

The Eagle Project

Originating from children's interest in birds, the 'real world' sighting of majestic eagles flying over the kinder and inspired by Bunjil the creator deity of Aboriginal mythology. Children engaged with this idea passionately and it became our 'big idea' or 'essence of intent' (Oken-Wright, 2002).

August 2020



We have been noticing eagles in the sky over kinder.



Can you see it? This one was here on Monday the 22nd of August. Last term we saw three circling to the east.





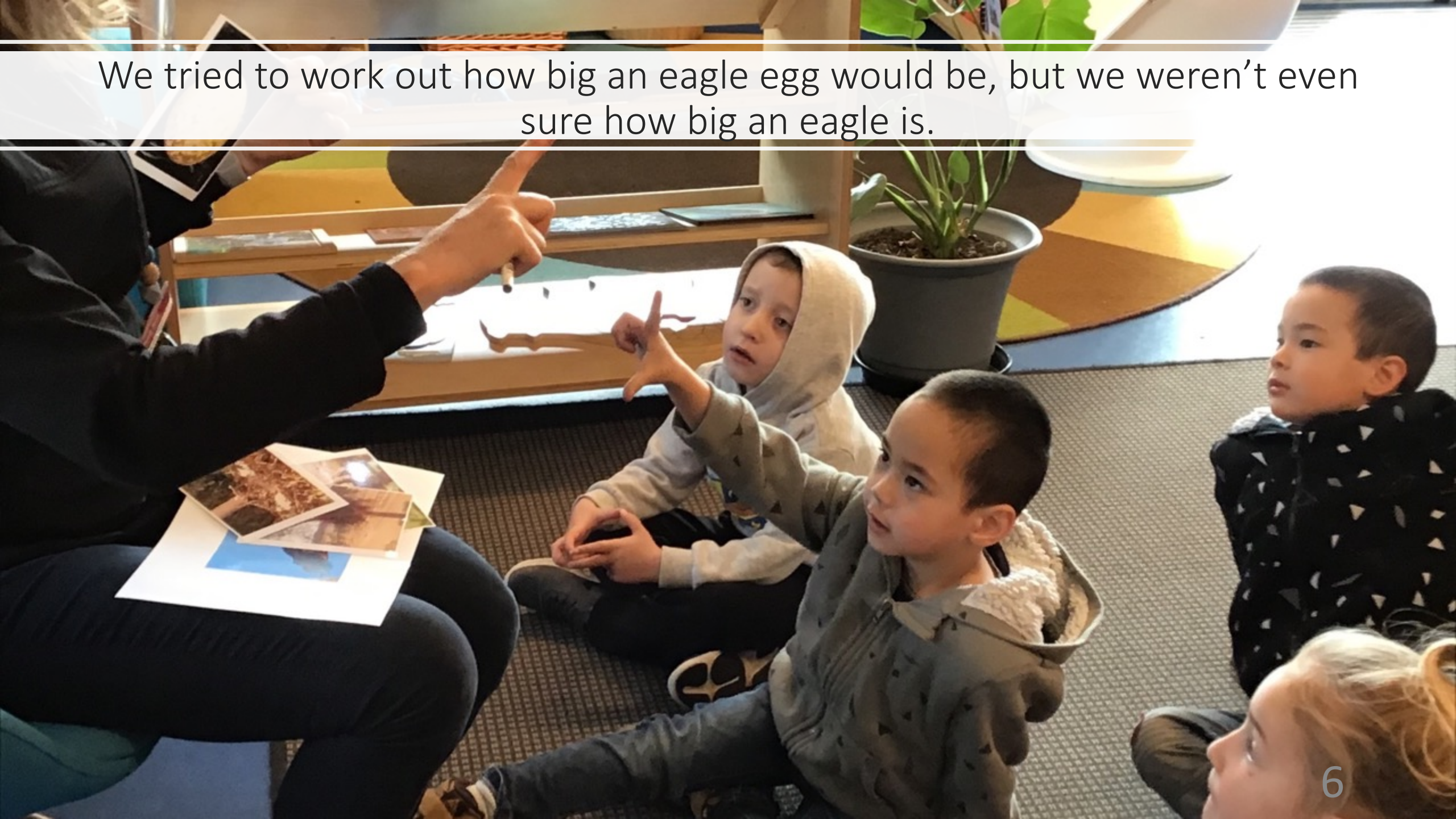
We know a lot about birds now, but what do we know about eagles?

