

The background of the slide is a watercolor painting. It features various brushstrokes in shades of light green, teal, and blue, scattered across a pale cream-colored background. The strokes are of varying lengths and thicknesses, creating a textured, organic feel.

Connecting to Country

Pathway to deepening cultural
understanding

Where did this project begin?

Running parallel with our project 'All the Possums' from the beginning of the year, the children demonstrated a developing curiosity and interest in the physical environment. This further provoked the exploration of Indigenous culture, specifically the Awabakal people and their land.



From the beginning of the year, educators have engaged in many reflective discussions about the importance of respectfully embedding Indigenous culture into our teaching and learning environments. Children hold great potential for future generations if we pay attention to actively engaging them in issues of social justice from an early age. Our educational philosophy places importance on sharing experiences with children throughout their early years focused on the significance of Australia's First Nations people, who walked this land before us. Furthermore, we are committed to culturally competent practices working towards reconciliation with all Aboriginal people through respecting, reflecting, celebrating and educating about Indigenous culture.



Throughout our discussions there were many moments where we found ourselves questioning why we felt this was an important focus to embark on with the children. We discussed delving deeper into the research and culture of the Awabakal people and how the children can build an authentic understanding of the First Nations People. Educators recognise that promoting a greater understanding of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing and being contributes to the richness of our community (DEEWR, 2009). We aim to reflect on everything we know about the children, their learning environment, our philosophy, our knowledge as educators and how this can form a connection with the learning outcomes we set.



Learning Objectives

- For the children to develop their understanding of the First Nations People by delving deeper into the Indigenous culture.
- To create a meaningful connection and appreciation of the land.
- Support a connection with our local community through the land, people and stories.
- To continue working towards our commitment to reconciliation.
- For the children to understand when we take from the land, we must give back to it.
- To develop the children's creative thought process as the children engage in experiences rich in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

Project Statement

Socio-behavioural theory tells us that children view their world through a cultural lens. Their lens is shaped and reinforced by the people around them (Fleer, 2018). We believe that the early years, in particular in the Possum room, we have the opportunity to shape that lens in an empathetic, respectful, and inclusive manner. This can be done by supporting the children to challenge assumptions and biases they are exposed to in the broader community (Millar, 2017).



“When most people think of Aboriginal culture they think of cultural expressions – our art, dance, and music. But there is so much more to culture. It is our way of being – our family and community; our ceremony and beliefs; our connection to Country; our language; and food. It is who we are and how we connect and we need to be free to celebrate it”

– Lesley Woodhouse, 2021

Project Methodology

In Awabakal culture, knowledge is shared and taught through the younger generations by connecting to the land, walking country, talking with Elders, sharing stories, song and dance.

Our philosophy as educators at Elder Street Early Childhood Centre shares a common connection to that of the Awabakal culture by supporting the children to develop new understandings, unpack their thinking and feel a sense of belonging within their community and environment.

Meeting together as a group is something the children and educators have placed value on from the beginning of the year in the Possum Room. Our main 'meeting place' has been the rainbow mat in the Possum Room. The children have further extended some of their favourite places to meet together to be around our new table crafted by local maker Mark Aylward and outdoors in the playground. These meeting places have nurtured and strengthened the children's relationships in times where they may have needed a space for their social connections to be supported.



Always

Our ongoing commitment to reconciliation

Throughout the year the children have celebrated a range of significant days for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Although these days are significant, to have an authentic ongoing commitment to reconciliation; it is more than just celebrating days. Throughout their interactions within the natural world the children are beginning to structure their emerging knowledge on the First Nations People and the importance of their land.





The Natural World

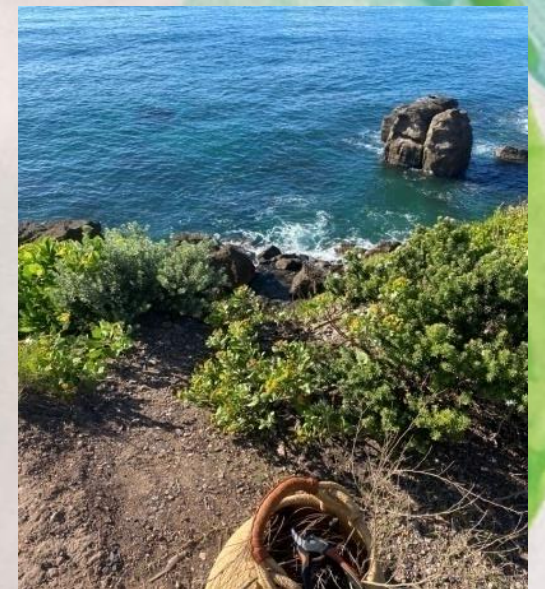
Both children and educators play a significant role in shaping the environment and world around them and because of this we focus curriculum decisions on children's social and cultural interactions. Entering our learning environment, you are welcomed by an array of natural materials and creative artefacts that are inspired and created by the children. They each represent who the children are as individuals and what they are interested in.



