can feel my whole family in my heart deep inside.

The Beyond Blue organisation has published a Connection Matters Booklet that tells us "Connections matter. Strong ties with family, friends and the community provide us with happiness, security, support and a sense of purpose."²



The more we discussed how connections make us feel, the more we realised that the feeling of connectedness did not just involve being with certain people, but that we could also have connections to a place.

Our own experiences have enabled us to see the powerful connection between land and country and the feelings that this evokes in us. We couldn't help but wonder, What is it within a place that creates this feeling of connection? The children wrote and drew about their connection to place. For some children it was a country where they were born or where they had family. For others it was a country their family came from.

I have a connection with Israel because Israel is where I was born, and it is a big part of me.

I connect with New Zealand because I have family there, because I am part Kiwi and I feel happy and proud.

My family was born there, and I have a little bit of Germany in me.

For other children it was a place they identified where they could feel happy, safe and calm.

My special place is the pool because I just love it and it is so relaxing.

“Place connects people and gives them a sense of belonging and rootedness. Place contextualises people and allows dynamic, social interactions to be possible.”³

This concept was eloquently reiterated by one of our children who stated:

Connection with a place is about being loved.

As we continued learning together, we wondered how we could use this knowledge of connection with place to support the physical connection to our classroom and school community. We were interested in finding out what it was about a place that gave the children a feeling of connectedness.

Early childhood educators and researchers, Deb Curtis and Margie Carter state:

“When your environment has a cozy, homelike feel that brings out strong connections among the people there, they will experience a sense of belonging and security.”⁴

With COVID-19 still playing a prevalent role on classroom attendance, it was more important than ever to ensure the children felt a sense of connection to their classmates and to the classroom environment. We delved deeper into the connections the children had with one another and our learning space. Within the classroom we observed friendships emerging, allowing for the development of a deep sense of belonging. Through commonalities, the children were discovering many connections with each other they didn't know existed. (Figs. 4 & 5)

Edward Relph, author and geographer, was cited in 'Caring Spaces, Learning Spaces' by Jim Greenman. He tells us:

“An authentic sense of place is above all that being inside and belonging to YOUR place both as an individual and as a member of the community and to know this without reflecting upon it.”⁵



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

When talking about their own personal feelings of being connected, the children spoke about feelings of safety, happiness, being understood and having a sense of belonging.

It can make you feel more safe. When I connect with someone, I feel happy.

Connecting with others makes me happy. It fills their bucket. It even makes me happy.

Connecting is important because it makes me feel safe and happy.

Connecting with others makes me feel loved and they keep me safe.

Connecting with others are the people who understand you because people you connect with makes you feel happy.

Educator Rob Gamesby states, “**The way that people interact with places is in part due to their connections to the place and their relationship with it.**”⁶

The children had many opportunities to explore their shared commonalities with each other. Throughout this investigation, the children used a diverse range of materials including clay, painting, water colours and needles and thread to express their thoughts and ideas. (Figs. 6 & 7) The use of different mediums allowed the children to develop strong connections for collaborative learning and to our classroom environment. Among the varied opportunities given to the children, it was the act of sewing, at first complex and foreign, that brought our children and their ideas together. As they sewed, they discussed their thoughts, overcame challenges and helped one another. (Figs. 8 & 9) They saw the transformation of a plain piece of fabric before their eyes. This experience provided them with a determination to create something as a tribute to their special place – the Bialik ELC. A place that has brought them together, given them a sense of belonging and been pivotal to their learning journey so far.

For us as a class, it appeared that sewing was the thread that helped connect us both to each other and the place in which we gathered. It was the medium we were most attracted to and continually came back to as a way of coming together.

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*Maybe the magic
is life!*

Our Hebrew/Jewish Studies team has been part of Windows into Children's Thinking for the past few years. Our stories need to be given a platform to be aired and what better place than here in our Bialik ELC journal?