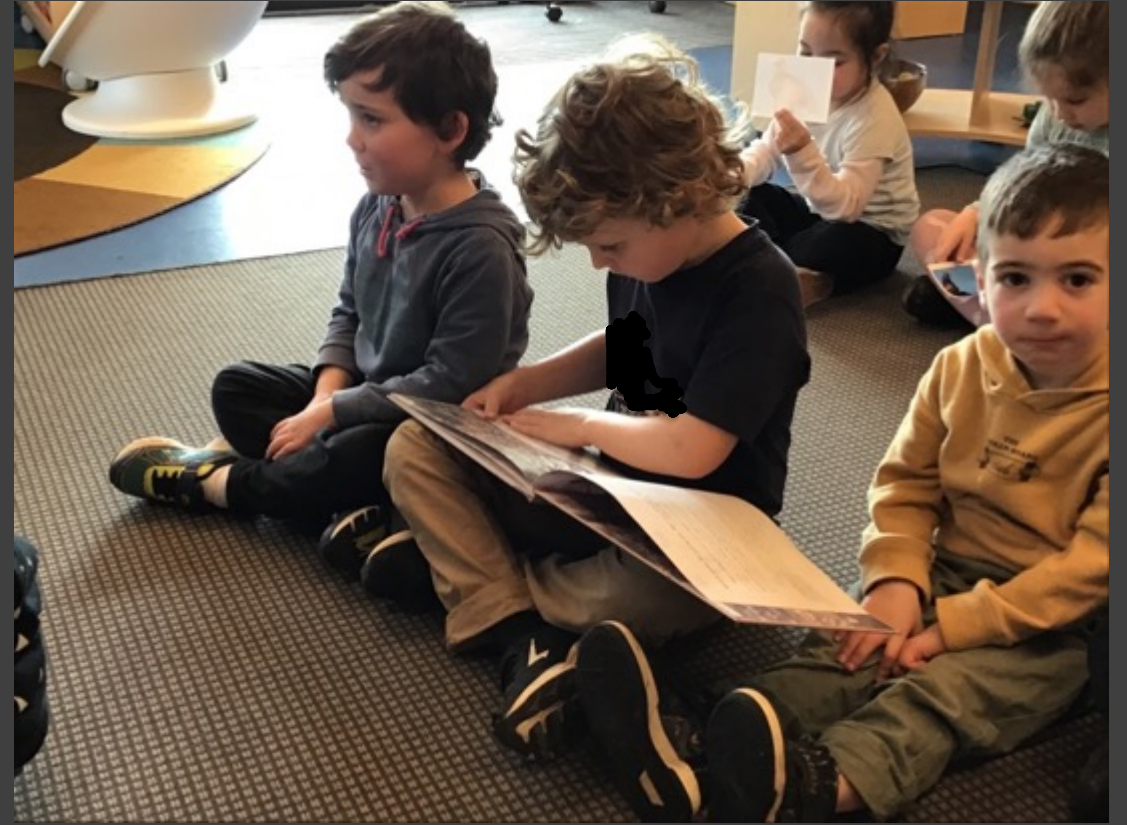
- We began by reading a book made by the Balnarring Preschool about an eagle called Bundjil (Parbin-ata, 2018).



Then we made notes about everything we did know.

We tried to work out how big an eagle egg would be, but we weren't even sure how big an eagle is.





We had some research to do.

- Looking through the book, there were some exciting examples of artwork done by the children at Balnarring Kindergarten.

Mind-map Eagle Knowledge

In fork trees
30m above
ground

Made of sticks

2-5m deep, 2-5m
wide

They return to
the same nest
each year

“Do eagles make nests?”

“When do they make nests?”

Laws “Are all eagles birds?”

“Why do some birds have nests on
the ground?”

81-106 cm females
bigger than males

Snake “Do they use their legs to climb up trees?”

Buzz “Do they have a tail?”

