



Creekulum Education 2019 with Moreland Primary School

Project Evaluation

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What is this story about?

We decided to tell this story about those times together in 2019 so that everyone involved could share and enjoy remembering.

This story remembers:

- Some of the things we did together
- What it was like to make an outdoor classroom that involved one school community, the local neighbourhood and a creek
- Noticing Wurundjeri seasons in the heat, the rain and the wind
- Having surprising adventures with different creatures, people, dogs, leaves, water...and smoke!



Who is this story for?

- Moreland Primary School community (children, families, teachers, leadership)
- Wurundjeri Woi wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation
- All kinds of educators might want to learn about what we did, how we learnt and then think about having a go too.



What happened in 2019?

Once upon a time some money was used to CREATE a special experiment with Moreland Primary School and Newlands and East Coburg Community Neighbourhood House. It became a community-based Creekulum Education Project. It meant everyone in the school – all the staff and all the students - would recognize they were all living on Wurundjeri Country. All year long, groups took turns to leave the school and walk to Merri Creek.

Sarita Gálvez visualised, led and coordinated the program that involved six key specialist educators from:

- **Wurundjeri Woi wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation (Wurundjeri education, stories & culture)**
- **Scale Free Network (Art-Science Collaborative)**
- **Merri Creek Management Committee (ecology & biodiversity on Wurundjeri Country)**





In January 2019
all the school
staff joined in
big workshops:

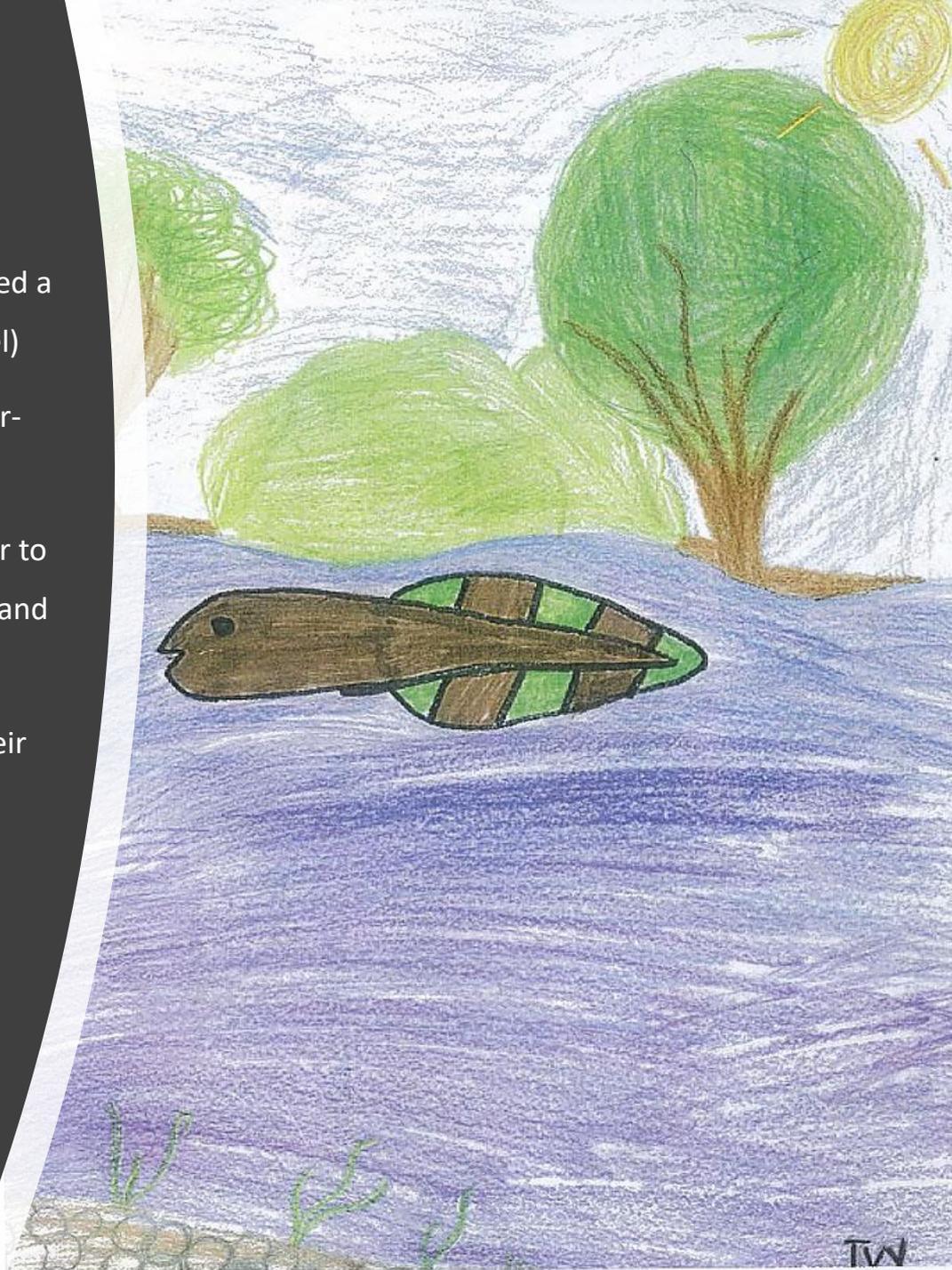
- Walking to Merri Creek to see what it was like and where the new outdoor classrooms would be. Merri Creek was new for most staff.
- Getting maxi-taxis to Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre at Melbourne Museum for a cultural guided cultural tour and lunch. There was a buzz of talk about how this new project could mean teaching history, music, maths, science differently. How might this affect the school play?
- Workshops at Newlands and East Coburg Neighbourhood House allowed for a lot of talking. It was obvious that leaving the classrooms would be exciting and welcome but made some people very uncomfortable. These specialist educators were basically strangers.
- Everyone had to get to know each other so we could build a good plan.

