

Elder Street Pedagogical Post

August 2021

Wonderful months of discovery in the Possum room.



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

The last few months have seen the Possum children engaging in wonderful learning experiences that support them in discovering who they are as individuals within a community of learners. Rogoff (1994) understands 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. 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. The rainbow mat is a special place where the children and educators often find themselves gathering in the room. It's 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. During a discussion on Indigenous perspectives, something 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. Throughout our discovery as educators we found reciprocity, community and together-ness are the ultimate foundations to learning. Vygotsky(1978) explains our internal developmental processes which are awoken by learning and can only operate when a child is interacting with peers within their environment. From this point the children began developing ideas to provoke and demonstrate who they are to their peers. They communicated their interests that may be a "ball" (Wyatt) and guided their new friends through sharing their socio-cultural influence and a love for the garden. These forms of sharing developed the children's holistic understanding of the beginning foundations of forming strong peer relationships within our Possum community.





CELEBRATING NAIDOC WEEK-A special week... A special year... Always

NAIDOC week is a special time to reflect and celebrate the history, culture and achievements of the First Nation Peoples, recognising them as the Traditional Custodians of the land.

The theme – 'Heal Country!' – calls for all of us to continue to seek greater protections for lands, waters, sacred sites and cultural heritage. It is also a time for us to look inward and to see the changes that need to be made so that we can 'Heal Country!' In the Possum room, this years theme seemed to really compliment our plans for our program since the beginning of the year.

Connection through art-Consisting of individual pieces of paper bark each of the children painted on, this display of artworks is a collective representation of the importance of connection, caring for the land and respect to the traditional owners of our land.

With our educational philosophy of incorporating natural items into play spaces in mind, educators intentionally drew from the 2021 NAIDOC week poster artist, Maggie-Jean Douglas' artwork. Featuring our foraged native gum tree leaves, strawflowers from Ella's garden, sticks, leaves, bark and wood from our local and wider community, the space was a textural and inviting art experience for the children. Before even beginning to paint, the children became familiar with the resources provided and gathered knowledge on how traditional Aboriginal artists use the land to create. Throughout the experience the children made various connections by drawing from their knowledge of previous experiences. We observed this through discussions, connection of colours, sharing knowledge and connection with one another throughout the experience. Educators noticed the children's intricate approach to this artwork demonstrating focus and intention as they created.

Sharing a song- Both educators and children have placed great importance on the inclusion of songs into our daily program. Together time on the mat is where most of our group learning around songs has occurred. This week educators ensured the inclusion of Indigenous songs to the collection. 'Taba Naba' is a children's song originating in the Torres Strait Islands just north of the continent of Australia. 'Inanay' is an Indigenous Australian lullaby, in the Yorta Yorta language. The children responded well to the songs and very quickly picked up the words and actions.

Cooking- Cooking experiences incorporated a collection of bush tucker ingredients which we shared across the centre for lunch. Educators were aware of how to engage in this experience authentically when introducing it to the children. We chose to make some delicious meatballs. As this was already on our menu for lunch educators substituted the mince for Kangaroo mince. By simply incorporating Indigenous ingredients into our menu we believe this supports our authentic inclusion of Indigenous culture throughout NAIDOC week.



THE POSSUM ROOM'S ONGOING COMMITMENT TO RECONCILIATION -A statement which encompasses our commitment to an embedded indigenous perspective

We acknowledge and respect the traditional custodians of the land on which we grow and learn, the Pambalong clan of the Awabakal people. We pay our respect to the past, present and future traditional custodians and elders of this nation.

From the beginning of the year the Possum team made the curriculum decision to create an authentic connection and commitment to an embedded Indigenous perspective into our educational program. We were mindful of the authenticity towards the representation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture we portrayed to the children. In order to achieve this we engaged in respectful research, utilised our connections with the wider Indigenous community and were inspired by native connections to the Awabakal land on which we learn. We are committed to continuing to embed the culture in a natural and authentic way throughout our educational program, environment and everyday practices and principles. Each day the children make connections with the land, animals, people, art, stories, language and music which supports them to develop a deeper understanding of the culture and learn about the traditional custodians and elders past, present and future.