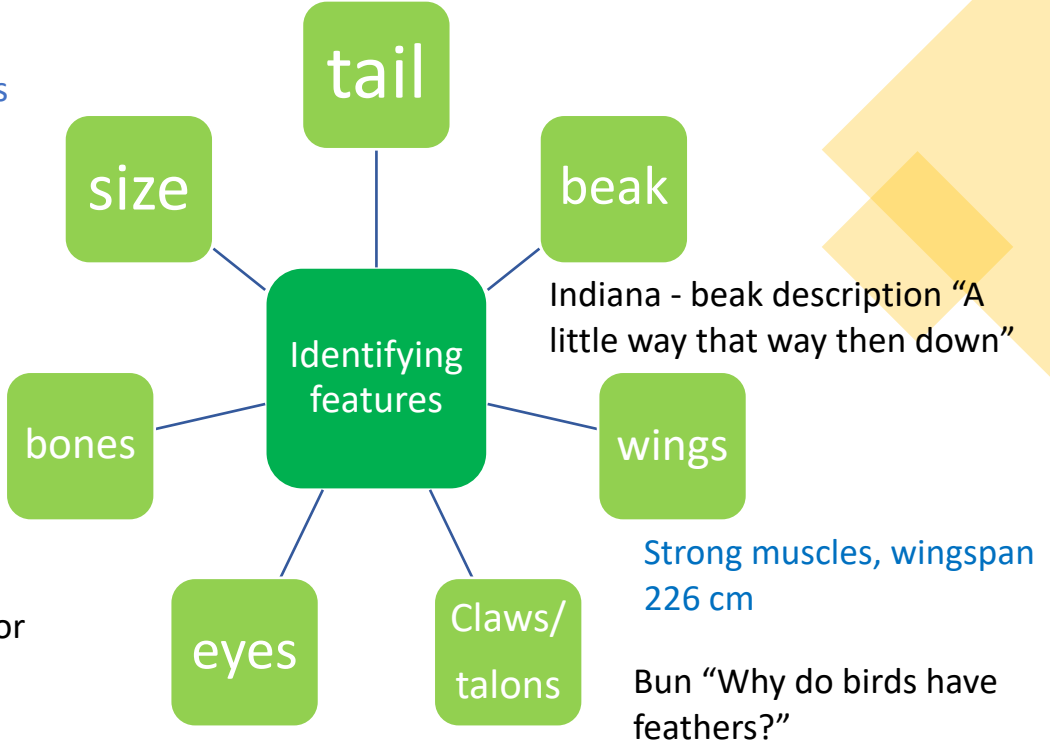
Unique wedge-shaped tail

Slinky “How do birds
lay eggs? How do they
hatch?”

“How big are the eggs?”

Both parents sit on the
eggs and feed the young

“Why do chicks look
different?”

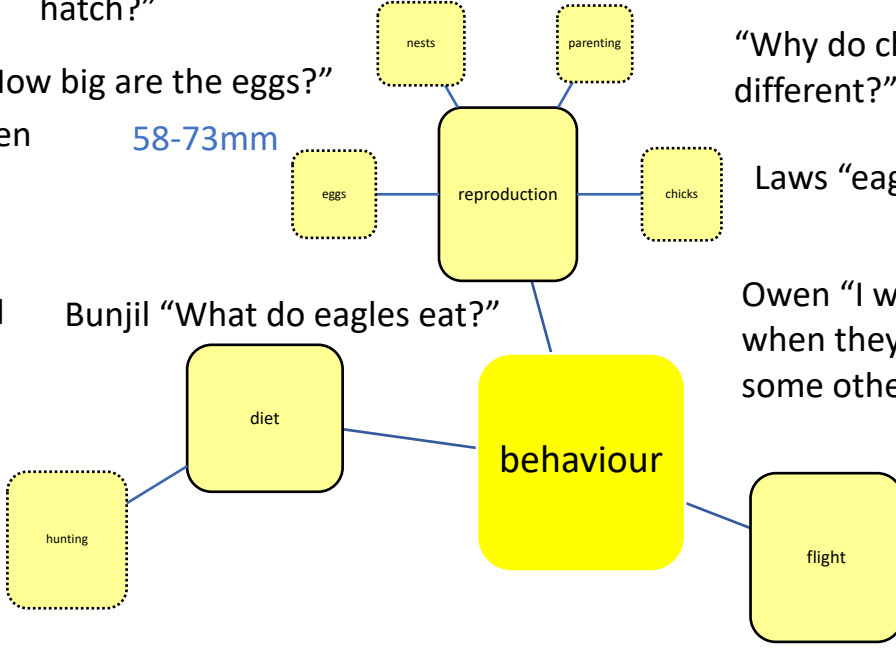


Snake “not even
cracking, too
hard to crack”
referring to a
picture he had
drawn with
thunder and
lightening

58-73mm

Laws “eagles have bones”

Owen “I want to know about
when they drop some food for
some other birds”



Bunzil “What do eagles eat?”