Student passion

- In January students across classes created and led a whole school assembly with iuk (Short-finned Eel)
- Students performed the iuk saltwater-freshwater-saltwater life cycle to announce the project.
- It was clear students were leading the way, eager to go out and embrace local Aboriginal knowledge and creative ways of learning together.
- The students seemed in no doubt about how their local creek would provide their education.

A big timetable for the year was made:

1. May - June: Grade 1 & 2
2. July: Grade 5 & 6
3. Aug - Sep: Grade 3 & 4
4. October: Preps





In April, a Welcome to Wurundjeri Country celebration was led by Uncle Bill Nicholson for the whole school community.

He told great stories. Everyone was so interested!

Traditional Wurundjeri Tanderrum smoking ceremony

- Everyone walked to the school oval through the special smoke.
- There was dancing on the school oval led by Mandy Nicholson and the Djirri Djirri Dance Group.
- All the students were sorted into male and female groups and then learnt to move in a dance like animals.





- The Welcome to Country ceremony took most of the day.
- The school was clearly ready for a very different year of learning!

How did we work together?

The specialist team and other specialist educators worked with teachers and students during the project to work out plans they were all comfortable with. Everyone asked questions all the time. In the beginning there were challenges:

- Some people felt Prep students couldn't walk all the way to Merri Creek and back to school.
- Some people were nervous about what the children would learn. Would the curriculum needs be met?
- Some people couldn't imagine students concentrating and learning away from classrooms from 10.30am to 3pm.
- What about toileting?

We learnt as quickly as possible to talk about how to do things differently and make new plans if something went wrong. That meant that our first learning experience was about listening to each other, being respectful and trusting that we all wanted to succeed even though we were making it up as we went along.



We planned to keep track of each other and the project even though it seemed messy...

- A visual archive of videos, photographs and reference literature was developed.
- 35x student journals were shared all year by all students, especially creek-side (carried in a tub).
- Regular meetings and conversations with school learning leadership teams connected specialist educators with the curriculum.
- Regular meetings with Wurundjeri educators, Scale Free Network, Merri Creek Management Committee and Creekulum coordinator Sarita Galvez in meetings and emails to ensure everyone up to date and able to co-lead new developments.
- There was a strong feeling about creating a positive impact on the learning communities of Moreland Primary School.
- Students and staff were always foremost in people's minds.
- Specialist leaders and school teachers often wondered if any school could sustain a Creekulum program over the years ahead.



Going out, getting along: Feeling safe & comfortable

Toilets were important! We timed occasional access to a neighbour's home and made friends with the East Coburg Neighbourhood House to stop for loos and a talk.

Our stuff: We carried all our food and gear. Sometimes backpacks and trolleys were used. A big mat was helpful sometimes.