Our umbrella theme this year is 'Connection'. Connection?... Connection to what? We scratched our heads and we felt overwhelmed by the possibilities. Trust the children to come up with something of significance. One statement, by one child, led us to connecting the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to the lives of our children today:

I would love to live in the Garden of Eden right now, life would be so easy and so nice.

We will not forget the excitement that we felt that we had something tangible to start with... Let the children lead us, they haven't let us down yet.

When showing the children a film clip with beautiful images accompanied by the song 'Somewhere over the rainbow', one child said:

I feel so relaxed, maybe this is how Adam felt in Gan Eden [The Garden of Eden]. (Fig. 1)

Yes, because everything was so perfect.

So many images filled their minds imagining what Gan Eden was probably like. They verbalised the perfect weather conditions, the beauty of the sky and the rivers, the greenery and the flowers. There was such peace that prevailed. Animals didn't hunt each



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

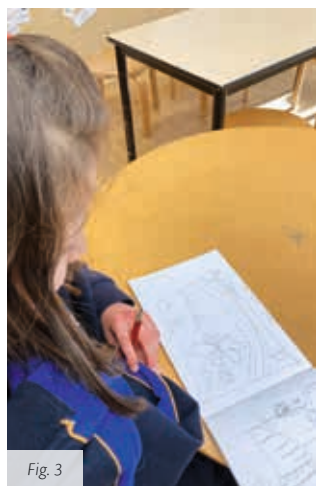


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

other in Gan Eden; humans and animals alike were vegetarian, thus never hunting for their food and never feeling threatened for their very existence. (Fig. 2)

I think it must have been like the Botanical Gardens, with a secret place, like paradise with fairies flying around. I could just pick any colourful flowers that I wanted.

So what does 'paradise' mean and where is your paradise?

I think that mine would be in Hawaii... Hawaii has palm trees, beautiful weather, and white sandy beaches.

I know a paradise that I've never been to where there are icebergs. It's called the Antarctica and it looks so beautiful. Everything is white and the penguins are so cute. I saw a movie about it.

My Paradise would be a huge playground with Art and Craft activities where I can be creative. (Fig. 3)

My Paradise would be in the Apple shop – I love technology.

We're going to Bali for Mum's birthday – I think that would be my paradise.

So many different ideas, one could almost hear the long sigh of the children while imagining their idea of their own paradise, their own Gan Eden. The atmosphere in the class was filled with an 'if only...', a longing to be somewhere else, somewhere in their own imagination that they imagined to be 'paradise'. The children had found a way to connect a story of over 5,000 years ago to their own lives and desires. (Fig. 4)

Another child interrupted our harmonious interlude by shouting out:

I don't believe in God, I believe in the BIG BANG, so I don't even believe in the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

This took us by surprise, but left us wondering – why not create a connection between the story of the Garden of Eden to different theories?

It's obvious, the Bible is just stories, the Big Bang is what actually happened. Any Science person will tell you that.

But I think that maybe the Bible story isn't true, after all, where even is The Garden of Eden? It doesn't exist anymore.

So we found a film on Ward E. Sanford's theory that the Garden of Eden may be sunken somewhere in the Persian Gulf as the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers are still on the map and they were two of the rivers that flowed into Gan Eden. This area was also rich in minerals.² (Fig. 5)

We continued exploring the biblical story of the Garden of Eden and spoke about Adam's tasks on an everyday level. He had to name the animals, trees, plants and flowers and he had to ensure that every creature lived harmoniously. He also had to care for the Garden of Eden.

So he was like the Park Ranger.

Adam had responsibilities, what does this mean?

Responsibilities are when you need to look after something, you need to take care of something.

