Windows into Children's Thinking

BIALIK COLLEGE, EARLY LEARNING CENTRE **JOURNAL 2024**

Bialik. *Be your best.*

Bialik College

From the Principal of Bialik College

It is not by accident that when we walk into the Bialik campus we are immediately presented with an array of beautiful flora and foliage that is thoughtfully placed and carefully nurtured. Our corridors are clean and our learning spaces are carefully curated both in the building and room design, as well as in the placement of fixtures, furniture and learning provocations.

Whilst this is a journal for the early years, as a single campus school it is often remarked upon that our secondary school spaces are unusually calm when compared to a 'normal' high school. This is not just a product of our learning environment in which relationships are prioritised above all, important though that is. Nor is it a reflection of the reality that our children understand we are an all-age school in which they need to be cognisant of those who are younger and older than themselves whilst they learn and move around their shared learning spaces. It is more than that.

As a Reggio Emilia-inspired early learning experience, we refer to the environment as the 'Third Teacher', one that is in partnership with our educators and our families. Thus the environment – whether it be the built environment, the movable environment, the outside environment or quite simply but most importantly the cultural feel, are all held in high regard by all of our stakeholders.

Our newest building, the Alan Finkel Launch Lab in the main school, was developed and built with place in mind. We enlisted the expertise of an educator from the University of Harvard to work with our staff and our architects in designing the space, whilst also working with our educators about how they would use the space differently following completion of the project. Whilst it is common to set aside a percentage of the budget for professional fees, services, fixtures and fittings, we set aside a percentage of the budget for learning. This is the importance in which we hold the concept of Place.

It makes a lot of sense, therefore, that the theme for the early learning centre in 2024 is, indeed, 'Place'. Not only is place an important concept in the Reggio Emilia philosophy, but it is also an important concept in our own Jewish tradition. Land and place are both central to our prayers, our philosophy and a history. The centrality of Israel in Jewish tradition is illustrated by a simple visit there. One can hardly drive down a road or walk down a street without coming across something or someplace that is reflected in our literary traditions whether in Jerusalem, in the deserts, in the villages or by the sea.

Thank you for taking the time for reading this beautiful journal and for reflecting on the centrality of place – and considering where indeed we are rooted philosophically, physically, educationally and communally. It has been a wonderful 'wondering' for our children, and I hope it is for you too.

B'Shalom, בשלום

Jeremy Stowe-Lindner
Principal

From the Head of the Early Learning Centre

"From the beginning, children demonstrate that they have a voice, know how to listen and want to be listened to by others. School should be a place where first and foremost it is a 'context of multiple listening' involving the teachers and children both individually and as a group".[1] This gives children (and adults) the ability to explain, to negotiate, to recognise that there are many different solutions to one problem; to give up one's own idea in recognition that perhaps someone else has a better solution than yours and most importantly, the ability to be able to use the ideas and theories of others, to help consolidate your own understandings.

Every year, we choose, in a democratic way, a new idea or big concept. This year the concept of 'place' became the lens through which our investigations began. The focus of an investigation provides a vehicle for achieving a much larger intent. The investigation should provoke children to develop theories and strategies and to test those theories in collaboration with others.

Any concept or idea we have involves choices. An important consideration with which our teachers begin is the motivation behind those choices. Why are we choosing to research a particular aspect of our work?

Among the many choices we made was one fundamental for the future; the identity, the reality, and the image we give to children and their education.

We encouraged our children and teachers to challenge their thinking, to ask questions without knowing the answers and to revisit ideas and thoughts in different ways. There is evidence that teachers, whose image of the child values collaborative relationships, creates rich learning for children and one another.

The writing of our journal was, as always, a profoundly rich period of professional development and exchange as we explored the structure of the context offered. The stories in this journal are not investigations in their entirety but rather small vignettes, part of the process, from each level as well as from cross class groups. Each investigation is documented through the recording of discussions and reflections by the children and their teachers, through photographs and other 'languages'. This documentation is fundamental to our work with our children. It makes their thinking, often very complex, visible and open to evaluation and interpretation. In this journal the children's words are italicised, and many of the articles are prefaced by their own words.

"When you make learning visible, you make it exist, real, shareable, the starting point for democracy"[2]

Daphne Gaddie

References:

1. Giudici, C., Rinaldi, C., Krechevsky, M., Barchi, P. and Harvard Project Zero (2001). *Making learning visible : children as individual and group learners.* Reggio Emilia, Italy: Reggio Children.
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Contents

Bialik Children's Centre

3 Year Old Kinder

The conventions in this book

A number of styles have been used throughout Bialik College Early Learning Centre Journal 2024 – *'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

Prep

Year 1

Bialik Children's Centre

Bialik Children's Centre Aleph & Bet

What does place mean to children under two?

Place is not merely a physical location; it is a dynamic interplay of sensory experiences, emotional connections, and emerging understanding of the world. Infants and toddlers develop at a rapid rate through exploration and curiosity during which the concept of place begins to take shape. Environment plays a crucial role in shaping their perceptions, behaviours, and sense of security.

The children became interested in making towers with connectable pieces. They stacked them and held them up to see their work. When placing them down these towers either toppled or wobbled. These creations took on a life of their own with more children gathering to participate in the process of stacking and building. They spent time looking at each other then back at the towers. (Fig. 1)

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 4

Fig. 3

Stable bases were offered to provide the children with steadiness, the initial idea was to hold the towers and keep them together. Balance and structure, height and stability all played a role in this investigation.

The experience of manipulating pieces to connect and form tall buildings on a well-lit platform created shadows. These were not just shadows from the towers but shadows of the children themselves that seemed to change as they moved. (Fig. 2–3)

When first presenting the space, educators sat and observed as the children selected their blocks and started to build. However, it was noticed that when the educator moved away, the children's responses changed. The children transferred their focus onto the movement created on the walls by their own shadows instead of the towers' shadows. (Fig. 4)

Children observed their own movement on the wall, created by the light. Some stopped to explore this movement, beginning to recognise that it was a mirror of their own bodies.

The children's motivation and interest was evident in their explorations. Their own shapes, forms and movement through the shadows that they saw became the focal point in their discovery. Moving the towers away provided a space for the children to navigate what they saw, felt and understood about the dark shapes in front of them.

This created a need to delve into the significance of place for infants and toddlers, examining whether their interactions with the shadows could influence their thoughts, movements and reactions.

It is intriguing the way children perceive light and shadow, as it can transform a simple space into a captivating playground of imagination.

"Experiences involving light and shadow enable children to appreciate the awe and wonder of the world around them and provide an environment that is rich in possibilities for them to develop their natural curiosity".[1]

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

As a child moved so too did the shadow, capturing the children's attention to explore further. The shadow grew bigger and smaller with the movement of the child.

It's moving!

With one finger a child touched the wall as if to feel the shadow, their eyes followed, and their body leaned to the wall as if to hug the shadow in front. (Fig. 5–6)

Another child pointed and repeated,

There.

There.

Touch seemed to bring connection and drew the children's senses into exploring the shadows and the possibilities. The interplay of light created shadows that danced and shifted, inviting children to reach out, explore, and understand their surroundings in new ways. (Fig. 7–8)

Fig. 9

Fig. 10

Fig. 11

Fig. 12

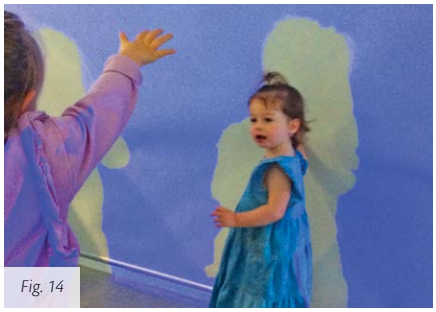

Fig. 14

Fig. 13

One child caught sight of his shadow and investigated the shape that his head made. As he came closer, he reached for the blind that the shadow had been projected upon and picked it up as if to try and find the person he saw in the shadow on the other side. (Fig. 9–11)

Finding a larger area for children to react to the shadows created an environment full of interactions, not just with the shadow people but with one another.

At one point a child pointed to her shadow, *that's me*, and then she saw her friend's shadow next to hers; *I can see you!* (Fig. 12–14)

The environment fostered a sense of place for children that was magical, rich and joyful. It invited a place where the children could collaborate, verbally engage in sharing their immediate reactions and delight in the shapes and movement of themselves and others.

For these young children, place meant togetherness, playful experimentation and freedom to be their true selves as contributors to their own and each other's learning.

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Bialik Children's Centre Gimmel

What types of connection do children have to place and how strong are these links?

In our quest to understand the children's connection to place, we went on a series of excursions or 'adventures' as we like to call them. This allowed the children to explore their community beyond the boundaries of the Bialik Children's Centre (BCC) building. These experiences provided valuable insights into how children perceive themselves in relation to their surroundings.

We started by taking the children to a nearby soccer pitch to play, but their attention soon shifted to the wider community. They noticed a digger through the fence and asked to investigate. This sparked a growing curiosity as they began observing and exploring more details of their environment. (Fig. 1)

The children began recognising and naming places in the community, later linking them to a printed map. They reimagined spaces based on their experiences, calling the Chaim Nachman Bialik statue *Daddy* and a playground *Tiny Tim* and the *Possum Yard*. As they explored, we asked if they knew where they were on the school map. This led to discussions about their sense of place.

Fig. 1


Fig. 2


Fig. 3


Fig. 4


Fig. 5


Fig. 6


Fig. 7

This creative renaming also reflected their personal perspectives and deepened their connection to place. (Fig. 2–4)

The more the children explored the more we observed a sense of freedom and empowerment to walk throughout the school grounds. The children looked at a shared map before departing the BCC building and as a group discussed where they would like to go and how they could get there. Children confidently pointed to different areas of the map.

I want to go to see chickens!

Soccer pitch!

This evolved into a pre-adventure ritual, where children were recognised as decision-makers, leaders, and collaborators. The children walked slowly exploring every "what's that?", engaging with their surroundings meaningfully. Playing footy at the oval or picnicking at the fireplace in the kitchen garden. These moments encouraged reflection, sparking their imagination and helping them see the potential for play in different locations.

During these walks, we frequently encountered families and colleagues who were engaged in the community. These encounters were not planned and greatly enriched our experiences as they often shared valuable insights and pointed out noteworthy aspects of place. One parent introduced us to a large fish and frog tank, which we would have otherwise overlooked. Another parent accompanied us on a walk to observe the chickens. On another occasion a child excitedly took the lead and directed us right to where his mum worked. These moments further fostered a sense of community and encouraged us to explore and connect not only with the places we visited but also with the people within them. (Fig. 5–6)

To extend the links to connection to place, we initiated a project where the children took photos of themselves in different areas of the school, adding them to a collaborative poster of the school map. This visual representation allowed the children to reflect on their adventures collectively.

That's me.

That's the soccer pitch.

As they examined the photos alongside the map, they began to articulate their experiences, fostering conversations and connections among themselves. Observations revealed that the children eagerly engaged in mark-making, documenting their thoughts and feelings about the places they had visited.

The map became a dynamic tool not just for directions but also as a provocation for imaginary play by involving it alongside wooden people toys. This interactive approach enhanced their understanding and connection to the map and the spaces within it. (Fig. 7)

As their mark-making experience expanded, we introduced the opportunity to stop and reflect in the places they visited. This encouraged deeper contemplation of their experience. The children sat as a group, looking at the world around them to inspire their drawn reflections. We discovered that children drew the spaces around them, the important people in their lives and recalled stories and events from their home lives.

Picnic place.

Soccer Pitch. (Fig. 8–10)


Fig. 8


Fig. 9


Fig. 10


Fig. 12


Fig. 11

Remarkably, children began to establish their own games and activities independently in various areas of the school. They initiated chasing games around the fountain, utilising the different levels of the decking area to enhance their play and discovered new ways to interact and engage with spaces. (Fig. 11)

Over time we found that the children were able to recognise the buildings displayed on the map, then linked them to their names both verbally and non-verbally.

There's Tiny Tim.

We're in Gimmel.

They were not only capable of pointing out each landmark accurately on the map but were able to recall, articulate and discuss what spaces and areas were around those landmarks.

Were the children beginning to form connections to place through knowledge of how to get there? What could they do within them? Was there comfort in their new knowledge?

They expressed a newfound sense of belonging within the broader community, confidently interacting with peers and adults alike. Their curiosity flourished as they began to collect artifacts such as lemons and leaves, showing interest in bringing them back to further question.

What's that?

It's a house!

Who do you think the house is for?

The possum!

Maybe! Or perhaps it's for the birds. It seems a bit small for a possum.

No, it's for the possum because this is Possum Yard! (Fig. 12)

By providing opportunities for self-directed engagement, the children developed a sense of place that was rich with meaning and connection.

"Every place has a soul, an identity, and seeking to discover it and relate to it means learning to recognise your own soul as well".[1]

As we reflect on the children's adventures and connection to place, it has become clear that these experiences significantly drew links to the greater community. This being the strength that enabled children to be empowered. By giving them the reigns, we were granted incredible insights into how they navigated themselves and found unique ways to find confidence in different places.

References:

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Bialik Children's Centre Dalet

Force and motion

How can the children's understanding of the way objects move from one place to another support their understanding of travel when moving from one place to another?

