

The background of the slide is a vibrant, abstract painting. It features a dense collection of brushstrokes in various colors including red, blue, yellow, green, and white. The strokes are layered and textured, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall effect is a colorful, energetic, and somewhat chaotic visual field.

# All the Possum's

Eighteen children, four Educators and one room with a shared vision

- A journey connecting who the Possum children are individually within a community of learners





Our year began with entering a new environment, being the Possum Room, where we were all strangers to one another. Many of the children in the Possum Room this year were joining us as they began their learning journey at Elder Street. Coming together as a group of individuals each new member in the room had the desire to feel a sense of belonging to the space and form connections with new people in their world.

In Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory, he explores the role of social interaction in the development of cognition. He believed that during social interactions the community plays a central role in the process of making meaning.







# Becoming a Group

Educators began to intentionally use times where the children grouped physically together to sustain their time together. Throughout these times we noticed the children were connected and in the moment. They enjoyed spending time together and engaging in experiences as a group. Our assessment of this time determined that these times were not necessarily focused on the experience educators were presenting; instead it was about the enjoyment of spending time together and the social aspects of that experience. Educators noticed non-verbal social cues between the children, from a glance to a giggle they shared with us that they enjoyed being in one another's company together.







Educators started to observe the children sharing the people most special to them outside of the environment to those within. We found this to be a very touching and wonderful social learning experience for the children to share with one another and continue to observe the children racing over to their peer's family photo, and then returning with a smile expressing love and understanding.

Bundura (1997) describes this type of social learning to be where children observe the people around them that behave and interact in different ways; modeling who they are within in a community of learners. This type of modeling influenced the children to form strong relationships based on their interests and sense of connection in the environment. Educators recognised this from early on in the year and by continuing to nurture the children's sense of belonging to a group in a new environment, the children's togetherness experience formed a strong, supportive and curious community of learners. To educators, this was highlighting the children's willingness to engage and share experiences with their peers rather than individually.





# Together-ness

## *Nurturing connections through collaborative experiences*

Running parallel to our settling in time, Elder Street as a community began a philosophy review. Educators in the Possum room wanted to creatively explore how we could understand what is most important to our children. Over a period of time we closely observed the children to determine this. Educators started to observe how important the children found connection to one another. During this time educators gathered valuable information from observing the excitement the children feel as their peers arrive, waving goodbye and blowing kisses, the call of a “cuddle” as they run across the playground and the simple interactions of play where the children would like to sit close to one another and spend time in each other’s company.





The concept of together-ness became an important factor in building a community of learners. Developing an understanding of together-ness and engaging in experiences to build on this experience, was used to take part in collaborative learning processes as the children continued to explore and journey through their individual learning.



Educators questioned which of the many languages would best support the children's learning and the concept of togetherness. How could we give the children a voice in their experience of being together? We first chose art as the tool to express our connection and time together.





Taking into account the value the children demonstrated in spending time together and connecting, educators brainstormed ways to collectively gather information on how the children felt about spending time together. We determined it wasn't about what they were saying, more so their connection and close relationships they had formed from the beginning of the year. To facilitate and extend on these feelings, educators intentionally sourced a large piece of paper and created a space easily accessible for all the children where they could join one another and express their close connection through 'together time' with art. The collaborative learning process took part each day of the week where each of the children was presented with the space. At the conclusion of this experience the children had produced a colourful and layered representation of their time spent engaging in the experience together.





Rogoff (1994) takes the perspective of learning to be the process of transformation and participation where the function of learning is the understanding of the socio-cultural activities in which one participates. She further argues that children learn when they are connected to an active community of learners, in our case the Possum room. The adult led aspect in this project is for educators to set up the learning and the, observe each individual children play the role of an active learner in a community of learners to discover and construct (Rogoff, 1994).