The children created meaningful connection to Indigenous culture through our natural environment by sourcing fallen leaves, branches, native flowers and plants from the land and our local community. These resources were respectfully incorporated into our art, music, movement and learning experiences for the children to develop a rich and meaningful connection to the land.

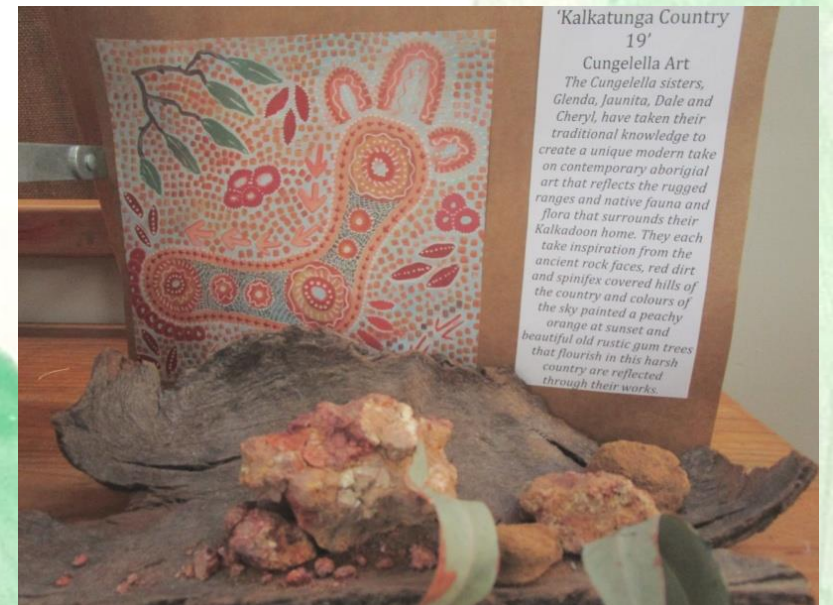
Art

From the beginning of the year, educators have identified that the children have formed a close connection with the natural environment and how it can inspire creative experiences. Educators aimed to harness this connection by nurturing this interest through a range of different art experiences inspired by the natural world and Awabakal land.



Many of these experiences involved native plants and flowers, earth components such as clay sourced from Redhead Bluff on Awabakal land, and involved listening to a range of different Indigenous artists from around Australia. Sourcing these resources provoked many conversations amongst the children around only taking what was needed or fallen and then giving back to the land.

Our art experiences indoors were inspired by many contemporary Indigenous artists; who like the children, draw inspiration for their artwork from the land. Both children and educators together spent some time researching and connecting to the professional contemporary artists. While doing so the children used their knowledge from the research to make connections to each unique aspect within the art space.



“Rock”
Harry pointed out.

“Can see the leaves”
Sunny shared.



“Leaf”
Frankie pointed out.

“Mine”
Harry stated.

While researching educators shared the story of the artists artwork to the children. The story was not only inspired by their country but also the story of who they are, the land they are from, their family, kinship and the dreaming.

A collation of the artworks the children connected with the most were transferred into a warm and welcoming art space indoors. The space itself consisted of artists the children are familiar with, sandstone rocks and artefacts such as gum leaves and Banksias.

Educators noticed that throughout the experience the children each referred to the provocation artwork. However, they were eager to create their own story through art.



Storytelling

The children found inspiration from the artist's storytelling as they demonstrated ways they were exploring this through their own art experiences. An important aspect of aboriginal art is based on important ancient stories and symbols centered on 'the dreaming'.

The dreaming stories pass on important knowledge, cultural values and belief of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that are the passed down to future generations to continue the process of sharing knowledge.

Ella and Frankie requested to engage in the art experience side by side. Throughout their experience, they interacted through small gestures of looking at each other's artwork.



