

Exploring Community Belonging: Children's Investigation of Built and Social Environments

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OUTLINE

- Introduction to our community
- Where did this idea come from?
- The journey of exploring our community belonging
- Children shared their community belonging through drawing and constructing
- Evaluation and my reflection of this experience
- How did this exploration change our practice?
- Conclusion

BANKSIA COTTAGE



OUR COMMUNITY



Images retrieved September 9th, 2016 from <http://www.mq.edu.au/about/campus-services-and-facilities/museums-and-collections/the-biological-sciences-museum> and <http://www.mq.edu.au/study/international-students/why-study-here/our-campus>

IT ALL STARTED ON MARCH 19TH 2014

- At the beginning of the year, the Koala's children showed great interest in building with blocks, Lego pieces as well as magnetic pieces in the room.
- The educators decided to plan an excursion intentionally to the construction site in front of Macquarie University Library.



BUT....

- Children showed very little interest in the construction site. They were more interested in the other environment around them.

Ella: We could roll down the grass.

Meydan: Suet, can we go run in the grass area?

Holly: Look at the sky! Is so blue!

- What happened? Why were the grass and sky look different outside Banksia?



MY DILEMMA

- The 'project' needed to go on. Perhaps, I could 'force' children to focus on 'MY PROJECT'.
- OR perhaps, I should embrace the unexpected and start the journey of exploring the sense of community connectedness with the children
- To choose between easy or difficult choices.

CHILDREN'S DECISION - APRIL 3RD 2014



- Through discussion, we decided to go to the lake.
- However, I suggested to children that we could revisit the construction site .
- As expected, children were rushing to go to the lake.

AT THE LAKE.....



Sky: Look at those sculptures! They look like people.

Luca: Yea. Do you know how they make those sculptures? They cover a people body with some kind of material so that the sculpture will look like a people shape.

Zoe: Those sculptures are for graduation. People take photos with those sculptures during their graduation.

Jemima: I see that before! They dress just like those sculptures

OUR PARTICIPATION IN THE COMMUNITY EVENTS



Orientation Week



TREE PLANTING DAY



ART EXHIBITION



ART EXHIBITION – ALL ABOUT EMOTIONS



ART EXHIBITION

– LEARNING THE HISTORY OF OUR PLACE



THE TREASURE MAP



OUR EXPLORATION OF THE COMMUNITY

- GUMNUT COTTAGE



VISITED THE PLANTS THAT WE PLANTED



LIVE IN THE MOMENT



“Ensure childhood is a time for being here and now and not solely about preparation for the future.” (Early Childhood Australia (ECA), 2016)

INVESTIGATION OF OUR COMMUNITY



AFTER A FEW MONTHS.....

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- We saw the differences in children. They were more confident and looked less anxious while being outside of the centre.



They also asked more questions while on excursions and started to link what they could see in the community to their own experiences



They started to understand more about how their community function.



Elijah: Suet, do you know that these are special statues?

Suet: How are they special? Because they are made of metal?

Elijah: No. They are for people to take photos on their special day.