Bunzil and Emma “How do eagles fly?”

Bluey “They fly really high”

Indiana “They do circles”

Buzz “loop the loops”

Owen - talons “They are sharp”

Blacky “Why do they have claws?”

Buzz “They could pick up other birds”

Rabbits, foxes, wallabies,
kangaroos, possums,
wombats, koalas, bandicoots,
smaller birds, roadkill

- protection
- insulation
- to attract mates
- flight

Have been recorded at altitudes up to 6.5 km

Mind-map Eagle Art

Blacky has used charcoal before, he drew a picture of his dog on his fort. "When I had my fire outside, I used my charcoal from the fire."

Provocation
endangered in Tasmania, scientists use trackers to study (McIntyre, 2020)

woven nest
papasan chair

puppetry

Provocation:
Abba – Eagle
Creative dance
• YouTube clip
• Audio version

Knuckles "That's so high"
Thomas "I wonder if they go to Mt Everest?"
Bingo - demonstrated that she was sore at the top of her arms from flying

Repeated drawings have increased focus – looking, thinking

Tim has seen people in jelly on TV slipping around on the paste reminds him of that

Indiana was fascinated that he couldn't click his fingers, they just kept slipping



Owen carries Bunjil a woven grass eagle from Jodie's trip to the Northern Territory



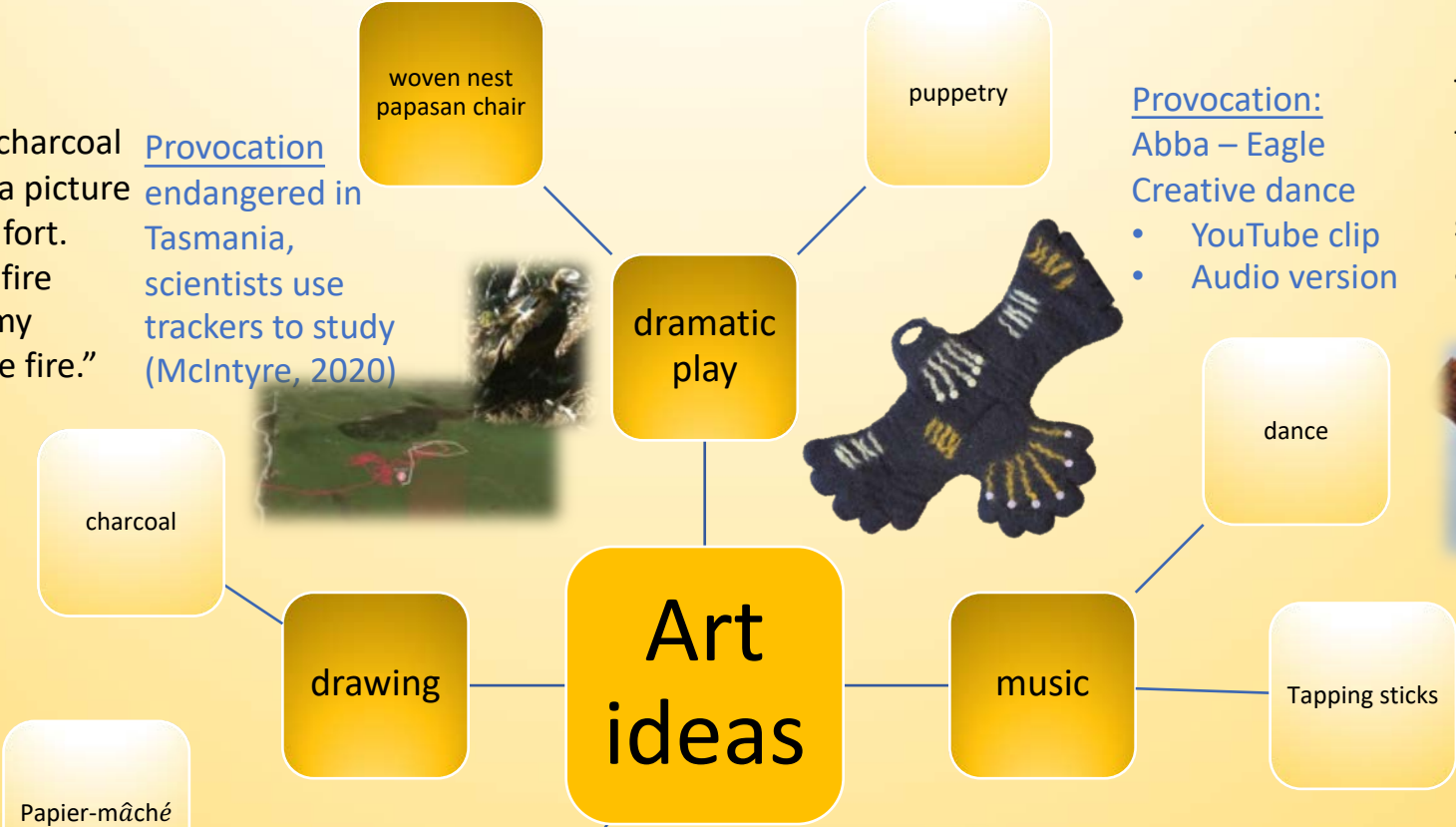
- natural materials
- grass weaving
 - clay
 - nest
 - eggs
 - eagle
 - tree - group project
 - ephemeral
 - sand markings
 - nest of sticks

