



Little J & Big Cuz: **A School Readiness Initiative** 2019

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19 Prospect Hill Road, Camberwell, Victoria, 3124, Australia

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Printed in Australia by Allanby Press

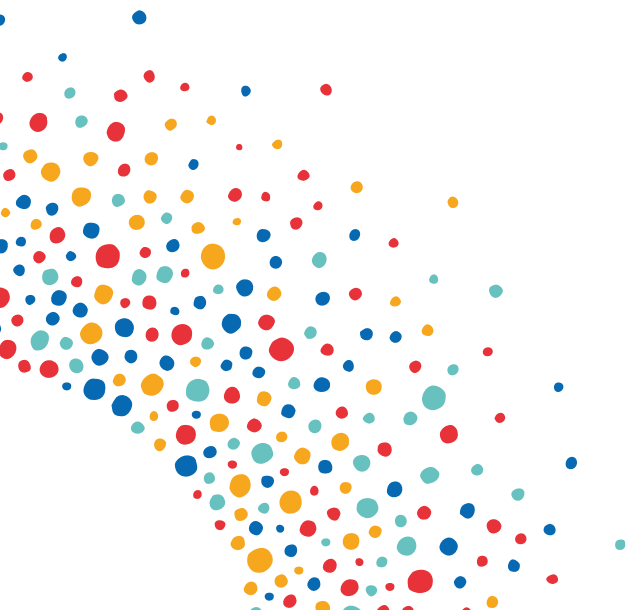
ISBN 978-1-74286-527-0



A catalogue record for this
book is available from the
National Library of Australia

RECOMMENDED CITATION

Moyle, K. (2019). *Final report and case studies – Little J & Big Cuz: A school readiness initiative*. Camberwell, Australia: Australian Council for Educational Research.



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Abbreviations

ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
AWGIE	Australian Writers' Guild Award
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EYLF	Early Years Learning Framework
NITV	National Indigenous Television
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
SDIN	Screen Diversity and Inclusion Network
SRI TV	School Readiness Initiative (SRI) Television (TV)

Acknowledgements

This study was conducted with support from the Dusseldorp Forum. Without their support this project would not have been possible. Their commitment and support throughout this study has been invaluable.

To bring this project to fruition, over the course of the past three years, several people have been involved. All of these people should be acknowledged.

The Indigenous Education Team in the Education Policy and Practice program at the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) worked with the ACER Foundation to initiate this project. Thanks go to members of the Indigenous Education Team, in particular Dr William (Bill) Perrett, Gina Milgate and Jacynta Krakouer. Thanks also go to Deirdre Jackson (then) Director of the ACER Foundation, and to Lisa Norris, the current Director of the ACER Foundation.

Insights into how the various episodes could be utilised in early childhood education were central to the outcomes for this project, and without the work of the following people, this study would not have been completed.

Kerry Bosisto	Early Childhood Educator, Morphett Vale East Kindergarten
Maree Bredhauer	Branch Manager, Early Childhood Australia, Northern Territory
Jo Brooks	Teacher, St Augustine's Catholic School, Mossman
Eileen Butler	Aboriginal Education Worker, Marion Primary School
Jo Byrne	Teacher, Marion Primary School
Julie Cadd	Early Childhood Lecturer, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Institute of Tertiary Education
Keiryn Christodoulou	Early Childhood Worker, Yera Children's Service
Marg Dorman	Teacher, Wulagi Family Centre
Maria Gialouris	Teacher, Marion Primary School
Amy Harrison	Early Childhood Coordinator, Wulagi Family Centre
Susan Kilgour	Principal, Wulagi School
Jessica Maddison	Director, Yera Children's Service
Kayla Neve	Preschool Assistant, Wulagi Family Centre
Paul Rayner	Principal, St Augustine's Catholic School, Mossman
Cheryl Ross	Principal, Marion Primary School
Elissa Sharpe	Teacher, Namadgi School
Georgina Sprigg	Teacher, Marion Primary School
Michelle Triantafilakis	Teacher, Marion Primary School
Sarah Weightman	Director, Morphett Vale East Kindergarten

Thank you, too, to my colleagues who assisted with preparing the case studies and reports, in particular Gail Erwood, Kevin McRae and Dr Antonio Mercurio.

1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify potential social and behavioural changes in individuals, schools and communities that could result from the implementation of the School Readiness Initiative (SRI) television project *Little J & Big Cuz*. This study comprised the preparation of a literature review, and the development of case studies drawn from early childhood, preschool and junior primary school settings.

Little J & Big Cuz is a 13-part animated television series that was commissioned as a SRI television project to build the school readiness of children and to support the successful home to school transition of Indigenous children (Masters, 2018). This project was intended to use a 'strengths-based approach' that built on the skills and cultural knowledge held by Indigenous communities, and to respond to the aspirations of Indigenous families for their children. The aims of the SRI TV project are consistent with the commitment of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to support strength-based models for improving the outcomes of Indigenous children and young people.

This Final Report provides a summary of the conduct of the study and a suite of six case studies, and is accompanied by a Literature Review.

1.1 Literature review

This study was originally informed by a Literature Review which was commenced in 2016, and was subsequently reviewed both internally within ACER and externally from ACER. On the basis of these reviews, this Literature Review was updated. It builds on but does not replicate the Lonsdale (2010) literature review *Using television to improve learning opportunities for Indigenous children*, which informed the original development of *Little J & Big Cuz*. The updated Literature Review accompanies this report and was used to inform the development of the case studies.

The Literature Review draws on both international and Australian sources, and focuses on transition-to-school programs for Indigenous children. This review of the literature has focused on academic, grey and other literature from the last decade. It provides an overview of current research about factors that support effective transitions to school for Indigenous children, and considers the role that television can play in achieving them.

This Literature Review informed the development of the case studies about the ways in which Season 1 of *Little J & Big Cuz* has been used in remote, regional and urban early childhood education settings.

1.2 Case studies

ACER was commissioned by the Dusseldorp Forum to prepare a set of case studies to investigate the potential of the television series to support children's transition to school. To gain insights into this purpose, the case studies were developed to address two underpinning questions:

1. In what ways have the provision of the *Little J & Big Cuz* series and associated materials been incorporated into the case study site's education programs?
2. How have the children reacted to these resources?

Each case study developed, highlights different approaches and perspectives of educators in utilising *Little J & Big Cuz* and its associated resources. These case studies used the episodes available in the first year of the program's release (2017–2018).

The case studies were developed in collaboration with education institutions located in urban, regional and remote locations.

1.2.1 IDENTIFICATION OF LOCATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CASE STUDIES

Early in the project, ACER began the process of applying for clearances with school and sector departments and gained Working with Children clearances. Approvals were sought to document education practices that could be reported in the case studies. These clearances were revisited with the relevant early childhood institutions and schools after the *Little J & Big Cuz* television episodes were aired.

Based on the review of the approvals, the original case study sites were reconsidered and re-contacted to confirm their willingness to be involved. Table 1 summarises the final locations for the case studies.

Two visits were made to each case study site.

Table 1 Locations of case studies

Name of institution	State or Territory	Type of institution
Yera Children's Service	Northern Territory	Not-for-profit childcare centre
Wulagi Family Centre	Northern Territory	Day care co-located on an independent government primary school
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education	Northern Territory	Tertiary education
St Augustine's Primary School	Queensland	Catholic primary school
Marion Primary School	South Australia	Government primary school
Morphett Vale East Kindergarten	South Australia	Government kindergarten



Mural artwork at Yera Children's Service, Batchelor, Northern Territory.

1.2.2 CASE STUDY DEVELOPMENT

The case studies were developed in collaboration with the education sites listed in Table 1. Each case study was prepared in the manner outlined below, and then checked with the educators at the respective sites, prior to design and production.

Visit 1: Collection of qualitative baseline data

The first visit to each case study site involved introducing the *Little J & Big Cuz* television series and associated resources to the educator(s), and discussing with the educator and school principal or early childhood director the purpose of the case study and how the outcomes from it would be used. The educators were offered observation proformas to use when their children were watching the episodes, in order to gather real-time observational data in a common format. All of the case study sites in the urban areas were asked to access *Little J & Big Cuz* from the internet. The remote and very remote sites were provided with a DVD housing all the episodes.

Visit 2: Collection of case study data from early childhood institutions and schools

The second visit to the case study sites involved interviewing the educator and where relevant the principal or director. Reflections by the educators about their classroom practices and their observations of the children's behaviours and reactions to the episodes were documented. Both positive and negative data were collected. Criticisms of aspects of the television episodes, teacher resources and/or online games were recorded.

Indicators of the strategies employed in the case studies that could point to promising early childhood-to-school transition practices included:

- development and/or improvement in pedagogical approaches
- recognition of the strengths in learners
- celebration and incorporation of Indigenous cultures into the learning environment
- bolstering of pride and identity in the Indigenous children
- support and development of learners' emotional wellbeing.

1.2.3 ANALYSIS AND WRITE UP OF CASE STUDIES

Data collected through the site visits were analysed and these data were used as the basis for writing the case studies. Data included the completed observation sheets, interview data and materials collected by the educators, such as examples of children's drawings and writing. The data for each case study were analysed, and themes emerging from each case study were identified.

1.2.4 PARTICIPANT CHECKS OF THE CASE STUDIES

Once written, the initial and penultimate drafts of each case study were checked with the educators to ensure they concurred with the final versions.

1.3 Identification of viewing data

To complement the Literature Review and case studies, the viewing statistics of the episodes, and the download information from the internet were accessed to add richness to the qualitative data collected. Section 5 goes into detail about the viewing statistics for Season 1 of *Little J & Big Cuz*. The viewing statistics and access data of the television episodes and associated resources were collected in 2017–2018.

The viewing data for each episode were collected from several sources including a Neilson poll in 2017, by the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), Beyond the Backyard Productions Pty. Ltd. and from the *Little J & Big Cuz* website (see littlejandbigcuz.com.au).

The viewing data were analysed concurrently to the development of the case studies.

1.4 Preparation of the final report

This Final Report was produced at the conclusion of the project. This qualitative study suggests that in the hands of skilled educators, there are emerging and promising signs that *Little J & Big Cuz* could offer several pedagogical, social and behavioural opportunities to support the transitions from home and early childhood education (ECE) to school, for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children.

2 Preparation, production and audience response

Little J & Big Cuz Season 1 is an Australian animated television series that comprises 13 episodes of between 10 and 12 minutes in length. The primary audience of four to six year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The series is aimed at providing them with glimpses of what everyday school programs 'look like'. It also provides non-Indigenous educators and children with insights into the relationships in one Indigenous family and their broader circle of friends and classmates. The series was designed to support a successful transition to school by Indigenous children.

Little J & Big Cuz is the first contemporary children's animation series to be screened in Australia that has Indigenous lead characters and presents some Indigenous perspectives on living and learning. Since its release it has been 'voiced-over' in six Aboriginal languages. While the series was originally designed for an Indigenous children's audience, the National Indigenous Television (NITV) Channel Manager Tanya Orman recently indicated that the series works towards demystifying Indigenous culture for non-Indigenous children and enables schools to value and share these cultures and knowledges, as well as demystifying school for Indigenous children (NITV, 2018).

In a press release at the launch of the series in April 2017, the likely appeal of the series was explained:

Guided by their wise and wonderful Nanna, their enthusiastic teacher Ms Chen, and accompanied by their Old Dog, Little J and his Big Cuz navigate lessons of bravado and humility, impulsiveness and patience, shame and confidence, selfhood and empathy ... themes that are common to childhood everywhere (Knox, 2017).

Little J & Big Cuz first was screened on the NITV network in May 2017. It was developed by Screen Australia, NITV and the ACER Foundation. The television series is a Ned Lander Media and Old Dog Pictures production, and was developed in association with Film Victoria and Screen Tasmania. The series producer was Ned Lander and its director and designer was Tony Thorne.

2.1 Writers

The episodes were written by Indigenous writers including Erica Glynn and Beck Cole. Erica won the prestigious 2018 Australian Writers' Guild Award (an AWGIE) in Children's Television – Preschool category for the episode 'Where's Aaron?' Beck Cole was also nominated in 2018, in the same category, for her episode, 'Lucky undies'.

One of the challenges faced by the creators of the series was to connect with Indigenous children from any part of Australia. Two strategies were adopted to meet this challenge. First, the episodes use Nanna's backyard as a doorway to distinctive and diverse urban and remote worlds. Second, some of the episodes were re-voiced in local Aboriginal languages. The creators worked with translators and actors from remote Australia to achieve this outcome.

So far Little J & Big Cuz has been re-voiced into Arrernte and Pitjantjatjara from central Australia, Djambarrpuyngu from Arnhem Land and Yawuru from Broome. Also in the North West, Ningali Lawford-Wolf has directed local cast in Walmajarri. Meanwhile in Tasmania the show has been revoiced in the reclaimed language, Palawa Kani (Knox, 2018).

Between writing the first and second drafts of the television scripts, the creators also became aware of the necessity to develop within the English dialogue, a "further language texture":

Little J, Big Cuz and their classmates 'code switch' – speaking mainstream English in the classroom. When they're with Nanna and on Country, they speak more Aboriginal English. The differences are subtle, but it's an additional element of authenticity (Madsen, 2017, p.15).

The creators plan to translate future episodes into more Indigenous languages, "offering unique opportunities for both language education and community ownership of the series" (Lander, 2017, p. 12).

2.2 Setting of *Little J & Big Cuz*

The episodes reflect Indigenous cultures and ways of learning through Little J's world, which is centred around his Nanna's backyard and Ms Chen's classroom at school. The episodes relate stories of how Little J and Big Cuz are busy with their ups and downs of family life, playgrounds and classrooms. There are gaps in Nanna's ramshackle fence, which lead to Saltwater, Desert and Freshwater Countries. With the help of Nanna and their teacher Ms Chen, Little J and Big Cuz find out about their culture, community and country, and hence their identities (Lander, 2017).