Travel is a concept that children have direct experience with, whether it's from holidays, everyday car rides, or even walking to school. These experiences of moving from one place to another provide a meaningful context for understanding how objects also move in space. When children related their personal journeys, such as *going to Bali on a train*, to the movement of objects, they began to form connections between abstract concepts and concrete actions.

"Nowadays it's possible to travel virtually through digital media, there is a consciousness that the actual travel demands a physical move from place A to place B."[1]

The children's holiday memories and initial reflections and stories about travel became a gateway for deeper learning. The interest in place also highlighted the children's curiosity and ability to explore complex concepts like motion, force, and adaptation through shared ideas.

The children were provided with ramps, tubes, pipes, and tunnels; all of which created an environment rich in opportunities for experimentation. This is where they could observe and manipulate objects in ways that built on their understanding of how things move.

The collaboration amongst the children, such as when one child applied force and another adjusted the angle of the tube, gave us a glimpse of early understanding of physics concepts like gravity and momentum. (Fig. 1)

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

A child was observed placing objects into the raised end of a transparent tube, exploring gravity and movement. There was a challenge of not being able to see the object's complete journey as the tube was too long, but this encouraged critical thinking as the child tried to determine where the object had ended up.

Children also placed cylinders around a tube and moved them along the tube's length. When asked how the cylinders moved, a child raised the tube at one end and watched as the cylinder slid down. (Fig. 2)

Two children picked up a long transparent tube and each child placed an end to their face. They were then able to see one another through the tube, converse, laugh and interact from a different perspective as sound travelled through the tube. (Fig. 3)

Connecting the children's exploration of moving objects to larger concepts like travel, countries, land, and water involved making abstract ideas concrete and accessible.

A wooden frame that had tubes securely attached was modified to provide a different context for exploration of movement. The frame provoked the question: do we need the tubes for these objects to slide? A child then used their own body to simulate sliding, demonstrating their understanding of this movement.

Look, I am sliding down.

Children hypothesised and compared themselves to moving objects. We wondered, if this was the beginning of conceptualising travel?

This wondering encouraged the educators to set up a provocation of a pendulum video, projected on the wall, to provide a visual of motion. What was observed was the children moving their bodies alongside the digital display. Their physical responses, such as swaying along with the pendulum, was sparked by an internal sensation to move.

They touched the image on the wall with their hands, tracing its movement. This visual feedback engaged the children's senses even further when they placed themselves on the visual wall and observed the moving objects projected on their body. This made them in sync with the pendulum where they were in control of their own movement rather than instigating the movement of another object. (Fig. 4)

Fig. 5

By linking the movement of their bodies to the movement of objects in their environment, children were able to make meaningful connections that lead to a more comprehensive and enriched understanding of how motion works. Through their personal experiences and collaboration with peers, the children were observed developing concepts of travel, movement and distance.

The children's understanding of travel, of moving from one place to another, played a significant role in their discovery of how objects move. The connection between their real-world experiences of travel and the physical movement of objects offered a conceptual bridge; helping them grasp the underlying principles of motion in relatable and engaging ways.

The ramps, tubes and pipes offered experimentation with concepts like motion, force and friction, all of which apply to real-world travel. They appeared to understand that they needed to push an object or tilt a ramp to set it in motion, just as a plane needs wings to fly or a car needs wheels to move.

Place and travel with moving objects deepened their understanding of how things move, both in their personal physical world and in the broader contexts such as transportation and navigation.

Fig. 6

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3 Year Old Kinder

Kinder 3
Aleph

Unlocking creativity: the power of loose parts

At the age of four, developing a sense of identity is crucial for a child's emotional, social and cognitive growth. This is a period where children begin to recognise themselves as unique individuals; where they become aware of their strengths, differences and preferences.[1]

Celebrating a birthday in Kinder 3 Aleph led us to reflect on what it means to be four years old. We looked at pictures that had been taken of us as babies and we explored how we have grown and changed:

I don't wear a nappy anymore.

I used to have straight hair, now it's curly.

I am too big for baby pajamas.

This process encouraged the children to think about who they are and how they see themselves. Loris Malaguzzi termed this concept 'me-ness'.[2] To explore this further, the studio was set up with mirrors for the children to see their reflection and focus on their individual attributes. (Fig. 1) We used the process of observation to notice the features of their faces, separating the parts from the whole. The children were asked **What do you see?**

I see my nose and my eyes.

I have a big forehead.

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

I see my face and my hair. (Fig. 2)

These observations inspired exploration of the form and structure of their features and how they fit together. We then gave the children a sharpie as a marking tool and asked them to draw what they saw.

My head is like a circle. My eyes are too!

My nose has holes in it.

Why can't I see my ears? (Fig. 3–4)

Self-portraiture is deeply connected to children's sense of identity. As they study their features and construct an image of themselves, children express themselves as both the subject and the creator of their artwork.[3] It was evident the children were not able to identify any features that made them different to their friends. At this point, our research question became clearer. We asked ourselves what place does individuality have in a child forming their identity?

With this in mind, we decided to take this exploration further by providing the children with loose part materials so that they could continue discovering their unique attributes through a different medium. 'Loose parts' refers to open-ended materials that children can manipulate, move, and combine in various ways to encourage creativity, exploration, and problem-solving. These materials do not have fixed uses, allowing children to experiment and create their own purposes for them.[4] Natural items such as acorns, sticks and leaves, as well as everyday items such as, buttons, fabric scraps, bottle lids, bottle corks and wool were some of the materials that were supplied to them. The children were also provided with cut out pictures of their facial features including those of eyes, mouths and noses. (Fig. 5)

While sitting in front of the mirrors in the studio once again, the children were asked to create another portrait of themselves. When asked what was special or unique about their faces, this time the children did not comment on their facial features but rather on how they had used their creativity to dress their faces up.

I have a pretty necklace.

This is like the special clip mummy puts in my hair.

This is the crown I wear when I am a princess.

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

These are the hearts mummy puts on my hands in the mornings. (Fig. 6–7)

Young children often think and represent ideas symbolically. The loose parts allowed for abstract thinking where a bottle cork became a nose, a button became an eye and a piece of string a smile. This reflected their developmental stage and understanding of the world.[5] This abstract thinking is fundamental to how young children make sense of the world. The loose parts gave them the freedom to make changes to their portrait and they continued to make changes in both the materials they chose and in the way they were positioned until they were satisfied with the end product. This differed from the first activity, where the children used sharpies and were unable to alter their markings.

When children around the age of four create self-portraits using loose parts, they often focus on adding features that reflect their sense of identity such as a necklace, a crown or a hair clip. This showed that the children were more interested in personalising their portraits with accessories that they find meaningful rather than observing and representing how facial features, like eyes, noses or mouths differ between individuals. Psychologist, Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development suggests that during the preoperational stage (ages two to seven) children are more likely to focus on egocentric perspectives, which means they emphasis features which are significant to their personal experience rather than objectively observing details such as facial proportions or features.[6]

A core concept of the Reggio Emilia model is that children express themselves in **"one hundred languages – through drawing painting sculpture and more."**[7] Allowing the children to create self-portraits taps into their natural desire to express individuality through art. This is not just about the physical representation but also about expressing their emotions, thoughts and feelings. It helps children articulate their unique perspective and identity in a way that makes sense to them. Their responses offered insight into what they understood to be important and what they valued about themselves.

By choosing loose parts over pre-cut facial features, the children in this study showed a preference for creative autonomy and personal expression. This highlights how, at this stage, their identity is more fluid, connected to symbolic representations and personal associations rather than fixed physical traits.[8] Instead of focusing on how they differ from others, children are more focused on what is important to their own experiences and how they wish to represent themselves.

Ultimately, individuality is essential to a child's emerging identity because it allows them to explore and express their unique experiences and sense of self through creativity. The freedom provided by loose parts encouraged the children to see themselves as creators, able to mold and reshape their identity as they choose. This process of self-expression through art fosters their growing understanding of who they are, not only physically, but emotionally and imaginatively.[9]

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Kinder 3 Bet

Family means you have lots of people in your house…

When the children of Kinder 3 Bet came together at the beginning of the year, they came from many different places. But the one commonality the children had when they arrived was that they all have families: different family arrangements but families all the same.

When we refer to a family, we can use the definition from The Australian Bureau of Statistics. A family is **"two or more people, one of whom is aged 15 years and over, who live together and related by blood, marriage (registered or de facto), adoption, step or fostering."**[1] When reading this definition, we understand the broadness of it. A family can consist of many different structures. This is reflected in our own Kinder community, as we have observed the children playing within this anti bias approach, a family can be anyone in the same house. As Stonehouse says when referring to family, **"Difference is okay, difference is just difference, not better or worse."**[2]

I am making a house – 2 brothers, 3 mums… This is the child.

How important is the child's family to them? What place does family have in a child's development and how do the children reflect this in their play?

One of the ways the children began to connect and form their new Kinder community was through sociodramatic play. The most consistent play observed was the play of *Mums and Dads*, with the children returning to this play often. This incorporation of family into young children's play demonstrates the influence family has on a child. (Fig. 1)

Fig. 1

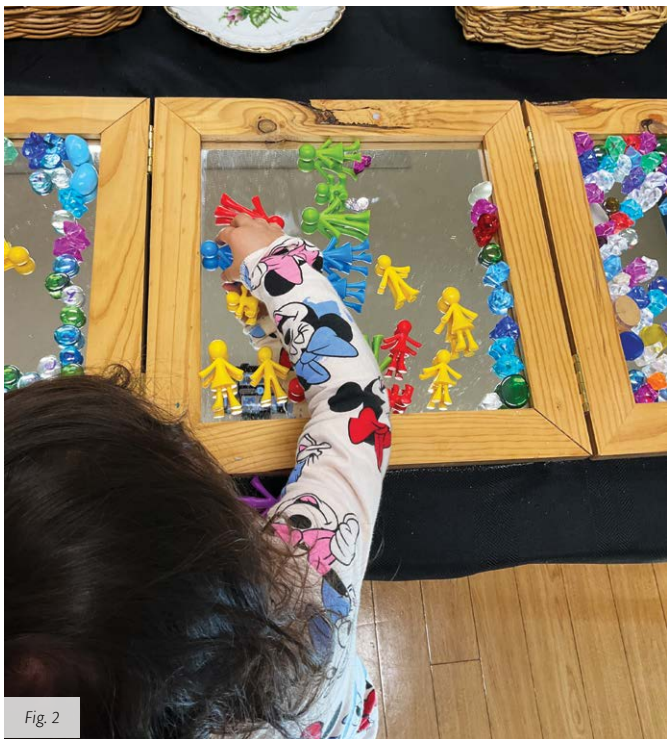

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

We are playing Mums and Dads. Mums and Dads and babies.

All the babies sleep here.

Now I am the mummy.

I am the baby.

Waa Waa Waa.

He is the baby.

He has to cry and we have to help him and we bring him milk and a dummy.

You the sister… ok?

It is through a child's family that their foundational experiences are shaped. As Erna Roostin, a researcher specialising in Family Influences and Young Children, discusses, the **"Family environment is the first educational environment, because in this family every individual or child first get education and guidance"**.[3]

These experiences significantly influence a child's physical, cognitive, emotional and social development. As acknowledged in The Early Years Framework of Australia, the family is the child's primary unit of society and provides the initial context for a child's learning and growth, this then influences the child's ability to develop future relationships and interactions.[4]

This concept of the child's family being viewed as an integral part of the child's learning, community and a contributor to their knowledge is also supported by the Reggio Emilia Approach. Tiziana Filipinni states **"Parents are the first and most important educators of their own children. As partners in the educational process, they have a vital role to play in supporting and enhancing their child's learning and development."**[5]

To deepen the children's connections to each other and create a place in the classroom to develop discussion, we set up the studio space with some figurines and other various loose parts. We invited the children in small groups. Small groups that had not had previous connections. Would family be the common link? Would they connect through their concept of family and use this to build new relationships with each other? (Fig. 2)

This is the whole family.

It's a family. It is a family that people live in a house.

This is my family. There are the family people. If you don't have people, it won't be a house. If you have people, it will be a house.

When observing the children playing with the small faceless figurines, most of them projected the role of a family member onto them and placed them into their own family scenarios. The materials offered to the children were not predisposed to being a family, they were open ended therefore allowing the children to use their imagination to make any play scenario. The children chose family, creating a common theme within their play. (Fig. 3)

The blue one is me.

They are looking at the rocks. We walked back to the house.

That's my family.

That's family to me.

Watching the children form relationships through their family play we can see the importance of these common connections, the connection of family. As Dr Gibbs, a researcher and consultant for Early Childhood Australia, states **"Relationships are the foundation for delivering positive outcomes for children".**[6] (Fig. 4)

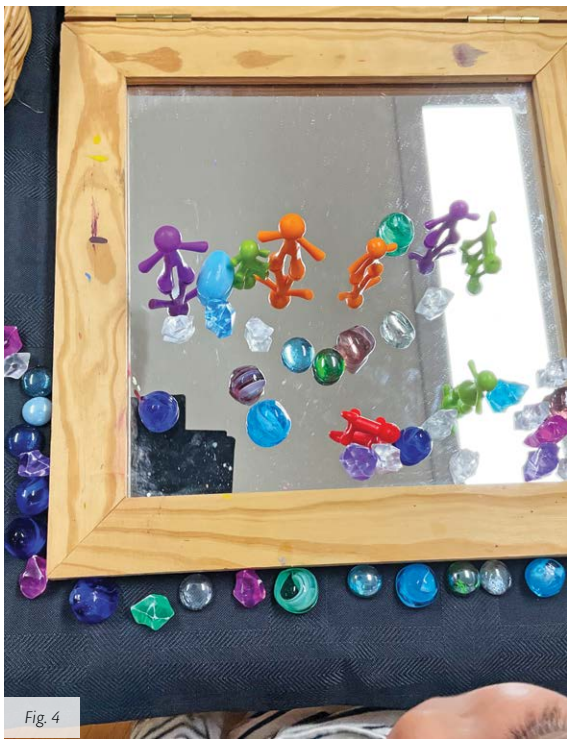

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

To further deepen the children's thinking we set up the provocation of an image on the wall. The image was specifically curated to be one that was not defined. The poster was of a grouping of people and the only connection between them was that they were hugging. We placed it on the wall and gave the children time to notice and interact with it. (Fig. 5)

That's a whole family.