Tim was intrigued by the sand images in the Bundjil book

Indiana "We could make an eagle for our nests"
Ruby "with clay and feathers"
Hutson "sticks for wings"



"Bunjil is dreamtime but we saw eagles – they are real and some really live near us."



Art goals

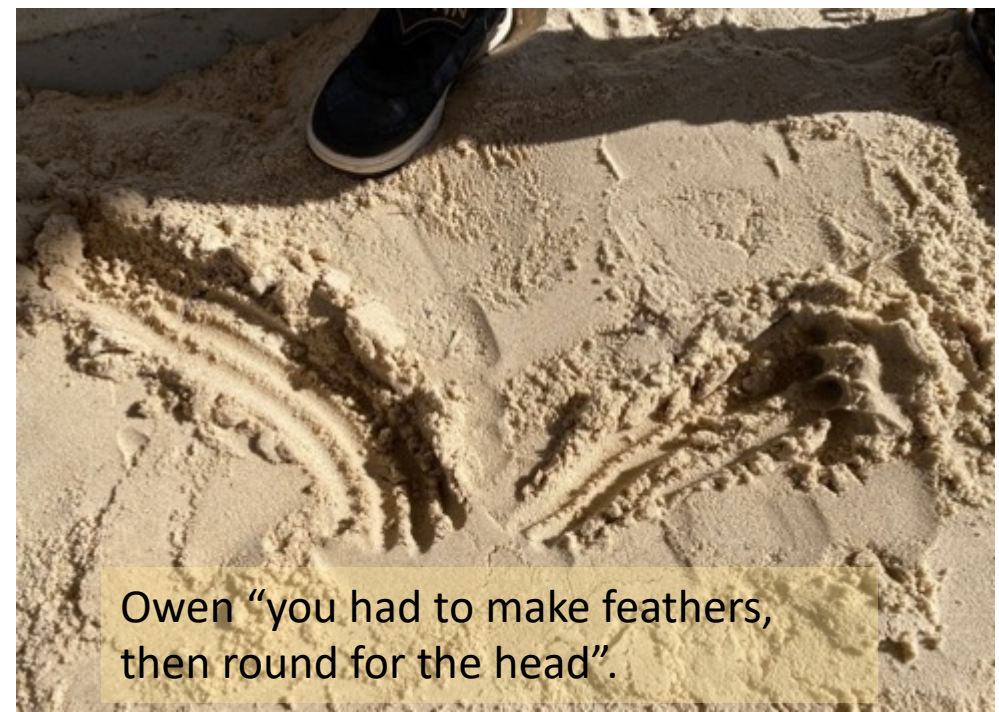
- Use drawing to observe and add to our collective knowledge of eagles. When children draw, they process information visually, kinesthetically and semantically which supports them to remember what they are learning (Terada, 2019).
- Through art, develop meaningful connections with the Country on which our early learning service stands.
- Develop craft and art literacy using charcoal, clay, papier *mâché* and dance.
- Take time for children to engage with, explore and manipulate within art experiences.