"It's a leaf"

Frankie shared with Ella.

Ella peered over and smiled as if she was agreeing.

"Oh, what is it?"

Frankie questioned.

Musical Expressions

As the children and educators explored their ideas around storytelling and discovering the importance of the dreaming, the children became inspired to link their musical interest into their learning.

This provoked by a playlist consisting of a range of different Indigenous artists that is often played daily. The children demonstrated their interest by bopping up and down through their art experiences, using Pampas grass to soar and fly like birds, clap along to the beat and expressing emotions of calm, excitement and happiness.



Connecting with Watiyelong

Throughout the course of the children's journey of connecting to country, educators noticed that the children utilised artistic experiences as a means of provoking discussions, ideas and new pathways. With this in mind, educators created a space within the room where the children could collaborate and create a visual artefact full of their ideas that have come to life. Throughout this experience the projector has been a valuable resource to support the children's exploration. It provided depth to the children space they were creating and enhanced their understanding of the natural environment wider than our centre's environment throughout the pandemic.

“Up in the tree”

Willow shared.

“Up tree up”

Harry stated.

“It trees”

Ella expressed.

“Big trees”

Frankie pointed out.



Emerging from this new project adventure, educators began connecting ways the children have utilised and adapted their environment with fallen tree leaves and branches coupled with their voices throughout experiences. Naturally, the children's first element of how they were going to connect with the country would be through exploring trees.

"Tree. Bird"

Jed expressed.

Eli was drawn into the experience of the projector on the wall. He leaned forward to explore how he can touch the wall in order to become closer with what he was exploring. "Yeah" Eli stated throughout his experience.



During the children's lunch time, we have been utilising being all together in a group to prompt ideas with noises of Australian bush land and engage in a discussion about trees.

Willow opened the discussion by asking

"Where are they?"

"Where's the birds?"

Willow asked, re-stating her question.

Loula's response to this question was to point to the paper crane bird that was above her head.

"Other birdies outside"

Willow stated.



The Project Space

The children's conversations they have engaged in, has supported the direction in which the project will take. From this, we employed a slow and meaningful pedagogy to pull apart, research and reflect upon what this project means to the children and educators and what direction it may take.

Kolbe (2014) understands that this form of a creative environment makes it possible for children to explore, invent and make their ideas visible. She further explains the value behind creating a space or 'studio' and how it plays an important role in how children actively engage in learning.

Educators opened a discussion during a collaboration meeting about how we believed our children learn. We ultimately came to the decision that creating a project space would provide the children with a consistent area that is predictable. It would also be a place where they could share their thoughts and ideas and then bring these ideas to life through a creative medium. The project space itself continuously adapted over the course of the project as the children gained a deeper understanding of the country and shared their ideas.



While watching a music video to the song 'Buyini' by Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu a member of the Gumatj clan, off the coast of North East Arnhem Land, the children were drawn to the digital media that portrayed the story of the song. In particular the trees and the boat.

"Wanna see the boat"

Ella expressed.

We shared knowledge on how the First Nations People utilised tree bark and carvings from the trunk of a tree to create boats like they were viewing in the video.

"Boat"

Harry confirmed responding to this new information.



Lyrics to Bayini by Geoffrey Gurrumul
Yunupngu

*It's all about life,
And the love for the land.
Looking out to the bay,
Sweet judgment.
Waking up to the sun,
Of the jungle fire.
It is paradise.
Its where we belong.
North wing coming in my way.*

Violet utilised the project space to appreciate the beauty of the natural landscape that was projected.

“Ohh”

she shared, while pointing to the trees.

Loula was observed sitting closely to the project space, mesmerised by the projection of the slow moving gum trees. She demonstrated this through getting as close as she could to the table while analysing what she could see and pointing.



“What that?”

Willow J asked, tuning into the noises of birds in a nearby tree outside.

Remi swiftly moved towards the viewing platform in the playground to stand still and observe.

“Birdies”

Willow J confirmed, pointing to a nearby tree across the road from the centre.

“It’s a birdies in the tree”

Frankie expressed.

Our exploration of trees has naturally led to many different conversations about birds that live within the trees. The children seem to be in tune with the sounds that birds create and that have gathered the knowledge that most of the time the birds can either be found in a tree or flying over the top of the centre.

“Want to sing Kookaburra”
Willow J asked.