FINDING OUR PLACE IN THE GARDEN

Although since our last addition it has changed from Autumn to Winter the Possum children have been very busy caring for and preparing the garden for Spring and Summer. Educators in the Possum room have a big passion for all things gardening and we have discovered this year not only do our children love this space too, so do their families. Spending time caring for and engaging in the garden has provided us with the opportunity to establish connections between the children's days in care and that of their time spent in their gardens over the weekend. As the Possum playground is a space you walk through when entering the building you may have noticed plenty of changes slowly occurring in this environment. We have been mindful to include a range of plants which link back to our embedding inclusion of an Indigenous perspective. Educators have chosen to intentionally introduce native plants such as straw flowers, kangaroo paw and violas to this learning space.

Love

Paula, Bree, Jena, Olivia,
Keely, Jess & Casey x



Discovery and investigation in the Joeys room



PROCESS OF LOOKING DEEPER- Unpacking an interconnectedness between children and their natural environment

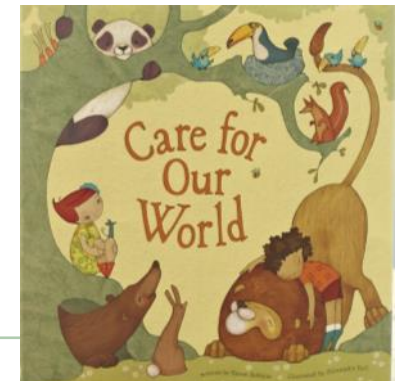
Throughout the last few months the Joey children have continued exploring their love of all things gardening as they continue to deepen their understanding and unpack how our lives are interconnected with the natural environment. Educators aim to support the children to gain an understanding as well as model respect and care for the natural world.

The children have developed the skills to confidently identify and communicate the differences between different plants. Although, they have displayed stronger connections to other languages; art, hands on explorations and literacy learning. Recently a new book has supported a new line of inquiry the children have been undertaking. 'The big book of blooms' delves deeper into the Joey's developing understanding of ecosystems. This learning began with the addition of our worms to the learning environment and our two snail friends which joined the discovery mid-way through the project. We are inspired by the ecosystems the children discover in their environments and incorporate this into our learning spaces within the room. The insect hotel has been a wonderful experience which the Joey children have been in the process of planning and designing themselves.

Educators have observed how the children have progressively used more expressive language with one another. This has been evident as they explore their thoughts and ideas and share in-depth conversations through a serve and return style interaction.

The Joey children have really enjoyed the display of documentation in the atelier and have been spending time looking back on the learning that has taken place. The atelier has become somewhat of the project room for the Joeys and this space is filled with documentation, provocations and resources to support and facilitate the project.

More than ever the community garden has become a special place for the Joey children. Not only have they been taking care of the space, gardening, planting new plants and feeding the worms they have also been spending time here to just be. They have utilised the beautiful timber off cuts Catherine brought in to enjoy lunch in the garden. During this time they discuss what is in their lunches, what is happening within the environment and general mealtime chit chat.



DEEPENING OUR UNDERSTANDING TOGETHER

Over the last few months the Joey children have really been engaging with the experiences presented to them at the tables. Educators utilise this learning environment to support them in developing their connections with one another. They have noticed within this space children tend to be exploring in social groups, providing for more creative conversations in play. Educators and children have been focusing on slowing down their play and delving deeper into the experience itself.

Throughout this exploration and in correlation with other learning taking place within the room, educators have noticed the Joey children exploring their more inquisitive sides. Together the children have been asking questions, provoking thinking and establishing new meaning throughout their play and including their peers in this process.



CONNECTIONS WITH LITERACY

Books continue to play a large role in the Joey room. They support children's developing understanding around new concepts, enhance learning which is taking place and are simply enjoyable to share together. Literacy is a fundamental resource to many areas of development, in particular the development of communication skills. A study published in the journal of developmental and behavioural paediatrics, conducted in the United States, found parents and educators who read at least one book with the children everyday expose them to an estimated 78,000 words a year. Throughout this continued engagement with books educators are supporting children to develop their communication abilities as well as a love and respect for literacy and books in general. This important resource we share and hold dear.