Tim and Owen experimented with making eagles in the sand.



Tim commented, "Owen's looked very good because the wings went down and looked like flapping".



Owen "you had to make feathers, then round for the head".





We had previously made nests out of clay so some of the children used the clay to make eagles to put in their nests.



There is so much to learn when you are working with clay.

Kangaroo "you can use water to stick it".

Buzz "Clay is hard".

Indiana "and wet".

Blacky "clay goes hard afterwards".

Bun learnt how to cut clay slabs.



It turns out full grown eagles are bigger than Owen but smaller than Laws.

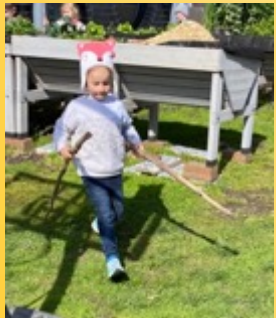
We took a field trip to the sand pit.

Eagle nests are huge, but we contacted our local environment officer and were surprised to find out that an eagle's eggs aren't much bigger than a chicken's eggs.



Bun thought we might have used “20 80 million sticks”.

Ephemeral Art



We clearly needed more sticks. How would the eagles carry the sticks to build their nests? No wonder they return to the same nest each year.

Art using natural materials like sand, sticks, clay connects us to nature (Goldsworthy, 2011) to the land and to Country.



Charcoal drawings

- We decided to make an eagle for our nest, like we had with clay.
- Earlier this year some of the children had used papier mâché to make a mountain so we decided to try that.
- First, we would need to do some observational drawings.
- When children draw, they get better at looking and they pay more attention (Ammer, 2019).



We were getting more confident with each successive drawing.



Photos, discussions, clay models and drawings developed sophistication in the way children looked at the form of an eagle.



Working individually and then in groups, supported children to learn some techniques and share them with their peers.

Feedback from families included comments on the huge quantities of drawings coming home especially from homes that do not see their child do a lot of drawing and one family offered some technical advice re: hairspray to stop them smudging.

Papier mâché

Mélanie Bournal (2019) demonstrates chicken wire as a frame for her life like papier mâché representations. Mau (1999) lists using the techniques of others as an important strategy in art development in his 'Incomplete Manifesto for Growth'. So after we established the size of a female eagle, I made a frame from some chicken wire.

Creating a life sized Bunjil supports children to make sense of the enormity of eagles.



Everyone helped to cover the wire with two layers of newspaper.



Bingo helped make up a cell mix paste, we needed a lot



Children could envision the end product based on all their observational work and their previous practice using papier mâché to make a base for a small world experience.

Learning to envision is a skill we teach children to support them to develop an artistic mind. It is one of Lois Hetland's eight studio habits (Hetland, 2003).

And then two layers of white paper.



- It was curious how soft our eagle became when the paste was wet and how hard it became once the paste dried.
- We were very careful to get a good cover over every part.



We painted Bunjil with acrylic paints to give him a glossy finish.

- Children were each provided with a palette of four colours with space to mix their own colours as well.
- The gold was considered very special.

Creative Dance



- We watched the Bangara Dance Company perform 'Spear' (Perth Festival, 2016) as inspiration for how movement can be used to characterise animals (Dinham & Chalk, 2018).
- Some children sat around the outside with tapping sticks giving others space to dance like eagles flying.
- We danced to the Abba song – Eagle (f23r, 2009) which had accompanying visuals of eagles flying over snow covered mountains.
- I danced with the children, role modelling ways to flap, soar, glide.



After lots of practice we added costumes and took our performance outside. We recorded our dance as a video and played it in the foyer as COVID restrictions prevented us from inviting families in to watch.

Creative Dance



Trackers

Scientists are tracking the movements of the endangered Tasmanian Wedge-tailed eagles using solar powered GPS devices.