Lyrics to the Kookaburra Song

Kookaburra sits in the old gum
tree,
Merry merry king of the bush is he.
Laugh, Kookaburra, laugh,
Kookaburra,
Gay your life must be!

Kookaburra sits in the old gum
tree,
Eating all the gum drops he can
see.
Stop Kookaburra, stop Kookaburra
Save some there for me!

Kookaburra sits in the old gum
tree,
Counting all the monkeys he can
see.
Stop Kookaburra, Kookaburra
stop.
That's not a monkey, that's me!

Connecting with Tibin

After some time exploring watiyelong (trees) the interest of tibin (birds) sparked many different conversations in the indoor and outdoor environment. The children were responsive to the noises of the birds, images of them within their natural environment and their presence in the playground. The project space was adapted to reflect the children's line of interest in birds. These included projections of trees, with kookaburra's eating the gum nuts to create a direct link to the 'Kookaburra Song' the children have been singing.



Prior to beginning the experience, Loula was fascinated by the way the real tree branches interacted and created shadows onto the cockatoo projection on the wall. "It's a Keyarapai. A white cockatoo" Bree explained to Loula. We know from Loula's socio-cultural environment at home that the Keyarapai is something that she often observes, flying from tree to tree in the afternoons. Loula utilised resources such as gum nuts and foraged leaves from the playground to create her own clay bird. "Birdie" Bree stated, forming a connection for Loula between her interest of birds and the clay creation she had made.





“Daaa”

Grace expressed while pointing to the Keyarapai. She leaned over the table to be closer to the projection.

Eli squished and manipulated the clay resources to create his desired body shape for the bird. He then used mostly leaves and sticks to squish into the clay to create **“spikey”** he explained.

Sunny made connections between the bird on the projection and what she was making.

“Birdie here”

Sunny pointed out. Sunny’s attention was then diverted to exploring how she could create indents and prints using her finger nails and the resources. “That looks like the pattern on the bird here” Bree pointed out in the projection to Sunny.

“Yeah Sunny make a bird”

Sunny confirmed.



The Kookaburra

When the sun rose for the first time, Bayame ordered the kookaburra to utter its loud, almost human laughter in order to wake up mankind so that they did not miss the wonderful sunrise.



The community garden is a space where the children often observe an abundance of birdlife flying from tree to tree, sitting on the power lines and communicating to one another. After listening to the story 'Kookoo the Kookaburra' the children began hearing some interesting noises amongst the bottlebrush tree.

“Oh what dat?” Ella gasped.

“Up” Harry pointed noticing the magpie.

“A birdie, twee twee” Ella expressed.

After completing the story, Bree shared with the children a dreaming story about a Kookaburra.

“Kaakaakaa” Willow giggled **“like this, it's a kookaburra”**.

One morning the children were provoked by the project space and projection of a kookaburra. “I wonder what bird it is?” Paula asked as she joined the children at the table.

“**A kakakaka**” Eli shared with a smile.

“**Yeah a kookaburra**” Willow added.

After further discussions the children began discussing the idea of painting.

“**Yeah painting**” Willow stated with excitement.

“Maybe we could paint some birds” Bree suggested, to extend the children’s formulating ideas around native birds.

“**Probably I can do that**” Willow responded clearly thinking about her plan, “**maybe I can do a parrot**” Willow continued.

“**It’s a whale here**” Willow later shared in the painting experience.





Through the children's exploration of birds in the natural environment the children continued to become in-tune with the sounds of birds they could hear in the tree's surrounding the outdoor playground.



"It's a little madpie"
Willow announced to everyone.

Once Loula heard the word 'magpie' she connected and tuned in with the environment surrounding her.



"Ohhhhh"
Loula gasped with excitement.



The Role of the Environment

Our assessment of the children's learning from the beginning of our project demonstrated to us that the children were highly influenced by the environment. Our philosophy of how children learn is influenced by the Reggio Emilia approaches' principle; that children's learning and interactions is influenced and relational to learning environment around them. Physical spaces hold the potential to influence what and how children learn. Our project space has played an important role in fostering the children's lines of inquiry throughout this project. Expanding from the project space, the children have also began transferring their emergent thinking into different learning spaces within the environment. This demonstrates to educators that the children are exploring theories and knowledge throughout their world; from within Elder Street itself, into their lives outside of the centre, at the beach, in the car and on family holidays. We believe the children have been inspired by their growing knowledge and connection to country.