They are hugging.

A family with glasses on.

It's a painting.

It's a love painting.

Again, the children took what they saw back to what they know, the security of family and what family means to them. Listening to the children we can hear that hugging means family, family means love. When we listen to the children's words, actions and conversations we are also listening **"to the patterns that connect, to that which connects us together"**[7] as Carla Rinaldi discusses in her book, *The Pedagogy of Listening.* (Fig. 6)

The pattern being family. This deepening of our relationships, within the Kinder 3 Bet community, was being created through our individual connections to our own families and then building on these to develop strong trusting relationships with our peers.

We then reflected back on our initial questions.

How important is the child's family to them? What place does family have in a child's development and how do the children reflect this in their play?

What we have observed, within our fledgling Kinder community, is that the strong, trusting and primary educational role a family holds in a child's life reflects in the child's ability to build positive relationships with themselves, their own ideas and also with their peers. The children do this through the capacity of finding the common thread of family. This thread of family runs through the children's play, their conversations and their ability to connect to others with trust. Therefore, the role of family is paramount to the development of the young child and is critical for the development of future relationships and interactions.

It's my house with my family. Mummy, Dad, cat and dog, baby and me…

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Kinder 3 Gimmel

How is an individual's sense of belonging influenced by their connection to place?

As we welcomed a new group to Kinder 3 Gimmel we strived to develop a sense of belonging to the group and a connection to our environment. According to the Oxford dictionary the definition of belonging is **"an affinity for a place or situation."**[1] How do we create this affinity for our new space and foster deep connections with our environment.

"The environment allows children to explore their interests, collaborate with other children openly, and learn from experiences inside and outside the classroom."[2]

As we explored our new inside and outside environment, it became evident that we were not alone in using our space. The children, as they were playing inside, observed a magpie through our big glass windows. (Fig. 1) They immediately became fascinated with the magpie and wondered what he was doing in our garden. Would he be there tomorrow? (Fig. 2)

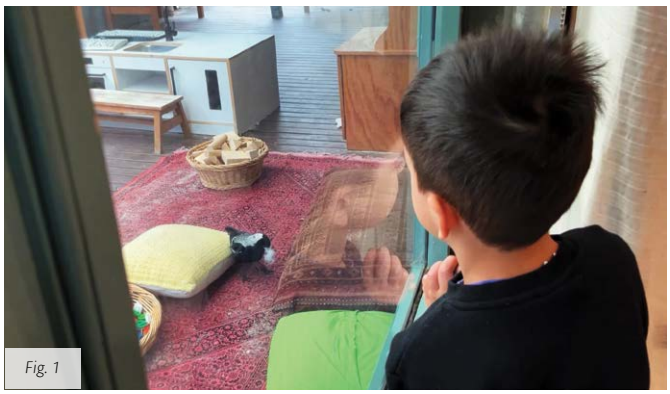

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Like us, the magpie returned at the same time each day. Could we be sharing our new Kinder space-how do we show the magpie that we accept him and we would love him to share our space with us. Could we all belong to the same place?

"The formation of a group is important for the learning dynamics that can take place inside it."[3]

After many consecutive days of the magpie greeting us, one particular morning he was not there. The children became concerned… where had the magpie gone? (Fig. 3) What can we do to help him come back. What did the magpie need?

I not see magpies and kookaburras… the name is only bird.

Where Bird?

How can we create the environment where we want to be… where we look forward to coming each day. Can we apply our same theories to our new magpie friends. We started to redesign our corner garden, giving the magpies a home, an identity, a sense of belonging. (Fig. 4)

"The foundational sense of who we are is profoundly important. Identity is aligned with belonging, the sense of feeling included in the social settings that are a part of everyday life."[4]

We discussed what makes us feel like we are home and the children decided what the magpies would need…

I'm making a home… a rainbow home-everyone can live in my rainbow home. (Fig. 5)

I can hear something… I think they are saying… we can't wait for our new house.

The birdies need a leaf to sleep. (Fig.6)

We collected natural materials from the garden and created a space in the studio to thread, weave and create a home for our bird friends. The children worked collaboratively, thinking about the magpies and what they needed to create their own nest. (Fig. 7–8)

Birds live in a tree… they only fly in the day.

The bird can sleep with his eyes closed… all the trees are too high up for the birds… big grey birds can sleep with their eyes closed but not black birds.

They go in all the trees in the days… and they can't find which one to sleep in.

Why are they not on a nest… why they sleep in a tree?

"Behind educators and families, physical spaces hold the potential to influence what and how children learn."[5]

As we began to use photographs of different birds as provocations, the children started to share their theories, their ideas, experiencing different points of views and opinions. We created a space where the children could connect with those they shared ideas with. Opinions were formed and voiced and theories were tested.

They live in a tree.


Fig. 3


Fig. 4


Fig. 5


Fig. 6


Fig. 7


Fig. 8

No, they live down low and dive down to eat something.

They fall down because they can't climb.

They just climb with their paws they can't fall.

They go in all the trees in the days… and they can't find which one to sleep in.

The magpie can come in and open the door by himself with his wings.

They need a drink and a bath and a rainbow.

The birds are thinking about the moon and ways to get there.

"There is a strong connection between developing a sense of place and forming a sense of belonging. A sense of belonging relates to a sense of connectedness."[6]

As we observed the magpies visiting us each day we started to tune into their voice. What were they saying?

Perhaps if we explored a little further, we could discover what the magpie may need to create his home and his connection to our place. We looked at a variety of texts and listened to audio recordings of magpies in a variety of environments.

When we listen, truly listen, what do we hear?

What are the magpies trying to tell us?

Birdies can't speak.

They just don't speak.

His beak doesn't have words.

He talks like words… I can hear his words.

The birds are thinking about the moon and ways to get there.

The perception of where we are is reflected by our ability to transport ourselves to an imaginary place. As we stepped inside the magpie we became one with the bird, feeling a true affinity with our new friend.

"It takes the learner outside himself or herself to understand that one's perspective often shapes how events are understood."[7]

It would feel great… they can feel the air.

All the trees are too high up for the birds.

It feels like it gets tired after the birds have been flying.

If I would fly I would want someone to look after me.

Maybe it would be very, very warm up there and we would go too fast and fall down and crash.

Even grown ups can't fly… I just don't know how you can fly.

Can we journey together with the magpie? When we journey together we build connections through our experiences. As children are given the opportunity to engage with their natural environment it encourages the children to explore and connect with the world around them. The environments we inhabit influence how we see ourselves and how we relate to others.

Maybe the magpies are a type of bird… it's more than a family when there are lots of them… it's like friends.

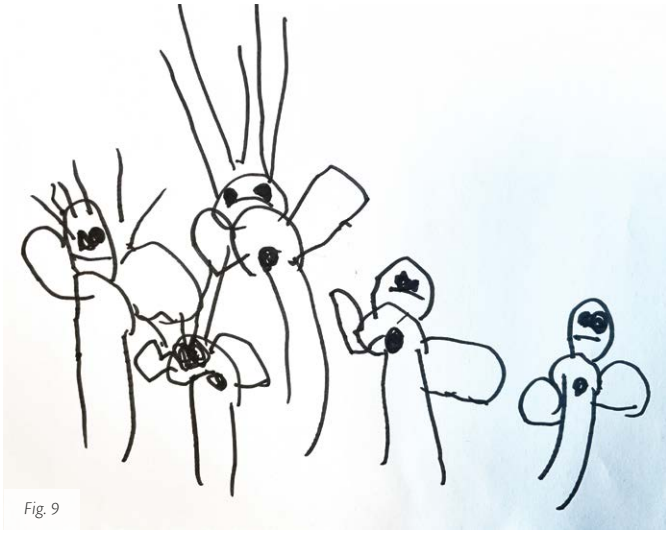

Fig. 9

These ones are more like family but similar to friends. (Fig.9)

Friends are similar to you but not all the time.

Family is a type of being kind.

With the magpies repeated visits, it was evident that we had created a space for the children and the magpie to connect to each other developing a shared sense of belonging. The magpie had become connected to our environment, his place, his home. By nurturing place attachment, we can foster a sense of belonging and a collective identity.

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4 Year Old Kinder

Kinder 4
Aleph

Nature's not a place and nature is a place...

Building on the skills that the children established as a cohort in 2023, the group discussions and ideas the children exchanged were becoming more complex. This offered a broader range of learning possibilities.

The challenge then became to push further to uncover not the breadth, but the depth of the children's thinking. Research suggests that this idea of **"going deeper"**[1] is in harmony with children's intrinsic disposition, as they thrive when given opportunities for **"repetition and immersing themselves in their current passion"**.[2] This continual revisiting of concepts and questions allowed for the children to hone not only their ideas and thinking processes but also the skills involved when expressing these.

Providing regular opportunities for the children to re-examine past and current ideas saw shifts in language and group understanding of the concepts being considered. This re-examination of ideas allows the **"children to re-explore and re-conceptualise their thinking"**.[3] Within our conversations surrounding Place, nature was an interconnecting idea that continued to reoccur in the children's language, likely inspired by the changing season the children were witnessing. This prompted a myriad of deep questions to ponder – What is a Place? Are people part of nature? What does nature's Place look like?, and Is Nature a Place? These 'big questions' offered the children and educators roles as **"co-researchers as they explore their developing fascinations"**.[4] The question of 'Is Nature a Place' prompted particularly robust conversations, with initial ideas indicating more rigid thinking:

A place can just be a city or a house.

Nature is not a place because a house is not nature. It doesn't even talk, people talk. (Fig. 1–2)

As we continued revisiting the question Is Nature a Place, the children represented their thinking about the concept of Place and

Fig. 1

the dynamic intersections between Place, nature and people. The children's visual expressions of their ideas offered teachers a fuller view of the learning process, with many of the children expressing their thinking about these big questions through collaborative creativity and using multiple materials and mediums. The process of exploration and **"defamiliarization through art"**[5] allowed the children to begin understanding their experiences and ideas in new ways; the children had opportunities for constructing and re-constructing knowledge through dramatic role-play, clay and playdough sculpture, mark making, collage, and digital storytelling. (Fig. 3–5)

As our group discussions continued to delve deeper into the children's ideas and thought processes, the children honed their communication skills, including listening, speaking, and building on and responding to the ideas of others. It was in the latter two areas that the children experienced a disagreement of ideas, with the children trying to identify where each unique perspective aligns, intersects, or opposes the view of another. As the group embarked on a search for answers to big questions, our aim was far from **"a cosy search for consensus"**; our discussions provided a place for **"conflict of ideas and argumentation"**, with the children exchanging, reflecting on and adapting the knowledges being discussed.[6]

Nature's not a place because nature doesn't live in a house.

Nature doesn't live in a house but some nature lives underground and some stay out of bed at night.

Yeah, like nocturnal.

Nature is a place but it lives in different places, like insects live in tanbark. Some animals live under the snow. Some animals come when it is night and there's a moon and the other animals are still sleeping and some animals are still awake.

These **"conflicting perspectives are viewed as a mechanism for group learning"**[7], with the children establishing and expanding upon group understandings. As educators, we are regularly reminded that developing and reflecting on group understandings and knowledges is crucial **"since individual knowledge is always partial and provisional"**[8]; group understandings support


Fig. 2

Fig. 3


Fig. 4


Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

the children to explore not only their own unique ideas and perspectives but also to become aware and responsive to the originality of others' thinking. The children have the opportunity to **"evaluate and refine their thinking as they are exposed to the ideas of other people"** through **"participating in creating shared understanding"**.[9] (Fig. 6–7)

As the children discussed, expressed, represented and reflected, ideas flourished, growing beyond the initially fixed ideas demonstrated in earlier conversations:

Nature's not a place and nature is a place. Nature is a place because big trees are like nature cause they can't talk or anything but it's like a place. Big trees are places and little trees are not places.

I actually can't fit in little trees, but you can fit in big trees and that kind of makes sense.

Dirt is not nature but maybe it is.

The children developed a collective understanding about the idea of Place, and acknowledged that this understanding was not fixed, but rather dynamic, evolving and perceived in direct relation to themselves within the Place.

What began as one question for consideration became many questions for rich investigation, and these questions elicited children's conflicting perspectives; a process of **"constructing and re-constructing knowledge from a myriad of sources"**[10] in what Malaguzzi referred to as **"a tangled bowl of spaghetti"**.[11] This metaphor of the learning process acknowledges that not only are the children's ideas closely interwoven with those of their peers, but that the learning process is very rarely linear; the revisiting, re-exploring, and reconstructing necessary to understand deeply often takes the form of this tangled, complicated system of ideas and perspectives.