2.3 Voice cast

Little J & Big Cuz features a voice cast of Indigenous actors that includes Deborah Mailman, Miranda Tapsell, Ningali Lawford-Wolf, Aaron Fa'Aoso, Ursula Yovich and Shari Sebbens.

2.4 Episode synopses

The titles of the respective episodes reflect the adventures the children experience, as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2 *Little J & Big Cuz Season 1 episode synopses*

Episode title	Synopsis
Lucky undies	Little J believes his new undies have special powers – so how can he play basketball without them?
Wombat rex	Big Cuz tricks Little J into believing that the Giant Wombat is not extinct.
New tricks	Little J frets that his dream of being an acrobat is not the right dream.
Right under your nose	On their quest to the beach, Little J, Nanna, and Big Cuz struggle to find what they need before sunset.
Goanna ate my homework	Little J gets confused hunting bush tucker when he follows his own tracks.
Big plans	When the ‘big kids’ refuse to play with him, Little J creates a tantalizing adventure – in the backyard.
Hopalong	When B Boy comes to stay, Little J is miffed – until they work together to care for an injured baby kangaroo.
Where’s Aaron?	Aaron the class mascot is missing ... and Little J fears he is lost in the desert.
Old monster dog	Little J is convinced there is a real live monster in the backyard.
Transformation	Can Big Cuz face dancing in front of the school, and will Little J ever see his caterpillar again?
Nothing scares me	Little J knows there is something that scares him but he is even more scared of being found out.
Territories	Big Cuz and Little J must put aside their differences to outwit a territorial magpie.
Night owl and morning maggie	Fascinated by an owl in the backyard, Little J turns nocturnal with some disastrous results.

2.4.1 ONLINE RESOURCES

Each episode in Season 1 is accompanied by online resources including games for the children and suggestions of teaching approaches for early childhood and junior primary educators. An ebook has also been developed for use in classrooms. The development of the television series and the associated resources were informed by the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (Department of Education and Training, 2009).

2.5 Audience responses and awards

The series has to date received three highly prestigious awards, which of themselves are a testament to the quality of the program and its success. First, the 2018 Logie Award for Most Outstanding Children's Program, reflects the quality of the program as an early childhood resource. Second, the 2018 Australian Writers' Guild Award (an 'AWGIE') in the Children's Television – Preschool category, points to the quality of the scripts developed. And third, the Screen Diversity and Inclusion Network's (SDIN) inaugural Award, which honours Australian producers and projects that have made a significant contribution to diversity and inclusion, on or off screen, within the Australian screen industry.

Production of a second season was announced at the end of May 2018 to coincide with the nomination for a Logie Award in the Most Outstanding Children's Program category, which it won. In an interview following the success at the Logies, lead voice actor Deborah Mailman explained why she believed the series has been so well received by Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences across Australia.

Well, you know, the characters, Little J and Big Cuz ... they're cheeky. You know, they love an adventure. It speaks to the audience that this show has been made for. [And] the fact that this show is now translated into so many different languages that goes out to remote communities. I think it is just a different point of view that we haven't seen before within animation. I think that is probably why people respond to it so strongly (Mailman, 2018).

Further, Knox (2018) wrote that:

Series one was loved by children across Australia. It dominated the audience share for five to nine year olds in its time slots, and reached into remote Indigenous communities through six language versions, with more Indigenous languages to come in Season 2.

2.6 Supporting resource material

Alongside of the development and release of the television episodes, ACER created a 'springboard strategy' comprising interactive teacher and family resource materials, which are available online. These materials were designed for use in classrooms and family homes to foster discussion aimed at enhancing understandings of Indigenous life experiences, and to encourage enjoyment in attending school through becoming part of the school community (Knox, 2018). Later in this report and in the case studies, insights are provided about how these resources have been received and utilised.

3 Approach to the study

This study took a strengths-based approach. It assumed Indigenous children are already learners before they start school and focuses on the things that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are capable of doing, rather than positioning these young people as ‘victims’ or helpless. This approach is reflected in the accompanying case studies.

A strengths-based approach recognises the resilience of Indigenous children and their families, and focuses on their abilities, knowledge and capacities. It emphasises the development of learning opportunities that leverages their prior knowledge and experiences, rather than focusing on what the children do not know or cannot do (Armstrong et al., 2012).

This study was conducted by the Education Policy and Practice (EPP) program within ACER. While ACER and the ACER Foundation are two separate entities, they are nonetheless part of the same overarching organisation, under the one chief executive officer. As such, the approach to this study has by necessity, taken an ‘insider’ approach (see for example, Costley, Elliot & Gibbs, 2010; Saidin & Yaacob, 2016).

Characteristics of ‘insider’ studies include that:

- the conduct of the study is a social process undertaken with colleagues
- the processes of the study are educative for all the participants in the project
- the outcomes are imbued with a development dimension that is integral to the study
- the study is focused upon aspects of practice in which the researcher has some control and can initiate change (Costley, Elliot & Gibbs, 2010).

These characteristics underpinned the respective approaches employed in this study.

This study was intended to commence in 2015 and conclude in 2018. However, as the TV series was not aired on NITV until May 2017 it was not possible to commence the collection of baseline data until early 2018. As such, the study’s approach was slightly amended to focus on the central work of developing case studies, and to meet an August 2018 deadline for their completion. The study was conducted in a manner consistent with the original purpose of focusing on the early and promising signs that *Little J & Big Cuz* was supporting Indigenous children’s transition to school.

4 Findings from the case studies

Six case studies accompany this report. Data were collected for the case studies through interviews, the collection of baseline data and documented educator observations. These data were based on the responses to two key questions:

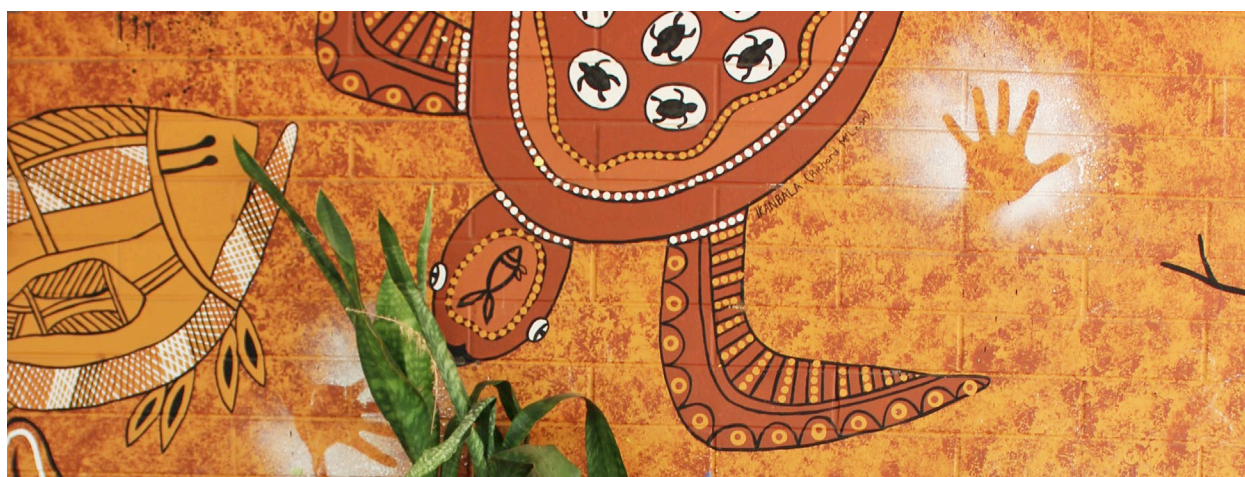
1. In what ways have the *Little J & Big Cuz* television series and associated materials been incorporated into their education programs?
2. How have the children reacted to these resources?

4.1 Case study locations and participants

The case studies were developed in collaboration with staff in a demographic range of locations (urban, remote and very remote), and in education institutions across the government, non-government and not-for-profit sectors. The case studies were undertaken at:

- one government school (Marion Primary School)
- one Catholic school (St Augustine's School)
- one kindergarten (Morphett Vale East Kindergarten)
- two early childhood centres (Yera Children's Service and Wulagi Family Centre)
- one Indigenous tertiary education institution (Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education).

Table 3 shows the variety of the different contexts for the development of the suite of case studies. Children involved in this study ranged in age from preschool children to students in Year 5. Participants from the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) were adult, early childhood education students who incorporated *Little J & Big Cuz* into their respective programs in very remote community settings.



Mural artwork at Yera Children's Service.

Table 3 Demographic information about the case study sites, 2018

Case Study	Institution	Demographic location	Children involved (no.)	Indigenous children involved (no.)	Year level/ Age
1	Morphett Vale East Kindergarten (SA)	Urban	20–23	3	3–5 years
2	Yera Children's Service (NT)	Remote	Up to 10	≈5	early childhood (0–4 years)
3	Marion Primary School (SA)	Urban	82	6	Reception to Year 2
4	Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (NT)	Very remote	5 adult early childhood education students	All Indigenous children plus their respective communities	Children in early childhood
5	St Augustine's Primary School (QLD)	Urban–Remote	21	5 (4 Aboriginal; 1 Torres Strait Islander)	Reception
6	Wulagi Family Centre (NT)	Urban–Remote	40	13	3–4 years

Each case study site had documented education programs, and each state or territory department of education has transition-to-school policies and/or websites to support parents and their children to make the transition to school from home or early childhood centre. The Northern Territory Department of Education, for example, has a transition-to-school policy *Early Childhood Transitioning* (Department of Education, 2017a), and an accompanying school resource package (Department of Education, 2017b). The degree of emphasis or explicitness placed on supporting children to make the transition to school varied across the case study sites.

Drawing on the baseline data and the case studies, a discussion of the two questions that underpin this study, follows.

4.2 In what ways have the *Little J & Big Cuz* television series and associated materials been incorporated into education programs?

Generally, the *Little J & Big Cuz* television series, and the online teaching resources were well received by educators and the children involved in this study. Most children had not seen the television series, although a small number had seen *Little J & Big Cuz* prior to viewing it in their early childhood or school settings. As such, the case studies can be considered to complement the analysis of the viewing data presented in Section 5.

Indigenous childcare workers in urban and remote locations liked that the television series has Indigenous lead characters, and presents some Indigenous perspectives to living and learning. There were however, some differing views about some aspects of the project. Nonetheless, there are promising signs that pedagogical, social and behavioural changes can emerge from the ways in which skilled educators utilise *Little J & Big Cuz*.

4.3 How have the children reacted to these resources?

The children enjoyed the humour of the various episodes, and the more humorous ones were generally their favourites. Educators at several sites reported that the children found the episode 'Lucky undies' to be funny. In general, the educators thought that the pace and length of the episodes were appropriate for preschoolers although in some locations the children were reported to have become restless about ten minutes into the episode, while at other sites, the children were reported to be completely engrossed.

Some educators thought some of the episodes were too wordy and unfocused. Other educators were surprised how well the children followed the stories. Several educators reported that the children enjoyed repeated viewings and remained engaged every time. One educator commented how this allowed for ever deeper discussions with the children. Some of the children indicated they had convinced their parents to download the series onto their personal tablet device or mobile phone, so they could watch the series at home.

The character of Old Dog was loved by all the children who watched the episodes. They found him funny and felt an affinity with him. Many of the children who viewed the episodes have pet dogs they consider are an equal part of their families.

In those sites where the book *Where's Aaron?* was also read to the children, the children recognised the connection between the book and the television series, and also recognised there were differences between the television episode and the book. These differences were used by the educator to highlight the differences between animations on television and books.

4.4 Major themes addressed in the case studies

The educators at the respective case study sites used the television episodes and associated resources in different ways. Table 4 summarises the major themes covered in the case studies, and the level of education in which the viewers of *Little J & Big Cuz* were located.

Table 4 Themes of the case studies

Viewers	Name of Institution	Theme
Childcare	Yera Children's Service	Preparing socially and emotionally for preschool with <i>Little J & Big Cuz</i>
	Wulagi Family Centre	Is <i>Little J & Big Cuz</i> suitable for children in childcare?
	Morphett Vale East Kindergarten	Connecting <i>Little J & Big Cuz</i> with a kindergarten education program
Reception	St Augustine's Primary School	Developing written language with <i>Little J & Big Cuz</i>
	Marion Primary School	Supporting social and emotional learning with <i>Little J & Big Cuz</i>
Tertiary	Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education	Teachable moments: Planning early childhood programs for Indigenous students that incorporate <i>Little J & Big Cuz</i>

The following approaches to learning emerged from the case study sites:

- incorporation of *Little J & Big Cuz* into formal and informal education programs
- support of learners' emotional development and wellbeing
- support of language development
- incorporation of teachable moments.

4.4.1 INCORPORATION OF *LITTLE J & BIG CUZ* INTO EDUCATION PROGRAMS

At all but one of the case studies sites, episodes of *Little J & Big Cuz* were formally incorporated into the educators' respective education programs. All of the case study sites followed up the viewing of the episodes with practical activities that explicitly linked to the EYLF. Most sites followed the viewing of a television episode with a group discussion and in two cases, with another related activity. One site followed up the television episode with the children playing the associated online games, as a group.

Little J & Big Cuz was also used for the development or improvement in the pedagogical approaches of the educators. The introduction of *Little J & Big Cuz* provided a vehicle for professional conversations. Not all educators in the early childhood settings however, were convinced of the efficacy of using television programs as part of the suite of teaching resources. Some educators thought the links to the EYLF were very helpful, while others thought they would be better if there were targeted lessons that more specifically linked to each episode. There were also a couple of educators who thought the EYLF links related to 'Lucky undies', 'Wombat rex' and 'Big plans' were tenuous.