Educators reflected on what this meant for our younger children in the Possum room that were only beginning to develop skills in moving around the room. We understood our younger children to be capable in developing their social skills and the older children to guide and nurture their learning through their close relationships they had formed from the beginning of the year. Rogoff (1994) believes that in a community of learners, all members in the community are conceived as active.

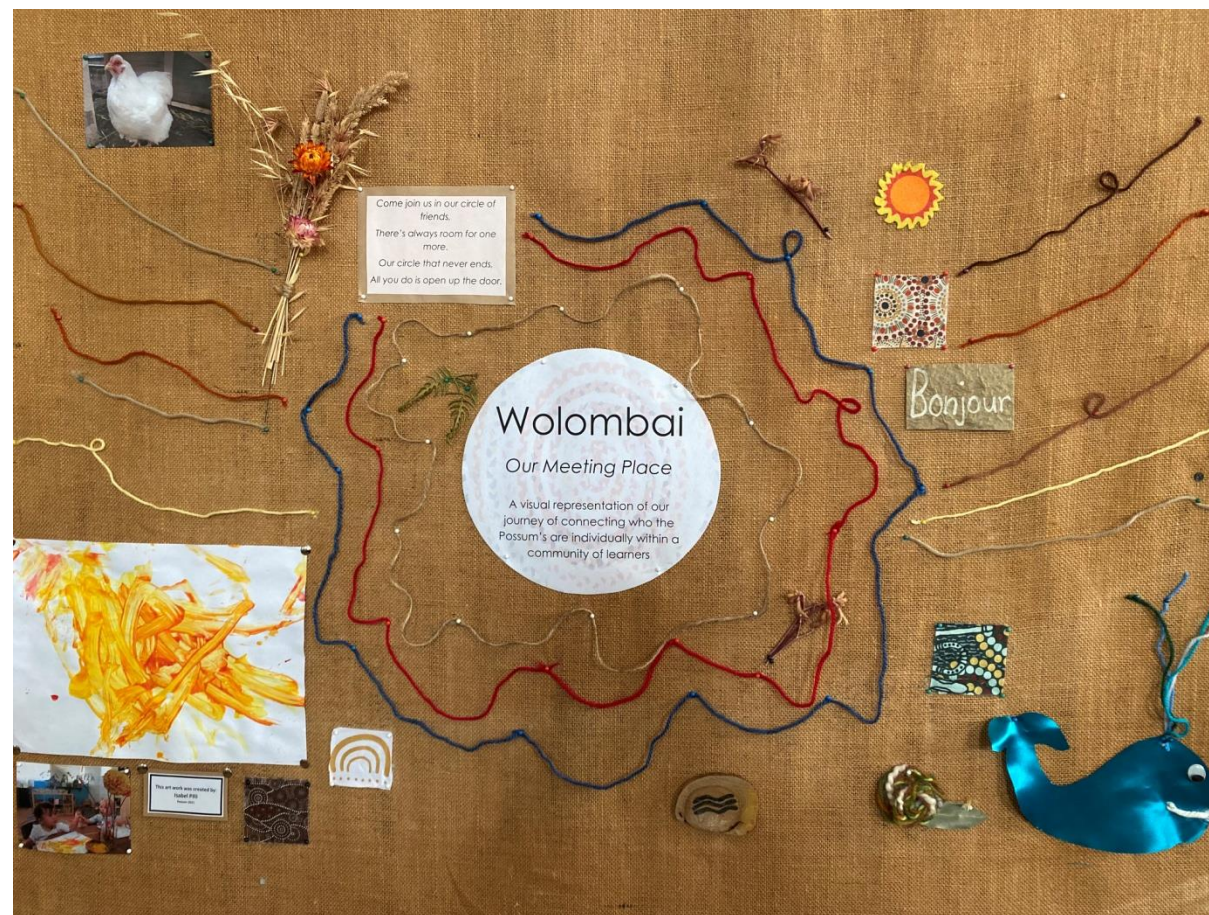




# Wolombai - Our Meeting Place

*A visual representation of our journey of connecting who the Possum children are individually and within a community of learners.*

Throughout this journey we started to discover the unique and special things about each of the children. As we gathered this valuable information educators discussed how we could visually and symbolically represent the children in a wall display as a type of documentation. Educators explored this idea for quite some time and drew on the collective knowledge of our educational team of Elder Street and decided to create a mural. Educators place a great emphasis on the children sharing who they are within a community of learners. We intentionally used different textural and interesting items to represents something uniquely special about the children in the Possum room. The mural became an evolving space that we continued to add to as we gathered information.