Kinder 4 Aleph's group exploration of the complex concept of Place and its intersection with nature highlighted the depth of the children's thinking when given the opportunity to revisit and re-examine ideas. By delving deeper into these concepts through discussions, creative expression, and collaborative activities, the children were not only able to refine their own understanding but also engage in rich and meaningful discussions with their peers. This iterative process of questioning and re-evaluating further highlighted the value of allowing the children to ponder big questions and diverse perspectives, fostering a culture where knowledge is constructed and reconstructed through shared exploration. The evolving nature of their ideas demonstrates the power of ongoing reflection and discussion in developing critical thinking skills and evolving the collective understanding. As we as teachers continue to offer space, time and opportunity for these processes, it becomes clear that embracing depth and conflict of ideas leads to richer, more complex understandings and illustrates the way in which learning thrives on curiosity, creativity, and collaboration.

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Kinder 4
Bet

Can we make a real city?

Place: How do we support children's agency in a place where they belong?

Our experience in early childhood education reminds us time and time again that children's sense of agency and belonging go hand in hand. It is human nature that we all want to be heard. When children are encouraged to interact with and transform interesting materials in the classroom, we communicate to them that we value their agency, thinking, and intellectual pursuits. This gives a powerful message to the children that their ideas are valued, and they are respected. When children feel respected, they begin to connect with the place where they belong. For young children, place is a space where they make decisions, learn, and connect with each other.

Drawing on the work of Jean Piaget, it has been suggested that **"children begin developing their sense of place during early childhood. Equipped with curiosity and their five senses, young children explore and manipulate materials in their environment to understand the world around them."**[1]

From observation, we noticed that the children were building a city using different materials and discussing their thinking and problem-solving. Seeing the children's interest, we saw the 'city' as a vehicle to explore place. We set up a provocation of a city where they could add some props as they played along.

To further explore the concept of a city, we collectively looked at some photos of different cities. The children described what they saw.

We know this is a picture of a city because there are tall buildings in the city.

There are some road works with witches hats, which means you can't go there.

Also, there is a red arrow that means you can't go there either, so the builders can finish the road work soon. (Fig. 1)

Fig. 1

Bialik College

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

This helped the children to draw details of their city. Seeing the photos gave the children a clearer understanding of what a city looks like and how they could build their own city. Equipped with knowledge from these images, the children chose to draw one aspect of the city. The children used different materials, which presented them with different challenges that were discussed during our group meetings.

There are two different buildings, and they are moving. That means we need to stabilise them. This is all wrong. This will not work. We need to start again. We need to have two blocks side by side, and the block that goes on the top needs to be in the middle of these two blocks to join them together; then it will not be moving. (Fig. 2)

The children expressed that they would like to use blocks and recycling materials to build their city. Those who wanted to build with wooden blocks worked in the mezzanine. A drawing area was set up in the studio and recycling materials were used in the Piazza. (Fig. 3–5)

The children chose the medium that they thought would be most appropriate to make their city. The Early Years Learning Framework strongly supports promoting children's agency and belonging. **"Belonging acknowledges children's interdependence with others and the basis of relationships in defining identities. Independence contributes to self-esteem, identity, and well-being. Doing something for yourself produces a powerful sense of achievement and success."**[2]

There were three groups of children with one educator in each group to facilitate the children's learning. The educators asked the children to consider what areas they wanted in their city and then they were asked to draw a plan.

We need to make five roads like in the picture. Then we can make five places.

I will draw the vet. The vet is a hospital for the animals.

I will draw a hospital for people.

I will draw a farm with a rooster.

I will make a school.

I will make the zebra crossing.

We need flowers for the bees so they can have pollen. Pollen is their food. If they don't get pollen, then they cannot make honey for us.

Let us start with the roundabout and then make the roads. The roundabout is round, and we need something round to make it round, and it has to be big.

Once the children had completed their drawings, they painted their plans and shared these proudly.

Can we make a real city? A real city means we can have trams, trains, and cars like in the real city.

With this enthusiasm, the studio was transformed into a space to build a 3D city with transport. We began with a plan on how we were going to do this.

The trams need a pantograph to run on. These are the black things on top of the tram roof that connect with the cable. A pantograph looks like arms.

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

One of the children began to build a tram track on the studio table. After drawing a line with a big ruler, he said, *I need to fix the track. It is a bit wobbly. The trams cannot run on wobbly tracks.* He then began to build tracks for the trains using wooden tracks.

We need a bridge and a depot for the trains to sleep at night.

We need some people for the transport in our city.

I am making a boat. The boat takes people from one island to another. It is called Dockland.

We have a depot for the trams to sleep at night.

We need an airport for the plane. The plane needs a lot of space to land and to take off.

The energy of our city 'developers' spread quickly, and a group of children came to see if they could also join in the play. The expectation was made clear that they could play, but they needed to make something first to add to the city transport. This encouraged the children to work in collaboration, supporting each other's learning. The children explained what they had made and proudly added their work to the 'city transport' table. (Fig. 6)

According to the Australian Psychological Society, **"belonging is a fundamental human need that most people are driven to satisfy."**[3]

Through building the city transport, we were able to observe the development of children's agency and sense of belonging. Our research became clearer.

When we value children's agency and belonging, it creates an environment where children feel empowered, supported, and motivated to learn. The children were eager to get involved and worked collaboratively on the project. They were able to move independently within the groups to have diverse experiences. When we intentionally set up an environment filled with warmth, innovation, creativity, and exploration, we help our children to make meaningful memories which continue with them as they grow.

The National Quality Standard suggests that **"supporting children's agency is about recognising that children have the right to make choices and decisions and are capable of initiating their own learning."**[4]

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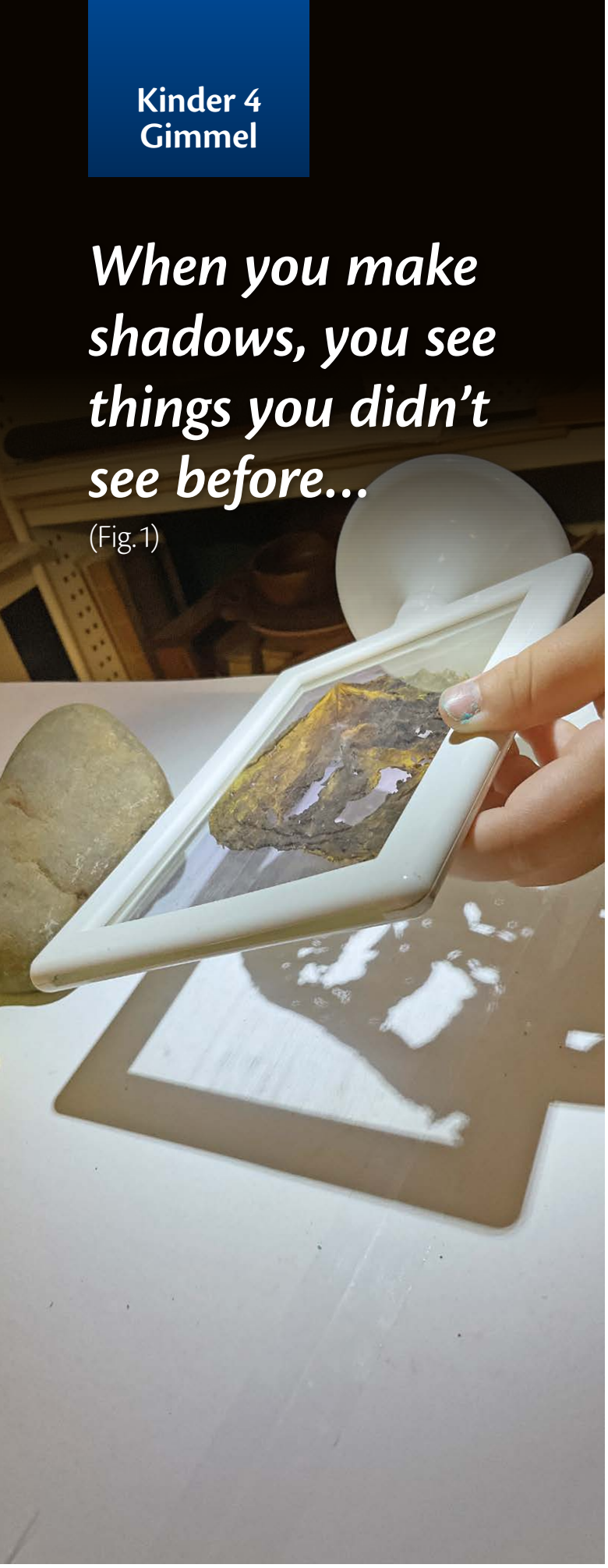
Kinder 4 Gimmel

When you make shadows, you see things you didn't see before...

(Fig. 1)



'Looking' and 'seeing' are important features in the eyes of the children, as they often stop and look and pay attention to very small objects found in their environment. Having been researching the 'magic' of invisible fairies last year, the children formed theories, thoughts, and a clear understanding of the subject without 'seeing' them.

Having worked with this group of children over the past two years, we were inspired by the wonderful discussions, and how much learning and conversation had been provoked through our wonderings in a fantasy world. As educators we were curious about why the fairies had fascinated the children so much and what it was about their tiny treasures that had captured the children's interest. Furthermore, honouring the children's right to imagine impacted positively on their experiences this year and together we embarked on a new research journey of **places we cannot see.**

If I had eyes like the owl, I could see places in the dark like a cave.

If you have yellow eyes, you can see in the dark.

If you want to see big you need good eyesight.

This is a telescope, it makes things closer from far away, but if it makes things look funny, it's not a telescope, it's something else.

If you want to look really close, you need to pinch with your fingers like that to zoom in, and then you see it better.

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

We wondered, what does the connection between place and visibility mean to the children? What is their perception of their own learning in relation to reality, and would light and dark play a part in this investigation?

This is a one-line drawing, you just need to connect it… it's actually a map… if you paint it, you can make it real.

When you think about it, your brain draws the picture and then it comes out of your hand, and you can draw it so everyone can see.

This is a city with animals and people that look after them… we put lots of pinecones for the animal to eat… it's a real city because it's beautiful… we made it, so when you make something, it becomes real.

At this stage the learning was heading in many directions. It was a matter of time and careful listening which guided us. Light sources, a dark corner, a variety of lenses at different spaces around the room and a set of questions pointed us further.

Sometimes when you put magnify glasses like this, it looks funny but when you do this (on top of the glass rock) it looks much bigger. (Fig.2)

If you lift the light higher and more higher it gets bigger until infinity… the light stretches and gets longer than long.

I know what is a reflection.

Reflections make shadows.

A reflection is when you put something on the floor, you see the shadow underneath.

According to Maddalena Tedeschi, **"reflections of light and shadow bring spaces to life. These constant variations create scenarios that make children wonder, inviting them into new exploration and opportunities for learning."**[1] (Fig. 3)

If we use light, the dark can turn to light.

The light makes it lighter.

Light is more better to see.

This [A4 magnify page] is a mirror because when you put it far away it makes things small.

The king has 85 eyes, they all go to sleep at night, but they can still see because they are x-ray eyes… they never stop seeing.

Young children are involved in many scientific experiences in their everyday lives. Experimenting with sources of light provided opportunities to communicate the presence and profoundness of a place, enriching the children's thinking and giving it meaning. Playing with light and dark provoked a new query in the name of 'shadows'. (Fig. 4)

When you make shadows, you make something you didn't see before.

A shadow is something dark in the light.

When fairies fly, their treasure is their shadow.

When you walk around and you look down and its dark, that is a shadow.

When you walk in the light, you find a shadow that is the same thing as you but not inside you.

It's the same shape as your body but bigger, wider and taller.

When I stand up it moves but if I jump in the air, it gets smaller.

You cannot see a shadow in the dark cause the shadow is dark.

Your shadow always stays with you.

When you walk in the sun it's shadow time.

The environment where children can explore, experiment, play, and learn has an important role in building knowledge. The studio in our classroom is a place that provides various media and tools to support children's projects, learning and research activities where they can play and experiment with light and shadows. In this place, they were given the freedom to determine and choose the tools and materials used for exploration and experimental activities to perceive the properties of shadows. (Fig. 5)

It looks more different when we take the cover off because there is more light and we see more different things.

I can see my jumper's shadow because my jumper is magical… when I turned the torch off, the shadow came back… it came out of my jumper.

According to Malaguzzi, it is around the age of four that children perceive a shadow more clearly as a physical object and **"not just as a companion of their play and curiosity."**[2]

Over time, the children's experiments became more focused, and they started to expand their points of view. Their relationships with shadows changed as well. The mobility of the light source became the element that determined the characteristic of the shadow and its composition. (Fig. 6)

When you move the light up and down, the shadow gets bigger and smaller, and everything is light-dark-light-dark.

At night it's a little shadow and in the day it's a big shadow.

In her research, Mollie Peoples explains that children are the owners and initiators of their learning. **"Every time they engage in play, they are developing conclusions and adapting to their environment."**[3]

When you put everything together, it's not the same shadow, but it's still a shadow.

But its not a very good shadow.

I'm making everything a pattern, so everything has a shadow by itself.