Where identified links were made between *Little J & Big Cuz* and curriculum areas, these were to English, Geography, Health and Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum.

The book 'Where is Aaron?' was well regarded as a strong support resource to the television episode of the same name.

4.4.2 SUPPORTING LEARNERS' EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING

All the episodes were recognised as supporting socio-emotional development and some received a special mention from the educators. These episodes included:

- 'Lucky undies' – supporting growth mindsets and highlighting the importance of persistence to success
- 'Wombat rex' – showing the importance of honesty
- 'Big plans' – providing role modelling of how to handle conflict and show empathy
- 'Goanna ate my homework' – demonstrating resilience and handling disappointments.

In two case study sites, *Little J & Big Cuz* was deliberately incorporated into programs to support the social and emotional wellbeing of children. One educator commented that through the reactions of the children to those of the main characters in the stories, it was possible to open up opportunities for the children to learn how to label different emotions. Some early childhood children recognised when Old Dog was sad or happy, for example. Of the main adult characters, the children liked Nanna and many of the children felt an affinity with the ranger, Uncle Mick.

Many of the educators liked that Nanna was portrayed as a knowledgeable woman to whom her children and friends turned. Some educators commented that the television series fits well with the 'growth mindset' part of their education programs. Some educators liked the 'child protection' aspects to each episode, such as how Nanna trusts Little J and Big Cuz to know their boundaries, yet quietly monitors their play; and Big Cuz keeps an eye out for Little J.

While the episodes were received positively, during the data collection stage of this study, two matters were raised as reflecting cultural insensitivity: 'Lucky undies' was an episode that was not universally well-received; and there was an issue raised concerning the home page of the *Little J & Big Cuz* website.

'Lucky undies'

The first episode, 'Lucky undies' was generally well-received by both educators and children, who found it to be humorous, and for many of the children, the story seemed to resonate with their own experiences.

A small number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people from different locations were not convinced the episodes were all age appropriate; and a few felt that this episode did not align with their moral and cultural values. They indicated that the episode raised concerns about both child safety and cultural safety risks for them. Their concerns were that this first episode illustrates to children that it is acceptable to show their personal underwear at school. This episode also shows children that it is acceptable to scare away a magpie. The magpie is a totem (i.e. a cultural strength) for some Indigenous people. These aspects of 'Lucky undies' were seen to show a lack of cultural respect, care and engagement with Indigenous people.

Little J & Big Cuz website

The home page of the *Little J & Big Cuz* website portrays two hanging ropes. Concern was raised that those who designed the features of the home page appear not to have taken into account the distress these ropes might cause some Indigenous people and their broader communities.

4.4.3 SUPPORTING LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

The language and lifestyle portrayed in *Little J & Big Cuz* resonated among the children. They liked the way the family talked, and how those conversations differed to the talk at school (i.e. the use of both Standard Australian English and Aboriginal English). More than one child commented: "she talks like my [family member]", referring to the character of Nanna. Some educators indicated that the discrete use of 'code-switching' by the main characters was a strength of the episodes, and provided practical examples for explicit teaching with their children.



'Lucky Undies'.

4.4.4 INCORPORATION OF TEACHABLE MOMENTS

Several educators followed up the viewing of an episode of *Little J & Big Cuz*, with guided discussions and activities. These educators asked open-ended questions to encourage children to discuss the stories, and to make meaning from what they had seen. The questions were similar to the following:

- What is the story trying to tell us?
- How did the family help Little J?
- Is luck something that just happens, or is to something that happens because you work at something?
- What do think [insert a character] feels about ...?

Some educators suggested that another approach to ‘teachable moments’ was to recognise and apply the key messages in each episode to their own contexts. For example, to use the episodes to talk with the children about their local fauna and flora, or about pertinent local issues.

4.5 Access issues

In both urban and remote locations, there were some issues with accessing the online versions of the respective episodes. As one kindergarten teacher in an urban location stated:

Unlike schools with big IT budgets, we in kindergartens have limited internet access or IT support, so we were not able to download the series on our system but finally got it through streaming on our personal mobile phones.

Another urban location reported that some of the links on the website did not work or the web page had expired. They tried to troubleshoot this problem and were frustrated by these glitches.

In some of the very remote locations, there were difficulties accessing television sets or computer screens and DVD players. The educators reported that if these devices did break, they were not repaired. Additionally, internet access and electricity are unreliable in many, very remote locations.

5 Analysis of viewing statistics

Both quantitative and qualitative data collected since the release of *Little J & Big Cuz* on NITV indicates that the series and its supporting resources have been accessed both via television and the internet. The viewing statistics of the episodes and resource material posted online, and from the television episodes aired on NITV, provide insights into how well the respective episodes were received between May 2017 and May 2018.

Figure 1 shows the number of pageviews per month by various audiences according to the different online materials accessed.

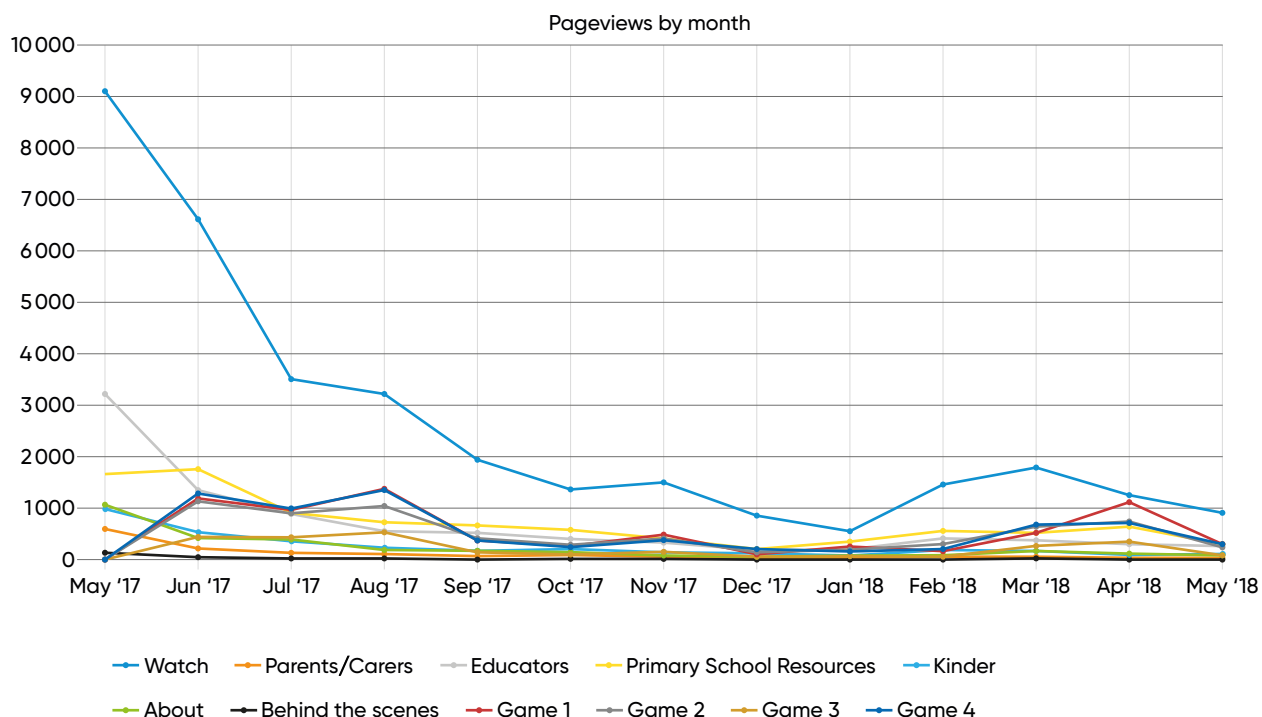


Figure 1 Pageviews by month

Source: *Little J & Big Cuz* Lifetime website statistics, May 2018 (1)

The word 'pageviews' refers to the total number of times a piece of online content is viewed during a specific period of time (e.g. 24 hours). A pageview is recorded every time a page is viewed or refreshed. 'Unique Pageviews' refer to the total number of pageviews generated by the same user of the same page during the same session (i.e. the number of times during the one session in which the same page was viewed one or more times).

Figure 1 shows the number of pageviews by month from May 2017 to May 2018, according to the following categories:

- Watch
- Parents/carers
- Educators
- Primary school resources
- Kinder
- About
- Behind the scenes
- Games 1, 2, 3, 4 respectively (all accessed from the official *Little J & Big Cuz* website).

Indicated by the top light blue line, Figure 1 shows the number of pageviews for the 'Watch' category was just over 9000 in May 2017 and settled to around 1000 after October 2017. There were 34 051 pageviews during that period. The rise and fall of the pageviews for 'Watch' over this period could perhaps be explained by spikes in interest during school terms.

Major users were viewers involved with various aspects of schooling, as the data in Table 5 suggest.

Table 5 Pageviews according education role

Educational use	Pageviews
Primary school resources	9390
Educators	9142
Kinder	3522
Parents/carers	1646

Table 6 also shows that the online games also attracted substantial pageviews.

Table 6 Pageviews of the online games

Online games	Pageviews
Game 1	7263
Game 4	7017
Game 2	7570
Game 3	2786

Table 7 gives more detailed analysis of these pageview statistics. It shows that 18 332 pageviews were unique pageviews for the category 'Watch', which accounted for almost half of the views.

Table 7 view statistics for Watch category

Page	Pageviews	Unique pageviews
games/game_1	7 263	4 262
games/game_2	6 570	4 489
games/game_3	2 786	1 985
games/game_4	7 017	3 732
/watch	34 051	18 332
/parents	1 646	1 039
/educators	9 142	4 964
/resources/*	9 390	6 244
/kinder	3 522	6 244
/about	3 167	2 115
/behindthescenes	375	244

Source: *Little J & Big Cuz* Lifetime Website statistics, May 2018 (1)

Table 8 shows the number of pageviews for each of the 13 episodes listed in order of highest to lowest. Although the first two episodes had the largest number of pageviews, the number of unique pageviews was generally consistent across the remaining episodes, with about 900 pageviews per episode. The number of unique pageviews (15 833) is arguably particularly high against the total of 19 662 pageviews.

Table 8 Overview of pageviews per episode

Episode	Pageviews	Unique pageviews
1 Lucky undies	4 053	3 200
2 Wombat rex	2 669	2 135
5 Goanna ate my homework	1 470	1 174
3 New tricks	1 468	1 093
7 Hopalong	1 426	1 087
4 Right under your nose	1 285	985
6 Big plans	1 175	928
11 Nothing scares me	1 099	864
10 Transformation	1 081	889
9 Old monster dog	1 052	845
12 Territories	1 023	869
13 Night owl and morning maggie	971	808
8 Where's Aaron	890	756
Total	19 662	15 633

Source: *Little J & Big Cuz* Lifetime Website stats May 2018 (1)

Table 9 shows the pageviews for the category 'Resources' and shows that there were 6673 unique pageviews of a total of 10 204. The majority of these were for the 'Resources' homepage (3341 unique pageviews), with each episode receiving approximately 100 unique pageviews.

Table 9 Pageview statistics for Resources category

Page	Pageviews	Unique pageviews
/resources	5 725	3 341
Lucky undies	1 452	1 127
/search	822	436
Wombat Rex	435	359
Goanna ate my homework	275	225
New tricks	188	158
Hopalong	157	135
Right under your nose	156	132
Territories	150	119
/resources? error	147	66
Night owl morning maggie	142	120
Transformation	126	108
Old monster dog	122	93
Where's Aaron	108	90
Big plans	103	86
Nothing scares me	94	77
/resources.com	2	1
Total	10 204	6 673

Figure 2 provides information about the size of the daytime television audiences, consolidated over metropolitan and regional areas.

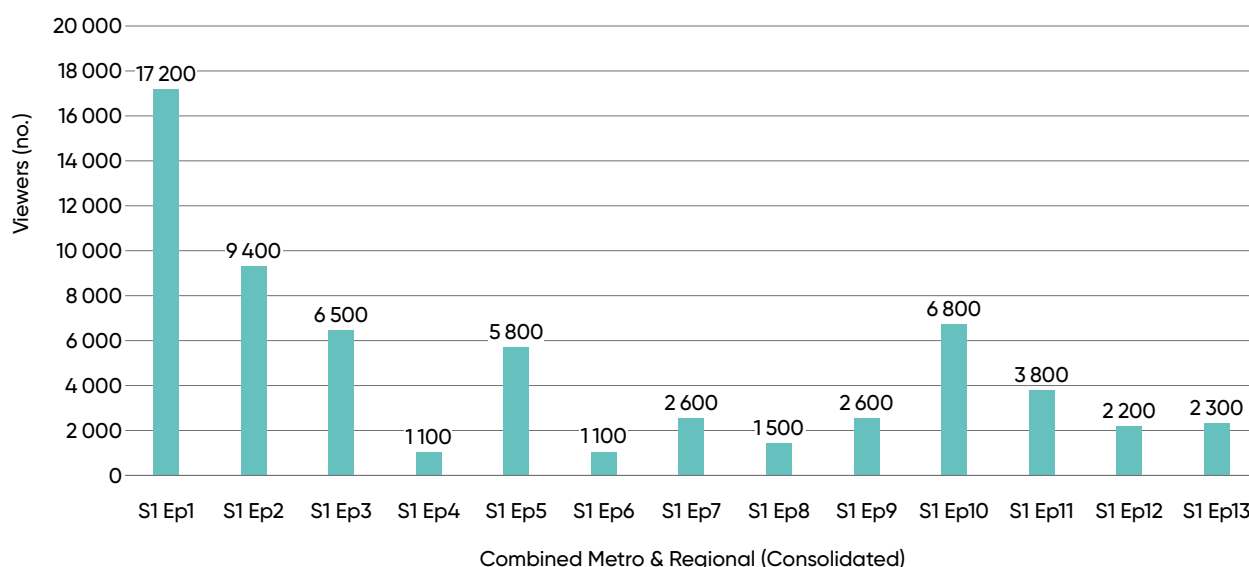


Figure 2 *Little J Big Cuz*, television audience, Fridays 7.30 pm, 28 April – 21 July 2017

Source: Nielsen Poll 2017, provided by SBS

Table 10 (over page) provides insights into the viewing statistics for the episodes screened in different Indigenous languages. From Monday 3 July 2017 to Sunday 9 July 2017 at 4.00 pm, episodes were screened in several Indigenous Languages. Table 7 (page 26) summarises the viewing numbers for these episodes.