The rainbow mat is a special place where the children and educators often find themselves gathering in the room. Its circular shape and vibrant colours promote excitement for the children to join their peers in the heart of the Possum room. Naturally, this is where we chose to begin the mural as it is the anchor within our room and formulates our intentional teaching around together-ness.



All art and cultural installations have a name which is significant to its meaning, idea, and essence of the piece. For us this was an important element we needed to determine throughout the process of creating the mural. It was an idea that we swayed back and forth from with the mural being affectionately known as 'The Wall' for several weeks as it began to take shape.



During a discussion on indigenous perspectives, which we are passionate about, we began to entertain the idea of incorporating this perspective into the naming of 'The Wall'. As we continued to experiment, play and research we decided on Wolombai. In the Awabakal language Wolombai means 'meeting place' and this seemed to be the perfect representation of where the mural began, what is important to us and what we value in the Possum room; time and space where we can be together as one. To us, Wolombai is an important concept and place where the children spend time together and engage in experiences, where they can share who they are as unique individuals.

# Wolombai

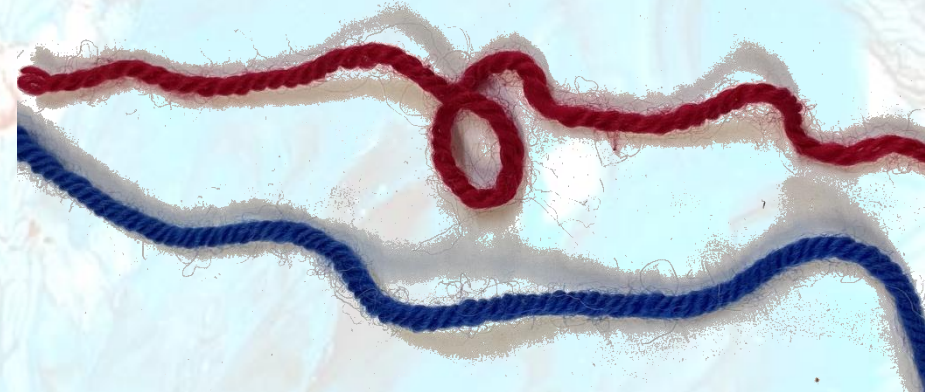
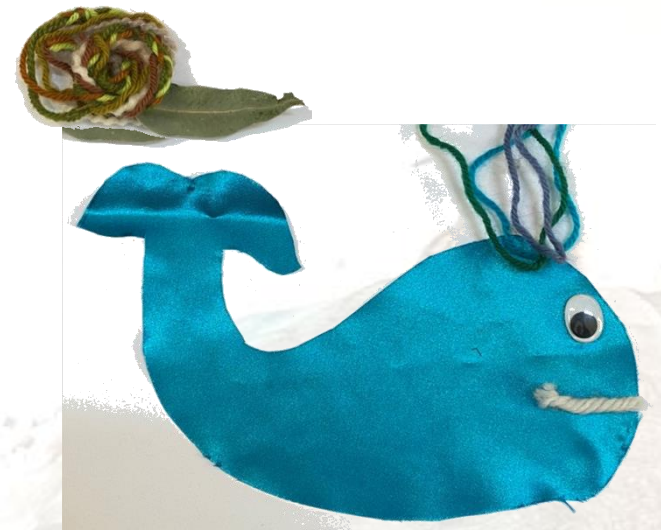
## *Our Meeting Place*