NEW RESOURCES

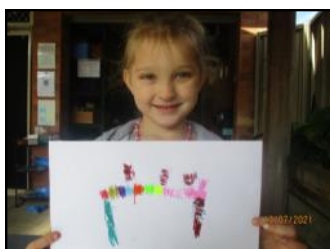
Who doesn't enjoy the addition of something new to a space. Educators worked hard to pick several new resources which will extend, develop and enhance the children's learning while reflecting their developing interests in a range of areas. Across the centre the children have really enjoyed the addition of these new resources. In the Joey room we were treated to new furniture for the dolls and kitchen items, which has provoked some lovely meals around the table. A collection of new books as mentioned above have made a huge impact to our love of reading. The addition of our miniature green house in the atelier has provoked some wonderful conversations and breathed new life into the long process of germinating plants.

All in all it has been a wonderful few months of exploring, learning and engaging in the Joey's room. We hope you have enjoyed reading.



Love,
Lauren, Ellie,
Jena, Olivia,
Keely, Casey and
Jess x

Learning and exploration in the Wallaby room from May - August



ROADS AND INFRASTRUCTURE - THINKING DEEPER ABOUT PLANNING AND CONSTRUCTION PROCESSES

This project stemmed from the children's interest and knowledge in road safety and educators began to intentionally plan experiences that supported this learning. This learning included becoming familiar with road signs and knowing what to do when crossing the road. The children shared their understandings through art pieces and spent time out in the community putting their understandings into practice. The children have demonstrated their interdependence within their world. They have shared their knowledge on how to be safe and respond to the world around them in safe but active ways. This has been most evident in their creative drawing experiences.

The next step involved exploring the different ways we can travel within Australia and around the world. The children utilised their imaginative thinking, creating trains, cars and boats in their play from resources in the outdoor environment.

These conversations steered us in the direction of the different infrastructures that vehicles travel on. Following the children's interests and supporting their ideas we began exploring road and bridge infrastructure and the planning processes that happen behind the scenes.



There has been deep thinking shared about how bridges and other types of infrastructure are built, how they stay standing and the factors that are taken into consideration when planning and building. We shared conversations in small and large groups about how different factors including gravity, weight distribution, height, shape, balance and stability affect the end result.

This learning has evolved from researching information about familiar bridges, in particular the Sydney harbour bridge, to drawing our own plans of how we see a bridge looking, using a range of construction resources to construct a large bridge as a group and most recently the children putting their ideas and critical thinking into practice as they think about, plan and construct their own replicas of bridges using matchsticks, paddle pop sticks and blu tac.

As educators assessed this learning we found that children who wouldn't be normally interested and engaged were able to regulate their bodies, process their ideas and work towards their goal. The children needed to think deeper about their ideas, why things weren't working, what they needed to change and sometimes have a few goes to get it to work the way they wanted.

Our curriculum decisions have been supported by the children's interests, their initiative in experiences and their sharing of where they would like to take their learning next.



EXPLORING OUR FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE

To support the children's ongoing project learning, we have been introducing them to new concepts including the roles of engineers and architects. This new information supports our ongoing project and provides a great platform for the children's plans and constructions. Educators have really reiterated the importance of not giving up and celebrating our 'failures'. After reading the books "Rosie Revere Engineer" and "Iggy Peck Architect" we opened up the lines of communication about what we can do if something doesn't go to plan the first time.

"We try again" - Alba

"We try something different" - Ivy

"Maybe we just need to make it stronger" - Elliott

"I just think about it and then try again a different way" - Ruby

"Don't give up" - Henry

"I just try a different way and then it works" - Max

We felt as though these special words were worth sharing. As a community we are educating such strong, capable and confident learners. They love taking in new knowledge, sharing their understandings with others and extending on their own learning with enthusiasm and energy. We are so proud of our Wallabies!!



