Indigenous Early Childhood Education, School Readiness and Transition Programs into Primary School

2019

Dusseldorp Forum

ACER

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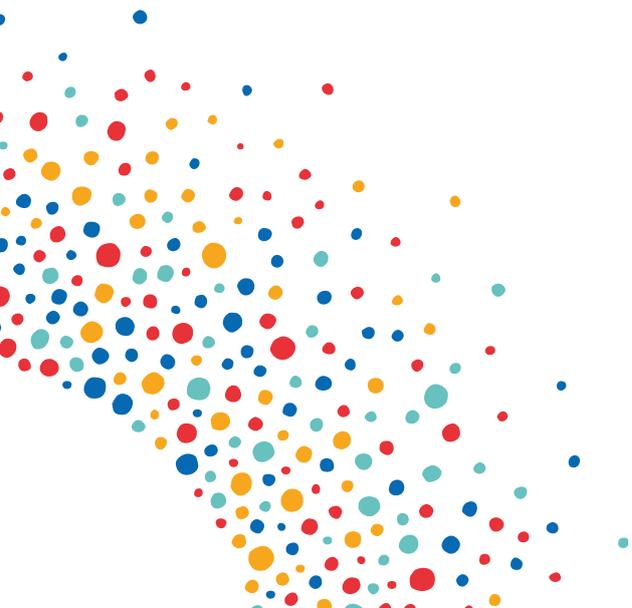
Contents

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ACMA	Australian Communications and Media Authority
AE	Aboriginal English
AEDC	Australian Early Development Census
ARACY	Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth
CCCH	Centre for Community Child Health
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CTS	Children's Television Standards
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ETC	Educational Transitions and Change
EYLF	Early Years Learning Framework
FTA	Free to Air
HIPPY	Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters
LDC	Long Day Care
ND	No date
NT	Northern Territory
PETA	Primary English Teachers Association
PBS	Public Broadcasting Service
SAE	Standard Australian English
SRI TV	School Readiness Initiative (SRI) Television (*TV)
SCRGSP	Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision
SNAICC	Secretariat of National Indigenous and Islander Child Care
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
US	United States (of America)
USA	United States of America

Executive summary

This literature review identifies, evaluates and synthesises academic, grey and other literature about transition to school programs for Australia's Indigenous children. It draws on both international and Australian research. Its purpose is to provide an overview of current research about factors that support effective transitions to school by Indigenous children, and to consider the role that educational television can play in those transitions. This literature review was also prepared to inform the development of the case studies about how the first season of the television program, *Little J & Big Cuz* had been used in various remote, regional and urban early childhood education settings. It builds on other literature reviews concerning Indigenous children's transitions to school prepared in the past decade.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience education trajectories that differ from those of non-Indigenous Australians. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are a heterogeneous group with diverse cultural and social values, norms, practices and expectations. Efforts to improve the educational opportunities and outcomes of Indigenous Australians have faced degrees of difficulty often not seen in non-Indigenous communities. Against this backdrop, quality early childhood education is considered to be a foundational key to improving the future educational outcomes for Indigenous children.

Over the past decade, Indigenous early childhood education has become an increasingly important policy priority. Australian governments have demonstrated their commitment to ensuring better access to early childhood education for all four-year-old Indigenous children, including those from remote communities. The *Closing the Gap* initiative was introduced in 2008, and in recent times the enrolments of Indigenous children in early childhood education have improved. In 2017, approximately 17 455 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were enrolled in early childhood education, which was an increase of 7.2 per cent from 2016. The 2018 *Closing the Gap* report shows that attendance in Indigenous children's early childhood programs is on track to meet its targets by 2025, in all states and territories except the Northern Territory.

The educational experiences of Indigenous Australians are regularly framed from a deficit perspective, whereby the failures of Indigenous people to engage with the states' and territories' formal educational systems are seen as 'the problem'. This literature review adopts an alternative approach to Indigenous early childhood education discourse. This alternative approach highlights the strengths that many Indigenous children possess when commencing school; strengths that may result from Indigenous child-rearing practices. Consequently, this literature review takes a strengths-based perspective for Indigenous early childhood education and school readiness, noting that Indigenous children are

frequently expected to adapt to both education systems that are foreign to them, and to school expectations that differ from those of their home environments.

In this study, the intervention of the television series *Little J & Big Cuz* has been investigated. The role that educational television can play in assisting Indigenous children to make the transition to Australian schools (where the school education systems are commonly based on English and Irish school education traditions), is discussed. It is often expected that Indigenous children must adapt to and understand Australia's school environments if they are to succeed in these schools. Potentially, educational television is a powerful tool that can assist in expanding a child's worldview through exposure to unfamiliar content, language and experiences. This literature review suggests that educational television, when coupled with expert educators, can be beneficial to a child's development by assisting them to understand different contexts, develop their emerging language and literacy skills, and support their social and emotional development.

It is important to acknowledge however, that for many children and their families, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, making the transition from home to school can be traumatic. The transition to school should be considered as an holistic, relational process that occurs over a period of time before and after the very first school day. These processes require not only children and their families to be ready for school, but for schools to be ready to accept the children. Judging by the research and government reports such as *Closing the Gap*, formal education systems and schools have largely failed to adapt to the learning styles of Indigenous children commencing school, thus presenting challenges about how Indigenous children are to experience a successful transition to school.

This literature review reinforces the idea that any measures of Indigenous children's school readiness are frequently undertaken from a Western perspective, thus potentially overlooking the importance of Indigenous values concerning school readiness. Determining the effectiveness of early childhood transition programs to support Indigenous children to prepare for school have to value both Western and Indigenous perspectives.