Little J & Big Cuz episodes were also downloaded from iTunes, as shown in Figure 3.

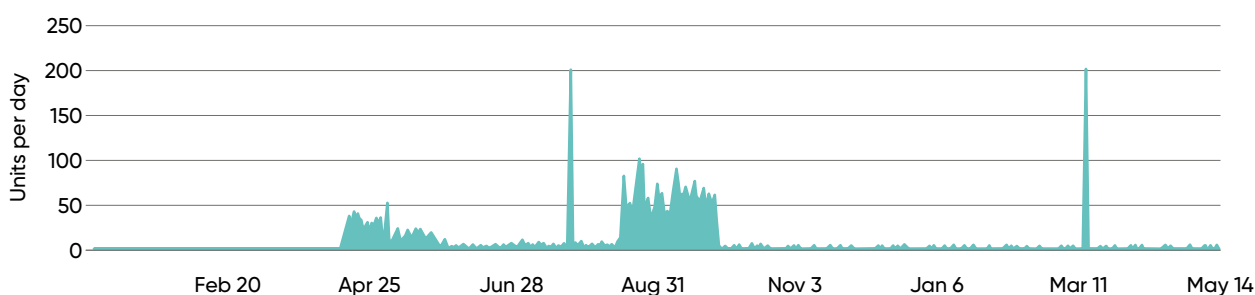


Figure 3 iTunes store downloads

Source: Duncan Imberger, Beyond the Backyard Productions Pty Ltd

Figure 3 shows that there were over 4060 App Store and GooglePlay downloads of the ebook 'Where's Aaron?' from 1 January 2017 to 14 May 2018. Most of the activity occurred between April and September 2017, which coincided with the television series going to air. There have also been 80 GooglePlay downloads up to May 2018. (Imberger, 2018).

Table 10 Viewing numbers for episodes screened in different Indigenous languages

Language (state or territory)	Episodes	Views per episode
Arrernte (NT)	Lucky undies	1 200
	New tricks	100
	Hopalong	200
	Total	1 500
Djambarrupuyngu (NT)	Right under your nose	1 800
	Nothing scares me	600
	Night owl and morning maggie	0
	Total	2 400
Palawa Kani (Tas.)	Hopalong	1 600
	Total	1 600
Pitjantjatjarra (NT, SA)	Wombat Rex	300
	Goanna ate my homework	1 700
	Old monster dog	0
	Total	2 000
Walmajarri (WA)	Lucky undies	1 800
	Goanna ate my homework	1 200
	Total	3 000
Yawuru (WA)	Right under your nose	2 400
	Nothing scares me	400
	Total	2 800

Source: Neilson poll 2017. Provided by SBS

6 Conclusions

Overall, the *Little J & Big Cuz* television series and associated online resources were well received by most of the children and adults involved in the development of the case studies.

The following suggestions were provided by the educators involved in this project:

- prepare more children's books to accompany the *Little J & Big Cuz* episodes
- create puppets of the main characters
- include more directed suggestions for physical activities in the teaching resources
- include more 'dreamings' in the stories for Season 2
- link the EYLF and the teaching resources in a more focused way to the episodes
- remove the baby bottle as an image in the online games
- redesign the images of the home page of the *Little J & Big Cuz* website.

Little J & Big Cuz has exceeded the original expectations of those who initiated this project. The SRI TV series set out to create an educational television series that would make a difference to the learning of Indigenous children. The audience viewing data alone suggest that the series has made inroads with the targeted audiences and their families.

This study was tasked to identify whether there is potential for individual, social and behavioural changes in communities and schools that could result from the implementation of the SRI TV initiative, *Little J & Big Cuz*. The aim of the television series is to build the school readiness of children, and to support the successful transition to school of Indigenous children. The SRI TV project was intended to build on the skills and cultural knowledge that different Indigenous communities already possess, and to respond to the aspirations of Indigenous families for their children.

The case studies developed as part of this study suggest that many childcare and early childhood educators and their children enjoyed the *Little J & Big Cuz* television series, and that these resources added value to their existing education programs.

Indicators emerged from the case studies to show that there are promising signs that the *Little J & Big Cuz* television series and its associated resources may support Indigenous children's transition to school. These indicators included:

- the development and improvement in pedagogical approaches by ECE educators
- recognition of the strengths in learners
- celebration and incorporation of Indigenous cultures into the learning environment
- bolstering of pride and identity in the Indigenous children
- support for all learners' emotional wellbeing.

There are positive signs that these stories and resources will have a place in future education programs.

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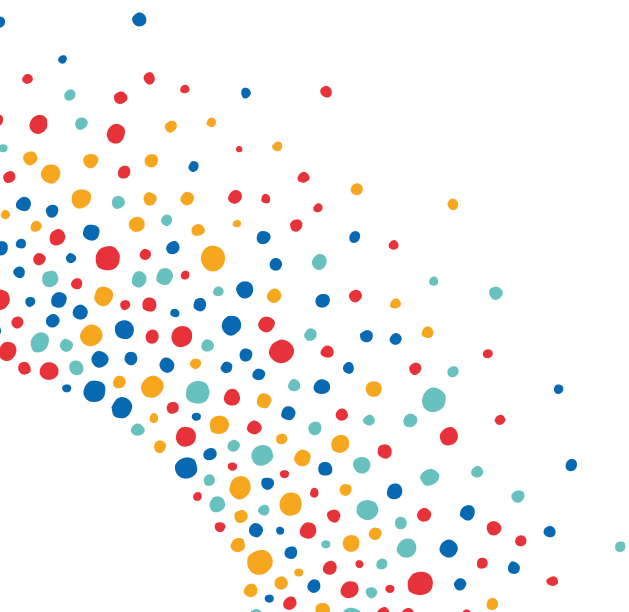


Case Studies

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the children and educators at Morphett Vale East Kindergarten.
Special thanks to Kerry Bosisto, Early Childhood Educator, and Sarah Weightman, Director.

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Connecting *Little J & Big Cuz* with a kindergarten education program

Morphett Vale East Kindergarten

MORPHETT VALE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Context

Morphett Vale East Kindergarten is a government-funded kindergarten in Morphett Vale in the Onkaparinga Council area between South and Panalatinga Roads, approximately 25 kilometres from the city of Adelaide in South Australia. It is part of the South Australian Department of Education.

As at Term 4 2017, enrolment hovered between 40 and 45 children aged between three and five years, with over 20 per cent of the children receiving preschool government support. In 2016, over half of the nearly 9500 households in Morphett Vale had an income of less than \$1500 per week. About one third of these households were either single parent families or couples with families.¹

In 2017, Morphett Vale East Kindergarten was evaluated as exceeding all Early Childhood National Quality Standards.

¹ See City of Onkaparinga: <https://profile.id.com.au/onkaparinga/household-income?WebID=270>

"The learning priorities of the Kindergarten focus on developing within the children a 'growth mindset'."

EDUCATING PRESCHOOLERS

The learning priorities of the Kindergarten focus on developing within the children:

- a 'growth mindset' (i.e. personal recognition that they are intelligent and growth is possible)
- literacy and numeracy skills
- curiosity, creativity, resilience and persistence with regard to their learning
- curiosity about gardening and cooking.²

There is also an education priority to build the children's understandings of 'child protection', at an age-appropriate level.

The Kindergarten is staffed by a Director, a qualified Early Childhood Teacher and a Teacher's Assistant.

DAILY PROGRAM

The daily program for the Kindergarten includes a small amount of screen time, which is used as a transition activity between a meal break and the scheduled program of learning. *Little J & Big Cuz* was incorporated into the education program as the screen time activity, which was then followed with discussions about each story the children had seen. The choice of episodes was linked to the learning priorities of the Kindergarten. As the internet connectivity into the Kindergarten is poor, the educators streamed the episodes to their mobile phones.

Each day about 20 children watched and discussed the episode they had seen. Three of these children came from families who at enrolment identified as being Indigenous. The children however, did not openly acknowledge their descent. As such, the *Little J & Big Cuz* series provided an unobtrusive way of giving prominence to Indigenous children as the main characters in the stories, without having to uncomfortably draw attention to this fact.

The following episodes were watched, more than once:

- 'Lucky undies'
- 'New tricks'
- 'Right under your nose'
- 'Goanna ate my homework'
- 'Big plans'
- 'Hopalong' (in Arrernte language)
- 'Where's Aaron?'

² The Morphett Vale East Kindergarten 2018 Quality Improvement Plan is available from http://www.mvek.sa.edu.au/docs/mvek_quality_improvement_plan_2018.pdf

EDUCATION RESOURCES

The educators commented that the teaching resources provided them with lots of leads for ways to incorporate activities to support the viewing of each episode. Prior to viewing each of the episodes, the educators checked the teaching resources provided on the *Little J & Big Cuz* website. They also colour-copied the feature image from the teaching resources website to accompany the viewing of each episode by the children.

VIEWING RESPONSES

Viewing each episode led to different conversations about the characters. The main messages portrayed in the episodes were consistent with the learning priorities of Morphett Vale East Kindergarten (outlined previously). The children started to ask to watch *Little J & Big Cuz* in preference to any other media. Once the children became familiar with the characters, they were keen to see what happened to them next. There were audible responses from the children, such as laughter, gasping and relief, at key points in the narratives of the different episodes.

Some of the children indicated they had convinced their parents to download the series onto their personal tablet device or mobile phone. The children did not seem to mind how many times they watched the same episode; they remained engaged every time an episode and the activity based on it were incorporated into the education program. The educators were surprised how well the children followed the stories.

The educators thought that the pace and length of the stories were appropriate for preschoolers, and that repeated viewings allowed for deeper and deeper discussions with the children. They liked the 'child protection' aspects of each episode: Nanna trusting Little J and Big Cuz to know their boundaries, and Big Cuz keeping an eye out for Little J. The *Little J & Big Cuz* series fits well with the 'growth mindset' part of the Kindergarten's education program, which encourages the children to 'have a go'.

EPISODE REVIEW

LUCKY UNDIES

'Lucky undies' was a popular episode with the children. They liked the humour, and the story resonated with some of their own experiences. After watching this first episode, the educators initiated a conversation about 'lucky things'. They posed the question: "Is luck something that just happens, or is it something that happens because you work at something?" For some children, the story resonated with their own experiences: they spontaneously discussed their own lucky drink bottles. Other children recognised that the headband that was made from the ruined undies was a diversionary tactic, while Little J developed his self-belief.

"There were audible responses from the children such as laughter, gasping and relief at key points in the narratives of the different episodes."

The educators built the conversations around some of the children's previous experiences, including visits to a museum. They thought that the teaching resources combined with this episode allowed them to continue to explore other cultural content (e.g. good luck symbols from around the world). They also thought the links to History/Geography: Past and Present were relevant to the children as they had already read the recommended book: *You and Me Murrawee*.

NEW TRICKS

The children related well to the physical activities presented in this episode and referred back to it for ideas during playtime. The episode resonated well with the children because they regularly achieved new feats, such as swinging, balancing and skipping. They also liked the backyard and 'couch conversations', and were motivated to play 'hide and seek'.

Consistent with the messages in the episode, the educators encouraged the children to plan and set up equipment within the Kindergarten. The educators liked the message in this episode, that, it is necessary to practice motor skills in order to improve and take risks.

The educators found the materials on the website a good reference point for cultural activities. They used the teaching resources *BLAKflip* and *ABC*



'New Tricks'.



'Right Under Your Nose'.

Kids *Hoopla Doopla* because they found these provided good stimuli for focusing on the development of motor skills such as stilt-walking, tight-rope walking and spring board activities.

RIGHT UNDER YOUR NOSE

The children enjoyed this episode and could easily relate to the frequent links between home and school culture and to the concept of 'show and tell', which is a part of their regular program for sharing news. Some children queried where Little J's parents were, but also provided their own explanations such as "they are on holidays", or "they are dead". Most of the children are in contact with their grandparents, and so were comfortable with the role of 'Nanna'. The nature of the children's family arrangements formed part of the discussion following the episode.

After the episode, the educators set up a campsite in the playground and several of the children recounted the cooking part of this episode. Some of the children said they recognised the clam shell.

The teaching resources were useful to the educators, and the list of questions provided helped them to guide the discussion with the children – to help the children to recount the main parts of the story. The tools and technologies mentioned were familiar to the children because several of them go camping with their families. The blue fish reminded the children and educators of the Bony Bream in a local Njaranderri story.

"The educators often discuss with the children the power of language and how language can be used to include and exclude people. It is an important part of their education program."

"The children liked the way the family talked, and how that differed to the talk at school."

GOANNA ATE MY HOMEWORK

The children remembered much from this episode, noticing a lot of detail, such as the use of a stick to remove the emu eggs so as to not disturb the nest or make the adult bird abandon the nest and young chicks. One child subsequently noticed golden gum sap on the bark of a tree and wondered out aloud whether that was due to honey ants.

Follow-up activities included the children making tracks in the sandpit and painting using their fingertips. The part in this episode which involved measuring a footprint to check if it was the same as your shoe size was re-enacted. The educators used their own local Indigenous resources, posters and books in the follow up activities.

BIG PLANS

The children picked up easily on the concept of having a 'best friend', which forms one of the central narratives of this episode. The educators often discuss with the children the power of language and how language can be used to include and exclude people. It is an important part of their education program.