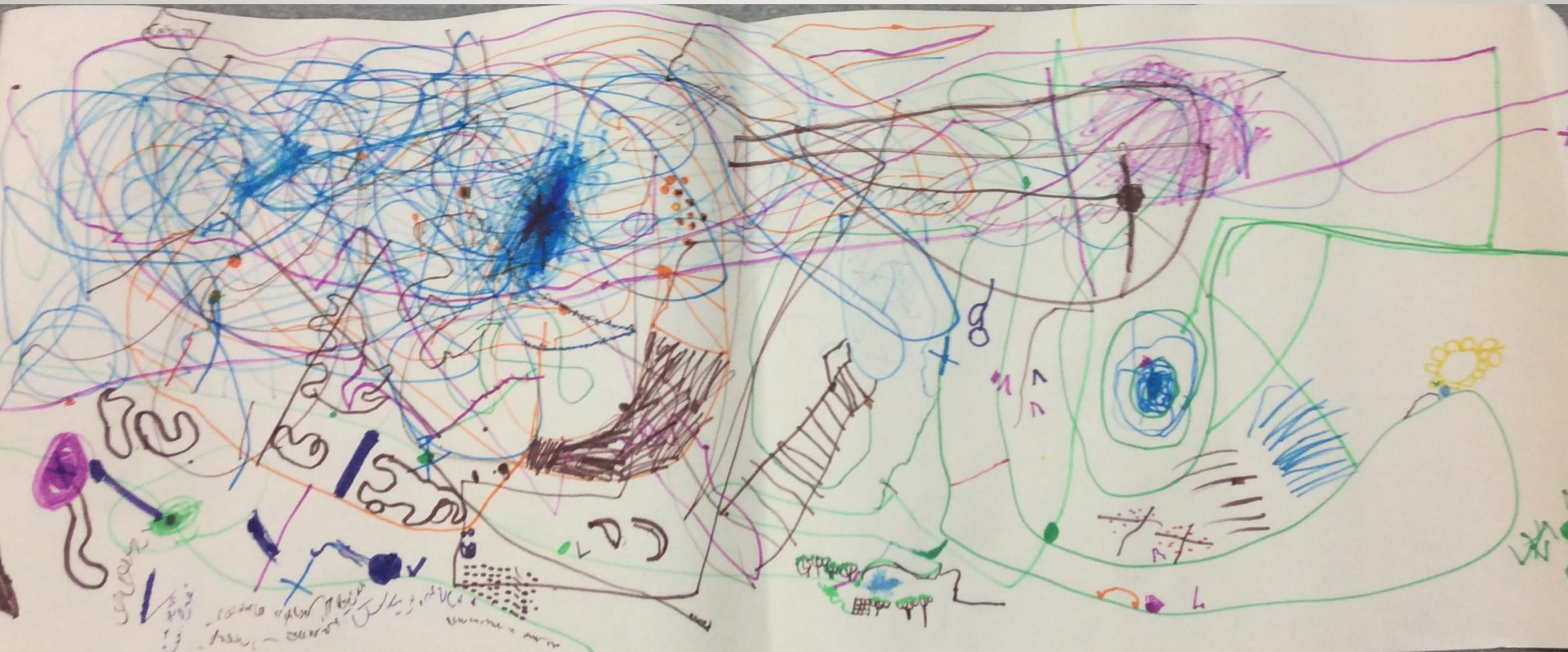
Holly: I know what day it is! Graduation day! I attend one of the graduation days before! They drink and have food after the graduation.

Elijah: (pointed to the crowd near the lake): There, there! Those people are celebrating!

- At the end of the year, I was curious about children's understanding of their community and wanted to learn more about children's sense of community belonging.
- I wondered how would children articulate their ideas of community using artefacts. So I challenged our children to use drawing and constructing to represent the buildings in their community.
- The children were divided into two groups: boys and girls.



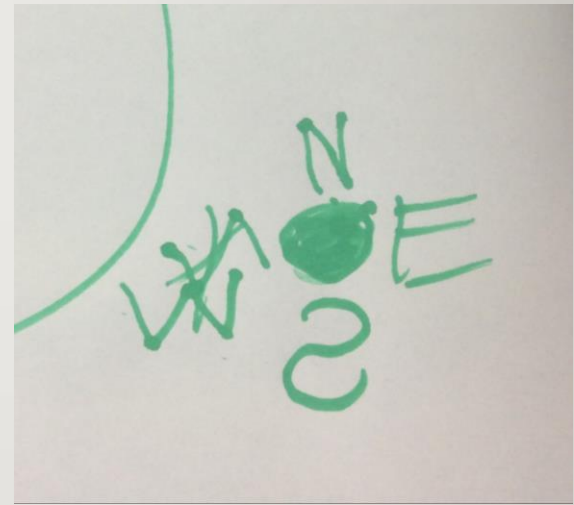
THE BOYS' DRAWING





The first thing that Luca drew

Luca: I am going to draw a compass. All the maps need a compass ... north, west, S... and E. Then.... (Quietly working on his drawing)



Then Luca started to draw....

Meydan: Is that Banksia?

Luca: Yes!

Suet: Banksia looks like that?

Luca: Yes! (Pointed at the windows) You can see trees everywhere in Banksia. That is why I draw some trees around Banksia.