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Fig. 9

Fig. 8

If you put only one rock it has a shadow on one side… but if you put all the rocks together, the shadow will be everywhere.

When you put all the shells together, their shadow is lost, but if you separate them, their shadow comes back again.

The next step in our research process was to invite the children to represent their impressions and theories about shadows. Drawing, the language of graphic, is an important process for young children since it can take place in different contexts and enables the creation of meaning as well as supporting thinking and communication. **"Drawing allows us to get a good picture about the children's idea of the phenomena they are currently researching."**[4] (Fig. 7)

In a 2024 symposium with Reggio Children, Sara De Poi, an experienced atalierista stated that **"when you draw there is a dialogue between your eyes and your hands. This dialogue means many things are activated like questions, curiosity, theories and hypothesis; all emerge."**[5]

Sometimes a square body person (wooden figure) has a round shadow, because this person sits on a rock. (Fig. 8)

I need to draw the shadow first, because it's under the person.

It's hard to draw shadow of a person because it's hard to draw the same thing as the person, but it's not a person.

Your shadow copies you, it has to be the same shape as you otherwise its someone else's shadow.

Looking closely at the shadow portraits made by the children, it seems that **"the pictures themselves are shadows that linger over what the children were trying to say."**[6] (Fig. 9)

Furthermore, this appears to represent what our parents' initial thoughts were about 'places you cannot see'. These thoughts emerged from a discussion that took place at a parent evening at the start of the year and included memory, imagination, thinking, the unknown, magic, transparency and different dimensions.

Through this investigation the children's eyes became hunters of super-ordinary events of light and shadows. Their research for the unseen, was full of discoveries, narratives and amazements; and for us, once again, we revealed a great sense of delight and wonder, learning alongside young children.

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Prep

Prep Aleph

How can educators and schools put learning back in place?

This question, put forth by Dr Daniel Wilson, was the focal question of a research project that we participated in this year. Monthly, a small group of educators were fortunate to work with Wilson, Principal Investigator of Project Zero at Harvard University, in order to learn about his more recent research around place and education.

In his article 'Learning in Place: why where we learn matters', Wilson explores the way in which engaging with 'place' can deepen and enrich teaching and learning practices.[1] In his writing, Wilson identifies place as a space for meaning making and social construction. In this way, people give meaning to place, and place gives us meaning. And thus, in our educational context, the conceptual and geographical idea of place should be perceived as a valuable pedagogical practice; that is, 'place-based learning'.

Wilson asks, **"How can we educators find or create places that situate learning more meaningfully in the daily lives, community contexts and local environments in which our learners live?"**[2]

Wilson highlights Dafna Granit-Dgani's epistemological framework to understand what 'place-based learning' looks like.[3] Wilson explores the four intertwining processes of learning **in** place, learning **of** place, learning **from** place and learning **with** place. Understanding these four paths of engagement allows educators to facilitate interactions with place in a meaningful and purposeful way. And placing place in the centre of learning more generally enriches teaching and learning practices.

The concept of place is also embedded in the Reggio Emilia philosophy. Inherent within the philosophy, the environment promotes and imbues it's pedagogical values; including citizenship and democratisation, relationships and advocacy for children's rights and development through the 'hundred languages'.[4] The founder of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, Loris Malaguzzi once said, **"Someone has written that an environment should be a kind of aquarium, mirroring the ideas, the morality, the attitudes and the culture of the people who live in it. We have tried to go in this direction."**[5]

In this way, the children, educators and families engage with the space is invaluable to the Reggio Emilia ecosystem. Often referred to as the 'third teacher' in this context, the environment (space) allows for the daily co-construction, resonation and reverberation of meaning (place).

"For Reggio Emilia, learning is a relational place; a process of co-constructing meaning, always in relationship with others."[6]

On top of these academic inspirations, serendipitously, the Early Learning Centre chose 'Place' as our umbrella idea this year. The purpose of having a chosen concept is to anchor investigations and research.

The physical environment of our classroom has long been a place of research for us as educators. We change, mould and adjust the physical environment for the learning in our classroom based on our understandings of the children, the group itself and the specific learning. As we embarked on a learning journey with a new group of children, we wondered, how can we take the learning beyond the walls of our classroom? Our research questions became clearer.

How can learning in/of/from/with place enrich our children's learning and understanding of the world? What is the importance of place in deepening and broadening learning?

Fortunately, we were able to look at these research questions with authenticity as our teacher Natalie travelled to Italy as part of the 2024 International Study Tour to Reggio Emilia. Having a well-known 'live reporter' in a contrasting city seemed advantageous as we continued to learn from place and considered how we could connect our children to this new place whilst remaining in the physical constraints of our school. The city of Reggio Emilia is a wonderful example of the true potential for learning where children embrace the city in which they live and, in return, the city embraces its children.

The book *'One City, Many Children'* outlines the history of Reggio Emilia and its impact on the present and this was our starting provocation for exploring an unknown place with the children.[7] The children predicted what such a place would look like in conversations and drawings. (Fig. 1)

These are all the houses and here are all the kids and here is the path and the sun and cloud in the sky.

This is the city and the children are looking in the window and a babysitter is cooking and there are three birds on each side and flowers and cars and a sun.

This is the big tall city and these are the kids. There is a kids' lift and a parent lift. They take you up and the stairs are for going down.

My city has cars and there are ten hundred people. Everyone is walking around and making a lot of noise.

There is a stage. There are stars. The city [building] – inside people are working.

It was clear from the reflections that the children's thoughts and ideas were largely shaped from their own personal experiences with cities – possibly the city of Melbourne or others they have visited. (Fig. 2)

The city and history of Reggio Emilia repeatedly reminds us of the importance of **"… built relationships with people and places across the world, weaving a truly global network of dialogue and mutual respect."**[8]

The children began their research by writing letters to their 'live reporter', carefully considering what they wanted to understand about this 'one city with many children'. The opportunity for authentic research was evident in the children's enthusiasm and dedication to these letters. They wrote with confidence and genuine interest.

How did you get there?

Did you sleep in a hotel or a tent?

Are you next to the beach?

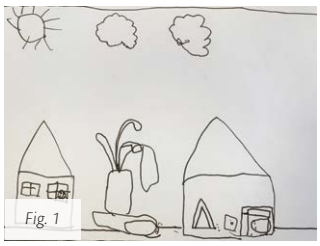
Fig. 1


Fig. 2


Fig. 3


Fig. 4


Fig. 5


Fig. 6

In response, the children received individualised letters with answers to their questions. This information, together with photographs and films that were collected in Reggio Emilia, became the basis of our research in the classroom. The children poured over this evidence and interviewed other teachers about their past experiences in Reggio Emilia. Very quickly the children showed interest and intrigue in the piazzas of this city. They were given many diverse opportunities to explore piazzas; they created their own piazzas out of blocks, they drew the people, animals and places in the piazzas, they created plays combining filmed footage with their live acting, they explored the signs that were there and made their own, they imagined the conversations of those in the piazzas and animated the movement of the animals that called these piazzas home. (Fig. 3-6)

These experiences provided the children new insight into the piazza and what it meant to those who visited.

It was clear that the children's understanding of place was growing as they explored a new place that was less familiar to them. Yet, we continued to wonder how these new understandings would influence their own sense of place here at Bialik.

The term piazza is very familiar to us at Bialik as we have our very own piazzas across the school and, most importantly to our students, is the ELC Piazza that they walk through every day. The word piazza has become a very common word in our lives, but what is it about a piazza that speaks to our children?

Humans like to go to piazzas because there are lots of food, they can dance and they can drink whatever they like. And they can bring their kids and it's nice to eat with your family.

There are people that come and do songs for you guys… and make music so some of you guys can dance.

In the piazza there are lots of people who talk to each other.

People learn there… things they don't know.

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

People walk in the piazza. People sit down on the chairs.

The children were given opportunities to research piazzas in our school. They documented what they saw in drawings and with photographs. They shared their thinking with each other. (Fig. 7–8)

I saw my brother and sister. My sister was playing down ball and my brother was playing dinosaur catches.

The children connected to the ELC piazza specifically. A place that they and their families encounter on a daily basis and, for many of them, have done for several years. They were given many opportunities to observe the ELC piazza using observational drawing, photography and film.

When I was photographing, someone asked me why I was out there with no teacher and with a camera. I said, I was doing research.

After reflecting on the children's thoughts, it was apparent that the children's interest lay in the piazza as a 'meeting place', a place to interact with others. A place to dance, eat, play, talk, sit, walk, run and make music. They told us it was a place for children and adults and animals. With this in mind, we asked the children to consider the piazza as a 'meeting place' and what else they knew about meeting places in their world. What are they? Where are they? Who is there? What is their purpose? In this way the children were developing an understanding about the world around them by learning from place.

The meeting place is where kids or adults or teachers learn how to teach other children to think more better than the adults and see how well they are at counting and writing – letters and numbers.

A meeting place is where you have meetings.

There is a place there so every time you go there, there is a room where you go on your computer and do work.

Meetings places can be city like in a big city… a very big city… the meeting places look like a bunch of windows in blue.

Meeting places are like where you need to be quiet.

Initially, the children were stuck on the word 'meeting' and specifically the formal concept of a meeting that they relate to adults and work. Having said this, with more interaction with the piazza itself and opportunities for further discovery using multiple languages, very quickly their understandings of piazza started to shift.

Meeting places are like parties where you see lots of people.

The piazza is a place for teenagers to go out with friends and have dinner – spaghetti or burgers or chips or pizza or hot dogs and sausages.

You can talk to people and tell them what to do and chat with them about stuff if someone is new.

If we didn't have meeting places or phones, we could make a fire because that is what people do if they don't have meeting places in the country.

Sometimes you go to meeting places for a reason – talk to friends. Or if they are lonely.

Meeting places are where people have chats. They are also in places where people are kind to other people.

Moving forward, meeting places as an anchor will allow our children to engage with place on multiple levels. This investigation may have started in Italy, travelled to East Hawthorn, but the potential for learning goes far beyond. What do meeting places look like and sound like in different contexts and perspectives? What role have meeting places played in our personal and collective histories? Perhaps, a 'kikar' (square) in Tel-Aviv or an Indigenous yarning circle. What can our children learn about the world around them through these meeting places?

A researcher at Project Zero Harvard Graduate School of Education, Ron Ritchhart references David Thornburg's book *'From the campfire to the holodeck'*, when describing a learning space. He writes, **"the campfire represents those moments when we come together to listen and learn as a group, from the elder of the group, who passes on his or her wisdom through storytelling. The waterhole is a place where we learn from peers in small and informal groups that are more conversational and less hierarchical."**[9]

With this in mind, we look forward to the campfires and waterholes as we continue to create our place. And we wonder what role these experiences will have on our children, now and into the future.

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Prep Bet

How does the seed know what it will become?

"Children have the right to be protagonists of their own growth, and their ideas, hypotheses, and interpretations should shape the learning journey."[1]

In the evolving landscape of education, it is paramount to foster an environment where every child's voice is heard. As educators, we are challenged not only to teach but to create spaces where learning is a shared journey, one that honours the diverse perspectives and experiences each child brings into the classroom. By examining how the physical and conceptual arrangement of learning spaces, alongside the intentional provocations provided, influences children's responses, we aim to highlight strategies for creating authentic, inclusive learning experiences that resonate with every child.

As the 2024 school year began, Prep Bet children embarked on their first formal year of schooling. Adorned in their new uniforms, their faces revealed a spectrum of emotions. They were tasked with navigating a new 'place and space' – the classroom environment, re-establishing their roles, and forging new relationships with both peers and adults. Recognising the complexity of this transition, it was vital to honour the child's self-image within educational practice. According to the Reggio Emilia philosophy, successful learning begins with the child's active participation at the heart of the process. Placing the child at the centre of the learning demands that educators critically examine and challenge the cultural paradigms that may impede their full engagement with the child's world.[2]

We understand that each child is a unique individual, eager to explore their identity and express their voice. It is then the teacher's role to support and facilitate this journey of self-discovery and expression.[3]

These characteristics became evident when we facilitated provocations to encourage connection amongst the children and to promote student voice.[4] One day, as the children walked in from their morning tea, they encountered a giant sized zucchini alongside a regular sized one on our classroom mat. This unusual apposition sparked a vibrant discussion and ignited their curiosity about the relationship between the interior and exterior of the fruits. The children speculated whether the seeds of the larger zucchini were the same size as those of the smaller one, and their curiosity soon extended to other fruits, particularly those they favoured.

I think the zucchini got so big because the seeds and the place inside are big.

I think the giant zucchini's seeds are not the same size as the other one (the regular-sized zucchini) because the giant one is big so the seeds will be bigger.

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

There are more seeds in the giant zucchini because there's more space for them inside. (Fig. 1)

To leverage the children's natural curiosity, morning teatime became an important space for them, as a class community, to explore the fruits and vegetables they were consuming. The children began observing each other's snack boxes, noticing and comparing the seeds that accompanied their fruits and vegetables. They shared their seed discoveries with one another, engaging in discussions about the similarities and differences. This interest led to the collecting of seeds, and to further nurture their curiosity, they were provided with cards to organise and display their findings.