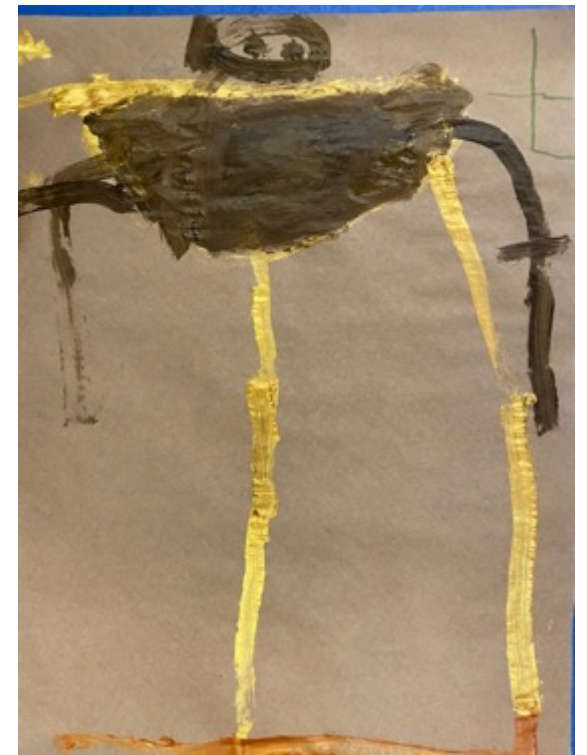
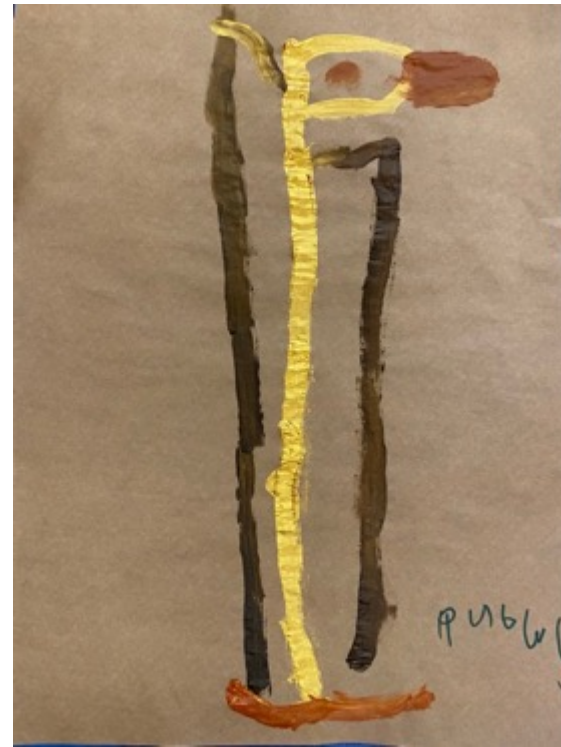
We used a mobile phone and a tracker app to track our movements around the playground.



Children
remained in
character,
flapping their
wings as they
ran.



- We watched a YouTube clip of how the Tasmanian data is used to draw lines on a 3D map.
- Children transposed the images of where they had run onto paper and added features of the playground.



Eagle paintings

Using acrylics on paper and with the benefits of all the observational work we did with charcoal.

Presentation

The Covid-19 restrictions in Melbourne have prompted critical reflection on how documentation of learning is presented and shared with others as families are no longer permitted in our rooms.

Evident in this photo is the daily journal, papier mâché display, paintings on foyer wall, foyer screens used to display dance movie and power point presentation of The Eagle Project.

Just out of sight to the right of the door was a display of children's clay pieces.



Learning stories

August 2020

Children master the authentic art of working with clay.

The idea of using clay to make eagles originated from an experience the children had engaged in the previous week, making clay nests.



When Bun wanted to know how we got the clay off the big block, he was taught how and cut up several slabs.

Children observed that clay was quite hard to work with and wet on your hands. Making nests involved lots of pinching but for eagles most of the children rolled balls. When the heads kept falling off, educators taught children how to use a slurry to glue their pieces together. The children decided feathers were essential and so these were gathered from the art shelves.

The biggest benefit children saw to working with clay was that "the things you make get really hard".



It takes skill to fly

August 2020

Learning stories



Bun is building a tool kit of art skills and processes. He actively participates in his own learning. During the Eagle Project I observed him experimenting and supported his learning with different techniques that could be used with charcoal. He was also happy to share what he had discovered with his peers. Bun took his time noticing the features unique to eagles and his painting on the final day demonstrated his awareness of an eagles sharp talons and hooked beak.