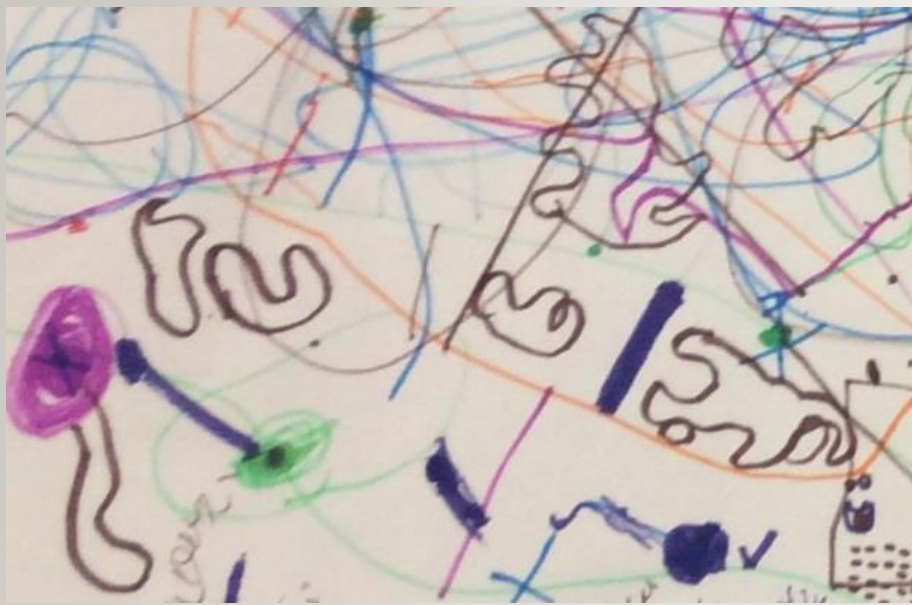


Meydan: This is Gumnut (Pointed to a brown dot on the paper)

Suet: Does Gumnut look like that?

Meydan: Yes! Remember when we walked to Gumnut there was a construction site at Gumnut. That is why it is brown with a big pile of dirt next to it.





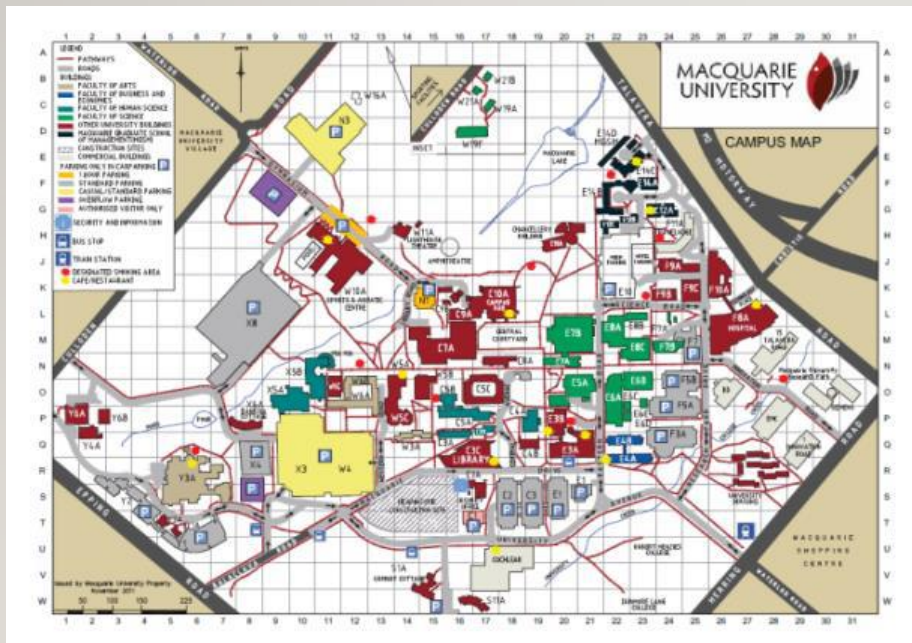
Lucas: Suet, look at what I draw. These are the buildings in the university.