In alignment with psychologist Wood et al., supporting children's interests authentically through the Reggio Emilia approach shifts the focus away from a "one-size-fits-all" model in the classroom, instead centring on the children's individual enthusiasm for learning.[5] The capacity to offer attentive listening, recognition, and support for children's rights and needs, led to thoughtful provocations being set out in inspiring the children to further explore their interests.[6]

As the children deepened their engagement with their exploration, they were introduced to the Reach learning approach to further support their curiosity. This was created by the Idea to Action team of Project Zero at Harvard University, led by David Perkins and Flossie Chua. They began by adopting the Explorer Mindset, which encouraged them to "Zoom Out" and consider the broader concept of seeds.[7] Through guided, open-ended yet structured questioning, children are encouraged to explore their thinking more deeply. This approach helps them develop and articulate their ideas and prior knowledge of seeds, allowing them to express their theories and make claims, using vocabulary that aligns with their level of understanding. Using magnifying glasses and self-crafted explorer tools as symbols of the Explorer Mindset, the children examined the seeds they had collected, comparing them to the fruits they had cut open as part of their investigative process. They observed the characteristics of the seeds, their placement within the fruits, and the relationship between the seeds and the fruit. This physical and conceptual space was intentionally designed to create meaningful provocations that stimulate the children's curiosity and inspire their ideas.[8] Detailed observations were documented as the children articulated their discoveries to one another.

This capsicum is smaller and looks like chilli. The seeds look almost the same too but the capsicum smells sweet and the chilli smells so spicy! Yuck! (Fig. 2)

This persimmon has no seeds, but the inside looks like a sun! Actually, kinda like a star! It looks sweet but it tastes like nothing. (Fig. 3)

There are some mandarin seeds in this one and they look the same as these ones (that was collected). (tasted a piece of the fruit) – It's sometimes sweet and sour at the same time… very unique.

Designing authentic learning environments and experiences for children was not without its challenges. By adopting the Reggio Emilia 'Confronto' process, the teacher engages in discussions with fellow educators, collaboratively reviewing evidence of children's learning.[9] This process allowed us to gain insight into the children's thinking. Through these observations, we could better understand how the children were making sense of the world around them. Ultimately, these interpretations of the children's voices were made to further extend their current interests into deeper theoretical exploration.[10] During this process, adult perspectives play a prominent role in analysing the children's documentation, prompting reflection on the complexities of student voice and the hierarchical power dynamics that can inadvertently suppress children's voices.[11] This could lead to a misrepresentation of the children's thoughts, ideas, and intentions, resulting in experiences and expectations that are unauthentic and misaligned with their true needs. It is pertinent therefore for the classroom teacher to advocate for the children's voice rather than merely conveying their messages during the Confronto process.[12]

Fig. 4

Fig. 5


Fig. 7


Fig. 6

There's a small plant inside the strawberry seed. When you plant it, give it water and sunlight, it will grow and grow, and the plant inside will pop out. (Fig. 4)

The roots are inside the avocado seed. Then it comes out from the top of the seed. When there's lots of roots, the baby tree inside the seed will start to grow. When it is a little bit bigger, the baby tree inside will push the seed open like an egg. It will grow bigger until it becomes an avocado tree. (Fig. 5)

Understanding this, a deliberate effort was made to preserve the authenticity of the children's voices, and through their inquiries, it became evident that their primary interest was in understanding what occurs inside a seed as it grows. The children were given the freedom to experiment with their ideas, using illustrations to document and articulate their thoughts and theories.[13] By transcribing the children's hypotheses and how they conceptualised the growth process, we as their educators gained deeper insights into their learning. The children shared and discussed their ideas with their peers, building on and expanding each other's thinking as their conversations developed. This collaborative yet parallel engagement fostered the growth of their perspectives.

In this discussion, it was imperative for us as educators to acknowledge the central role of children's voices in shaping their learning experiences. Collective interpretations gain authenticity only when educators place their observations of children's voices, alongside documented evidence of their interests, at the forefront of the conversation. Furthermore, educators must engage in ongoing reflection, critically examining their own values, beliefs, and assumptions about children. This self-reflection is essential when making informed judgments and decisions throughout the children's learning journey.[14]

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Prep
Gimmel

Wonder and play

"… space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value."[1]

'Place' was chosen as the Early Learning Centre's (ELC) overarching idea to be explored in 2024. It was obvious that for the Prep children starting school the concept of place could be explored through a plethora of opportunities. Our place in a new class, our place within learning and our place in the classroom. There are also the thoughts and feelings that a place can give us and the impact it has on our learning.

These experiences allowed many openings in which to investigate the children thoughts, opinions and theories about place at school and home. There were attempts to explore this through conversations, drawings, small group work; provocations both planned and unplanned.

As it happened, in one of the first few weeks of school, we found a cricket in the classroom. The children's conversation centred around where the cricket's place was.

Mice are not meant to be on beaches. There are not meant to be crickets in the classroom.

They are meant to be outside.

Why?

Because they are nature and nature live outside where there is lots of food, there are lots of things on the ground they can play with. (Fig.1)

Fig. 1

A place for the cricket.

Throughout the Prep year the children developed as learners, conversationalists, investigators and friends. The children were able to share interesting insights and understandings about their place in the world.

It's in my bed and I'm comfy. My sister keeps on waking me up. It's so fun because my dad reads me a book and she ruin it sometimes. She ruins my book sometimes and plays with my lamp.

My couch, I mean my place, is it because it has books, and I can read and play. It's the best I actually love it, it's amazing, it is amazing if it has my books, and I can sleep on it, it turns into a bed, it shines in the moonlight not the sunlight.

We reflected on the children's thinking, drawing and conversations and couldn't help but wonder how by understanding the children's interpretation of places they feel comfortable in, could influence their learning in the classroom. During our conversations as educators, we debated and discussed how to provide provocations, experiences and opportunities for learning within our new space.

We considered how we could better use our physical environment to engage and enhance learning. This opportunity came when the children reflected on the new playground being built at our centre.

I thought the playground was a little bit little. There was only the slide and the stairs, so I just went on the monkey bars.

It was fun but it was little, so Ruby and I went to the bigger equipment.

The climbing thing looked like a spider web.

They shared their thoughts and ideas about the playground, a space with tremendous value for them. The children's enthusiasm to discuss and reflect on a place they know so well was evident. They designed new playgrounds and created prototypes to be included in future playground designs. These experiences were twofold; they allowed us to really look at how the children were engaging in the learning, and which experience provoked a deeper conversation, but they also provided a real-life experience for research. (Fig. 2–4)

The conversations around play with the children highlighted their understanding of play and how they valued it in their own lives. These conversations were an opportunity to extend their knowledge, their access to language around the type of play available to them and to allow them to delve into the importance of play in their lives.

In these conversations around play the educators noted the children had strongly linked the experience of play on a playground with equipment and only with friends.

Play is when you want to play on different things and with your friends, lots of things in the playground.

I think play is when you join with somebody else, and you have lots of fun.

In Jane Attfield research of play and learning, she noted that **"Garvey (1991) suggests that not everything that young children do together can be classified as play… Garvey regards**

Fig. 2

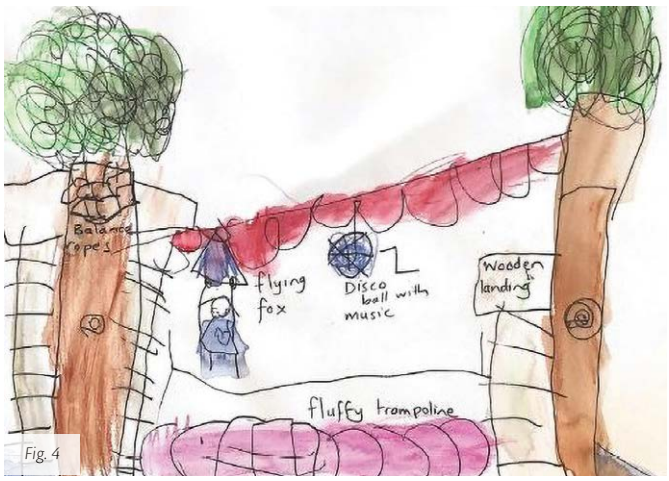

Fig. 4

Fig. 3

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

play as an attitude… There are endless possibilities for what children play with, what they play at, and the imaginary worlds and scenarios they create… Thus what play is, and what it does for the player, cannot be constrained by theoretical or temporal definitions"[2]

This provided a research question: how do the children's experiences of play influence their interactions with learning?

"If playing and growing are synonymous with life itself, then lifelong playing can be seen as an important aspect of lifelong learning."[3] (Fig. 5–6)

The investigation continued and the children were taken out to the playground to do their own research. The children observed how other children played in the playground. They mapped out the areas where the children were playing and what type of play they were engaged in. They compared it to their homes. They took photos, drew their observations and reflected on what they saw. With this new insight the educators relaunched the question: what is play? The conversation and ideas that the children shared expanded and showed a broader understanding.

Play is looking at animals and it makes me happy. All the time I look at my fish, I feel happy, it feels like I'm in their life and part of their home.

I feel when I play; I feel my imagination, I close my eyes, and you don't see anything. Then I see when I close my eyes, I imagine playing on the slide with my friends.

When you play by yourself it feels calm, and you can have fun and do things.

Playing is learning to play.

Further investigation into the role of play in children's learning and development made us wonder if the children's ability to engage in deeper learning correlated to their development of the characteristics needed for play. Educators of children in the early stages of school are constantly finding the balance between meeting developmental needs of the children, societies academic expectations, and the curriculum requirements. But those in the classroom cannot ignore the importance of play to engage, grow and support our learners. (Fig. 7–8)

Alice M. Meckley, a Professor Emeritus of Early Childhood Education, through her study of play, noted that play is a human activity shared across place, history and cultures.[4]

Play is something children and adults engage in. Meckley built on Garvey's definition of play to further develop it. She lists six characteristics of play. The two that relate specifically to the research for this article are **"Play focusing on the doing (process not product)"**[5] and **"Play requires active involvement."**[6]

I saw children in the Bialik Children's Centre playing and dancing. (Fig. 8)

We started to wonder if there are characteristics or values of play that would enhance the children's learning and development? Within our classroom the investigation turned to how can skills develop naturally through play in the classroom. Looking through this prism of play, we were interested in the benefit engaging in play that challenged the children's imagination and wonder, would have on their learning behaviours. This would include patience for the process, perseverance, curiosity, and conversations. We also thought about the concept of being comfortable with being uncomfortable, allowing for growth without a concern about the end result.

As we continue to explore the concept of play as a place of understanding our children and their abilities, we observe how they navigate learning skills with greater confidence. We also wonder how this place full of wonder and play will impact our children's learning now and in the future.

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Jewish Studies

Our Place is Israel

Can a place be figurative? This is what we tried to extract from the children, and with all respect to them, not only did they succeed in understanding this concept but also broadened our perspective with their incredible thinking and imagination. At the start we, as their teachers, needed to set the structure and ask pertinent questions.

Being a pluralist Zionist Jewish school, the children are exposed to the land of Israel and a love for Israel from a very young age. They celebrate Shabbat (the Sabbath) every week, learn about the Jewish festivals and the spoken language Hebrew, which is taught from kindergarten. The idea of Israel, Zionism and our Jewish identity are all linked.

Biblical timeline connected to Israel

For the children to understand this connection, we went back in history to explain this concept from grassroots and in so doing created a timeline.

The children were fascinated with the story of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt and so this was our starting point. They created a timeline with visual drawings in order to understand the sequence of events. (Fig. 1) They participated in a 'Step Inside' routine and were divided into three groups. One group drew Egypt. They drew slaves and pyramids and palm trees and cacti. This group had to think about how the newly freed slaves were feeling and had to show their facial expressions, as well as their clothing. The next group drew the Children of Israel in the desert. They created people, donkeys, camels and hot sand. This group had to focus on what the people wore in the unforgiving, hot climate as well as the feelings of the people that oscillated between extreme happiness

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

at being free and contemplating a life in the desert where food and water were scarce. The third group focused on the receiving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. This group focused on the Children of Israel purifying and cleansing themselves in their readiness and excitement to receive the Torah, the Jewish laws from God. (Fig. 2)

This aligned with this year's Early Learning Centre theme of 'Place'. A place has the power to transform us in unexpected ways. We encounter different experiences, and perspectives that challenge and transform us. We asked the children:

Do you think that the children of Israel changed in any way from when they were slaves in Egypt?

They were free now, so they were happy.

But they weren't so happy, they didn't know how to be happy and free yet because they were slaves for such a long time.

Still, they knew that God was taking them to Israel, the land that He had promised them.

This made us wonder, how can we truly understand and experience a place that we haven't physically visited?

Teaching a language together with the culture

This is the essence of our investigation. We had every faith that the children would endeavour to explore this possibility. Most of this group of children had never been to Israel. In their eyes, Israel is a place that they have connected with through bible stories and the stories of the Jewish festivals such as Passover, Shavuot and Yom Ha'atzmaut (Israel's independence day). Through stories of heroic figures, majestic landscapes and bustling cities, these young children embarked on a journey of discovery, experiencing the essence of Israel with a sense of wonder and curiosity. As second-language educators, our philosophy is that language and culture are interconnected. Soran Karim Salim claims in his article, Teaching Language and Teaching Culture, that there is a symbiotic relationship between language and culture. This can occur through experiences and explorations.[1] As teachers, it is important for us to portray modern Israel. For example, we introduced the children to a popular Israeli board game, 'Shesh Besh'. (Fig. 3) Through this the children learnt another aspect of the Israeli culture. We are also fortunate that technology is available to enhance our connection to a far place and so we used multimedia as a tool to enrich their experience of the culture.