It was not the prerogative of this review to identify all the factors that impede Indigenous success in early childhood schooling. Rather, this review of the literature identifies those factors that lead towards Indigenous success in the transition to school. This approach uses a strengths-based perspective of Indigenous early childhood education, school readiness and transition to junior primary school. By focusing on research about transition programs that have demonstrated positive outcomes for Indigenous children, the information provided in this literature review can inform future directions for the development of culturally-safe transition programs for Indigenous children commencing primary school.

Introduction

This literature review examines research concerning Indigenous early childhood education school readiness and transition programs, and the role educational television programs may play in supporting the development of school readiness capabilities. This review has been prepared as part of the School Readiness Initiative (SRI) Television (TV) series supported by the Dusseldorp Forum. The initiative saw the release of the television series *Little J & Big Cuz* in May 2017 on National Indigenous Television (NITV).

The SRI TV series was designed to improve the school readiness of Indigenous children. As such, this literature review discusses the concept of school readiness and investigates the current discourse concerning transition programs for Indigenous children.

An important function of this literature review was to inform the way in which the case studies for this initiative were developed and to understand how *Little J & Big Cuz* may be used in various remote, regional and urban early childhood education settings. The case studies are intended to provide early childhood educators with authentic insights into different approaches of how *Little J & Big Cuz* can be incorporated into early childhood education and transition to school programs.

This literature review provides an overview and discusses the current research concerning:

- the location of Indigenous children in Australia
- Indigenous early childhood education
- Indigenous school readiness
- transition programs designed to improve Indigenous school readiness
- educational television and Indigenous school readiness.

This literature review focuses on issues concerning transition programs designed to improve the readiness of Indigenous children commencing their first year of formal schooling. The factors that ensure an effective transition to primary school are highlighted, thus ensuring that any consideration of future transition programs for Indigenous children have an evidence base upon which to draw. This literature review includes international and Australian research.

Over the past decade, several literature reviews have examined Indigenous school readiness, transition to school and educational television. These include *Using television to improve learning opportunities for Indigenous children* (Lonsdale, 2010), which provided the justification for the development of the *Little J & Big Cuz* television series. This literature

review extends beyond the Lonsdale (2010) literature review. Here, the terms 'Indigenous', 'Aboriginal' and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' are used interchangeably to reflect the diversity of Indigenous peoples and their various preferences for terms of address. It is acknowledged that both Australian and international Indigenous populations refer to themselves interchangeably as 'Aboriginal' and 'Indigenous'.

Methodology

Database searches were conducted using a range of relevant search terms in order to locate literature for this review. Academic literature was obtained via the Australian Council *for* Educational Research (ACER) Cunningham Library's subscriptions to multiple online databases, including, (but not limited to) educational databases such as Informit, A+ Education, EBSCOhost, PsycINFO and Learning Ground – Indigenous Education Research Database. Grey literature[1] was also obtained through ACER Cunningham Library's access to databases such as the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse and WhatWorks.

The database searches were conducted using various combinations of the following terms: school readiness, early childhood education transition programs plus a cultural descriptor such as 'Indigenous' or 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander'. The cultural descriptors were varied in order to ensure that both Australian and international literature were included in the search results.

To ensure the search results were highly relevant, descriptors such as 'Indigenous children', 'transition to school' and other variations of the key search terms were also used. The criterion of Indigenous-specific literature was used to narrow the search results. Significantly fewer search results were obtained this way. Some mainstream literature on school readiness and/or transition programs was subsequently included in this literature review to ensure sufficient depth of analysis was possible.

Additional academic, grey and other literature was obtained through an analysis of the references listed in the articles reviewed. Predominately, the additional references obtained outside of the ACER Cunningham Library database searches were sourced from previous literature reviews on the topics of 'Indigenous school readiness' and 'Indigenous transition programs'.

[1] Grey literature refers to content produced by government departments, corporations and other organisations that has not been published in book or journal form. Examples include technical and research reports, brochures, fact sheets, press releases and white papers.

Literature review

The formal early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector in Australia takes into account childcare that is predominantly provided through long day care and outside-school-hours care; and early childhood education (ECE) which is provided to children through a range of settings, including childcare centres and preschools (also referred to as kindergartens in some parts of Australia) (Australian Government, n.d.). Childcare is offered to babies and infants as well as young children, whereas early childhood education in Australia generally occurs in preschools, for the year or two before children commence full-time school, and is not compulsory (Australian Government, n.d.; Baxter, 2015). Attendance at school in Australia however, is compulsory, and commences between the ages of five and six, depending on the state or territory (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2016; Australian Government, Department of Social Services, 2016).

Early childhood education is identified as one of the key factors influencing children's subsequent achievements at school (Torii, Fox & Cloney, 2017). Indigenous school readiness though, is often framed in the literature from the dominant Western perspective (Bamblett, Harrison & Lewis, 2010; Department of Education and Training, n.d.). Indigenous children are expected to adapt to formal Australian school settings, which are based on the English and Irish education systems (i.e. in the Western tradition), where too often, behavioural, social and prior-knowledge expectations vary from those of Indigenous children's home contexts (Ball, 2012).

According to Carbines, Grieves, Robb, and Wyatt (2008) for most of the history of Indigenous education, the dominant approach has been one that has sought to assimilate Indigenous children into Western culture, with little regard until relatively recently, for the cultures of Indigenous peoples. The Educational Transitions and Change Research Group (ETC) (2011, p. 1) observed that when Indigenous children transition to school they encounter "different contexts, systems, curricula, philosophies and approaches". This literature review takes into account the dominant Western perspectives to education, and presents an Indigenous, strengths-based approach to interpreting the literature.

A strengths-based approach assumes Indigenous children are already learners before they start school. This approach focuses on those attributes that demonstrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are "able, capable and have agency" (Hutchins, Martin, & Saggers, 2007, p. 35), rather than being victims or being helpless. This approach recognises the resilience of Indigenous children and their families, focuses on their abilities and knowledge, and then builds learning from there, rather than focusing on what they do not know or cannot do.