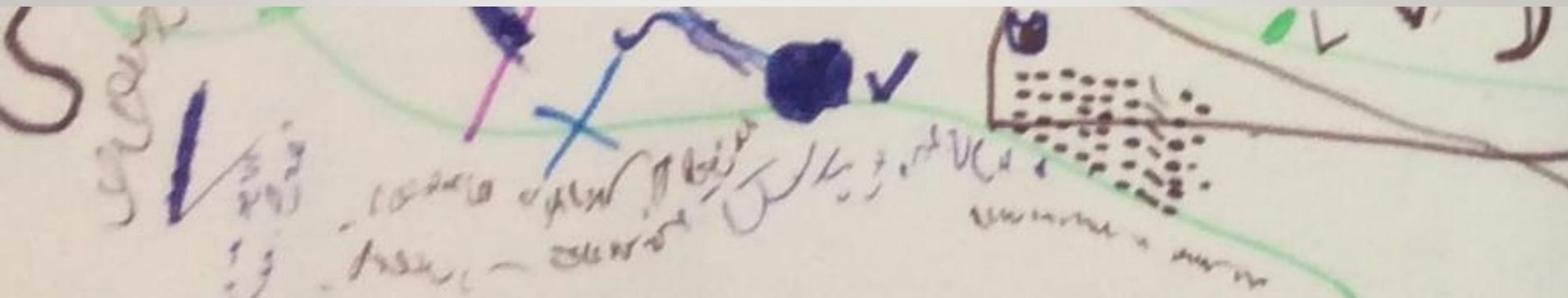
Suet: Oh. The buildings look like they have irregular shapes. Why is that?

Lucas: Well, when you look in the map. The buildings look like that isn't it?

Suet: Right! The Macquarie University map.

Lucas: Yes! The University map. In the map, the buildings look like that!





Suet: What are these tiny lines?

Meydan: They are words! You know the words on the floor? Sometimes you can see in the university.

Suet: The words that people draw with chalk?

Meydan: Yes! Sometimes you see in the university!





Lucas: (looked at Matthew's drawing) Cool Matthew!

Meydan: (looked at Matthew's drawing) That's too big Matthew. That's too big.

Matthew: No, it is not. (Continue his drawing)

Meydan: You are messing it now!

Matthew: No. I am not.

Suet: What are these lines Matthew? Why are they in different colours?

Matthew: They are road. The blue one is the road for cars and the purple one is the road for people. They look a bit messy because there are a lot of roads in the university for people and cars!

Lucas: I put the square here. That is the Macquarie Shopping Centre.

Luka: We can walk to the shopping centre from here. It is very close. (Pointed to the roads that Matthew drew) We need to cross a very busy road to go to the shopping centre.



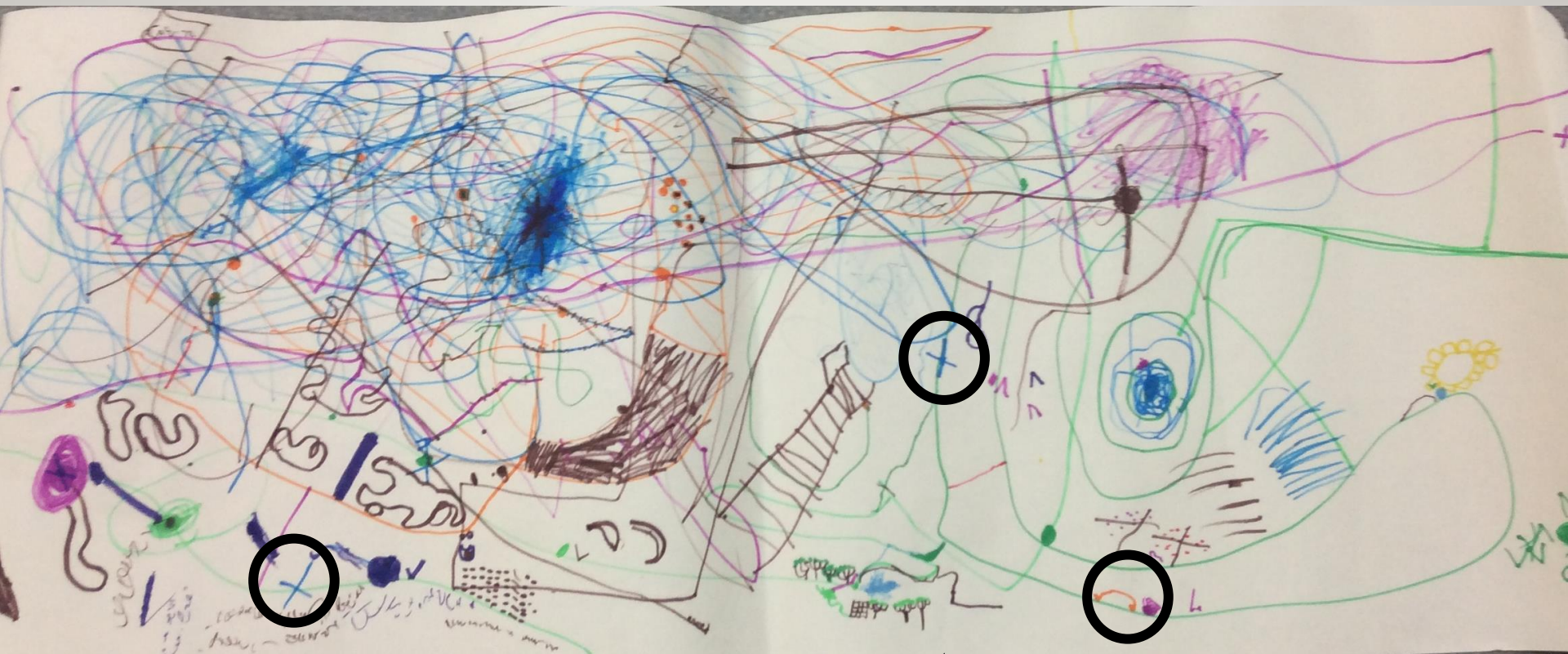
Interestingly, Daniel, Luca and Matthew included their houses in the drawing.