Following the episode, the discussion focused on how to 'make up games'. The children asked if they could make their own obstacle course, and so this activity became the afternoon program.

The web links to circus activities were considered useful as they led to new follow-up activities with the children.

HOPALONG

This episode was played in the Arrernte language and the educator read out the English subtitles. The children however, asked the educator to be quiet as they found this episode self-explanatory even in a language other than English. The joey appealed to many of the children, and after the program, this interest led the educators to incorporate further activities about Australia's indigenous animals. The children are now keen to look at the Kindergarten's reference books to find wallabies, kangaroos, lizards, goannas, eagles and so on.

The educators used the teaching resources about habitats and the concept of 'sustainability' to build the idea of being a member of a family to thrive. The educators also found that the teaching resources enabled them to consider deeper learning opportunities and to tie in 'big picture thinking' with the cultural aspects of the episode.



Uncle Mick 'saving' Aaron the class mascot – from 'Where's Aaron?'.

WHERE'S AARON?

The children enjoyed this episode because it connected well with activities in which they had already participated. At the Kindergarten they have a 'Kinder Bear' that sometimes accompanies one of the children home. Losing the doll Aaron and the potential for misadventure within this episode then, resonated well with the children. When Aaron turned up and the truth emerged, the children were relieved there was no fuss made by Nanna or Ms Chen.

The educators were able to connect this episode to other books they had read to the children, such as *Lost Bear*, which has a similar storyline, with the bear ending up at a rubbish dump. The educators commented that they welcomed the reminders of some Aboriginal ways, and big-picture thinking. They particularly mentioned learning by observing, respecting your elders, nature-based learning, and oral storytelling: all of which fit well with the Morphett Vale East Kindergarten early childhood education philosophy.

The educators found the teaching resources useful for the suggestions to explore the local 'high country', and to examine trees, canopies, mica and clay.

"Incorporating Little J & Big Cuz into the education program provided a vehicle for professional conversations among the staff."



'Transformation'.

MAIN CHARACTERS

The children very much liked the character of Old Dog. They found him funny and felt an affinity with him. Many of the children have their own dogs and see them as an equal part of their families. They also liked the other animals in the episodes, which generated interest in Australia's indigenous flora and fauna. But Old Dog was their favourite. The children liked the way the family talked and how that differed to the talk at school (i.e. the use of both Standard Australian English and Aboriginal English). There was a resonance among some of the children of the lifestyle portrayed.

Of the main adult characters, the children liked Nanna, and many of the children were intrigued by the ranger, Uncle Mick.

PROFESSIONAL CONVERSATIONS

Incorporating *Little J & Big Cuz* into the education program provided a vehicle for professional conversations among the staff. They discussed the messages in each episode and the way the various characters interacted, behaved and were portrayed. These conversations provided the staff with the opportunity to discuss and clarify their own values and beliefs.



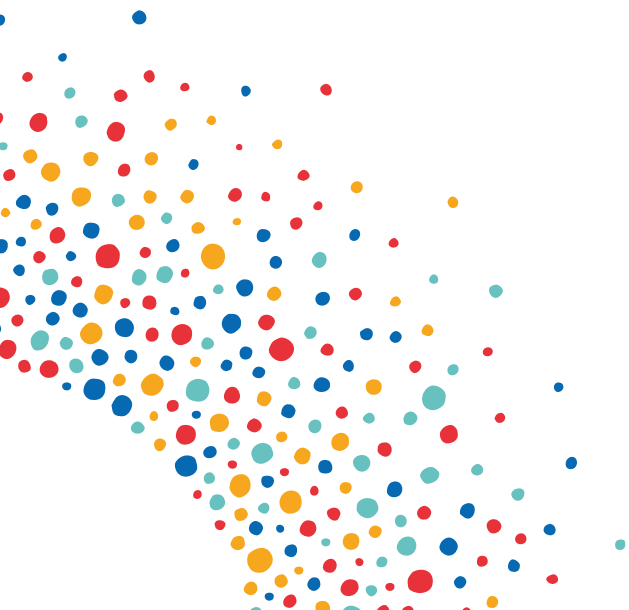
Acknowledgements

Thank you to the children and educators at Yera Children's Service.

Special thanks to Keiryn Christodoulou, Early Childhood Worker and Jessica Maddison, Director

The mural images used in this case study were painted by art students at Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education

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Preparing socially and emotionally for preschool with *Little J & Big Cuz*

One Tree Community Centre Yera Children's Service

BATCHELOR, NORTHERN TERRITORY

Context

Yera Children's Service is a remote early childhood centre that is part of a group that forms the not-for-profit Yera Children's Service. This Service provides childcare to children aged six years and under in centres located in Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Victoria. The Yera Children's Service in the Northern Territory is located within the campus of Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) in the township of Batchelor, 98 kilometres south of Darwin. The Northern Territory Department of Education early childhood centre and primary school are nearby. The township of Batchelor has a population of 336 people. Students studying at BIITE who live in very remote Indigenous communities travel in several times a year to undertake intensive face-to-face classes, and live in the accommodation provided on the BIITE campus.

Yera Children's Service at Batchelor has 34 places for children from birth to three years of age and a 'kindy' room that caters for children aged three to six years of age. The early childhood educators prepare development programs for the children, including programs to develop children's social and emotional wellbeing and prepare them for their transition to junior primary school.

"It is Keiryn's view that with good teaching, the various episodes of *Little J & Big Cuz* can be used with junior primary and primary children. "

TEACHING EARLY CHILDHOOD CHILDREN

Keiryn Christodoulou has been an educator at the Yera Children's Service at Batchelor since 2010. With the support of the Director, Jessica Madison, Keiryn incorporated all the episodes of *Little J & Big Cuz* into her learning program for the children in her early childhood group. The children in this group were aged between two and four years, and comprised nearly equal numbers of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children.

While Keiryn used *Little J & Big Cuz* in her programs for children up to the age of four, she discovered informally that children up to the age of 10 enjoyed watching the episodes. The older children came into the Yera Children's Service after school, and were content to sit with the younger children (a bit like the characters, Little J and Big Cuz), to follow the various stories of these characters. It is Keiryn's view that with good teaching, the various episodes of *Little J & Big Cuz* can be used with junior primary and primary children.

INCORPORATING *LITTLE J & BIG CUZ* INTO THE CHILDREN'S LEARNING

With the children at Yera Children's Service, Keiryn would play one episode of *Little J & Big Cuz* and then immediately discuss the stories with the children. She noticed the two types of English language used in the episodes: the more formal language inside Ms Chen's classroom and the more colloquial language used outside of the classroom by the characters Nanna, Little J, Big Cuz and Old Dog.

Keiryn also read the book *Where's Aaron?* to the children in her group. The children immediately recognised the characters in the book, and realised that it and the television episode were different. The children enjoyed pointing out these differences. Keiryn found that she could highlight different types of language used in books and on television. She found that together the *Little J & Big Cuz* book, *Where's Aaron?* and the television episodes, meaningfully engaged the children. The various resources linked to *Little J & Big Cuz* provided Keiryn with different learning strategies to use with the children based on stories they had come to love.

Once the childcare group had viewed all the episodes, they requested to rewatch their favourites. Keiryn observed that the children connected with the stories and stated that "everyone is related – *Little J & Big Cuz* model their own stories".

PREPARING FOR PRESCHOOL

Keiryn included *Little J & Big Cuz* in her education program to assist the children to make the transition to preschool. Keiryn thought that the television episodes subtly assisted with this preparation in several ways. She considered



Mural artwork at Yera Children's Service

the stories provided a good way to show the children how to interact with each other by talking and listening with care, respect and empathy.

Keiryn also noticed that when the episodes involved time in Ms Chen's classroom, the children would model some of the behaviours of the onscreen children, such as sitting up and crossing their legs. She liked the way the children paid attention when Ms Chen was teaching something formally. Keiryn also thought that the multi-age group in Ms Chen's class was similar to her own experiences of school, and would likely be experienced by the children she educates. The way the differences in ages of the children were approached in episodes such as 'Lucky undies' and 'Big plans' showed some ways in which children and teachers in multi-level classes can overcome concerns that a child might be 'too little'.

SUPPORTING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Social and emotional development is a large part of the overall early childhood program conducted at Yera Children's Service. The television series was integrated into the transition from play to lunchtime. That is, the children were settled down to 'quiet time' by having the 'special treat' of watching *Little J & Big Cuz*.

"Children would model some of the behaviours of the onscreen children, such as sitting up and crossing their legs."

"Messages in the episodes reinforced the learning on which she was working."

Watching television programs is not a preferred way of educating children at Yera Children's Service; however, Keiryn found that the children loved the stories and would be highly engaged for the ten or so minutes of each episode. She observed that watching one program per day helped the children to transition to lunchtime, by sitting down, like Little J and Big Cuz and their friends do when in Ms Chen's class.

The children especially liked the character Old Dog; they found him funny and empathised with him. When Little J and Big Cuz were throwing a ball in 'Big plans' and Old Dog wanted to get involved, the children sympathised with Old Dog being left out, saying: "Old Dog sad".

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Keiryn was enthusiastic about using *Little J & Big Cuz* for many reasons including that the students could see respectful language being used. The episodes are expressed in a level of language the children can understand. The children heard all the main characters use phrases and expressions that were normal for them. In addition, Nanna helped the children with their learning.

Keiryn also found that messages in the episodes reinforced the learning on which she was working. For example, the use of the phrase "all you have to do is ask" supported the learning about how to request something rather than to stretch across and grab it.

AUTHENTIC CONNECTIONS

Keiryn felt that the stories were authentic to the children's experiences. The children connected with little things in the episodes, such as the graphics and settings in each episode. The backyard that leads out to the different environments was familiar for the children, as they too live in urban yet remote settings on the edge of the bush. The colour and design of Nanna's doona were recognisable to some, and all of these images provided a sense of authenticity to the stories of *Little J & Big Cuz*.

Keiryn thought that all the episodes were well written and the children would make comments about the familiarity of the voice-overs; for example, "She talks like my Mum", was a comment about the character of Nanna.

Keiryn noticed that the children liked how Nanna prepared food familiar to them, and that the food was not an idealised or romanticised view of the food eaten by Indigenous families. The children recognised food such as spaghetti bolognaise and damper, as well as 'bush tucker'. One of Keiryn's Indigenous children wanted to catch a goanna to eat after watching the episode, 'Goanna ate my homework'.

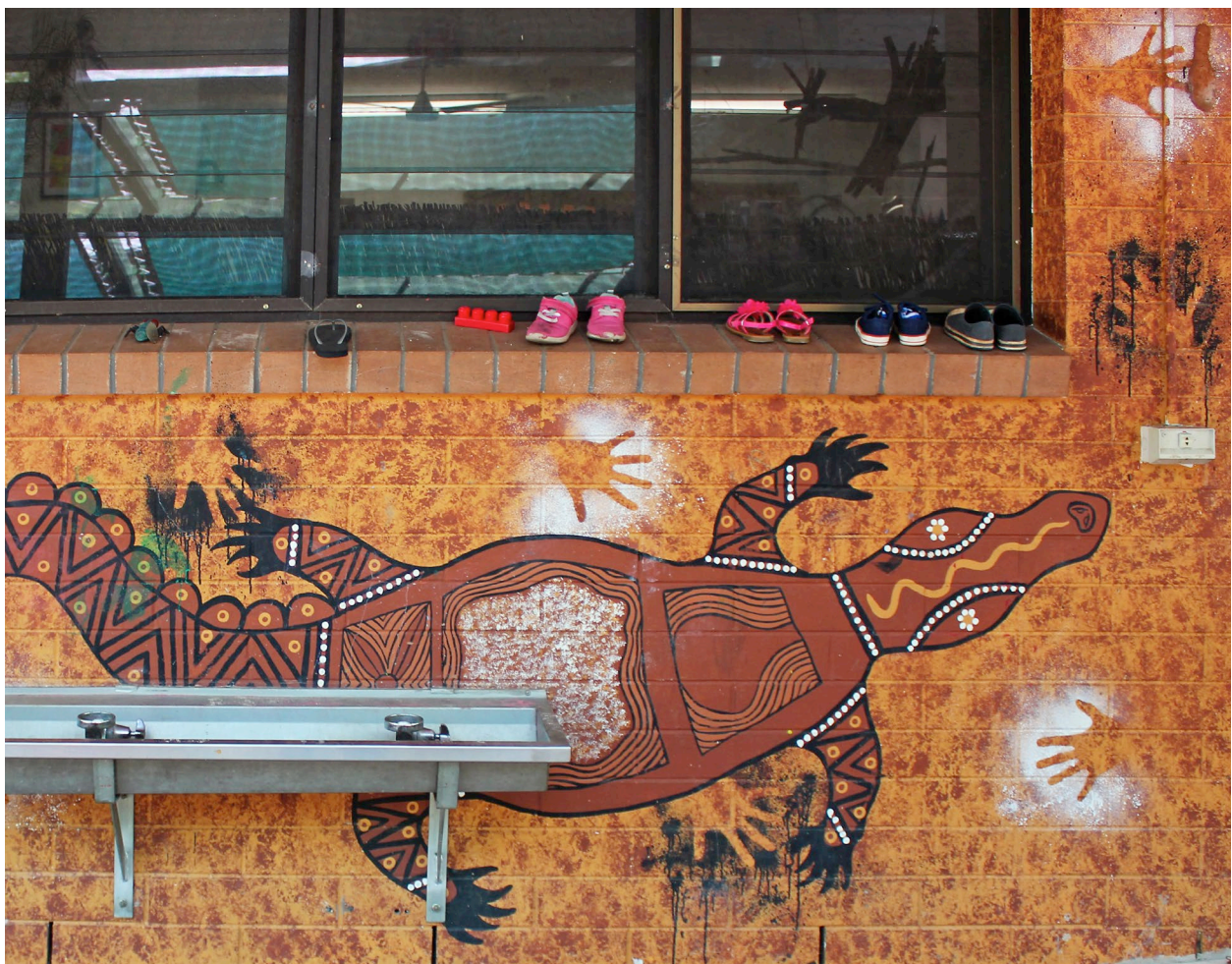
Conclusion

Through the 13 episodes of *Little J & Big Cuz*, Keiryn was provided with authentic resources that the childcare children enjoyed and that resonated with their own experiences. In subtle and explicit ways *Little J & Big Cuz* modelled some of the behaviours Keiryn was deliberately trying to develop in the children, especially respectful and empathetic relationships with each other and adults.