GROUP LEARNING AND SOCIAL PLAY - THE BENEFITS ARE ENDLESS

Social connections and friendships are so beneficial in the early years. They assist children in developing social and emotional skills and feeling a strong sense of belonging. Educators place great emphasis on the connections children hold within the Wallaby room and how these are supported in play experiences and environments.

In both the indoor and outdoor environments, spaces are planned and set up so that they support this type of play and learning. These spaces encourage; communication, cooperation, listening, problem solving, turn taking and perspective taking. Social play also requires children to share ideas and express feelings while negotiating and reaching compromises.

We have noticed that when children are engaged in social play they demonstrate creative and collaborative thinking and challenge each other's ideas and ways of completing tasks. They encourage and inspire each other to try new things and support each other whole heartedly.



COMMUNICATION AND CONFIDENCE - SHARING NEWS

Standing in front of your peers to share something special to you is such an exciting thing for a child. It supports confidence, communication skills, memory recall, independence and autonomy and language development. As educators, we love seeing a child's strong sense of belonging and community as they make connections between their home life and time spent here with us at Elder Street. The excitement and authenticity of these moments is what make them so special. We would like children to think deeper about the 'news' they are sharing. Why is it important to them? Where did it come from? What are three things that you love about what you did/ what you received? Who did you experience this with? These are just some questions that may prompt your child's thinking when it comes to the things that are important to them.



EXPERIMENTATION, HYPOTHESISING AND DIVING DEEPER INTO THE 'WHY'

This learning initially began with a simple request from the children to make a volcano. The interest continued to grow and the opportunities seemed to become endless as to where our learning could end up. Through shared group learning, the children discovered what happens when two substances are combined. They used thinking processes and problem solving skills to explore the 'why' of things happening and how this is affected by a range of concepts.

This learning was supported even further during National Science Week from the 14th - 22nd August. National Science week happens all over Australia and is an annual celebration of science and technology. The theme this year is Food: Different by design. It honours the United Nations International Year of Fruits and Vegetables and the International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development.

Throughout the week we explored a range of food related experiments and posed questions that made us think deeper about what we were learning. We started off our week experimenting with celery sticks and what would happen to them if we placed them in jars of coloured water. Over 48 hours the children discovered that the water was soaking up through the celery sticks and coming out of the leaves. Next was the skittle rainbow. We watched as the warm water caused a reaction with the coloured lolly's and created a rainbow like pattern in the middle of the plate. Using a decibel reader to support our data collection, educators asked the question "how loud can a carrot crunch?". The children took turns to crunch into their carrot and we discovered that their crunches were in the same vicinity as a loud street or a car radio. WOW!!! What a wonderful week full of so much discovery and new knowledge.

If we regard play as stemming from the dispositions of children's minds (Claxton & Carr, 2004; DEEWR, 2009) - their natural curiosity, imagination, risk taking, problem solving and persistence—we can see how play and by association creativity, contribute to children building their identities (Wood & Hall, 2011)



Love Kate, Donna, Emily, Luan, Olivia, Jena,
Keely, Jess & Casey x

LITERACY LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Emergent literacy is when children develop reading, writing and oral language concurrently and independently as a result of their exposure to social contexts (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). As educators we place great emphasis on children being exposed to literacy through an exciting range of play based experiences. Over the past few months this has included; building letters from lego pieces, literacy and numeracy exploration through chalk drawing and loose parts and literacy learning through art.

From our time spent observing the children we have found that they are more focused and eager to learn about letters, numbers and words when it is incorporated into a play experience.





What is Project work?

A parents guide to what project work is really about.

Project work is an educational practice we follow here at Elder Street. Inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach, project work is a true journey of learning that takes place between educators and children as a collective. Educators work together to formulate and hypothesise about the possible directions of a project that studies in depth concepts, ideas and interests which arise within the group of children. Project work is considered as an adventure where educators help children make decision about the direction of study and representational mediums. Educators work alongside the children as a teacher-researcher to resource and guide expertise with the children. Throughout this project work educators create progressive documentation displays for children, families and educators to support the process of cyclical learning in our environment.