Practices of moving: Although we weren't in a classroom it was still school time. Children were reminded to walk through the streets with joy and respectful for neighbours who might be napping or working nightshift. Be respectful. Not too loud!

Safety: Controlling all street crossings strictly and not being too near water. Students were very happy to comply.

Walking & talking: The walk to the Neighbourhood House was about 25 minutes and involved crossing six streets. Lots of time to talk about Dad's cars, Nanna's schnitzel with lemon juice and whose house was down the next street!



We often wondered what 'Caring for Country' meant for us all creating the Creekulum.

Creekulum 2019 was an interdisciplinary community-based education model with a whole of school involvement...



Always on Wurundjeri Country:

- Sometimes with Wurundjeri Elders
- Always noticing Woi wurrung language and seasons
- we saw plants, animals, fungi and microbes
- we thought about the basalt rocks and the nature of rivers
- how to share public places with creatures
- how the rain moved - seeing the rushing stormwater whoosh down the drain and into Merri Creek.





Working it out

Pencils can be squeezed into legs
and the ground is fine to sit on.

Sharing journals all year by all
students sent a message that
we're all in this together and
that everyone's contribution
is welcome – on any page.

We can mix it up.

We did mix it up.

We wondered whether we could do it.

“The little preps can’t walk to the creek.
We’ll have to bus them in...”

What happened?

Preps all walked. Wet towels were draped around kids necks to cool them down because it was so hot.

More parent and grandparent involvement was reported by the Principal than for any other preceding project.

What happened?

We made good plans. Kids were proud, attentive and cooperative.





We used some great gear:

- Class set of 60x magnification field microscopes
- Blindfolds (used with tree partnering exercise)
- Cardboard (used as seats)
- Class set of journals
- Colouring pencils & textas
- Botanic drawing kit with black paper & white wax pencils
- A giant MCMC Catchment map of Merri Creek
- Poa and wool to make iuk sculptures (Short-finned eels)
- Trays of local water sample with waterbugs (freshwater macroinvertebrates)
- 6x 1 metre long wooden rulers for square metre investigation



Sticky, rough, shiny, cob-webby stories

Everyone was learning all the time,
as we walked, made things, talked,
carried lots of things and asked
questions.

Plans evolved.

Sometimes students were so
involved with the activities,
they preferred to shorten their
play/lunch break time.

Walking, talking, writing

- There was time to notice the rubbish and litter and even teeny water bugs.
- There was some time to find a diary and a fresh page to write on and draw what was seen and heard.
- Kids were very focused and worked hard under the trees beside the creek.
- Kids were relaxed: even walking back with energy.





Some new friends were there all year long (*Hello Tawny Frogmouth!*) ...and some were there depending on the season.

Tawny Frogmouths (Nightjars, not Owls), dogs, freshwater bugs, Bardy moths & teeny creatures too small for the human eye to see!

Some animals have English and Woi wurrung names:

Eels – iuk

Platypus – dulai Wurrung

Owls – moop moop

We enjoyed making notes about what we saw and who we met

We thought about creatures in many different ways when we were:

- Walking
- Twining
- Drawing
- Measuring
- Listening with our eyes shut

All this happened on hot days, wet days and cold days.





We learnt about soil's secrets:

We explored our field samples back in the classroom with microscopes and drawing:

- Class set of 20/40x (magnification) stereo microscopes
- Compound microscope
- Videoflex microscope camera
- Data projector & monitor



We learnt about tiny patterns of our skin, our clothes, and teeny creatures



We found so much new language to share.

We all felt fascinated about the world right around us!

It wasn't all hidden, we just needed time to look and share what we saw.



We asked questions all the time!

- Are there creatures too small to see with our human eyes? Handy inexpensive equipment showed us all a wild world!
- Grade 5 & 6 asked about 1 square metre for a month: culturally, archaeologically, spatially, ecologically, etc
- We all asked: What can you do with that kind of information?
- What can't you know about a place with information from 1 square metre?
- What is a plane? Grade 3 & 4 drew the flat view of the creek, noticing circles made from the raindrops.
- We were asking about concepts of life, difference and representation.