Luca: Because we walk to Banksia. We live close to the centre.

Matthew: Yea!

Lucas: I didn't draw my house because my daddy and mummy have to drive me to Banksia. If I want to draw it, it will be outside this map





THE GIRLS' DRAWING







Livinia: Remember that time we planted the tree near the lake?

Martina: Yes! We can draw that!

Livinia: We walked a long way to the lake. And there were a lots of trees on the way.

Martina: And a lots of rocks too!

Suet: What are these flowers for?

Martina: These flowers are the little plants that we planted. It will become flowers when they grow up.

Ella: Ok, I will draw the grass area near the lake. We ran and played games there!



Juniper: I am drawing the people I see last time. This is a mummy who is walking with her children.

Isabel: I will draw an aeroplane. I always see aeroplane outside.

Allegra: These are words on the floor! I saw people writing on the floor with chalk!



Isabel: I am drawing a picture of people having picnic near the tree.

Nicole: Yes! And all the flowers and butterflies we see when we walk outside Banksia.

Isabel: And the ladder we see near the lake.

THE BOYS' BUILDING



The group of boys spent some time building Banksia and the lake.

However, this experience only lasted for about 15 minutes.

Luca: We can't do this. We don't want to do this with blocks.

And they walked away.

THE GIRLS' BUILDING





Jemima: I will build the pathway that we always walk pass. The one with another centre (Mia-mia) near there. I like the grass area there. I love running there. I am also putting a lot of people on the pathway, because there are always a lot people in that area.



On the other side, Isabella, Isabel, Lizzy and Juniper, decided to build the buildings that they could see in the university area.



Isabella: I am going to build the big place where peoples rest there (Courtyard).

Isabel: I can help you. I will give you the blocks.

Lizzy: I am helping.

Juniper: Ok, I am going to build all the buildings around the University. All those buildings that we walk pass!



Zili: Suet, I am not going to build the buildings.

Suet: What are you going to do then?

Zili: I want to put all the rocks, flowers and trees that we see when we go for an excursion. That is what I see.

Livinia and Martina were helping the others with their building. When the other girls finished their building, both Livinia and Martina noticed something was missing.



EVALUATING THE EXPERIENCES

- The dynamic of the groups. Boys group and girls group.
 - Boys group focused on the physical environment
 - Girls group focused on the social environment
- Challenge the children's capability: Unexpected outcomes
- This journey contributed to the development of our sense of identity which is expected to give confidence to voice our views and opinions, to make choices, and to help shape our own learning (NCCA, 2009).

MY REFLECTION

- Reshaped my image of children.
- Encouraged me to redefine the meaning of 'community belonging'
- The development of consciousness and sensitivity towards the values, expectations and opportunities in the community (Ebrahim, 2012).

WHERE TO FROM HERE?





- This year, the exploration continued. Unlike previous years, we focused on small groups of children and listened to individual's connection to their community.



CONCLUSION

- This learning process helped me to understand the importance of embracing the unexpected and readjusting our lens 'beyond the script' to listen to those connections children are keen to pursue.
- Importantly, the spirit of this piece speaks of wondering and wandering together and how embracing this approach is fundamental to children's sense of belonging.

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Thank You