Looking at this through the lens of our project, educators have made the connection between our understanding of how the children have been learning and what we know about how the First Nations people and their reciprocal relationship with the land. The land being the web of relations, connects back to how the First Nations people rely on and gain knowledge through the dreaming.



Connecting to the Muring

Educators noticed the children's conversations in the project space adapt to a new connection and interest of the ocean (Muring). Running parallel to this interest the children began integrating this into their conversations, play, art experiences, and the learning environment. Leo retrieved a sea animal book one morning and returned back to the rainbow mat where he was surrounded by a group of children. Not long after, Willow J sourced some of the sea animal figures within the room and returned to the space to compare them to the book.



The role of the learning environment continued to play a large role in the children's connection to Awabakal land.

"It's a waaaave" Ella shared one morning noticing the clouds creating a pattern in the sky. Bree observed Ella analyse the small movement of cloud from the wind.

"Moving" Ella shared as her eyes were captivated by this discovery. "Where is the wave?" Bree asked Ella.

"Over there" Ella said pointing up to the sky. For some time Ella observed the clouds move through the sky and continued to make connections between the rolling waves of the ocean.





Remi was observed comfortably propped up on the table watching the animals swim by.

“Ah, turtle” Remi explained with a large smile across her face.

“Turtle” Remi continued as she pointed to and touched the turtle on the wall.

“It’s a fishy” Willow explained. Isabel gestured as a fish darted across the screen.

“Look tha dolphin” Willow continued while labeling each of the animals she will see.



The children and educators created colours that linked to the colours of the ocean that they have been investigating in the projections. After the colours were dry the children used fine pens to mark intricate details into their ocean coloured images.

“It’s a whale” Ella enthusiastically expressed, **“lots of whales”**.

“They go bbbbb” Ella shared, connecting to her knowledge of the sounds that whales create.



Delving Deeper

Going to the ocean and our beautiful beaches has not been easily accessible to the children throughout our new project journey of connecting to country. Living on the east coast of Australia, educators understand that the beach and coastal life is something that is familiar to the children and something they connect to. Due to this socio-cultural positioning, educators and the children enjoyed many different learning environments where they could share their knowledge and develop their own understanding of the ocean before investigating First Nations and Awabakal perspectives of the importance Muring holds.

Willow suggested, “**watch the kadaloo story?**”

The children later grouped together to re-visit the dreaming story shared by Robin Japanangka Granites from Arrernte land. To link with their new line of inquiry, the children and educators shared the dreaming story of a whale, told by the Mirning people.



The Mirning People

The Mirning people hold wisdom and knowledge of whales that pass by their land and encompasses the ancient coastal seabed of the Nullarbor

Plain Ngargangooridri, the spectacular limestone Bunda Cliffs and the pristine waters of the Great Australian Bight. The children listened to the story of the white Dreamtime whale Jeedara. The annual returning of the whales in their migrationsignifies the story of re-birth, a celebration of the Mirning people and re-uniting family.



“Shishy” Remi smiled.

“A big black whale” Willow explained.

Harry held a whale figure to the screen as though comparing the two. When the image changed to fish swimming, Harry quickly dropped the whale and held the fish to the screen.

“Fish swim” Harry shared.



Much of the children's knowledge they have gathered throughout the space of the project has been gathered through investigative inquiry prompted by a different range of media. What we have assessed through careful and close observation and co-opted learning is that the children now understand that animals within the ocean express and portray knowledge that was valuable to the First Nations people.



Awabakal tribes were closely connected to the information that was provided by whales migrating from south to north throughout the year. Whales began the great migration to move north into warmer waters in the cooler seasons in order to mate and breed new **“baby whale”** as Willow J explained. Later when the cooler seasons were over, they began to move back down south to find fish in the arctic waters. This migration was an indication to the Awabakal people of when the seasons were changing.

Ongoing Theory Building Through Art

The children's knowledge and theories about the ocean and ocean animals progressed through creative thinking. Educators intentionally created a space to support ongoing knowledge building so the children could continue to re-visit and add to it as new theories emerged.

One afternoon the children spent some time intentionally adding intricate details and colours to their water paint ocean colours.



“A dolphin” Willow H giggled.

“Red snail” Harry shared.

“Look at that! A whale” Willow J stated pointing to her art.

“Drawing the people in the water”
Frankie shared.

Later Harry re-visited his artwork and began making connections with the colours of the coral he was viewing on the projector. **“Harry’s”** he stated pointing to the projector and then his artwork.