Location of Indigenous children

According to the 2016 Census conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Australia's highest proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in the Northern Territory (NT) and comprise 25.5 per cent of the NT population. New South Wales records the highest total number, with more than 216 000 people being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander decent (ABS, 2017a).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a much younger age profile and structure than the non-Indigenous population. In 2016, more than half (53 per cent) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were aged under 25 years. In comparison, almost one in three (31 per cent) non-Indigenous people were aged under 25. Children aged four years and under formed 11.3 per cent of the Indigenous population compared to 6.1 per cent of the non-Indigenous population (ABS, 2017b).

In 2017, there were 11 366 service providers of early childhood programs in Australia with 17 455 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in early childhood education, which was an increase of 7.2 per cent on 2016 enrolments (Australian Government, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018). Of these service providers, 37 per cent were preschools (either stand-alone or as part of a school), and 63 per cent were long day care centres (LDCs). Enrolled attendance by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in preschool programs of 15 hours or more per week have increased by 12 per cent between 2016 and 2017. The largest increase in attendance during this time was in the NT (41 per cent) (ABS, 2018).

Indigenous early childhood education

Early childhood education is universally considered to make important contributions to later achievements and to lead to successful educational outcomes (Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), 2018). The *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF), accepted by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), states that

> *Children's early learning influences their life chances. Wellbeing and a strong sense of connection, optimism and engagement enable children to develop a positive attitude to learning (Australian Government, Department of Education and Training, 2009, p. 10).*

The Australian Government has increasingly recognised the importance of quality early childhood education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, as noted in a variety of policy documents such as the targets identified in the COAG *Closing the Gap* reports originally introduced by the

Rudd government in 2008, and released annually (to 2018 thus far); the *Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014*; and the *National Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015* (Dreise & Thomson, 2014; Education Council, 2015; Torii et al., 2017; Tye, 2014). All of these reports indicate that it is essential to improve access to early childhood education for Indigenous children.

Further, these reports argue that the educational disadvantage experienced by Indigenous children has to be addressed and then improvements sustained, given the poor comparisons over time of Indigenous children compared to the performances of non-Indigenous children (Australian Government, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2015; Education Council, 2015). These gaps in academic performance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, for example, were reported in 2006 by Zubrick and his colleagues (Zubrick, et al., 2006), and the notion of comparisons has continued for over a decade.

The 2015 *Closing the Gap* report indicated that improving Indigenous early childhood education could lead to closing the gap in later educational outcomes for Indigenous children as measured in comparison to non-Indigenous children (Australian Government, Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2015). This view has been reiterated in each of the subsequent *Closing the Gap* reports.

In 2018, the *Closing the Gap* report indicated

> *Indigenous children who had attended ECE [early childhood education] services were better equipped with social and developmental skills, which aided their transition into school (Australian Government, Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018, p. 42).*

The literature then, links school readiness and school attendance and at times conflates these concepts.

School readiness and school attendance

It is often argued that the attitude underpinning the behaviour of 'school attendance', can be built through school readiness and transition-to-school programs (see for example, the *Closing the Gap* annual reports). As such, school attendance is linked to school readiness. Over the past decade or so, the Australian Government and academics have reported that school attendance is a key factor impacting on Indigenous children's life chances.

The Productivity Commission's *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* (2014) report noted that:

> *... regular school attendance is important to achieving core skills, such as literacy and numeracy. In 2013, within individual school sectors within a State or Territory, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students generally had lower attendance than non-Indigenous students, and this difference was larger in Year 10 compared to Year 5 (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014, p. 40).*

Consistent with the research, government initiatives to ensure school enrolment and attendance, are recognised to be fundamentally important. This is demonstrated in statements from COAG (see for example, COAG, 2009). In 2010, COAG recognised that educational disadvantage brought about by incomplete school attendance, is an issue that gets compounded over time, with Indigenous students being less likely to attain a Year 12 or equivalent qualification, or to participate in full-time employment, education or training after leaving school (COAG, 2010).

In 2016, Indigenous children's participation in early childhood programs was recognised as one of the factors that could assist with building positive attitudes to school attendance and thereby close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children's attendance and performances at school (Social Research Centre, 2016).

It has been widely argued however, that Indigenous children do encounter a range of risks that can interfere with their engagement in high quality early childhood education. For example, Indigenous children have traditionally attended preschool education at a lower rate compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts (Kitson & Bowes, 2010; Dockett, Perry & Kearney, 2011). According to recent ABS data, this trend is starting to even out with significant increases in enrolment and attendance of Indigenous children in childcare and preschools over the past five years (ABS, 2018). Indeed, the most recent *Closing the Gap* report (2018) indicates that all states and territories except the NT, are on track to achieve the target of 95 per cent of all Indigenous four-year-olds enrolled in early childhood education by 2025, with 91 per cent of Indigenous children currently enrolled in early childhood programs (Australian Government, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018).

It has also been argued that early childhood education centres and schools place a set of expectations on Indigenous children that they do not experience in their home environments (Adams, 1998; Ball, 2012; Kitson & Bowes, 2010; Taylor, 2011). Dockett, Mason and Perry (2006, p. 144) state

that there is a cultural mismatch between home and school expectations and that when commencing school,

> *Indigenous learners … need to adjust to an extra range and layer of experiences, demands and expectations relating to their cultural, language and social skills.*

Entering compulsory school education is a key transition point for all children and their families. This transition can take many forms. Children enter school from home, and some from childcare, preschool and/or kindergarten. Interactions in early care and learning environments are often smaller in scale than the larger-scale interactions that occur at school. Transition to school involves children moving from individual personalised relationships to more collective relationships; and from environments with a limited range of ages, to institutions that accommodate children with wider range of ages. School readiness programs are intended to smooth these transitions.