Every parent's desire is to raise children who are helpful, kind, and compassionate towards others. One way to do this is to help children understand responsibility at an early age. When children know that they are part of a community, it is a natural inclination to want to contribute to it. Even at a young age, children understand that their primary community is their family. That is why giving children age-appropriate responsibilities provides them with a sense of pride and competence. Teaching children about responsibility early will help raise confident and resilient individuals. Life at home models the world itself. It is a safe place to engage in trial and error: like a laboratory for life. Of course, responsibility is a comprehensive term that incorporates many facets such as dependability, accountability, accepting credit, admitting mistakes, and meeting obligations.

The children in different classes used different routines to understand the meaning of 'responsibilities'. (Fig. 6)

We felt that understanding the meaning of 'responsibilities' was essential for our children who, at times, take so much for granted. We felt it was important that the children understood the meaning and the practicality of this. (Fig. 7)

We continued by exploring the significance of the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge, and the concept of good and evil. The big question was: **Why do you think that God put the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden if He forbade Adam and Eve from eating the fruit from these two trees?** (Fig. 8)

The children took this big question and led us somewhere that we never expected... to the concept of 'magic'. The interesting thing was that once the first child, in one of the groups, introduced this concept, the rest of the group identified with this phenomena, didn't even question it and continued along this thread.

Well I think that the roots of these two trees feed every other tree in the Garden of Eden.

The roots are the carriage/pathway which takes food to other trees and plants so they can have life: otherwise they will die.

I agree. I think that the magic is in the roots of the tree – if there was no magic in the roots of the tree, the fruit wouldn't be good.

I was thinking about the magic and the roots, how would these trees have got there if it wasn't for the magic?

Remember that we spoke about God creating the trees, flowers, plants; the whole world. What part does God play in the Creation of the World, if you think it's merely magic?

But God is magical.

Are you saying that God is a magician, that he waved a wand and the world was created?

Kind of... yes... how could God have created the world without magic?

One child challenged this idea of magic.

But God is just a good spirit that is made up of moisture and dirt.

Maybe the magic is life.

There are four rivers leading into the Garden of Eden, the water and the power of those two trees will make magic.

This conversation followed an unexpected path. How could we lead it back to the children distinguishing between good and evil? That perhaps God wanted to introduce the idea of free choice. However we allowed this conversation to flow in their direction of magic.

This inspired us to do some 'magical' research. Jean Piaget, a developmental psychologist, first documented that magical thinking in children starts to wane around ten years of age and only then will children start questioning the feasibility of the mechanisms that lie behind the connections they make. Magical thinking is a part of normal development of children, frequently appearing around the age of five to eight years.³

We changed our own thinking after reading up about magical thinking and we wondered whether it is the belief that one's own thoughts, wishes, and desires can influence the external world. Children are magical, perhaps because they have very little fear. They have the innate belief that the world is good. This beautiful innocence is one of the most 'magical' things that one can ever witness. This kind of thinking enables the children to develop some kind of prediction about an extremely complex idea. The children



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

were excited by this idea of magic. Many will happily accept impossible explanations of many things. Piaget goes on to say that these perfectly normal examples of child cognition coincides with normal brain development, their own egocentricity combined with the ability to reason with abstract concepts.

A different group of children with the same question went down a different path.

The Tree of Life gives life to all creatures and the Tree of Knowledge, good and evil gives knowledge about what is good and what isn't.

It gives you choices of what is good and bad.

The children acted out a scenario (Bibliodrama), where an adult tells a child what to do and what not to do.

I think that God wanted to test Adam – to see if God could trust him.

Our initial intention was for the children to uncover the concept of 'free choice' and what this might mean.

I think that God wanted Adam to make up his own mind about what is good and what isn't.

It means that Adam had to choose what he can do and what he can't.

I know when I'm doing something wrong, I can feel it. God wanted Adam to feel it and I also know when I'm doing the right thing. I can feel it too. I think that's what kind of makes me, me.

Yes, but sometimes someone else makes me do the wrong thing.

Well... that's where you have to make up your own mind, my Mum always says that if someone tells me to jump out of the window, will I do it?