“I’m swimming in the water” Willow H giggled while reflecting on her artwork.





Bangarra Ballerinas

Upon returning inside one morning, Willow requested to listen to **“Sia chandelier ballerina music please”**. The piano version of this song prompted Willow, Ella, Remi, Isabel and Sunny to join in performing their beautiful ballerina dance moves.

The children’s interest in ballerinas quickly intensified. In Aboriginal culture, dancing is used to share stories from generation to generation; stories about the dreaming, the land, the people and the animals.

The Bangarra Dance Theatre is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation that orchestrate and perform nationally, portraying significant aspects of their culture, the people and the dreaming. While viewing the dancers the children found different ways to connect with what they were seeing.



That evening many of the children excitedly shared their experience of watching the Bangarra Dance Theatre with their families in the home environment.

“It’s the birdy ballerina”

Willow explained to her dad on her way home.

“This one”

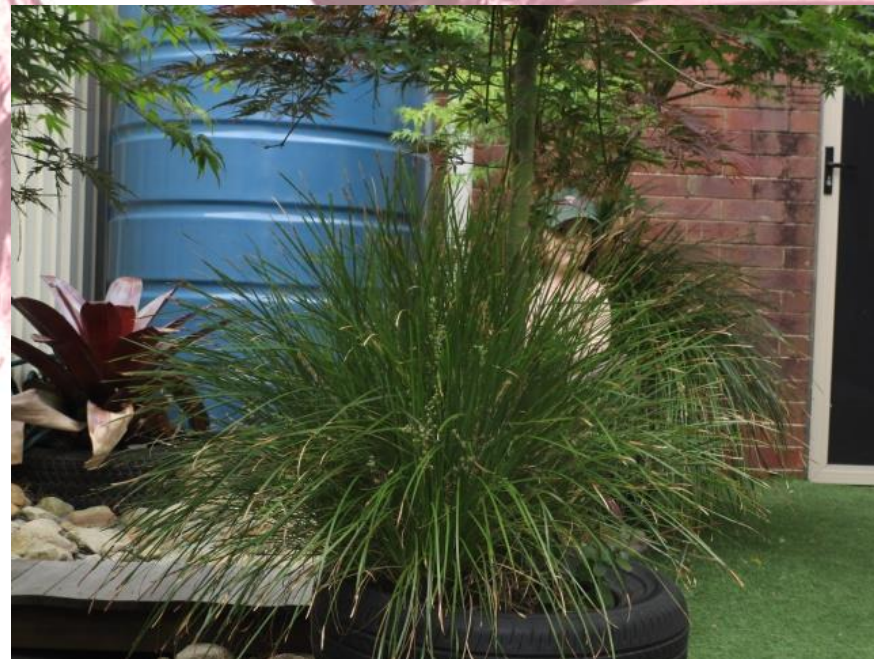
Sunny shared with her mum, while demonstrating a dance movement with her legs.

Ella’s mum shared that in the evening at home, Ella gracefully danced around the lounge room before she went to sleep.

A few days later, Willow and Sunny re-engaged with the storyline of the Bangarra Dance Theatre’s performance alongside Keely in the playground.

Sunny demonstrated her elegant and intentional dance moves in a flow of lifting her leg, spinning around and extending her arms in the air. **“Like this”** Sunny confidently expressed.

Willow recalled her interpretation of the dancing where the birds were hiding behind the trees. She promptly rushed over behind a grassy bush in the playground and expressed **“I’m a birdy”**. Moments later, Willow raced out from behind the bushes, **“the rain is coming... flying”** she explained. **“Birdy dance”** Willow smiled.



Deepening Connection to Culture and Land

“What’s that rain” Willow enquired one morning while peering up to the sky.

“Is it raining yet?” Bree asked Willow.

“It’s raining soon” Willow responded.

Willow and Bree engaged in a conversation about some signs that the Awabakal people looked out for within the environment when it might be about to rain.

“Big cloud there” Willow stated pointing up to a grey cloud.