SCHOOL READINESS

Globally, the concept of school readiness has gained currency as a viable strategy to close the learning gap and improve the equality of outcomes for all young children (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2012). But there appears to be no single, clear-cut definition of school readiness in the literature reviewed. Rather, the notion has undergone several shifts over the past couple of decades. It has moved from primarily a maturational definition to a more socially constructed concept.

Previous understandings of school readiness focused on the qualities and capacities of the child, with school readiness considered to be a natural part of child development (Centre for Community Child Health [CCCH], 2008a). That is, school readiness was traditionally thought of as being a simple outcome of maturation or chronological age. Implementing this view meant there was a focus on the particular qualities and capacities of the child. Once these capacities were obvious, the child was deemed to be ready for school (CCCH, 2008a).

This understanding of school readiness however, has been dismissed because it was one-dimensional and did not account for the role that families, educators, schools and communities play in the process of children becoming ready for school (CCCH, 2008a). Indeed, the implications were that early childhood services and communities did not have any role to play in promoting school readiness; nor were schools seen to have any responsibility in being ready to meet the incoming children's learning and development requirements.

According to Janus and Offord (2007), school readiness is an holistic concept that encompasses "cognitive, socio-emotional and physical components" (p. 2). Five areas of personal capacity for being ready for school are frequently outlined in the literature: motor development, emotional health, social knowledge, language skills and general knowledge (McTurk, Nutton, Lea, Robinson, & Carapetis, 2008). These domains of school readiness however, remain predominantly focused on the individual attributes of the child and do not take into account the impact of broader social, cultural and environmental factors.

Conversely, according to Lee and Thompson (2007), for those Indigenous children who do attend formal early childhood education centres, their transition to school may be no less difficult compared to Indigenous children with no prior formal education. They argue this is because early childhood education tends to be more play-based and less structured compared to school. They therefore posit that attendance at a formal early childhood education centre prior to school commencement is not necessarily a good indicator as to whether or not an Indigenous child is judged as more or less ready for school.

McTurk et al. (2008) provide a broader, 'ecological' definition of school readiness, which over the past decade has become more evident in the literature. Transition to school situates the child at the centre of an ecological framework, surrounded by the support of the child's family, community and the school (Bronfenbrenner, 1999; Carbines et al., 2008; McTurk et al., 2008; Secretariat of National Indigenous and Islander Child Care [SNAICC], 2014). This ecological definition recognises the influence on school readiness of family, community, school and services. Similarly, UNICEF (2012) identifies a broad concept of school readiness, using three dimensions: children's readiness for school; schools' readiness for children; and families' and communities' readiness for school.

The idea of applying an ecological approach to understanding the transition to primary school is useful for Indigenous children (McTurk et al., 2008). It supports a strengths-based approach to school readiness. As SNAICC (2014, p. 6) explains, viewing each child 'ecologically' requires:

> *Looking at each child in the context of their family and community; working holistically to meet each child's transition needs; removing any potential obstacle that could hinder a child successfully beginning school; acting as an advocate for the child throughout the transition process; and, instilling in children a love of learning and a confident attitude.*

Further, SNAICC (2014) argues that an ecological approach to transition requires that schools are flexible, so that Indigenous children develop positive associations with school.

Successful transition programs for Indigenous children involve all the stakeholders in the child's early education (Carbines et al., 2008). The different stakeholders – the children, families, communities and schools – each have specific roles in the transition processes. The concepts of 'ready children', 'ready families', 'ready communities' and 'ready schools' are each seen to be central to successful transition programs for Indigenous children:

- *Ready children* places the focus on children's learning and development (SNAICC, 2014; UNICEF, 2012).
- *Ready families* focuses on parental/guardian attitudes and involvement in their children's development and learning (UNICEF, 2012).
- *Ready communities* provides appropriate support and resources to families (McTurk et al., 2008).
- *Ready schools* focuses on the school environment, and fosters relationships and practices that support a smooth transition for children into primary school, promotes children's learning (UNICEF, 2012); and places a focus on the cultural quality of school readiness programs (McTurk et al., 2008).

Such definitions are more applicable to Indigenous contexts than the simple emphasis on the child only.

INDIGENOUS SCHOOL READINESS

It has been argued that over the past decade, 'school readiness' has generally been defined within a Western worldview. There is an inherent assumption within the literature that school readiness includes the capacity or preparedness of Indigenous children to adapt to and fit in with non-Indigenous school systems. The language used in many of the government reports and in the literature reviewed, frequently describes Indigenous children as 'less ready' for school compared to their non-Indigenous peers.

Dockett, et al., (2011) indicate that Indigenous children have lower performance in cognitive and language tasks upon school entry compared to non-Indigenous children. They attribute this gap in school readiness to lower socio-economic status, lower preschool participation rates, the presence of risk factors in home and community environments, and differences between home and school environments, particularly in terms of language and culture.

McTurk, et al., (2008) also identify numerous risk factors identified in the literature that impede high quality early childhood education for Indigenous children, such as low birth weight, parental substance use or mental health

issues, cultural obligations such as 'sorry' business (i.e. funerals), child abuse and neglect, lack of stable employment, and family and community transience. These identified risk factors can be placed into one or more of the following categories of risk: individual, parental, health, cultural, socio-economic and community.

Yet it is equally important that schools are prepared to both acknowledge the risks some Indigenous children may bring with them to school, and to simultaneously accommodate Indigenous cultural practices and worldviews. Taking into account both the strengths and possible risks facing Indigenous children, can thus ensure that school readiness is an ecological, two-way process that supports diversity.

