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Making Microbes, Building Bodies

Mikki Trail

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Blue Gum Community School is located in Canberra, the bush capital of Australia. For this project, Making Microbes, Building Bodies, established and emerging artists worked alongside primary school students and a scientist to produce an innovative, electrifying art installation.

Kindergarten through to Year 6 students were invited to theorise, imagine, design and discuss their ideas around what a microbe is, what it does and what it actually looks like. The youngest students worked collaboratively to produce large drawings, while upper primary students focused on turning their more abstract ideas into concrete interpretations. Over the next fortnight, much interest and debate about microbes was generated within students' classrooms and with their families, and students were ready to welcome our visiting scientist and artists armed with large bags of clay.

The art studio buzzed with the making of a multitude of magnificent microbes with pharmacist, research scientist & textile artist Mary Murray, ceramic artist Janet De Boos and visiting artists from Singapore Michelle Lim and Seok Har Ng assisted by an enthusiastic team of Australian National University students and volunteers from the Canberra Potters Society.

There was a fusion of ideas as young students and adults worked side-by-side, hypothesising, predicting, theorising - was this science or art, or a wonderful amalgamation of both? Students were captivated by the scientific thinking - then set about turning it into art. The project built a community across the disciplines, just as microbes form communities within our bodies demonstrating the effectiveness and importance of art-science collaboration.