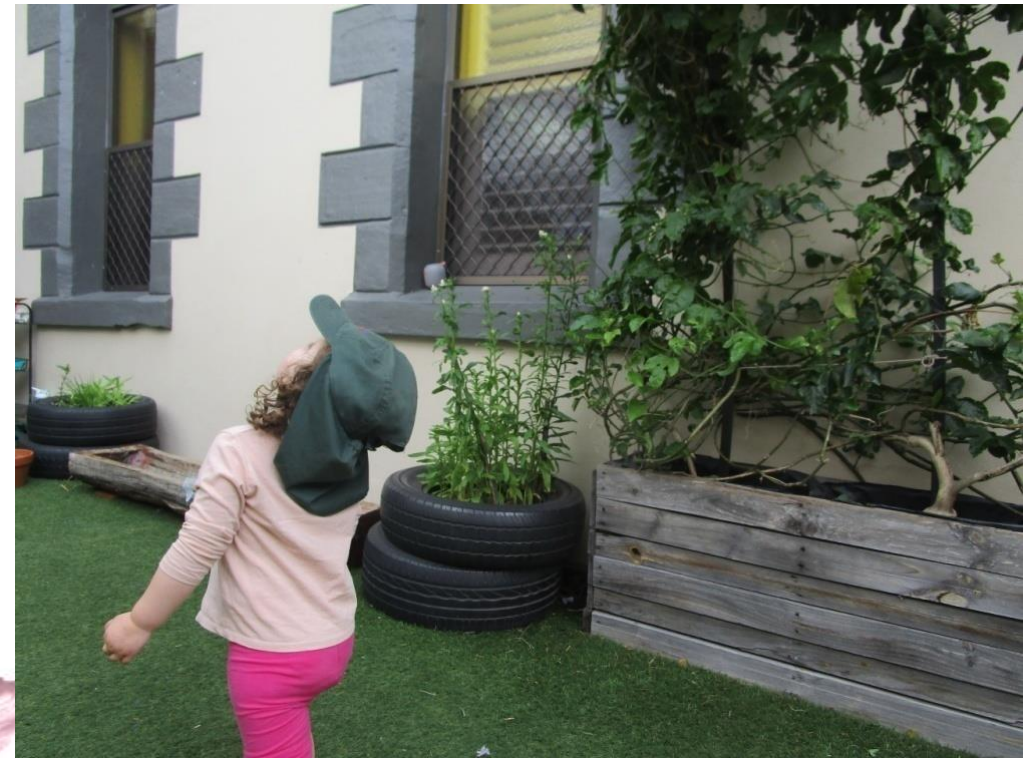
“Can you remember what the different birds do to tell us that it’s about to rain?” Bree prompted Willow.

“It’s a kadalookooka” Willow stated with a giggle.

Eli quickly joined this conversation sharing his knowledge on the kookaburra call,

“Kaakaakaaka”.

“Like the birdy ballerina?” Willow questioned, linking her knowledge of the kookaburra with the experience of watching the Bangarra Dance Theatre.



“Birds telling us rain”

Sprinkling raindrops emerged from the sky and the rainbow lorikeets responded by chirping in the tree across the road from the playground.

“What’s that” Ella expressed noticing the sounds of the birds. Ella answered her own question by sharing **“they dancing there, like this”** while striking a ballerina pose.

“Birds telling us rain...look... birdy ballerina” Willow J shared.

It was in this moment that educators noticed that the children began to equate their own connections and knowledge through the dance form of storytelling and what they were observing in their immediate environment.





Warlpiri Elder, Jerry Jangala (2021) explains the importance of a reciprocal relationship between the land and people. He extends an understanding that is undertaken in a respectful manner, it is important for everybody to feel and know the land in order to live on it.

“Honoring this reciprocal relationship with the land is central to Indigenous culture and is a concept important for all people living in Australia today” (Jangala, 2021).

To connect with their own theory, the children began standing on tree stumps and wooden logs to perform their own dance to inform each other of the rain they believed was soon to arrive.



Creating a Song

Creatively engaging with the children's learning and connection to country through song creation

When reflecting on our project of 'Connecting to Country' that has taken place over the year, educators have observed a deep level of learning, discoveries and evolution of theories. In order to end this section of the project, we began to reflect on the children's creative interests and strengths in order to create something truly special.

Educators were drawn to the children's ongoing interest in singing songs, whether it was together as a group or individually, there was always a song for the occasion. This occurred often and has been a large part of our program this year. Utilising this shared interest, we decided to draw from all the aspects of the project thus far to create our very own song. Educators and children will together unpack their understanding of animals we have learnt about, the land and oceans we have explored and the Indigenous dancing and music to create our own, amazing and unique song to accompany our project.