The episodes provided Keiryn with many 'teachable moments'. She used the television program as the basis for discussions with the children after each episode, and these discussions linked directly to her planned education program. Keiryn found that in her professional setting, *Little J & Big Cuz* particularly supported the students social, emotional and language development – all important for preparing them to make the transition from childcare to preschool.

Keiryn and the children at Yera Children's Service thoroughly enjoyed the episodes and are looking forward to the second series of *Little J & Big Cuz*.

"In subtle and explicit ways *Little J & Big Cuz* modelled some of the behaviours Keiryn was deliberately trying to develop in the children."



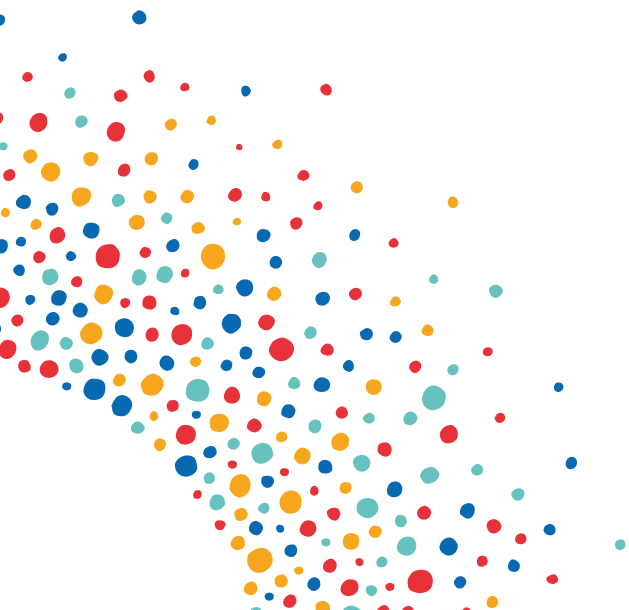
Mural artwork at Yera Children's Service

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the children and educators at Marion Primary School.

Special thanks to Cheryl Ross, Principal, and Eileen Butler, Aboriginal Education Officer, as well as the Teachers of the R–2 classes: Jo Byrnes, Maria Gialouris, Georgina Sprigg and Michelle Triantafylakis.

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Supporting social and emotional learning with *Little J & Big Cuz*

Marion Primary School

ADELAIDE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Context

Marion Primary School was established in 1972 to meet the demands of new housing developments 10 kilometres south of the Adelaide central business district. The school draws students from the suburb of Marion and the surrounding suburbs of Mitchell Park, Sturt, Darlington and Oaklands Estate. It has an enrolment of a little over 200 students with eight classes from Reception to Year 7.

There is a high level of student transience due in part to the mobility of families in short-term rental accommodation, which includes parents who are students at the nearby Flinders University. Students come from a diversity of cultural backgrounds with more than 14 countries represented in the school. About 35 per cent of students at the school receive government financial assistance in the form of the School Card scheme.

This case study was developed in collaboration with four junior primary teachers at the school.

"Students come from a diversity of cultural backgrounds with more than **14** countries represented in the school."

"Little J & Big Cuz provides engaging stories centred in Aboriginal culture ... the series reflects the importance of extended family and how Nanna provides a positive role model."

ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY EDUCATION OFFICER

In 2018, there were 21 students enrolled at Marion Primary School who identified as being of Indigenous descent. To support these Indigenous students and their families, the school has an Aboriginal Community Education Officer, Eileen Butler, known to everyone as 'Aunty Eileen'. She works 15 hours a week supporting students in classrooms, working with teachers, and connecting parents with the school through home visits, as well as meeting with parents in the school. She noted how the Indigenous students could relate to the language style of the main characters, and to their relationships (such as between Nanna, Little J and Big Cuz). She is pleased that *Little J & Big Cuz* provides engaging stories centred in Aboriginal culture, which are not often present in other media for young children. She commented on, and values that the series reflects the importance of an extended family, and how Nanna provides a positive role model.

TEACHING JUNIOR PRIMARY CHILDREN

A team of four teachers at the School incorporated the *Little J & Big Cuz* television series into their junior primary teaching and learning programs:

- Reception and Year 1 (R-1) class of 32 students, in which two children identified as Indigenous.
- a combined Year 1/Year 2 (Year 1-2) class of 25 students, in which one child identified as Indigenous.
- a combined Year 1-2 class of 25 students, in which three children identified as Indigenous.

The teachers were aware of the *Little J & Big Cuz* television series as it had been in use at the school since its release in 2017. The Year 1 students had prior exposure to the series as they had watched it when they were in Reception. Some students had seen episodes outside of school, on NITV or YouTube. In 2018 however, the series was formally incorporated into the teaching and learning programs for the first time.

The teachers incorporated the series into their planned curriculum as a key element of the Social Emotional Learning program. They also looked for opportunities to incorporate episodes in other curriculum areas such as language and geography.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Social Emotional Learning is a whole-school priority and has a strong focus on student wellbeing and social development. The school participates in *KidsMatter*, which is an Australian mental health and wellbeing initiative in primary schools, and in early childhood education and care services

(including preschools, kindergartens and day-care centres). *KidsMatter* provides a framework that helps schools and early childhood centres to take account of children's mental health by providing advice on how to:

- create positive school and early childhood communities
- teach children skills for good social and emotional development
- work together with families
- recognise and get help for children with mental health problems.

Marion Primary School also provides an extended transition program from home and childcare to school, for children who expect to commence school in the following year. The program is called GREAT (Get Ready, Engage and Thrive). This program enables children to experience school for two hours on a Friday each week, from the middle of term one to the middle of term four of any given year.

INCORPORATING *LITTLE J & BIG CUZ* INTO PROGRAMS

While each of the teachers used the series in different ways, there were common links. They each found a strong connection between the themes raised in the different episodes and aspects of the school's Social Emotional Learning program, such as developing resilience, feelings, relationships and problem-solving. There were also links made to the school values of harmony, courage and integrity. These connections were developed through asking questions such as 'What is the story trying to tell us?' and 'How did the family help Little J?'

In her Year 1–2 class, Maria Gialouris used the series to promote student conversations about key messages in each story. Fostering these conversations allowed students to articulate their understanding of the messages in the episodes and allowed her to incorporate aspects of Social Emotional Learning she wanted to highlight from each particular episode. For example, she used the episode 'Wombat rex' to lead a conversation about the importance of honesty. This came from how Big Cuz tried to trick Little J into believing that giant wombats still lived near their house. This episode also had the children talking about the importance of leaving 'old' things in their place and not to ruin them.

The episode 'Big plans' led Maria to guide a discussion on being inclusive; that is, cooperating with others, letting others join in, and not being 'bossy'. Maria observed the students remember these key messages, as reflected in their teamwork and support for each other in activities after watching and talking about the episode.

In their R–1 class, teachers Georgina Sprigg and Michelle Triantafilakis asked the question 'What was the story trying to tell us?' as the conversation

"The teachers incorporated the series in their planned curriculum as a key element of the Social Emotional Learning program."

"The teachers commented on the positive ways in which all students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, engaged with the episodes they watched."

starter for each episode. The students thought that 'Big plans' was about making friends, being useful with your time, including people in play, being kind and making harmony.

The children identified the key message in the episode 'Transformation' was about being courageous, with Big Cuz getting up and dancing in front of others. The idea of being resilient and not giving up are aspects of the School's Social Emotional Learning program.

The children identified that 'Lucky undies' was also about not giving up, and having a go. It shows how Little J had to find confidence in his own abilities. The teachers used this episode to talk about family and how Little J's family helped him gain his confidence. Big Cuz turns the torn-up undies into a lucky headband, and the family used kind words with Little J to help him to be a member of a team.

Jo Byrne explored how the students thought the series helped their learning. The students spoke of learning about culture, wellbeing and the morals related to each story.

Overall, the teachers found the series to be a valuable asset in their Social Emotional Learning program. The messages in the series connected to the school's priorities of wellbeing, having a positive growth mindset, building relationships and social development.

CHILDREN'S REACTIONS

All teachers commented on how well the children engaged with the episodes. In particular, they commented on the positive ways in which all students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, were attentive during the episodes they watched. Although some students had viewed the episodes previously, the teachers reported that this did not seem to dampen their enthusiasm for and engagement with *Little J & Big Cuz* as a class activity. The students liked the music that accompanied the beginning and end of each episode and made the connection that it framed each episode. Jo commented upon how her students liked to hum along to the music, and even did so when not watching the program.

The children found some episodes were more engaging than others. They especially liked those with humour and the more exciting storylines. 'Lucky undies' was a favourite. Maria's class watched this episode repeatedly and they were engrossed and amused each time.

Jo commented how her class really responded well to 'Wombat rex'. They found different parts funny, and were able to bring prior knowledge and experience to the class discussions after the episode. Georgina and Michelle's class responded well to different parts of 'Lucky undies'.



Class at Marion Primary School watching an episode of *Little J & Big Cuz*.

The children laughed and made thoughtful comments. Several children made personal connections to the story, talking about their own lucky items, such as football socks.

One powerful impact reported by the teachers concerned an Aboriginal girl who had experienced a difficult start at the School. She had spent time in the behaviour support unit and was finding it challenging to settle into the routines of the school. When she watched the series she was engrossed. She commented that “they talk like my Mum”, which was a reference to the character of Nanna. She could identify with the characters in the series and this seemed to influence her behaviour in a very positive way. She was calm and settled while watching the episodes, and participated in the discussions and activities afterward.

The teachers thought the students could clearly identify the messages in each episode. The children were able to recall what each episode was about, the messages that emerged and could relate these to the next episode. The teachers thought the messages in *Little J & Big Cuz* were conveyed naturally through the story lines and were not forced.

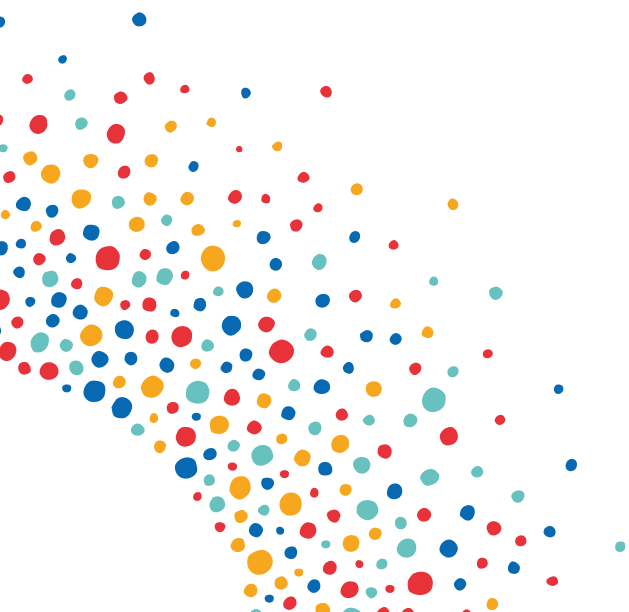
WHAT IS NEXT?

The four teachers involved in this case study plan to continue to use the series as part of their Social Emotional Learning program. They consider there are opportunities to link to other aspects of the curriculum, such as language, and plan to clearly focus on these links so they are of the greatest benefit. Through being able to talk about and apply the messages from each series in their classroom activities, the teachers found the impact on all the students was positive. Both the teachers and Auntie Eileen reported that a great strength of *Little J & Big Cuz* is the positive spotlight it shines on Indigenous cultures.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Julie Cadd, Lecturer at Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, and to the students in the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care course.

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Teachable moments: Planning early childhood programs for Indigenous children that incorporate *Little J & Big Cuz*

Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education

BATCHELOR, NORTHERN TERRITORY

Context

Students in the *Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care* course at Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) incorporated *Little J & Big Cuz* into their early childhood programs and family life in the respective communities in which they live and work. This course is a three year program and enrolment requires that the students are working in early childhood settings.

The students from remote Indigenous communities attend BIITE four times per year to undertake intensive workshops and face-to-face learning. Julie Cadd is a lecturer for the *Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care* course and supported the initiative to incorporate *Little J & Big Cuz* into the learning programs.

"The students from remote Indigenous communities attend Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education four times per year to undertake intensive workshops and face-to-face learning."

The BIITE students who planned and incorporated *Little J & Big Cuz* into their early childhood programs live in Yarralin and the Tiwi Islands.

Yarralin is also known as Walangeri. It is a remote Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory located 705 kilometres south-west of Darwin. It is part of the Victoria Daly Regional Council. Until 1975, Yarralin was part of the Victoria River Downs Station and called Gordon Creek Station. In 1972, the local Ngarinman people walked off the Victoria River Downs Station to protest their pay and working conditions. This started a land dispute that was not resolved for 44 years. In 2016, the land was handed back to the Ngarinman/Yarralin people. According to the 2016 census, there were 53 families, 293 people and 37 children under the age of four years living in Yarralin. The main languages spoken in this region are Ngarinman and English. Childcare is provided through the Victoria Daly Regional Council.

The Tiwi Islands are located in the Eastern Timor Sea, approximately 60 kilometres north of Darwin. Two islands make up the Tiwis: Wurrumiyanga (Bathurst) and Yermalner (Melville) Islands. There is a history of 15 000 to 20 000 years of inhabitation by the Tiwi people.