Work with clay also intrigued Bun and he was especially interested to learn how to cut the clay into portions. Inspired by our paper mache sculpture and Bun's interest in penguins he also began his own project at home. Tracey, Bun's Mum emailed a photo for Bun to show the class. He was able to describe his process to everyone and answer many questions.



Learning stories

When you know how to fly...



I have watched Bingo light up when the dance music comes on. Through dance Bingo demonstrates her skill coordinating and controlling her body and her developing spatial awareness. During the Eagle Project, Bingo's love of dance enabled her to conceptualise flight as experienced by an eagle. She contributed to group discussions explaining which parts of her body grew tired as she flapped and soared her way through our dance performance.

This physical awareness translated into understanding in Bingo's many charcoal drawings...



...and insight when making our paper mache eagle strong.



August 2020

Reflections

- During the Eagle Project I witnessed children constructing and sharing knowledge and achievements with families, peers and educators.
- Children learnt techniques and skills using a range of materials and art disciplines.
- Each child came to the project with their own individual funds of knowledge. They engaged and developed uniquely. I responded to each child's individual needs, scaffolding and extending to ensure every child's development was supported.
- Children reviewed the project power point presentation with me, adding their voice to the documentation.
- Children also chose their own pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality in this version. This was quite fun as they understood the concept as it applies to Clarke Kent and Bruce Wayne and took the matter very seriously.
- In the future (outside of COVID restrictions) I would love to have an expert come to visit or alternatively I could set up a Zoom meeting rather than just texting the Environment Officer as I did during this project.

Opportunities and possibilities



- The Project Approach provides unlimited literacy, numeracy, STEM and artistic opportunities. Children become confident and involved learners as they co-investigate with educators (Helm & Katz, 2016).
- Art education is important for maintaining creative skills of communities into the future (Mack, 2018).
- Art enhances our program as it informs, stimulates, challenges and satisfies (Eisner, 2016) as demonstrated by this project.
- Children are eagerly awaiting the hatching of 4 eggs in the Welcome Swallow nest outside our front door.
- We have also begun a new large group project using clay to make a large tree where children are carving out parrot nest holes and linking in a variety of nest sizes and shapes with accompanying birds.

References

- Ammer, R. (2019, Jan 17). *How drawing helps you think*. [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqITSCvP-Z0&feature=youtu.be>
- Dinham, J. & Chalk, B. (2018, p.149). *It's Arts Play. Young Children Belonging, Being and Becoming through the Arts*. Oxford University Press.
- f23r (2009, Nov 28). *Abba – Eagle*. [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdoSy4ROZpg&t=206s>
- Goldsworthy, A. (2011, Dec 1). *'We share a Connection with Stone'* [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DjCMqtJr0Q&feature=youtu.be>
- Helm, J.H. & Katz, L.G. (2016). *Young Investigators: The Project Approach in the Early Years*. Teachers College Press.
- Hetland, L. (2003). *Eight habits of mind*. Project Zero. Harvard Graduate School of Education. <http://www.pz.harvard.edu/resources/eight-habits-of-mind>
- McIntyre, D. (2020, 31 May). *Wedge-tailed eagles wear trackers for research into safer flights*. ABC News. [Video]. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-31/gps-trackers-attached-to-eagles-for-safer-flights/12296932>
- Mack L. (2018, April 5). *Art education matters, so what's the problem?* [Video]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CRJ1jX27_E8&feature=youtu.be
- Mau, B. (1999). An Incomplete Manifesto for Growth. *The International Design Magazine; New York*, 46(2), 56-59.
- Oken-Wright, P. & Gravett, M. (2002). Big ideas and the essence of intent. In Fu, Hill, and Stremmel, (eds.) *Teaching and Learning: Collaborative Exploration of the Reggio Emilia Approach* (pp 197-220). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Parbin-ata, C.B. (2018) *Bundjil*. Balnarring Pre-school & Boon Wurrung Foundation
- Perth Festival (2016). *Spear | Lotterywest Festival Films*. [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mygrmR3tXM>
- Terada, Y. (2019, March 14). *The Science of Drawing and Memory*. Edutopia. <https://www.Edutopia.org/article/science-drawing-and-memory>