When looking at this idea deeper we were required to determine a baseline for the song, something familiar for the children and educators to adapt, change and revamp. We discussed creating a song alongside the children that was easy to follow and something we have listen to previously. We considered that 'Give me a home among the gum trees' by Wally Johnson and Bob Brown could be the perfect inspiration for our song.

Reflective Learning

The children utilised the documentation panels to provoke common themes within the project that could be used to create a song. Bree prompted the children to investigate the panels of documentation on the wall utilising them as a tool for reflective discussions between the children.



“What do you think should be in our song about Awabakal Country?” Bree asked the children.

Willow immediately ran over to the whale figures and returned. **“The mummy and the daddy and the baby”** she expressed. She promptly dropped the whales on the floor and began searching for the documentation panel that includes the photograph of the story ‘The Lost Joey’, **“the mummy kadaloo find its baby here”** Willow J shared.

“The birdies tweet tweet” Frankie shared.

“No birdies in the tree” Harry added.

“Raining birdies go tweet tweet like the kooka”
Willow J joined in on the conversation.

“That one” Jed stated, pointing to the photographs of himself holding shells from the ocean.

“The mummy kangaroo” Willow H added.



Researching Awabakal Language

And so... the children's research for correct Awabakal terms and language began

Watiyelong, Tibin and Muring; Awabakal words for tree, bird and sea, are common words that the children have become familiar with hearing in conversations and learning shared while connecting to country. The children utilised the photographs within the Miromaa Awabakal Dictionary as a point of discussion between the group.

Jed closely investigated each page within the dictionary. He smiled when he noticed an animal, he was familiar with and moved it closer to the other children to view.

“That one” Ella expressed pointing to the Kookaburra.

“Werekato” Bree responded.

“Whale” Harry pointed out with excitement noticing the picture of the whale in the dictionary.

“The Awabakal word for that is Berebakaan” Bree added.

“Yes” Harry agreed.



Learning the New Song

The song itself brings together all components of the children's learning journey into one holistic representation in a symbolic finale. It cohesively concludes the end of the children's learning journey for 2021. The song showcases the children's vocabulary whilst also including their unique theories and stories that they adapted from their own ontologies and knowledge while connecting to country.

While the children were learning the song, educators were reminded of the importance and influence of an actively social learning environment. The children were highly influenced by the socio-cultural environment which played an important role in connecting their previously acquired knowledge of country with their new knowledge. This knowledge reflected through the dreaming stories they listened to, play experiences, songs they sung, and the Bangarra Dance Company.

While learning the song alongside the children, educators captured videos of the children singing and dancing to the song. The vision being to create a digital documentation share with our families and community. To share this exciting documentation, we welcomed our families and community back into the Possum Room to enjoy the storytelling imagery projected onto the wall alongside the children and educators. The digital footage showcased the documentation panels created throughout the project course and filmed moments of the children singing their new song 'Welcome to Awabakal Country'.



Connecting with the Wollutuka Institute

Recently the children were given the opportunity to contact a team member from the Wollotuka Institute at the University of Newcastle. Her name is Jade Nicholson and she is also a close friend of Bree's.

During the video call the children proudly sang their song 'Welcome to Awabakal Country' to Jade including the actions of the song. This special opportunity offered the children a unique experience to connect with a local Indigenous education coordinator and researcher. Jade proudly supported the children and congratulated them on the research the children have embedded into learning each day.

Later during the call, Jade invited the children to come and visit the Wollotuka institute in the Birabahn Building at the University of Newcastle to share their song with her colleagues.



Welcome to Awabakal Country

As this project draws to a conclusion for the year, educators believe it is not the end of the children's learning journey of connecting to country. The journey of Reconciliation is never over, so rather we see the project as a chance to position how we welcome new children, new theories, and new perspectives within an ongoing learning journey and partnership with the Awabakal people and land. We are committed to ongoing education on reconciliation at Elder Street, on the land on which the children learn and play upon each day .

This learning journey began on Awabakal country. The country of our homes, our families, our community and our place of learning. It required the children to come 'together'. A term the children inhabited within their whole beings from the beginning of the year.

This learning journey supported the children in creating a meaningful connection to the First Nations people through the dreaming, caring for the land, songs, dancing which embraced and embedded holistic connection and reconciliation.

"This learning journey embodied a waterway that absorbed all the creeks that fed into it, making space for the new waters to cross and create a river"

(Gilimbaa, 2021).