Exploring Israeli culture through the five senses

In recent years there has been a rise in research on the senses. David Howes is a Professor of Anthropology at Concordia University and editor of the Sensory Formations series. Howes challenged assumptions of mainstream western psychology by emphasising the wisdom of the senses shaped by culture. He said that we develop a sense of place and belonging through daily smelling, touching, seeing, hearing and tasting and described this as **"a sensory revolution"**.[2]

In our daily teaching, we include the culture of Israel, and we decided to explore our learning through the five senses.

In his poem from *The Hundred Languages*, Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio Emilia philosophy, talks of the way children are creative and active in building their knowledge and how they understand the world not only as it is told but also in one hundred different ways, through all their combined senses and with all their individual personalities and ideas.[3]

We felt that we were on the right path and that our children had understood that there is not just one way to experience a place that is important to our Jewish culture.

These sensory feelings are most decidedly a part of our cultural heritage.

Our research was to see if a group of children could identify with a country that they had never visited, yet was very much part of their culture and whether it could evoke a feeling of identity and belonging. A sense of place comes from a feeling of connectedness, be it physical, emotional or spiritual.

The sense of listening

The children were asked to turn away from a screen set up in the classroom and listen to a short video clip about Bazaar Walk which is in the Carmel market in Israel. This is a well-known iconic market in Tel Aviv where Hebrew is spoken. The market comprises many voices and sounds that represents a part of the Israeli culture.[4]

The children had to attempt to identify what they had heard.

It's really noisy. I think that they are shouting in Hebrew.

It sounds like a supermarket and lots of people are talking.

The second listening exercise was listening to a conversation in a different language, in this case, French.

It's a different language that I've never heard of.

It sounds a bit like Hebrew, but it isn't Hebrew.

The next listening experience was listening to a conversation in Hebrew.

This was definitely in Hebrew.

I didn't understand it, but it was Hebrew.

If you didn't understand it, how did you know that it was Hebrew?

Because Hebrew speaks like Hebrew and the other one was a different language.

The children then listened to two Hebrew songs that they had heard before, 'Yisrael Sheli' and 'Hurricane.'

I've heard of the first one before. It's about Israel.

It means 'My Israel'.

Some children started dancing to this song and created their own instruments, tapping to the music with pencils on the chairs and tables.

The second song was Israel's entry into the Eurovision competition of 2024.

The children recognised the language and the songs, which added proof that language is embedded into their cultural background. Their cultural connection was evident in the way they acted and behaved when the language was familiar to them, but not necessarily understood. (Fig. 4)

Fig. 4

The sense of sight

The children were exposed to a variety of photos of places in Israel. They perused these photos and shared what they already knew about Israel. They were given the opportunity to choose a photo that they connected with the most and were told that they would have time to paint their chosen image. (Fig. 5–6)

I chose this one because the fish looked happy, the coral looked nice, and I wanted to go there.

When I was little, I went to the Kotel (Western Wall), and I put a note in it.

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

When I went to Israel, I went to the Shuk (market) every day.

This picture makes me want to go and live in Israel.

I want to take a vacation there.

Actually, it's crazy looking at these photos – I think I'm there but I'm only looking at photos. I like them, they are all different.

The children were clearly engaged in the photos they had chosen which showed that the sense of sight proved to be a strong sense, allowing the children to physically feel that they were in Israel.

Exploring each other's paintings in class encouraged them to analyse the different places and to connect once again with Israel. (Fig. 7)

Smell and taste

Well known disability rights advocate, Helen Keller, who was blind and deaf wrote:

"Smell is a potent wizard that transports you across thousands of miles and all the years you have lived."[5]

In our Jewish Studies we explore the different festivals through traditional Jewish and Israeli food. For example, on the festival of Yom Ha'atzmaut we eat an authentic Israeli lunch. This includes pita bread filled with felafel, Israeli salad, hummus and delicious pickles. (Fig. 8) On Yom Ha'atzmaut, the building is filled with the aroma of Israel. Another common example, every Friday the children experience the smell and the taste of Challah baking (traditional bread of Shabbat) which sifts through the whole building.

Touch

Learning about Israel through the sense of touch proved to be more of a challenge as it could only be experienced by physically being in the place. In order to overcome this challenge, we invited the children who have visited Israel to share their experiences of the different sites.

I touched the stones of the Kotel when I was there, it was rough.

I swam in the Dead Sea. It's amazing, you just float.

Our final question was – **What did you use to know about Israel and what do you now know?**

We showed the children a short video clip on Israel.

The children related to this with wonder. Some of their comments were:

I never realised that Israel was such a busy city.

I didn't know that Israel was so beautiful.

I thought Israel was a poor country, but now I know it's not.

The children drew and wrote what appealed to them most about Israel.

From our investigation this year, it is evident that in our world we can connect with distant places even without physically being there. Through the power of experiences, explorations, imagination and sensory engagement, one can have a deep connection to a place.

Our senses can form a connection to a place even though it is beyond our immediate reach.

Our Place is Israel!

Am Yisrael Chai!

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Year 1

Year 1
Aleph

Exploring the night sky and what lies beyond

When an investigation begins one often wonders in which direction the children's explorations and thinking will go. The ELC overarching theme 'Place' provided us with a myriad of opportunities to follow, allowing for a depth of thinking, curiosity and anticipation of what was to come.

In Daniel Wison's presentation on developmental cultures – creating conditions for learning, thinking and understanding, he discussed the importance of creating an environment that fosters curiosity. He posed the questions, **"How are places designed to spark surprise, wonder, awe, and amazement? How do they support noticing, inquiry, and exploration?"**[1]

In the classroom the children are given a quiet, protected time each day to choose and revisit books they are captivated by to share and discuss in small groups, providing the opportunity to build on and develop relationships with their peers through mutual interests. During this time we noticed that many of the children gravitated to books about space and began discussing what they noticed. (Fig. 1–2)

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

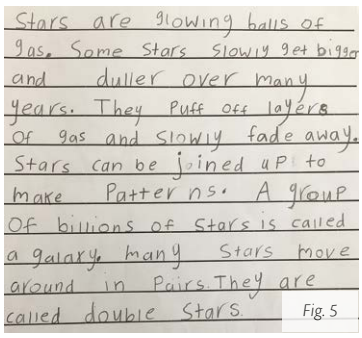

Fig. 5

When you fly around the world you go up above earth, and then when you reach the place you are going to you go down back to earth. You can see earth from where you are in space.

When you are on earth looking up at the moon it looks like it's very small, but when you go into space to the moon the moon is really big. It looks small because it's so far away.

This led us to look at our place in space and the many avenues the children could explore. During the children's initial conversations it became apparent that they knew a lot of factual information.

An asteroid ring is a lot of asteroids combined and when it hits a planet or something in space they all break up into individual asteroids.

The sun is made out of hot gas, you can't see gas.

Earth is the third closest to the sun. The moon is the brightest thing in the whole solar system. (Fig. 3–5)

The children's fascination with facts was a challenge as we wanted to nurture the children's curiosity, imagination and wonder. How do we pique children's curiosity when they have so much prior knowledge? For us this highlighted the significance of choosing a provocation that would provide the best vehicle for the children to further explore their wonderings and engage their curiosity and imagination.

"If imagination is the power of the mind over the possibilities of things, then to neglect the imagination is also to impoverish children's worlds and to narrow their hopes. The possibilities of things – the counterfactual world of supposings and imaginings – make it possible for children to stretch themselves beyond their everyday realities and confront experience with the question 'What if?'"[2]

Being mindful of the importance of the provocation we choose enables us to ensure that the children's curiosity and use of their imagination is fully realised. With this in mind we used a seminar meeting with colleagues to brainstorm a provocation that could do exactly this. Our pedagogist showed us some panels about the sky that was created by a group of children some years ago and we wondered if this might be a catalyst to spark the children's inquisitiveness.

We gave the children time to observe the panels using the 'See, Think, Wonder' routine, hoping their conversations would provide a springboard for the direction we would take.

I think the panels are all about the sky and how the sky looks.

I think they all did it at different times of the day and night because some have the sun and some have the moon. When I look at the pictures they look like they are from a different part of space because they're all different.

I wonder if because the sun shines so brightly the stars are still in the sky but you can't see them.

I wonder why the moon can be seen during the day but you can't see the sun at night.

It appeared to us from the children's comments that they were intrigued by the night sky and what lay behind it.

"Children are curious by nature, everything is new and the desire to explore, discover and understand their world is a powerful motivator for learning."[3]

To give them time and opportunities to further explore their wonderings we wrote a letter to our cohort of parents asking them to give their children the chance to observe the night sky from their garden, at different times and in different weather conditions, and to have the children record their observations through written comments, drawings and photographs.

It was wonderful to observe the children discussing what they had seen the night before as they were unpacking their bags and the sheer excitement they imbued.

Did you see the huge moon last night? I took a photo of it using an app my mum put on her phone.

I saw it too. It was a blood moon, it was so red and it was so big.

Looking at the night sky and space from other places provided the children with an opportunity to further explore their world through another lens.

"Explorers step out into the unknown and look around using whichever tools seem best for exploring interesting and important sides of a topic."[4]

We discovered the value and importance of giving children the opportunity to learn outside the classroom. This provided the children with the opportunity to continue to explore and further their wonderings, ultimately helping them to make sense of the world around them.

"From the very beginning curiosity and learning refute that which is simple and isolated. Children yearn to discover the measures and relations of complex situations."[5]

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

Fig. 9

Fig. 10

Fig. 11

I wonder how far away the moon and stars are from earth so that the clouds are able to cover them so that you can't see them.

I find it so interesting that the moon can be a different shape and size on different nights. I think maybe the moon is changing because it is moving further and further away from Earth causing it to change shapes.

Based on the children's observations, thoughts and wonderings of the night sky from other places, we carefully considered how to relaunch our investigation. Children need time and space to be creative and the opportunity to use different media and tools to express this creativity. Taking this into consideration we set up the studio with the photos, drawings and wonderings from their home observations and provided a variety of mediums they could use to recreate the night sky based on their understandings. (Fig. 6–8)

Their creations and designs gave them another language to explain and express their viewpoints, thoughts and understandings of the night sky. This allowed for rich and varied discussions to take place in small groups in the studio. Through this investigation we noticed children's theories change and evolve when given opportunities to explore and research their wonderings and curiosities.

I think the moon is changing shapes because it's moving further and further away, causing it to change its shapes.

I love that we could see the Milky Way, moon and a group of stars really clearly with our eyes. This makes me want to learn more about the sky and space and I can't wait to look at a clear sky when I go camping.

It appears clear from their observations, that if we equip the children to develop and research their wonderings then we set them up with the ability to explore and understand the world around them without limiting their imagination and curiosity.

The opportunity to collaborate with home furthered our investigation highlighting the importance of school/home partnerships. (Fig. 9–11)

Reggio Emilia educator Professor Carlina Rinaldi states that, **"Participation involves the children, the families, and the teachers and is viewed not only as taking part in something but being part – the essence, the substance of a common identity, a "we" which comes alive through participating."**[6]

From what the children had observed when looking at the night sky at home, they became very interested in clouds – their shape, texture and colour. So maybe, the next time you look up at clouds, perhaps you will be reminded of the importance of curiosity and imagination.

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Year 1
Bet

How do REACH mindsets deepen our thinking?

This year Flossie Chua, principal investigator at Project Zero, and David Perkins, Professor of Teaching and Learning Emeritus at the Harvard Graduate School of Education have been working with Bialik educators on the REACH project. This project entailed trialling three mindsets to encourage learning through creative enquiry.

The mindsets required the children to take on three different roles during their learning – that of Explorer, Investigator and Innovator.

"The mindsets are the frames or lenses through which we see the world. This approach is designed to transform the teaching of subject matter in ways that deepen understanding, foster thinking and learning skills and dispositions, and promote/ foster transfer of learning to students' lives."[1]

These mindsets provided us with unique tools to support the children's investigation.

We could not help but wonder how these mindsets could enhance our children's learning; enabling them to uncover more, think deeper and make connections that may not have been made previously.

Before introducing the Explorer mindset to the children, we decided to first uncover their thinking about an 'explorer'.

Explorers see things in their magnifying glass, and they write it in their journey book.

The explorer thinks of what to do next.

He thinks about checking things.

Looking at their drawings and explanations we noticed that the children's thinking of an explorer aligned with the REACH Explorer mindset. (Fig. 1–2)

"The mindset develops attitudes and skills toward looking at the world broadly and deeply, seeing how things fit together, and drawing out implications."[2]

Fig. 1

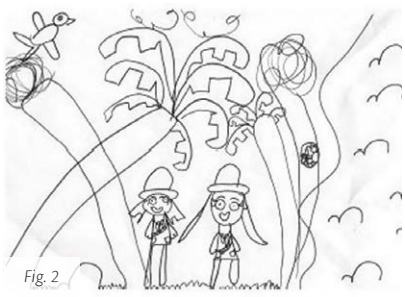

Fig. 2

The Explorer looks at three complementary themes on the same topic: Zooming In, to understand the parts of a topic, Zooming Out, to examine how that topic connects widely, and Zooming Through Time, for how the topic developed and where it's going.