You might hear, read and see educators and children talking about their project. Each room has their project displayed within the room and we encourage you to spent time reading, sharing and engaging with each of our project. This display may not be complete as this is an adaptive body of work that is continually added to and re-evaluated. Throughout each of the rooms updates there is a teaser for families to find out a little bit more from each of the projects. We believe this snippet may paint a picture, however the work of art needs to be viewed as a whole.



PROJECTS CURRENTLY ON DISPLAY WITHIN THE ROOMS.

Possum Room– All The Possums- A journey connecting who the Possum children are individually within a community of learners.

Joey Room– The process of looking deeper– Unpacking an interconnectedness between children and their natural environment

Wallaby Room– Roads and Infrastructure; thinking deeper about planning and construction processes.



Our Updated Elder Street Philosophy

Elder Street Early Childhood Centre COMMUNITY PHILOSOPHY

The beliefs and values of the children, families and educators of Elder Street Early Childhood Centre have been consolidated to form our philosophy on the wellbeing, care, and education of children aged birth to five years.

Our philosophy is what we believe best represents, based on continually evolving evidence and collaboration, what is most important for children's experiences in the early years.

Through guiding values of accountability, collaboration, and courage we commit to the principles shared in this philosophy statement.

PLAY & LEARNING

Learning through play provides opportunities for children to search for knowledge, solve problems, take risks, and think critically.

Play is complex and requires a child focused contemporary and diverse teaching approach to make children's rich learning outcomes visible.

Our educational program is guided by the Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009) and the Reggio Emilia approach to project work and documentation of children's learning.

This type of learning enables interpretation and assessment of children's creativity, curiosity, needs and interests as they play.

THE CHILD

Each child's wellbeing, safety and potential is at the core of our purpose.

The child is not an abstract concept. Each child, no matter how young, comes to us already connected and a part of the world.

Our image of young children and childhood shapes our relationships with them. As the human brain is at its most adaptable form in early childhood, what occurs during this formative period matters a great deal, affecting children's life potential.

Children will have a strong start when they have rich contextually meaningful early experiences and when their families thrive in supportive communities. Therefore, we view all children as curious, competent, intentional learners who are knowledgeable, culturally, and socially connected meaning makers.

Positive outcomes are achieved for children by teaching and caring with happiness, joy and love and creating environments that are calm, flexible, authentic, and warm, open ended, ethical, and democratic.

RELATIONSHIPS

When children's thoughts, ideas, feelings and being, is holistically supported through meaningful relationships a strong sense of wellbeing is developed.

We consider relationships to include those with children, families, educators, the broader community, and the Awabakal people whose land that we are situated on is unceded. The Awabakal people, their land and culture motivate our relationship and commitment to Reconciliation and forms an integral part of our play and learning curriculum.

We value a sustainable future for culture and land with approaches to learning that includes recognising the importance of equity for all. We believe in cultivating a deep relationship with the planet through Education for Sustainability. We do this through a focus on nature play, recycling, waste control, awareness of water and energy usage, land care and gardening with children and families.

Relationships for children and families are developed through connection with our team, through building friendships, through cuddles, through relationship with play environments that are both built and natural, through sharing the importance and value of our educators explicitly and through sound communication.

Each of these relationships needs to be nurtured, reciprocal, secure and based on being respected, respectful and deeply valued. Relationships are key to belonging to the Elder Street family.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

We are guided by the international agreement for children's rights, outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Along with the many articles contained in the convention, we are committed to ensuring children are seen as knowledgeable and capable.

Each day children are empowered to make their own choices, to be celebrated for who they are individually and to be heard and included within the community.

Along with their rights we also believe young children are capable of understanding the responsibility associated with these rights and the rights of others.

EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

The development of children's social and emotional wellbeing is highly valued by our community.

By engaging in trusting relationships with educators, friends and families, children will grow to become resilient, confident, and empathetic.

Through experiential learning that elicits joy, happiness, self-expression, and self-confidence children develop practical wellbeing skills and self-efficacy. This in turn fosters interdependence and emotional security.