Despite locating some Indigenous perspectives on school readiness, this review did not locate a clear consensus on a definition of school readiness from an Indigenous standpoint, in the Australian literature. This finding is supported by the earlier findings of McTurk et al. (2008) and Dockett, Perry and Kearney (2010). Both of these papers highlight the lack of knowledge available from Indigenous perspectives about school readiness and school readiness assessments. Cultural considerations concerning school readiness definitions however, are important. For example, a Western definition of school readiness can be problematic for Indigenous children because it does not always capture the skills Indigenous children possess as a result of their early cultural upbringing (Ball, 2012; McTurk et al., 2008).

A concept of 'school readiness' presented from an Indigenous perspective is provided by the Canadian, Cajete (2000, p. 183) who states that:

> [Indigenous] education is really about helping an individual find his or her face, which means finding out who you are, where you come from, and your unique character.

Another Indigenous perspective on school readiness is found in Norris (2010, p. 19), who indicates that when Indigenous parents were asked the question "what should be done to help children get ready for school?", Indigenous parents stated that adjustment and disposition were the most important factors, citing specific examples such as "building up respect for teachers, telling children 'you're a big boy/girl', and telling children that they'd be with a group of other kids and it would be fun."

Ball (2012) notes that the development of cognitive strengths among Indigenous children was not recognised across commonly used Canadian school readiness indicators. Ball found however, that Indigenous Canadian parents taught culturally-valued knowledge to their children in early childhood (such as traditional language, their relationship to the land, and their position within their family and community). As a result, Ball

(2012) argues that when these strengths are affirmed by a school, it is likely that the children will be judged to be more school-ready, creating the potential circumstances for more positive school outcomes such as improved student–teacher relationships, positive conceptions of school and improved self-confidence.

Several authors argue however, that teachers, principals and other educators often emphasise different aspects of school readiness to those valued by Indigenous communities. These aspects include the importance of cognitive skills, literacy skills, social skills, 'fitting in' with the school rules and cultural expectations. Only focussing on these aspects, overlooks the strengths that Indigenous children may bring to the classroom (Arnold, Bartlett, Gowani & Merali, 2007; Dockett & Perry, 2002). Consequently, cultural mismatches can exist between home and school for Indigenous children. These mismatches are often cited in the literature as barriers that have to be overcome by the Indigenous children in order for them to meet the indicators of school readiness, rather than identifing the strengths of Indigenous children that can then be built upon at school (see for example, Ball, 2012; Dockett & Perry, 2002; Lewthwaite et al., 2015; Norris, 2010).

HOW IS SCHOOL READINESS MEASURED?

Consistent with the notions of 'school readiness' outlined above, many of the assessments of school readiness described in the literature are also developed from a Western perspective and underpinned by similar educational values. Various assessments, such as the *Bracken School Readiness Assessment* (Bracken, 2007), for example, have been used to ascertain when a child is ready for school. Indicators of school readiness, such as age, and exposure to literacy sources such as books and computers prior to commencing school, have the potential to stereotype Indigenous children as 'less capable' and 'less ready' for school. Sadly, the effect is to increase the chance of Indigenous children holding negative associations with school (Carbines et al., 2008; McTurk et al., 2008).

Western definitions of school readiness may also clash with Indigenous worldviews providing limited insights into how future assessments of Indigenous school readiness could be measured or improved (Ball, 2012). Western definitions of school readiness are also problematic for Indigenous children because of the heterogeneity that exists within and between Indigenous populations (McTurk et al., 2008). Indeed, this is probably the case for non-Indigenous children, too.

No assessments of school readiness from Indigenous perspectives were identified in the review of recent literature. In 2008, McTurk et al. called for an Indigenous assessment of school readiness to be developed in order to better understand the concept of school readiness from an Indigenous

perspective. In 2010, the Australian Government acknowledged that there was insufficient information about what Indigenous parents and communities understand by 'school readiness' (Dockett et al., 2010). In 2018 however, the Australian Government definition for making judgements about 'school readiness' is still focused only on the child (see Australian Government, 2017). Further, there is no national agreement on what is important in terms of 'school readiness', let alone school readiness for Indigenous children.

In addition, an audit and examination of current school readiness assessments used in Australia is required to determine what is missing. Current literature suggests that if the concept of 'school readiness' is to be measured, such measures should start from a strengths-based approach, and take account of a breadth of worldviews evident in Australia. There is a glaring gap in the literature that takes account of different worldviews and measurements of school readiness.

Characteristics of Indigenous children's transition to school

Dockett et al. (2006) argue that there is no consensus on what constitutes or defines a successful transition to school for Indigenous children. SNAICC (2013) states that effective transitions to school by Indigenous children, sees children, parents and families all feel comfortable, connected and engaged with their school, community and environment, and that the strengths they bring to school are recognised.

Transition to school can be defined as the period of time in a child's life, and that of his or her family, when they all have to adapt to the new experiences of school for the first time (SNAICC, 2014). The transition to school however, should not be understood as a process that simply occurs in the classroom, but instead should be considered from a range of different perspectives that acknowledge the roles of multiple stakeholders – that of the family, community and teachers – in influencing a child's transition to primary school (Carbines et al., 2008). Further, the experience of making the transition to school is a process that occurs over a period of time starting before the commencement of school and concluding when the child is considered to have 'transitioned' by the people who know the child best (i.e. their parents, teachers, families and peers).

It is accepted then, that commencing primary school signifies a major life change for children and their families; changes which can be both stressful and exciting at the same time (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development [DEECD], 2009; ETC Research Group, 2011). Many of these changes are experienced emotionally by families.