A visual representation of our journey of connecting who the Possum's are individually within a community of learners

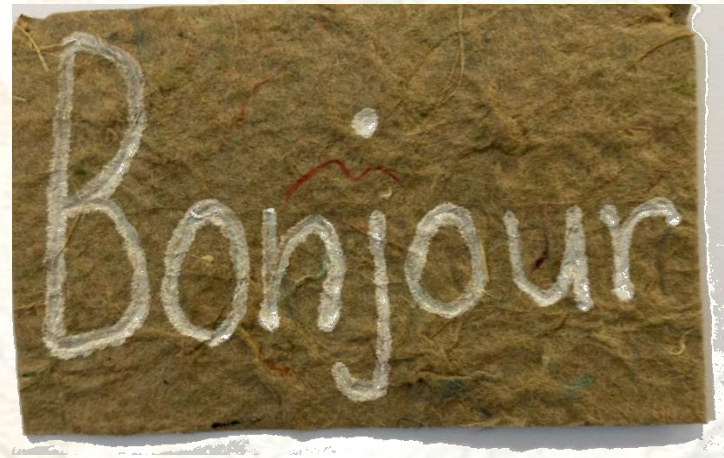


# What do the elements of Wolombai represent?

- Our mat, in the centre of the mural shows where it began and where we gather as a community within our room.
- The colours are representative of our local sports teams that our families have a close connection to, and support.
- Awabakal symbol for water. This has a multifaceted meaning within the display; the children's interest in water, connection to our embedded indigenous perspective and in the outdoor playground the children are drawn to the water trough and as such this has become a time we spend together exploring outdoors.
- Snail and the Whale; this is one of the first books introduced to the room at the beginning of the year; it connects as a settling in tool with the importance of embedded literacy for young children.
- Indigenous material; supporting the indigenous Possum children within the group and sharing their indigenous background in correlation with our commitment to reconciliation and inclusive cultural competence.







- A rainbow is representative of the love we share for one another, our families and Elder Street. Love was an important response to our questionnaire with many of the families sharing its importance within their family. The rainbow has been intentionally chosen from the pattern that is also on one of our cot sheets to also link the image back to the warmth and comfort of Elder Street
- Our connection to nature and Australia represented through our love of plants with a collection of native plants and a bouquet made from the plants in one of our family's garden.
- Bonjour; connection to Frankie's family's plans for moving to France and incorporating the language into daily communications with Frankie.
- To one side there is one of Isabel's paintings. This image was created from a provocation of a Marigold flower inspired by Isabel's Indian cultural connection and the significance of this plant within their culture.





- An image of a sun to represent the light and energy the children bring to the room.
- Our beloved chicken Sweetie Lah-Lah is displayed in the mural. She provides support for a smooth and soothing transition, a connection to the interdependence we have on one another and is a valued member of Elder Street.
- The overall mural is shaped through layered circles with lines coming from the sides. This depicts the Awabakal symbol for meeting place intentionally bringing the whole design back to the name ‘Wolombai’

When creating Wolombai we were provoked to look at our holistic view of each child. Identifying what is unique and special about each of them and what they bring to the community of learners individually.

“School is a place of culture –that is, where a personal and collective culture is developed that influences the social, political, and values context, and, in turn, is influenced by this context in a relationship of deep and authentic reciprocity”

–(Rinaldi, 2001, p 43)



# Introducing Documentation

The addition of the documentation to the room has played an important part of engaging with the project. Introducing documentation to the room provides a space where educators and families alike are able to discover the learning that has taken place over time. Often people see documentation as a form of evidence for adults to read. However, it is so much more.



Documentation plays an important role in the children's learning cycle. For our children, it has been a tool for exploring their learning, spotting themselves in the photographs and reflecting on the community of learners they have created in the Possum room. It has provided a space where the children can reflect, discuss and explore their understanding further.