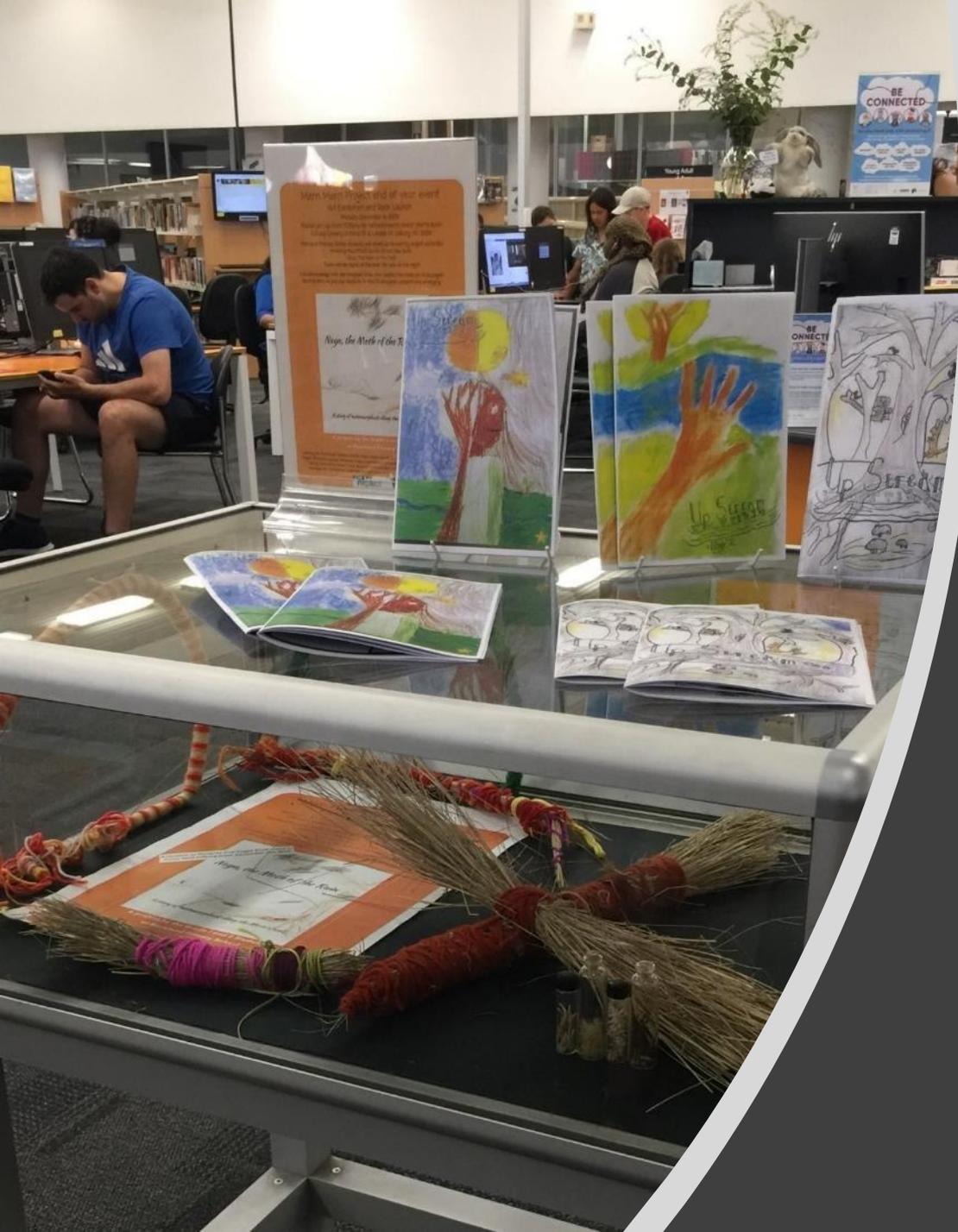
We
could
barely
believe
our
eyes!



The Newlands and East Coburg Neighbourhood House shared their place with us all year!

- two rooms
- their toilet
- their kitchen
- their whiteboard
- a cupboard





Learning together

- Guest educators and teachers worked with student enthusiasm!
- Sometimes educators realised they had overloaded a day with too much planned in it.
- They had to work with the children's interests.
- New things happened:
 - the school play went back 60,000 years instead of 200 years,
 - the children published a story book, made an exhibition, and displayed creatures made with local grasses and wool in the Moreland City library.



Space to learn

Educators had to drop their big agendas and listen to the children and enjoy figuring out how to shoo off the dogs walking in the parks.