The front gate of Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education.



Map of northern Australia

Yermalner is the larger of the two islands. Over the past several centuries explorers seeking land for their nations have visited and been banished. These visitors include the Macassans, Malays, Portuguese, Dutch and the English. Wurrumiyanga was established as a mission by the Catholic Church in the early 20th century.

The Tiwi Land Council states that there are 97 families who own land on the Tiwi Islands. The 2016 census indicates there were 592 families comprising 2453 people living on the Tiwis, of whom 2187 identified as being Indigenous. There were 159 children four years of age and under living on the Tiwi Islands. Tiwi is the main language spoken.

The Tiwi Islands Regional Council Regional Children's Services operates four programs across three communities. These programs include:

- flexible long day care at Wurrumiyanga – Jirnani Child Care Centre
- two crèche services at Pirlangimpi Crèche and Milikapiti Crèche
- outside school hours care at Wurrumiyanga, Pirlangimpi and Milikapiti
- vacation care at Wurrumiyanga, Pirlangimpi and Milikapiti
- Families as First Teachers (Wurrumiyanga only).

The BIITE students who participated in this case study worked in Wurrumiyanga, Pirlangimpi and Milikapiti.

PLANNING TO INCORPORATE *LITTLE J & BIG CUZ* INTO INDIGENOUS CHILDREN'S LEARNING

Three approaches to incorporating *Little J & Big Cuz* into early childhood learning were used in the *Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care* course at BIITE:

- The students were introduced to the television series while attending a workshop in Batchelor. They watched five episodes and were then each provided with a DVD of the first season and a USB flash drive of resources to take back to their communities.
- At the next workshop, the students were encouraged to reflect on using *Little J & Big Cuz* with their families and communities, and discussed the ways in which two episodes ('Big plans' and 'Goanna ate my homework'), could be used in their own locations when they returned to their communities.
- This case study was prepared as a draft and then checked in class by the BIITE students before being finalised.

TEACHABLE MOMENTS

One of the BIITE students showed all the episodes to her community, including her own children and other family members. When walking to school and work one day after watching the 'Goanna ate my homework', she saw recent marks in the dirt made by a snake and used this opportunity as a 'teachable moment' with her own children. Recalling how Little J had set off in search of bush tucker, and that Nanna helped him to recognise different tracks left by animals, this student took the opportunity to talk with her children about the snake tracks, to point out the direction in which the snake was moving, and to show them how she knew the snake tracks had been made recently. She recognised the importance for the children to see that their experiences are meaningful and worthy of being included in a television program.

This BIITE student also recognised there are teachable moments for school students and adults embedded in the various episodes of *Little J & Big Cuz*, so she took the opportunity to provide her DVD to the local school so they too could use the resources.

APPLYING THE KEY MESSAGES

As part of the course, the BIITE students have to develop and implement a learning framework that supports children's wellbeing, learning and development. The students discussed and planned how two episodes ('Big plans' and 'Goanna ate my homework') could contribute to meeting the requirements of the learning framework by identifying potential activities and teachable moments.



'Big Plans'.

ADOPTING AND ADAPTING THE KEY MESSAGES OF 'BIG PLANS'

The episode 'Big plans' involves Little J and Big Cuz dealing with conflict over issues that siblings typically squabble about, such as who has access to the bedroom over the weekend, the games to be played and friendships. All four main characters (Little J, Big Cuz, Nanna and Old Dog) are involved in the storylines. Old Dog, Big Cuz and Little J all want to play their own games and cannot agree on a game to play together. Each character experiences rejection over the course of the episode, but with guidance from Nanna they are all eventually able to happily play the same game.

After watching this episode the BIITE students brainstormed the key messages from the episode, and the ways in which they could adopt and adapt those key messages into meaningful and authentic activities in their own settings. The key areas and messages they identified were:

- physical activity: teamwork and playing the game together is more important than winning
- relationships: relationships are dynamic, and conflict resolution requires skilful handling
- creativity: using your imagination to create different games is fun.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Fostering physical activity is part of their own learning programs. The BIITE students envisaged the ways in which they could connect the television episodes their children were watching, to being outside and active.

"They could see connections that were mutually reinforcing between the Little J & Big Cuz episode and their own learning programs aimed at fostering physical activity."

"The BIITE students discussed how they could use the examples in this episode to encourage their children to be imaginative and create new activities and games."

'Big plans' opens in Ms Chen's last class for the week, which involves the children competing in three-legged races. The BIITE students indicated they could apply that scene to the physical activities they play with the children in their communities, and that these activities could be expanded to other physical activities such as sack races and egg-and-spoon races. They could see connections that were mutually reinforcing between the *Little J & Big Cuz* episode and their own learning programs aimed at fostering physical activity.

RELATIONSHIPS

This episode incorporates several relationships, and Nanna is an expert in conflict resolution. These relationships include:

- Nanna diverting Little J away from getting angry with Big Cuz
- Big Cuz and her friend Sissy
- Old Dog and Little J, and then with Big Cuz and Sissy.

There is a build-up of tension in the various relationships between Little J, Big Cuz, Sissy and Nanna over the course of this episode. There are different points of conflict between Little J and Big Cuz, and between Big Cuz and Sissy. The BIITE students discussed how they could use these different points of conflict to assist with the social and emotional development aspect of their learning programs.

CREATIVITY

In 'Big Plans' both Little J and Big Cuz develop imaginary activities – Big Cuz imagines she and Sissy are in a singing competition, and Little J creates an imaginary obstacle course. The BIITE students discussed how they could use the examples in this episode to encourage their children to be imaginative and create new activities and games.



'Goanna ate my homework'.

ADOPTING AND ADAPTING THE KEY MESSAGES OF 'GOANNA ATE MY HOMEWORK'

The focus of this episode is on different types of foods and 'show and tell' activities at school. Little J excitedly offers to bring bush tucker to school for the whole class to taste. Unfortunately his plans do not go well. First, he discovers he does not know how to track and gather bush tucker; and once he has located enough emu eggs to share, these are stolen by a goanna.

The BIITE students identified the following key messages that could form teachable moments:

- Problem-solving and asking for help: Little J was given the latitude to try to solve the problem he had created. He was 'scaffolded' first by Nanna asking Big Cuz to keep an eye on him, and later he had to ask Nanna for help.
- Handling personal emotions: Little J had to deal with several disappointments – he had to deal with his lack of knowledge, and that the goanna ate the emu eggs he had collected.
- Classroom activities and interactions: there are several scenes in this episode that show how children behave at school.
- Different foods: both bush tucker and Italian spaghetti bolognese are highlighted in the 'show and tell', providing the opportunity to discuss different people's local foods.

PROBLEM-SOLVING AND ASKING FOR HELP

The BIITE students liked that Little J was able to problem-solve on his own but then ended up asking for help from Nanna about tracking and collecting bush tucker. They could see how this part of the episode could be used to acknowledge and reinforce the importance of family members and the elders in their communities as the holders of knowledge about their respective lands, and for building respect for that knowledge and those people. Practical activities inspired by this episode included making track marks of different animals using available materials common to the student's own local communities.

HANDLING PERSONAL EMOTIONS

There were many teachable moments in the several disappointments experienced by Little J. Through his resilience, and supported by his family, Little J is still able to present at his 'show and tell' session at school. The BIITE students felt they could build on this message with the children they teach.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND INTERACTIONS

The way Ms Chen and the children in her class interact is respectful and happy. Having positive examples of class behaviour, set in contexts that

"The BIITE students thought there were opportunities for adults, parents and educators to learn from the ways in which different circumstances are handled."

are recognisable to the children at the BIITE students' workplaces, was discussed as useful for their own programs of learning.

DIFFERENT FOODS

The BIITE students suggested several ways the theme of 'food' (which is evident throughout the episode), could be used in their own settings. These ideas included:

- collecting bush tucker and cooking it up for lunch (e.g. goanna, snake, turtle)
- teaching the children what is bush tucker and good medicine, and what things should be avoided
- learning about the food in other cultures (e.g. spaghetti is an Italian national dish).

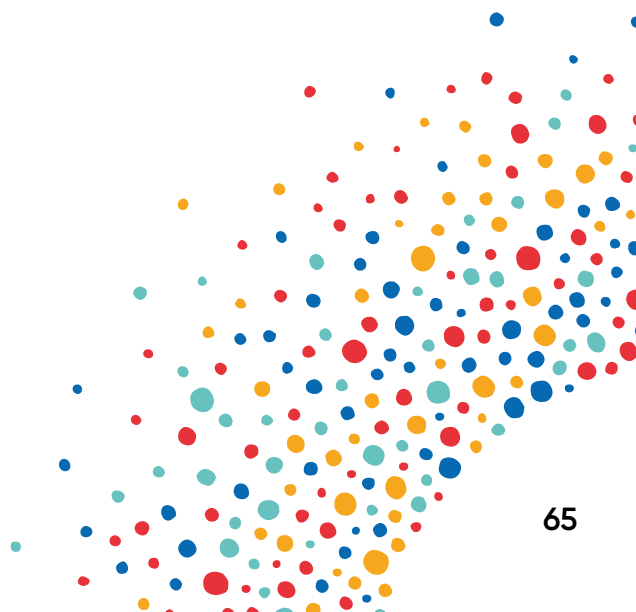
OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

There were several points throughout the 13 episodes of *Little J & Big Cuz* where the BIITE students thought there were opportunities for adults, parents and educators to learn from the ways in which different circumstances are handled. This is particularly the case for the character Nanna. For example, in 'Big plans', Nanna skilfully distracts Little J away from trying to play with Big Cuz and Sissy. Then Nanna takes interest in Little J's obstacle course by taking photos and videoing his play. This lures Sissy and eventually Big Cuz outside to play. Without reprimand or direction, Nanna handles the different conflicts expertly. The BIITE students thought this scenario was worth sharing with other adults.

Conclusion

The students in the *Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care* course at BIITE utilised *Little J & Big Cuz* as an education tool in their own communities and as a planning tool in their course. Where possible, the BIITE students viewed the episodes on the DVD in their own communities, and shared these with their families and other educators. In the class, the BIITE students viewed five episodes on two occasions, and identified the key messages in these episodes, that could then form the basis of expanding the learning for the children in their respective communities and preparing for teachable moments.

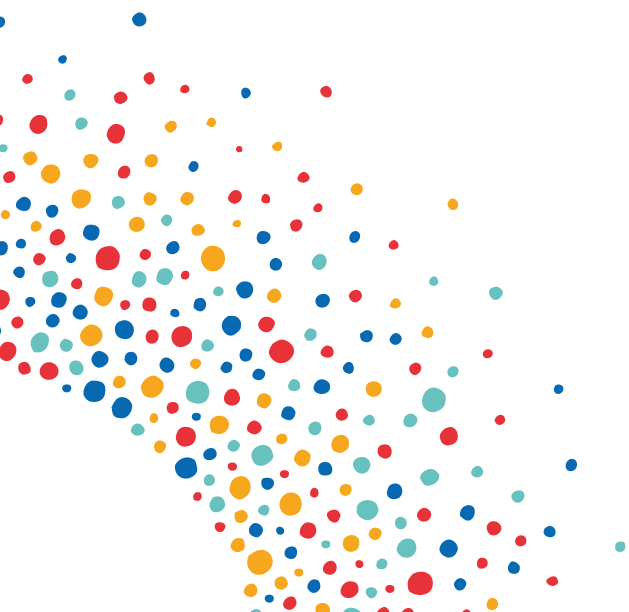
The BIITE students also identified several opportunities for professional learning with adults that could arise from the use of *Little J & Big Cuz*. They could see that interactions with the children at Nanna's (at home), and Ms Chen's (at school), offers adults in their communities with examples of both how to positively deal with their children, as well as the common issues facing families and social groups.



Acknowledgements

Thank you to the children and educators at St Augustine's Primary School.
Special thanks to Jo Brookes, Teacher, and Paul Rayner, Principal.

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Developing written language with *Little J & Big Cuz*

St Augustine's School

MOSSMAN, QUEENSLAND

Context

St Augustine's School is a Catholic primary school located in the town of Mossman in Far North Queensland. The school opened in 1934 and was originally run by the Sisters of Mercy. It is now a Diocesan school under the umbrella of the Catholic Education Office in the Cairns Diocese.

As at June 2018, the school had a student population of 183 students, coming from Mossman and Port Douglas, which is about 11 kilometres south of Mossman. There are 18 students in the school who identify as Indigenous. The school has 10 classes from Prep to Year 6. The school teaches the *Australian Curriculum* (Version 8) and includes the *Queensland Essential Learnings*. The *Essential Learnings* identify what should be taught and what is important for students to have opportunities to know, understand and be able to do. The *Essential Learnings* are a common part of the curriculum across all Queensland schools, and are specified for each of the key learning areas, at four different year-level junctures (end of Years 3, 5, 7 and 9).

"Jo used four episodes of *Little J & Big Cuz* over six weeks as part of her English, geography and health program."

TEACHING JUNIOR PRIMARY CHILDREN

Jo Brooks is the Prep class teacher at St Augustine's School, and she incorporated the *Little J & Big Cuz* television series into her teaching and learning program. Jo is an early career teacher who commenced her teaching career at St Augustine's three years ago. Her Prep class has 21 students of whom five identify as being Indigenous; four as Aboriginal and one as a Torres Strait Islander. She had not previously used *Little J & Big Cuz* as part of her teaching and learning program, but found that six students had seen one or more episodes on NITV. None of these students were Indigenous.

Jo used four episodes of *Little J & Big Cuz* over six weeks as part of her English, geography and health program (taught as Social Emotional Learning in Queensland Catholic Education schools). The four episodes viewed were 'Lucky undies', 'Wombat rex', 'New tricks' and 'Right under your nose'. She used these episodes as stimulus materials for the students to assist with their conversations and writing.