The documentation has been intentionally displayed in a space central to the children's learning. Access to their learning supports the children in confidently reflecting on their learning process alongside their peers and educators who have experienced this journey with them.

According to Vygotsky, the documentation displayed is a mental tool where the children are prompted to take charge in their own learning by attending and remembering in an intentional and purposeful way (Bodrova & Leong, 1996).

Each of the children, have engaged in this documentation in a different manner. Both individually and collectively they have spent time sitting, observing, assessing, revisiting and discussing their learning as they engage with the documentation. Educators have observed the children touching the images, recognising themselves and their peers and spending time in this space together.



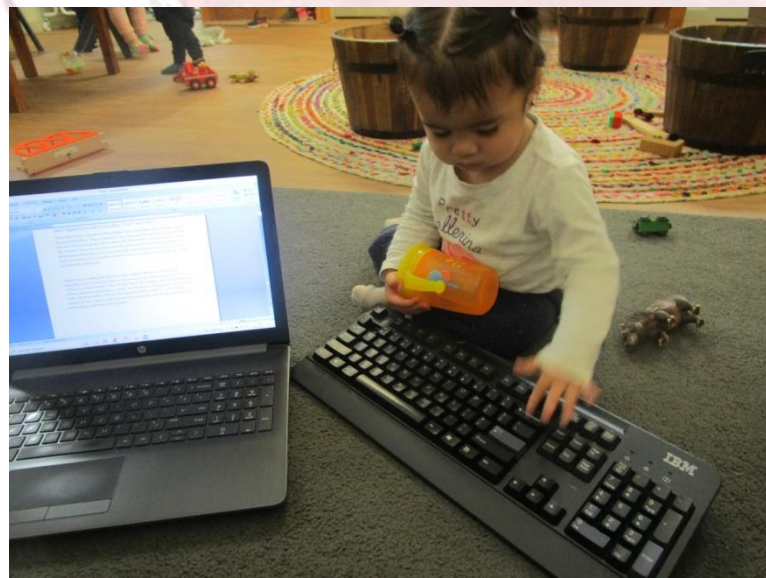




There were many moments of the children proudly leading their families over to the documentation. They pointed out and discussed the special moments, their friends in the photographs and shared with their families what it means to be in the Possum room and how important this community of learners is to them. The photographs throughout the documentation intentionally project a story; our story, our journey of connecting who the Possum children are individually, within a community of learners.

The process of writing this documentation was slightly different to the writing of project work educators had completed before.

This process was completed mostly in the company of the children. They contributed to the thinking, the feel and the flow of the overall documentation as they sat alongside with educators collaborating by pointing to photographs. The children often made sense of this by bringing over a keyboard or also looking at the theorists educators had on loose sheets of paper. We feel this supported the children in connecting deeper to the process of progressive documentation and sharing the learning taking place within the environment.





# Conclusion

When we originally undertook this project educators discussed the prospect of creating learning objectives however felt that creating 'objectives' hindered the natural learning flow, adapting body of learning and progress of the project that we had already observed. Rather than these objectives we focused more so on the idea of; what we had hoped the children will gain such as finding a sense of self, celebrating who we are individually, and how we come together. In addition we were looking at what we will gain as educators throughout this joint learning journey; a deeper understanding of who the children are and what makes them unique.





# What did the children gain from this project?

From the beginning of the year the children entered the Possum room as unique individuals in the community. As time went on the children began developing deep and curious relationships with their peers.

*Who are these other people in my space?*

*What are they going to share with me?*

*How are they going to contribute to my learning?*

These were some of the questions educators anticipated the children were asking themselves each time they entered the room.



Educators noticed the children express their natural curiosity on, who these people were, by beginning to join each other in reading stories, dancing, building, running, and beginning to demonstrate modes of connection through hugging each other and expressing forms of tenderness and care through touch.

Once strangers at the beginning of the year, each of the children became an integral part 'All the Possums'.