Students of every age were consistently engaged and still energised walking back to school around 3pm.



What did we think?

(results from a SurveyMonkey poll)

Creekulum 2019 had a very positive impact on the school community, especially:

- Greater awareness and respect for Indigenous culture and connection to Country
- A stronger sense of community
- A stronger connection between our bodies and the local ecosystem.

"What an incredible project. Not only did my children gain a better understanding of the world around them but they were able to talk to their dad and me in such an engaging way great dinner table conversation. They are also so much more culturally literate and have a true appreciation for the world's longest continuing cultures. A gift too many Australian children miss out on."



What did we think?

(results from a SurveyMonkey poll)

"The project greatly increased the school community's understanding of their impact on the world around them."

"We at MPS and the Coburg neighbourhood have been so blessed to have been able to participate in this incredible project. Thanks to everyone involved."

"Absolutely brilliant project - I have never seen my children so engaged with their learning. They learnt so much and would tell me about what they learnt every time they went to the creek. The projects were so impressive. I cannot thank those who organised and ran this project enough."

"All of the families increased awareness of the Indigenous connection to our local area and the biodiversity present in our community."



What did we think?

(results from a SurveyMonkey poll)

"Our project created opportunities for students, teachers, and families to engage with the Merri Creek and with Melbourne waterways more broadly, in creative and respectful ways."

"Learning from Wurundjeri cultural leaders has had a very significant impact in our community as well as enhancing the curriculum to include hands-on experiences of human-environment relations."

"Students, staff and families have learned new ways of caring for Country through local practices. We made local-global connections through this place-based education."

"We extended our Indigenous knowledge in the curriculum to think about conservation and recycling."

"The connections with external agencies and artists/scientists has been a very valuable aspect of this project. Students engage with different adults and for the most part these experiences are essential to keeping the learning exciting."



What conditions make Creekulum work possible?

- Determination, vision, high level of pedagogical & local cultural understandings,
- Commitment to and confidence in community engagement and networking
- Careful project management
- A blend of school educators and guest educators
- A willing and committed Principal
- Continuous review of delivery



What conditions make Creekulum work possible?

- Flexibility, openness & discussion
- Respect for children's voices at every stage
- Creekulum works most powerfully when the classroom is expanded to include a mixture of interactions: in the school grounds & buildings; in the neighbourhood; and across outdoor locations
- Creekulum learning outcomes increase when there is agency between places and educators, with children's leadership.



Recommendations for continuing this work...

5. An informed budget that understands costs and works within its means.
6. A planning regime that allows for, and pays for a strong Traditional Owner role in the project conception and delivery.
7. A project strategy that contains student roles in the development of project vision and delivery, with time for feedback.
8. Places to track and monitor outcomes (expenditure, project experiences for students and educators).

Acknowledgement of Creekulum's key contributors

- Dr Sarita Gálvez visualised, led & coordinated the Creekulum program
- Uncle Bill Nicholson & Uncle Dave Wandin for Wurundjeri cultural project leadership & education, Wurundjeri Woi wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation
- Students and staff from Moreland Primary School
- Djirri Djirri Wurundjeri women's dance group, Wurundjeri cultural project leadership
- Will Nicholson, Wurundjeri Cultural Fire
- Judy Nicholson, Wurundjeri Education Sessions
- John Williams, Creekulum friend, Principal, Moreland Primary School
- Gregory Crocetti & Briony Barr, Creekulum project leadership & educators, ScaleFree Network
- Angela Foley, Creekulum project leadership & educator, Merri Creek Management Committee
- Friends at East Coburg Neighbourhood House
- John Patten, Indigenous Cultural Awareness Training (ICAT) leadership, Bunjilaka, Museum Victoria
- Meg Petrie, facilitator and digital storyteller
- Adrienne Kneebone, twining sessions with Poa and wool
- Katie West (ICAT), Gigi Chandrashekeran and Bruce Mowson
- Slow Art Collective, facilitating experimental bamboo structure at Moreland Primary School
- All the dogs, kids, families, parents and grandparents who joined in at different stages



Photo credits in this report:

Grateful thanks to Briony Barr (SFN) & Moreland Primary School community.

Indispensable elements:

Merri Creek, moths, trees, leaves, soil, rocks, birds, sky, rain, wind, ...