> *The commencement of formal schooling is associated with the negotiation of changes or discontinuities in physical and learning environments, rules and routines, social status and identity, and relationships for children and families ... all of which result in tensions between change and stability and between adjusting to new challenges and preserving old patterns (Hirst, Jervis, Visagie, Sojo & Cavanagh, 2011, p. 11).*

The changes that occur then, involve the nature of the relationships between children and their families, and how they experience the world of 'school'.

CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS

School transitions include the development of numerous relationships, between the child and the school, teacher and future peers. Children who are making the transition to school from home, for example, were previously surrounded by primary carers such as parents and siblings who formed their social group. These children have to adapt to school settings, which involves different routines, structures and relationships, such as becoming a part of a new social group that includes peers as friends, and teachers as authority figures (ETC Research Group, 2011; SNAICC, 2014). New rules and structures have to be learnt, and for some children, interacting with peers of the same age can be challenging (Rahman, 2013).

The literature suggests that one of the biggest changes occurring during the transition to school involves the nature of the children's relationship with adults at school. Schools tend to be structured as teacher-led, rather than play-based environments, which can make them different to early childhood education centres (ETC Research Group, 2011), although many junior primary schools do try to make this transition a smooth process.

The first impressions of school that children and families experience have implications for future educational and broader developmental outcomes. Transition to school requires the collaborative effort of a variety of stakeholders to ensure it has a positive impact on a child's wellbeing, learning and development (SNAICC, 2014; ETC Research Group, 2011). As SNAICC (2014) points out, compared to non-Indigenous children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have traditionally experienced higher vulnerability and exclusion rates in early childhood education, and have demonstrated poorer indicators of development in areas such as literacy and numeracy.

> *For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the transition to school will set the pattern for inclusion or exclusion, and thus engagement or non-participation, within mainstream education for that child's schooling life (SNAICC, 2014, p. 3).*

Dockett et al., (2006) state that the most successful transition-to-school programs build the capacity to develop positive relationships between stakeholders. This is because positive relationships among stakeholders enable engagement with school, not only for the child, but also for the family and community (Dockett et al., 2006). McTurk et al., (2008) however, argue that approaches towards improving school readiness for Indigenous children have tended to focus on building skills in the individual child and family, such as improving early literacy skills. More recent research undertaken with Māori children in New Zealand suggests though, that one of the crucial factors for enhancing early school outcomes, is how well children form relationships with their peers and teachers (Peters, 2010).

Research undertaken by SNAICC (2014) supports Peters (2010) findings, stating that a key feature of successful transition programs for Indigenous children is characterised by the quality of student–teacher and teacher–parent relationships formed in the early phases of children commencing school. Consequently, the type of relationships developed between stakeholders – be it positive, negative or neutral – are indicators for measuring the success (or not) of school transitions.

STAKEHOLDERS IN THE TRANSITION PROCESS

There are different stakeholders involved in a child's transition to school, including the child, parents, families, communities and schools. Transition programs tend to target one or more aspects of the transition process, such as ensuring familiarity with the school environment, or educating parents about nutrition required to sustain a child's attention during the school day. It has been argued throughout this literature review though, that a strengths-based, 'ecological' and 'holistic' approach is preferable for addressing the various requirements of Indigenous children, rather than only focussing on a single issue solution.

In a similar manner to which 'school readiness' was framed earlier in this literature review, drawing again on McTurk et al., (2008), transition-to-school programs can fall under the same categories of 'ready children', 'ready families', 'ready communities' and 'ready schools'.

Ready children

The ability of a transition program to foster readiness in children to achieve early learning outcomes, cognisant of the prior knowledge Indigenous students bring into the classroom (SNAICC, 2013), is of utmost importance. According to McTurk et al. (2008), transition-to-school programs for children can include antenatal interventions designed to prevent low birth weight; interventions to improve nutrition and hence, attentiveness at school; and interventions designed to promote resiliency and improve problematic behaviour that interferes with a child's capacity to succeed at

school. These indicators can be found in the High/Scope Perry Preschool (Schweinhart et al., 2005), and the Houston Parent–Child Development Project (Besharov, Germanis, Higney & Call, 2011), both located in the United States of America (USA).

Other authors however, have focused on indicators outside of health interventions to support school transition, (see for example CCCH, 2008b; Nolan, Hamm, McCartin & Hunt, 2009). The following list of factors indicates a successful transition to school for Indigenous children:

- likes school
- looks forward to going to school regularly
- separates easily from their parent or caregiver
- attends and participates in school
- shows steady growth in their academic and social skills, no matter their starting point
- demonstrates knowledge of the school environment, including school routines, key staff and their roles
- has and can make friends
- seeks out assistance when required
- asks questions and contributes to classroom discussions
- explores and tries new things
- confidently communicates with educators and peers (CCCH, 2008b; Nolan et al., 2009).

Some of these indicators are framed from a Western perspective. In particular, the indicator concerning communication styles, which focuses on children asking questions. During classroom discussions, Indigenous children may not feel comfortable asking questions. Ball (2012) explains that in Indigenous cultures, it is less common for children to participate in question-asking and answering during educational discussions compared to their non-Indigenous peers. Ball states that Indigenous children are generally taught not to talk or brag about their accomplishments. Indigenous children typically learn:

> not to demonstrate knowledge of something she or he expects an older person to already know (for instance, answering such questions from the teacher as 'What colour is the sky today?' (Ball, 2012, p. 290).

Consequently, it is important to understand how effective transitions might be framed from strengths-based, Indigenous perspectives.

Ready families

The success of any transition program must take into account the importance of ensuring that families understand the school culture, the manner in which schools operate and, most importantly, trust the school and teachers with their children.