As educators, we have both the responsibility and pleasure of creating opportunities that encourage the desire for knowledge, the sharing of theories and the questioning of hypotheses.

We decided to share with the children the book, *Where the Forest Meets the Sea* by Jeannie Baker.[3]

The children were excited to step into the role of Explorer when reading the story.

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

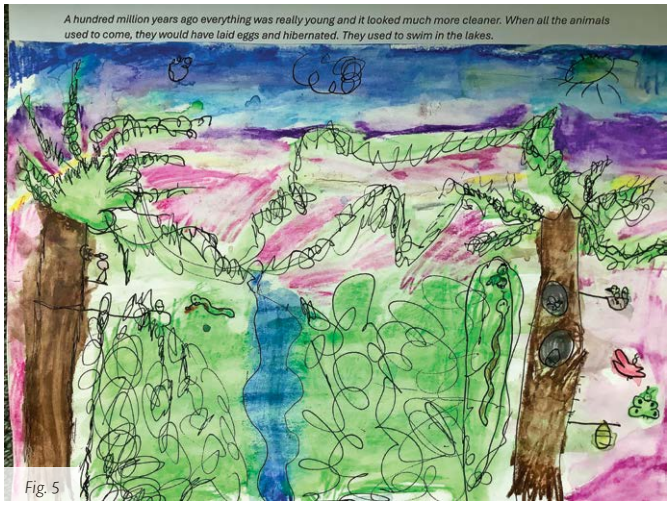

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

The book begins… 'My father knows a place we can only reach by boat'.

This was a wonderful springboard to explore our umbrella idea, 'place'.

As the children began to share their thinking, we noticed how their view of place sparked wonder and curiosity.

A place is somewhere you can have adventures.

Somewhere where there are birds and animals.

A place is somewhere you can go to make memories.

The importance of 'place' for the children revealed the constructing and forming of relationships with each other and with nature and animals, creating meaningful experiences lasting through time, to be preserved for reflection – creating memories.

Looking closely at the illustrations, the children noticed a name on the boat, 'Time Machine'. Here we saw evidence of the Explorer mindset in action and how looking for detail led the children to make connections and to see how ideas fit together.

The Time Machine is there because you can make memories so that when you get bigger you can think back to that time. (Fig. 3)

The author's intention was to give the reader insight into the theme of how a place changes over time. Our children were fascinated at what they discovered about time as they zoomed in further.

What do we want place to look like and be like over time?

Or, perhaps looking back; have our actions changed a place over time?

The Explorer mindset of zooming through time was a perfect connection to the text that read, 'My father says there has been a forest here for over a hundred million years.' (Fig. 4)

The children were asked to draw what they thought the forest may have looked like a hundred million years ago.

A hundred million years ago everything was really young, and it looked much cleaner.

A hundred million years ago in the rainforest there were no people.

A hundred million years ago there were dinosaurs who ruled the world. The documentaries that I have watched taught me about how that time was. (Fig. 5)

The Explorer mindset was key to the children's continued awareness when searching for detail, highlighting and following the author's intention of and attention to time and place.

They wrote their reflections of what they thought were the important parts of the story and were supported by a teacher to identify a claim that could be explored further.

As the children spent more time revisiting the story, discussing and debating the intricate details, such as the bones in the water, they found themselves in a place of authentic research.

I think there might be crocodile bones in the water.

Crocodiles are dinosaurs because they changed over time.

I think they are dinosaur bones because like people they die.

You could scrape off some DNA from the fins to see what animal it was. Left over skin has DNA in it which you can test to see what animal it is. (Fig. 6)

This seemed like a natural link to the next mindset of the REACH project – the Investigator mindset.

The Investigator mindset follows three themes, **"Question Finding, to understand and sometimes sharpen up the question, Evidence Finding, to round up evidence and assess its strength, and Conclusion Finding, to consider what and how strong a conclusion."**[4]

The children began to consider their claims, question their theories and search for evidence through research.

Taking on the role of Investigators the children saw themselves as detectives actively searching for resources to help them back up their claims. As the children worked in small groups, we observed rich discourse and debate which helped them clarify hypotheses and reason with evidence.

Their tools for research were books, maps, models of dinosaurs and magnifying glasses when looking at tiny photographs and diagrams, to help them uncover their evidence. (Fig. 7–8)

I wonder what tree is the oldest in the jungle.

You count the rings, and the trees gain a ring every year. I found this information in a book called Trees, by June Loves. (Fig. 9)

My claim is that the author probably went to the forest. The boy is dreaming that the forest is turning into a city and all the invisible pictures were from the past.

I claim the forest is magical because there is evidence the trees can change their taste of their leaves so the animals don't eat the leaves. The trees talk to each other. I read this in the book, The Gentle Genius of Trees, by Philip Bunting.

The forest went into a ghost forest. It looks like footprints. Lots of people came and lots of footprints came.

At the back of the book there is a map, and it shows the Daintree Forest and Jeannie Baker wrote that she has been there.

The forest was all forest at the start of the book and at the end of the book the forest was turning into a city. Jeannie Baker was trying to tell us to keep nature, or it will end up like it did on the last page when it was a city.

Using the Investigator mindset encouraged the children to deepen their understandings and further their thinking. Instilling the importance of creating an awareness of questioning by testing theories and the source of information, substantiating claims through investigative research.

We observed the children innately using these mindsets when applying their research skills during our literacy focus on non-fiction text. The children began recommending books they had discovered that would further the curiosity of their peers in assisting their research of a topic of their choice.

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

Fig. 9

Significant evidence emerged from granting the children tools that the REACH mindsets provided. This enabled them to develop new perspectives, questioning and a deepening of learning and research through creative inquiry.

We continue to examine the Innovator mindset and the impact the three REACH mindsets have on equipping the children with new tools of thinking. We wonder how this will extend the children's learning beyond the classroom environment into their own lives.

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Year 1
Gimmel

Everyone is a traveller

Children are naturally curious with an innate desire to explore and broaden their knowledge. At the Bialik Early Learning Centre (ELC) we are fortunate to stay together as a class for two years, allowing us to develop strong bonds, connections and share in the learning journey of the children we teach. At the beginning of the new school year the children arrived with a buzz of excitement, returning to the familiarity of their classmates and teacher, albeit going into a new classroom.

We began the year sharing the story, 'The World Needs Who You Were Made to Be' by Joanna Gaines.[1] This text was chosen intentionally to help the children understand the importance of themselves, their differences and their place within our classroom, the ELC and the school.

A chance comment by a teacher visiting our classroom was a spark in our investigation. The teacher shared; **I wish I could teleport myself to the 'Big' school.** This sparked a flurry of conversations and questions about what teleport means.

Teleport means it can take you places you want to go.

It quickly became clear that this could be a wonderful provocation for the exploration of our ELC's big idea 'place'. As the children discussed this idea further, the concept of journeys to the past and future arose.

A time machine takes you back in time and into the future.

A time machine takes you into a year that has already been or a time in the future.

We wondered how this interest in time travel and journeys could help the children learn about the unknown and the world in which we live.

The children were keen to hear stories of adventures and travels. Through travel blogs of journeys taken by others, we learnt about places we had neither seen nor heard of. Literature was also used to enrich the children's understanding of travel. We shared the story 'Dirt by Sea' by Michael Wagner, about a father and daughter who live in outback Queensland and travel around Australia.[2] (Fig. 1) This led us to wonder; why does a traveller embark on a journey? This question was posed to the children who had many varying views.

They want to explore the world… they want to go because they haven't been there before.

They want to explore the world because there are new things.

Travellers don't just go to one place. Travellers don't generally plan the trip, they just go!

I don't think that travellers only go to lots of places because once I went on a trip and went to one place. Everyone is a traveller.

As we continued to reflect on these thoughts, it became clear we needed to know what the children's current understandings were of a 'traveller'. The children shared interesting insights and understandings through drawings and conversations. (Fig. 2–3)

People who travel – travel because they want to find out what is going on around the rest of the world.

A traveller is someone who can visit people in all different places.

A traveller is someone who goes to places and explores the world.

When delving deeper into the children's understandings we asked them to consider what a traveller feels in their heart. The children agreed that travelling and exploring brings excitement and joy for what is new.

I think they are feeling excited and happy because they are excited to go to a new place. There is lots to look forward to… try new food, meet new people.

I think travellers are really excited because when they get to a place they get to explore new stuff.

As the American space agency NASA states, astronauts have discovered **"Since the dawn of humanity, people have explored to learn about the world around them, find new resources, and improve their existence."**[3]

The more we spoke about travelling and exploring the more it became apparent that through travelling and taking journeys we are giving ourselves the opportunity to learn and grow. How is the natural process of learning when travelling mirrored in our children's learning at school? How, as educators, do we inspire curiosity and nurture an intrinsic desire for knowledge in each child's learning journey on a daily basis?

You can learn in one place you have been. You can still explore it again because you might forget, or you might remember.

The children identified the importance of revisiting a place. We couldn't help but wonder is this not the same as revisiting a concept when at school. Within our Year One classroom we are learning about the mathematical concept of Time and although this is not the first experience for the children in this unit, through revisiting the topic, the children are able to cement previous teachings, dismiss any misconceptions, whilst also further expanding their understandings through new language and experiences related to this concept. (Fig. 4)

I could learn from other people – people who live there. Learn from things they do and from exploring.

Fig. 1

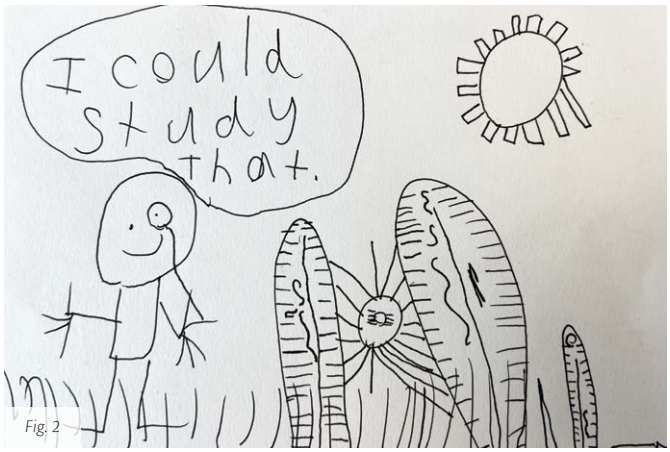

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

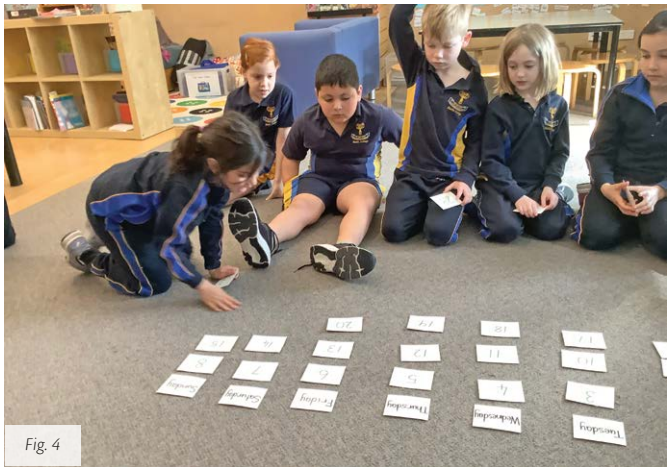

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Is the process of learning from others through travel, the same as learning from each other within a classroom? As we look around the classroom, we see children asking one another for help and together they are problem solving on a daily basis. The children constantly rely on each other to learn and grow within a classroom. (Fig. 5–6)

Travellers learn through experiences – trying things.

Learning through experiences and exploring the world around them, just like the traveller, the children can use this same concept within their own classroom environment. (Fig. 7)

Within their daily play the children are often exploring and trying different ways to solve problems when the initial solution does not work. In the classroom when completing construction tasks, the children find objects which are suitable for their design. This can involve trialling different shaped objects to find the best result. The use of technology gives opportunities for the children to demonstrate their learning in innovative ways. It requires perseverance and trial and error to learn the appropriate skills and programs.

With the concept of 'place' in mind, we as educators can use our physical environment to create learning opportunities for the children through creative provocations, to engage with experiences that allow for trial and error and exploration.

It is clearly evident, that without realising it, the children are all travelling on their own learning journeys and the skill of the traveller exists within our classroom every day.

"Children are born with a deep, innate desire to understand their world. They're born with a natural enthusiasm for discovery. And it's up to us – their parents, caregivers and educators – to constantly nurture that curiosity and travel alongside them on their path of exploration and wonder."[4]

As the children complete their final year at the ELC, we wonder what more they will discover as they travel into the unknown and what skills from their travels in the ELC will support them on their new adventures.

References:

1. Gaines, J. and Swaney, J. (2020). *The world needs who you were made to be.* Nashville, Tennessee: Tommy Nelson, An Imprint Of Thomas Nelson.
2. Wagner, M. (2022). *Dirt by Sea.* Random House Australia.
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4. O'Brien, S. (2022). *Children are born curious – Seriously Kids.* [online] Seriously Kids. Available at: https://www.seriouslykids.com.au/children-are-born-curious/.

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Bialik Children's Centre Aleph & Bet

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ALEPH ROOM: Ana De Moraes, Tony Penna, Joanna Li
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Sam Cashen, Tung Nguyen, Lareina Chen. Sunny Kim, Serene Wangmo

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