In Social Emotional Learning there is a strong emphasis on mindfulness and kindness to each other. The *Little J & Big Cuz* series was seen as supporting both these aspects of the Social Emotional Learning curriculum through the story lines and the relationships between the characters.

Jo thought the length of each episode was about right for her students, and the muted colours were not jarring, and as such, the students were engaged by the episodes rather than being 'hyped up'.

On two occasions parent helpers were present when Jo incorporated 'Lucky undies' and 'New tricks' into her classroom activities. These parents were not aware of the television series *Little J & Big Cuz*. Their responses were very positive and they were 'enthralled'.

SUPPORTING LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

In her English program, Jo was focusing on the development of both oral and written language. To develop students' written language, she used the episodes as a writing stimulus. The class watched an episode, which Jo then used to prompt discussion about the characters, plot and setting. Students then wrote their own stories based on the characters and/or plot in that episode. Their questions about 'Lucky undies' led to stories about the resilience and the growth mindset required to keep trying in order to be successful.

A theme explored in 'Wombat rex' was investigation and inquiry. This theme proved to be a great stimulus for the students to talk about 'finding out', and to write imaginative stories about exploring, which they then shared with their peers.



St Augustine's Primary School, Mossman, Queensland.

TEACHING POINTS

Jo found that all of the episodes generated a great deal of conversation among her class members. The students loved watching and talking about the episodes. These discussions opened up the opportunity for lots of conversations and language teaching points. These points included developing students' vocabularies so that they could use new words in their conversations and writing. Jo also used these activities as opportunities to develop students' sentence structures.

In addition, Jo developed a number of extension activities based on the episodes, such as asking the students to draw as well as write about what they watched. She also used 'elbow buddies', where students in pairs took turns to tell each other about each episode they watched.

Jo found many incidental teaching points emerge from the series such as teaching about different family units. The students could relate to the stories. The students really liked the character Nanna and talked about how she always wore a beanie. They considered Uncle Mick to be 'totally cool' and he became a key character for the class.

The students talked about the different environments in the television series compared to the tropical rainforests and sugar cane growth around their school in Mossman. Jo used the different environments in the series: the school, house, beach and desert as further teaching points. Her approach enabled the students to describe what they saw in the different episodes and make comparisons with their school, houses and the beaches with which they were familiar. The students also thought that the backyard of

"Jo found that all of the episodes generated a great deal of conversation among her class members. The students loved watching and talking about the episodes."

"She saw this support of oral language development as beneficial for several of the Indigenous students in her class whose 'at home' language is either Creole or their clan's language where the language structure and pronunciation are very different to Standard Australian English."

Nanna's house, with its sofa and mattress, was a great place to play, and some said they would like their backyards to be like Nanna's.

ORAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Jo indicated that a great strength of the series was its support for oral language development. She reported that she could use it to support the teaching of phonics, new words and sounds. She saw this support of oral language development as beneficial for several of the Indigenous students in her class whose 'at home' language is either Creole or their clan's language, where the language structure and pronunciation are very different to Standard Australian English.

SUPPORTING EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

The theme of 'Lucky undies' fits in with the school's *Second Steps and Growth Mindset* program for emotional wellbeing. The episode demonstrated important aspects of the Social Emotional Learning curriculum including showing respect for others and taking turns. The class was very excited when Little J was successful in the basketball game in this episode and gave a cheer.

The students were also very interested in the science experiment. It led to the class wanting to make slime. The school has an Under 8s Day, and on that day, the Prep class introduced slime making to other students.

This aspect of students wanting to share what they learnt or saw in an episode is also exemplified by the outcomes from watching 'New tricks'. This episode introduced students to the concept of what is a circus. Only five students had prior knowledge of circuses. Learning about circuses led the class to want to investigate what circuses are and do. The students learnt about the different acts likely to be performed at a circus. During play time, the Prep class students were then observed sharing what they had learnt about circuses with the Year 1 and 2 students. This was entirely student initiated.

LITTLE J & BIG CUZ TEACHING RESOURCES AND INTERACTIVE STUDENT MATERIALS

Jo referred to the teaching resources for the development of her program, and read through them to use as a stimulus for her teaching, rather than as direct teaching materials per se. She mainly referred to the resources concerning early childhood language development.

Jo found the teaching resources a particular strength of the *Little J & Big Cuz* series. She found them to be a valuable resource for her teaching and that the materials provided her with engaging language development resources to which the students could relate.



St Augustine's Prep class watching an episode of *Little J and Big Cuz*

She indicated that the resources for her Prep class are pitched at the right level. She also indicated that it was possible to make links to other curriculum areas such as science and geography. Jo plans to use the series for geography and to continue its use for language development.

In addition, Jo reported that the interactive *Little J & Big Cuz* games were useful and enjoyed by the students. The students were able to play the games on the school handheld tablet devices. As part of language development, Jo used the *Scene Builder* game to help prompt story writing and oral storytelling. The games were easy for the students to access, as there were no login details or passwords required. Some students with external internet access played the games at home.

"The resources for her Prep class are pitched at the right level."

Conclusion

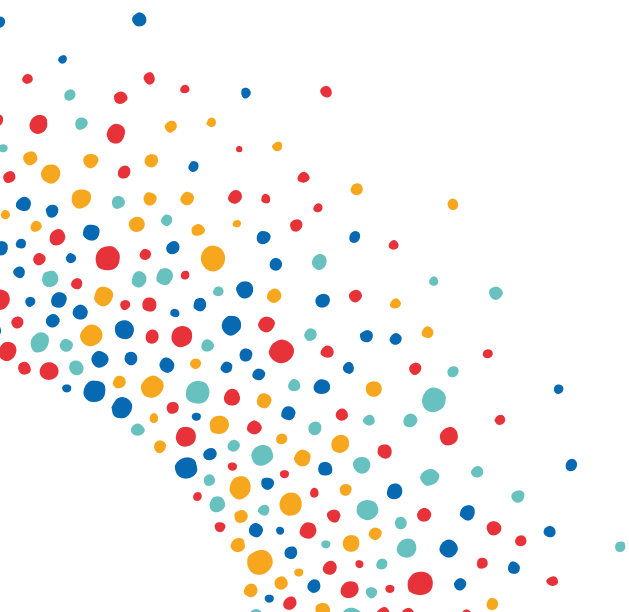
Queensland teacher Jo Brooks found a valuable teaching resource in the *Little J & Big Cuz* series. This resource engaged her Prep class. It led to student directed conversations and to diverse student initiated learning activities. As a language development resource with the possibility of planned and incidental links to other curriculum areas, Jo plans for *Little J & Big Cuz* to have an ongoing role in the Prep program at St Augustine's.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the children and educators at Wulagi Family Centre.

Special thanks to Susan Kilgour, School Principal, Wulagi School; Amy Harrison, Early Childhood Coordinator; Kayla Neve, Preschool Assistant, Wulagi Family Centre; Marg Dorman, Teacher, Wulagi School.

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Is *Little J & Big Cuz* suitable for children in preschool?

Wulagi Family Centre, Wulagi School

DARWIN, NORTHERN TERRITORY

Context

The Wulagi Family Centre is part of the Wulagi School, and both institutions are part of the Sanderson Alliance. The Sanderson Alliance is a whole-of-community initiative in the suburbs of Karama, Malak, Anula and Wulagi in Darwin, Northern Territory. The establishment of the Sanderson Alliance occurred in 2015 and was financially supported by the Wulagi Primary School Independent Public School initiative, the Northern Territory Department of Education and the philanthropic partner, Opportunity Child.

Wulagi School is a suburban Independent Public School situated about 18 kilometres from central Darwin. It has 250 students enrolled, from preschool to Year 6, in 10 primary classes and two preschool classes. The school receives children from across the suburbs in Sanderson including those who transition from the Wulagi Family Centre. One of the aims of Wulagi School is to provide a seamless transition for children throughout their respective phases of learning.

Wulagi Family Centre provides Families as First Teachers playgroups for children aged four years and under and their families. The Centre also provides parent capacity-building workshops to support the parenting

"One of the aims of Wulagi School is to provide a seamless transition for children throughout their respective phases of learning."

"The Abecedarian Approach is based on research conducted in the United States which focuses on coaching families in specific strategies to promote language learning and social-emotional development."

journey. Led by the Wulagi School Principal, Susan Kilgour, the Centre is staffed by a small team comprising a qualified Teacher and three qualified Playgroup Leaders. Wulagi Preschool provides the next phase of learning for children to begin in the year they turn four. Wulagi Preschool is staffed by a Preschool Assistant and two qualified Teachers.

Guiding learning in the early years

The Wulagi Family Centre and Wulagi Preschool provide programs for children and adults that emphasise the importance of language development and high quality interactions between children and adults, informed by the Abecedarian Approach.

The Abecedarian Approach is based on research conducted in the United States which focuses on coaching families in specific strategies to promote language learning and social-emotional development. The Approach empowers caregivers with strategies to build strong emotional connections with their children and to help their child's development.

Amy Harrison is the Coordinator of the Wulagi Family Centre and the Preschool Teacher in charge. Together with her colleagues Kayla Neve (Preschool Assistant) and Marg Dorman (Teacher), they used six *Little J & Big Cuz* episodes and all of the online games with the 40 children attending Wulagi Preschool. As their educational program already had a clear focus for the term, they chose not to fully integrate the episodes into their education programs, nor to use the teacher resources. Instead, they wanted to critically appraise each episode's content; review the appropriateness of their pedagogical intent; and ascertain the children's level of engagement with the television episodes. The educators wanted to undertake these tasks before integrating them into teaching and learning programs. As such, for this case study, the *Little J & Big Cuz* television episodes, online games and resources were deliberately not integrated into the formal learning programs for the children at Wulagi Preschool, but were informally incorporated into the day, as a way to test them out with the children.

The children involved in this trial were aged between three and four years, and 13 of the children identified as being Indigenous. The individual learning requirements of all children, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, were carefully considered and informed all aspects of the program. The Family Centre was established with a core purpose of welcoming Indigenous children and families into the school from an early age, with the Northern Territory *Learning Games* (a contextualised version of the Abecedarian Approach) chosen because they feature some Indigenous contexts for caregiver-led early childhood learning.



Wulagi School, Wulagi, Darwin, Northern Territory.

Wulagi Family Centre provides a seamless transition to the school environment. The Principal recognises that Indigenous families “really do family well”; that is, they are role models for raising children within a network of family support and Wulagi Family Centre seeks to build on that wisdom. In Wulagi Preschool, Indigenous children’s identities and learning are particularly supported through an open-ended learning environment inviting multiple ways of knowing; implementation of the Abecedarian Approach to support English literacy and language learning; a buddy program with older Indigenous children; the provision of food and clothing if needed; and family engagement with Indigenous administration staff.

The episodes shown to the children were:

- ‘Lucky undies’
- ‘Wombat rex’
- ‘New tricks’
- ‘Goanna ate my homework’
- ‘Hop along’
- ‘Transformation’.

“The Principal recognises that Indigenous families ‘really do family well’, that is, they are role models for raising children within a network of family support.”

"The online games were enjoyed by all the children and provided an oral language opportunity for the learning of new vocabulary."

Each of the episodes was shown twice so that the children could become familiar with the stories.

The six selected television episodes were played on the Centre's 'smart board' as a transition activity leading into the children's afternoon learning program, or as an end-of-the-day activity. The online games were played after some episodes. All the online games were played.

Responses

The decision to not incorporate the package of *Little J & Big Cuz* programs and resources was made in part because the passive watching of television is not normally a learning strategy that fits with the educators' pedagogical philosophy. The educators believe that the children are exposed to sufficient screen time at home. Nonetheless, the Preschool staff reported that even though the children were tired at the end of the day, they were attentive to the stories being told and enjoyed following the various characters, especially Old Dog. One Indigenous child expressed an understanding that the main characters were Indigenous, although no deliberate connections were made by the staff with the children to acknowledge the Indigenous perspectives arising from the use of *Little J & Big Cuz* in the way described in the Teacher Guides.

The educators noticed that the three-year-old children in particular tended to become less attentive at around the 10-minute mark in the episodes. The educators observed that the children enjoyed watching the episodes, but most did not seem to understand some of the key messages. A few of the children reported they had seen *Little J & Big Cuz* outside of school.

The educators reported that the online games were enjoyed by all the children and provided an oral language opportunity for the learning of new vocabulary. The educators reported that the games were useful as an end-of-day activity.

The teacher resources were acknowledged as being useful but were not employed at Wulagi Family Centre as they were considered to not be sufficiently specific to the television episodes.

Conclusion

At Wulagi Preschool *Little J & Big Cuz* was trialled with 40 children, aged between 3 and 4 years of age. About a third of these children identify as being Indigenous. Due to the timing of this trial and that the educators' programs were already planned, the staff chose not to incorporate *Little J & Big Cuz* into their current education programs, but rather to trial them informally.



A sculpture at Wulagi School.

As such, the purpose of the trial at Wulagi Family Centre was to determine whether there is potential for including *Little J & Big Cuz* into future programs.

The staff found that *Little J & Big Cuz* has the potential to support children through stories that specifically incorporate Indigenous perspectives, and there are opportunities to incorporate *Little J & Big Cuz* into future programs. The staff acknowledged that the stories in the respective television episodes may be able to contribute to their Early Years Learning Framework, given the emphasis on language and socio-emotional development that is in *Little J & Big Cuz*. The staff said that the teacher resources provided a good starting point for considering how to support the incorporation of Indigenous perspectives in the preschool curriculum. The staff noted that the picture book (*Where's Aaron?*) and web links suggestions for each episode were particularly useful.

"Little J & Big Cuz has the potential to support children through stories that specifically incorporate Indigenous perspectives."