McTurk et al, (2008) identify transition programs for Indigenous families that include parenting skills programs aimed at correcting 'problematic' child behaviour, or assisting parents to cope with difficult child behaviours; home visits from trusted community members; and nursing services that enable improvements in child health and wellbeing. They also highlight the Brotherhood of St Laurence initiative, the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY), which is aimed at improving a child's school readiness through the development of literacy skills prior to formal schooling (Barnett, Roost & McEachran, 2012). The HIPPY program teaches parents to be their child's first educators in the home. HIPPY encourages reading in the home environment which subsequently improves the literacy skills of both parents and their children.

While the aforementioned programs are intended to be of assistance to Indigenous families, Winkler (2009) argues that successful transitions to school require greater parental involvement for Indigenous children and families due to historical negative associations many Indigenous people have with the education system. As such, the importance of ensuring that parents and families are included in and have positive experiences of the transition to school processes, cannot be dismissed.

Ready communities

Lee & Thompson, (2007) argue that transition-to-school initiatives in the community can include programs aligned with local Indigenous child-rearing values, providing communities with the opportunity to actively participate in the development of culturally-appropriate transition programs, and training and employing local Indigenous staff in services or schools in order to facilitate effective transition.

Ready schools

Carbines et al. (2008) argue that there has been an assumption that Indigenous children will have better success at school if their readiness is enhanced, rather than undertaking any serious questioning of how schools can be made more ready for Indigenous children. According to these authors, observable factors that are indicative of successful school transition programs for Indigenous children include that:

- the child is able to engage successfully in classroom learning appropriate to their cultural background and the first year of formal schooling

- the child's parents and/or family are comfortable with their child being at school and with their ability to contribute to and support their child's learning
- the school and class teacher are prepared to provide culturally-sensitive and rigorous learning experiences (Carbines et al., 2008).

Several other authors also propose indicators of successful school transition programs that can promote a positive school environment, and support cultural diversity among school students (McTurk et al., 2008; SNAICC, 2014). For example, according to SNAICC (2014), characteristics of Indigenous school transition programs should include:

- recognition of Indigenous children's potential and ability to learn
- commitment to building relationships between the school, the child, parents and the family
- fostering engagement in and involvement with the school for the family and children.

Dockett and Perry (2011) suggest that effective transition programs view each child as a capable learner; are flexible; cater to the diversity of individual students and their families; and take into account the context of the school environment, including understandings of the local communities within which the school is situated. Dockett et al,. (2006) argue that indicators of effective transitions include that the school embraces Indigenous culture; has high expectations for Indigenous children; welcomes parents; develops sound relationships and recognises the strengths of Indigenous students. Dockett et al., (2008) go further again by identifying several features of effective school transition programs for Indigenous children and families, which include simultaneously, placing a focus on the development of the following:

- positive relationships between children and teachers, and parents and teachers
- children's engagement with school
- children's learning outcomes
- a multi-faceted approach that includes multi-dimensional understandings of the child and family
- approaches that build upon the strengths of the child, family and community
- a participatory approach that involves and engages children, families and communities
- teacher attitudes that reflect high expectations of the Indigenous children
- wellbeing programs for children and families, and the promotion of a positive sense of Indigenous identity within the school.

SNAICC (2014) have identified features of successful and effective transition-to-school programs for Indigenous children. These features include that organisationally, schools are:

- flexible in their education provision, staffing and support for students and families
- collaborative and include working with community services
- culturally competent, with staff who exhibit positive attitudes towards Indigenous children and their families
- employing Indigenous staff, particularly staff from the local communities
- willing to cooperate with and learn from the local community
- able to reflect on barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children accessing their programs, and how these issues can be changed.

In summary, effective transition programs for Indigenous children utilise an ecological and holistic approach to school readiness, one that accounts for the diverse roles of multiple stakeholders in the transition processes: the child, parents, families and schools.

This literature review has provided a basis for the development of the case studies. The following section considers the implications from this literature review for the development of these case studies.

Implications for case study development

There are implications arising from this literature review for the development of the case studies selected to highlight the use of the *Little J & Big Cuz* television series. These implications include that the case studies should support Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, teachers and families to recognise the strengths Indigenous children bring to school. Further, irrespective of the ECEC settings in which *Little J & Big Cuz* is used, there has to be a recognition that Indigenous as well as Western worldviews have a place in the early learning of preschool and junior primary children.

Fundamental to supporting children's transition to school and underpinning children's learning prior to and at school, are the core relationships supporting that learning: those of teachers, parents and peers. That is, the case studies had to be approached from a strengths-based perspective. Such an approach was employed in the selection of the case studies, and was informed by this literature review.

Consideration is now given to how educational television can intersect with Indigenous children's school readiness.

Educational television and Indigenous school readiness

In contemporary society, television is a major aspect of the environment in which many children grow up. Almost all Australian children (96 per cent) aged between birth and 14 years watch television programs, movies, videos or DVDs at least daily (Australian Communications and Media Authority [ACMA], (2017). It is unknown, but unlikely, that these statistics reflect the daily experiences of children in very remote and isolated locations. However, few children's television programs in Australia are aimed specifically at Indigenous children aged between three and six years. *Little J & Big Cuz* goes some way to address this gap.

According to the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) (2011), children's exposure to media such as television during their early years can have long-term implications for their cognitive development and future media use. Mackinlay & Barney (2008, p. 276) indicate that:

> *Like other forms of mass media, television provides a model of the world, its deepest values, what is defined as good or bad, positive or negative and normalises ... augments and shares common cultural norms.*

These perceived influences of television generate varying views of the value of educational television as part of ECEC programs and raise moral questions for educators about how to handle the content presented on television. It is argued here, that if educational television is to be included into teaching programs, then teachers have to take a critical, pedagogical approach to the incorporation of that content.

ACMA regulates Australian children's television content (i.e. programming and advertising) on commercial free-to-air (FTA) television, through the Children's Television Standards and the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice (ACMA, 2017). The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and NITV self-regulate children's television content through codes of practice. Here 'children's television content' and 'educational television' are used interchangeably, and are simply defined as television that is intended to teach and instruct.

