

Reconciliation begins at home

SHORT ARTICLES (/CATEGORY/SHORT-ARTICLES) / OPINION

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Saturday marks 50 years since the 1967 referendum to include Indigenous Australians in the census and is the beginning of Reconciliation Week.

However, access to educational opportunities remains a significant contrib gap in equality and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people observed in last year's **State of Reconciliation in Australia** (<https://www.reconciliation.org.au/the-state-of-reconciliation-in-australia-report/>) report.

ACER's **research** (<https://rd.acer.org/article/revisiting-indigenous-primary-experiences>) shows that achievement gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students can be the equivalent of **three years of schooling** (<http://research.acer.edu.au/ozpisa/22/>), and that many of these gaps exist from the time children begin school.

According to the **Australian Early Development Census** (<https://www.aedc.gov.au/>), Indigenous children are twice as likely as non-Indigenous children to be identified as developmentally vulnerable in their first year of school. At the same time, **Productivity Commission data** (<http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/childcare/report>) reveal that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are only **half as likely** (<http://www.snaicc.org.au/early-years-policy-reform/>) to have participated in important early years education.

Research (<https://arts-ed.csu.edu.au/education/transitions/publications/Statement.pdf>) has also shown that a successful start to school is linked to positive educational and social outcomes, and that children who make suc

transitions to school are more likely to regard school as important and to feel positive about their ability to learn and succeed.

With the strong support and involvement of the Indigenous community, AC SNAICC – National Voice for our Children have worked with partners to develop *Little J & Big Cuz* (<https://www.teachermagazine.com.au/articles/school-transitions-made-easier-with-the-help-of-little-j-and-big-cuz>), a 13-episode animated series that is currently being broadcast on NITV.

Featuring the voices of Miranda Tapsell (Little J), Deborah Mailman (Big Cuz), Aaron Fa'aoso (Old Dog), each episode in the series is a narrative adventure to build positive connections between children's home environments, schools and country.

Little J & Big Cuz is unique, not only because it is the first animated children's television series to feature Indigenous Australians, but also because it uses television to convey strong educational content with a positive image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and culture through the prism of the learning environment.

In developing the series we focused on the **strengths** (http://research.acer.edu.au/indigenous_education/27/) that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children bring to school, **getting schools ready for children** (http://research.acer.edu.au/indigenous_education/43/) as well as children ready for school, and the importance of **two-way learning** (http://research.acer.edu.au/indigenous_education/38/), with teachers and schools, and local communities learning from each other.

NITV Channel Manager Tanya Orman has observed that, as well as working to demystify school for Indigenous children and families, *Little J & Big Cuz* demystifies Indigenous cultures for non-Indigenous children and families.

From dreamtime stories to tracking animals, bush tucker and taking only what we need, *Little J & Big Cuz* subtly offers an insight into traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, country and languages.

As the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

key feature of both the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum, ACER convened a team of Indigenous educators to develop a series of *Little J & Big Cuz* resources that model a way for early years educators and teachers to bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into the classroom as part of daily conversations.

The learning resources for each episode act as a springboard for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in education environments. This is not an activity that takes place only in classrooms – it can also begin

The State of Reconciliation in Australia report identified a ‘shared national identity’ in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and rights are valued and recognised, as one of five dimensions required to achieve reconciliation.

Sitting down with our children to watch programs that demonstrate and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing and being, such as *Little J & Big Cuz*, is one small ‘next step’ that each of us can take on the journey towards reconciliation.

Stay tuned: Teacher will continue to explore the themes and resources linked to Little J & Big Cuz in forthcoming articles.