It's the same thing... you know when it's a good thing or a bad one.

From their responses, it was evident that they understood this concept. We always emphasise how rules and occurrences that happened in Biblical times thousands of years ago can still apply to our own lives today.

To conclude, what connections have we made?

We have connected a story from the earliest of times to our own lives today.

We discussed Gan Eden being paradise and connected this idea to the children's idea of 'my perfect place,' 'my own paradise'. We discussed Adam's responsibilities and made a connection to our responsibilities at home, school and towards the environment. The significance of the Tree of Good and Evil led us to an awareness of the importance of magic in the lives of this age group and our discussion about the idea of free choice emphasised that the children are very aware of the concept of right and wrong.

And so, from scratching our heads and thinking 'Connections to what?'

The children together with us, their teachers, came up with...

Connections to everything! (Fig. 9)



Fig. 9

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Figures:

- Fig. 1 Using the routine of 'colour, symbol, image' (Cultures of Thinking, Harvard University), my perception of what Gan Eden looked like
- Fig. 2 My perfect place
- Fig. 3 My craft park
- Fig. 4 Using the routine of 'colour, symbol, image' (Cultures of Thinking, Harvard University) my perception of Gan Eden
- Fig. 5 Map of what Gan Eden may have looked like
- Fig. 6 Using the routine of a 'chalk talk' (Cultures of Thinking, Harvard University) children write their responsibilities towards the environment
- Fig. 7 Using the routine of 'chalk talk' (Cultures of Thinking, Harvard University) children write their responsibilities towards school
- Fig. 8 Using the routine of 'colour, symbol, image' (Cultures of Thinking, Harvard University) a child shows the tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden
- Fig. 9 Children create their own harmonious connections and push desks together to eat and chat together in an inclusive way

Bialik Creche

Creche Aleph

How do babies form relationships and connections with one another?

Shalika Halinhinga, Ericka O'Sullivan, Sarah Starr

Creche Bet

Forming connections with families as the first teacher.

Theresa Li Man Chee, Hongling Zhai, Khristine Paring

Creche Gimmel

How do children connect things that appear to have no obvious connection to one another?

Melania Petrassi, Sam Chasen

Creche Dalet

How do children connect to a new environment and the land on which we live?

Marina Remano, Paul Nur, Valerie Carias, Rajitha Subasiaghe

3 Year Old Kinder

Kinder 3 Aleph

You are my friend, and I am your friend.

Amy Jacobs, Adi Barzilay, Jo Angeloska

Kinder 3 Bet

It means myself is like that...

Megan Miller, Mira Ziger, Rosemary Barry

Kinder 3 Gimmel

Do we connect with those who we share a language with, or do we seek to find those with shared curiosities?

Sarah Downie, Ayana Shavit, Gail Bousi

4 Year Old Kinder

Kinder 4 Aleph

The crystal has energy to make my power. It makes energy and power in my fingers.

Elise Rotstajn, Pazit Spring, Julia Rogers

Kinder 4 Bet

The power of reflection.

Bianca Singer, Ortal Erez Bennett, Miri Sheffer-Watsonson

Kinder 4 Gimmel

Children and places.

Gali Sommer, Tali Carmi, Megan Jay

Prep

Prep Aleph

Imagination is when you meet something that is not in this world.

Natalie Kluska, Zoe Winograd

Prep Bet

It is the people that make places special to us...

Karen Sulman

Prep Gimmel

Our differences make us unique.

Leah Mand, Tali Fine

Year 1

Year 1 Aleph

We all need to connect to others: we always have and always will.

Roz Marks

Year 1 Bet

How does our understanding of what is inside influence our connection?

Linda Baise

Year 1 Gimmel

Connection with a place is about being loved.

Melanie Woolhouse

Year 1 Jewish Studies

Maybe the magic is life!

Yael Rath, Etti Ben Artzi, Desre Kaye





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