CHILDREN'S VIEWING TRENDS

According to the CCCH, in 2008 children aged four years and under, watched an average of 194 minutes of television per day when they lived in a subscription television household (CCCH, 2009), although it is unclear how much time children of the same age spent on FTA programs. According to ACMA (2017) however, over the past 12 years, for children 14 years and under, there has been a slow but steady decline in the amount of total time children have spent watching television, with 30 minutes less viewing time being recorded in 2016 compared with 2005. Television viewing by children amounted to an average 6.7 of hours per week in 2016 (ACMA, 2017).

Children though, are still watching programs specifically made for them. ACMA (2017) reports that in 2016, dedicated children's programming comprised more than half of the top 30 programs watched by children aged 0–14 years. Compared to 2005, when only one-third of the programs seen on Australian television were dedicated children's programs. Children's programs form a large part of the content they view, with 64 per cent of the total average viewing time of children aged 14 years and under, spent watching children's television programs, movies, videos or DVDs. The way children watch television however, is changing, with the use of multiple devices and platforms becoming the norm. On average, a child uses 3.2 devices and 2.9 different platforms to watch children's television programs (ACMA, 2017).

Research by ACMA (2017) also indicates that multi-tasking is a feature of children's viewing practices, with 55 per cent of children doing other activities while watching children's programs. They also report that multi-tasking increases with age, with nearly seventy-five per cent of children aged 10–14 years doing other activities while watching children's programs.

INDIGENOUS CHILDREN'S TELEVISION VIEWING TRENDS

Insights into Indigenous children's viewing trends can be found in the *Footprints in Time* longitudinal study of Indigenous children (Australian Government, 2012). This 2012 report shows that from the age of three years, around 90 per cent of Indigenous children watched television more than one hour a day. Children aged between three and four years were the most likely to watch five or more hours of television per day. After the age of four however, there was a decrease in the amount of television watched, which may have been due to the children having less available time to watch television once they started preschool and school (Australian Government, 2012).

In comparison, the ABS (2014) indicates that in 2012–13, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander toddlers and preschoolers aged between two and four years, living in non-remote areas, spent an average of 1.5 hours per day on screen-based activities such as watching television or DVDs, or playing electronic games. Similar data were not available for Indigenous children living in very remote and isolated locations.

EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION

Australia and the United States (US) have led the development of educational television with programs such as *Play School* in Australia (discussed below), and *Sesame Street* in the US. In the American context, research has demonstrated positive effects from watching *Sesame Street* and other educational television.

SESAME STREET* AND *BETWEEN THE LIONS

Sesame Street first aired on US television in 1969 through the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) television stations (Mares & Pan, 2013), and is still on air today. It is broadcast to millions of children throughout the world. Recent additions to the show include a character with autism (Mares & Pan, 2013).

A strength of *Sesame Street* identified by Linebarger, Kosanic, Greenwood & Doku (2004) is that school readiness skills are imparted via television. While Mares and Pan (2013) found that watching *Sesame Street* had positive educational outcomes for preschool children such as the development of literacy and numeracy skills, learning about the world, and the development of social reasoning capabilities.

Other developments in US educational television have seen the release of the show *Between the Lions*, an American puppet television series broadcast on the PBS Kids network, specifically designed to promote literacy in young children. Several studies have evaluated the effectiveness of *Between the Lions*, and although the findings vary to some degree, the overall consensus is that the series is beneficial for the development of

emerging literacy skills, such as phonological awareness and sound–letter recognition (see for example, Prince, Grace, Linebarger, Atkinson & Huffman, 2002; Linebarger et al., 2004; Linebarger, 2009; Uchikoshi, 2006).

Prince et al., (2002) examined the literacy effects of watching *Between the Lions* in Native American Choctaw and Indianola communities and found that many of the children did not have sufficient prior literacy knowledge to significantly benefit from the program. This finding was supported by Linebarger et al., (2004), who found that educational television programs designed to help Indigenous and disadvantaged children develop their literacy skills are sometimes the least beneficial for the most at-risk children. They posit that this is because these children tend to not have familiarity with the respective media being used in these programs, and therefore the children find it difficult to benefit from exposure to them. The issue of prior literacy knowledge may similarly, be problematic for Australia's Indigenous children who do not have access to formal early childhood education (Dockett et al., 2011). It is important to note however, that literacy development was not the primary focus of the SRI TV series, *Little J & Big Cuz*.

Play School

In 2015–16, ABC2 was the most watched channel by Australian children, especially the children's programs for preschool children aged four years and under (ACMA, 2017). In the Australian context, the ABC's *Play School* has been one of the leading educational television shows for children. It first aired in 1966, and was designed to stimulate learning, support language, psychological and cognitive development, foster social skills and encourage children's imaginations while concurrently providing insights into the diversity of Australian culture (Mackinlay & Barney, 2008).

Play School has showcased differences in Australian culture through the segment 'through the window'. In this part of the program, Australians' culturally diverse backgrounds are seen in different settings – playing, working or participating in various cultural activities (Mackinlay & Barney, 2008). As such, *Play School* has shown the viewers glimpses of Indigenous Australians at play or engaging in cultural activities. But these views through the window have tended to focus on traditional Indigenous cultural performers participating in traditional dances, rather than on more contemporary practices and views of Indigenous Australians. This tendency led Mackinlay & Barney (2008) to argue that focusing largely on the activities of remote-living Indigenous people perpetuates mythical stereotypes, such as, all Indigenous Australians live on country and engage in traditional cultural practices.

Mackinlay and Barney (2008) also argue that stereotypical representations of Indigenous people on television invites viewers to see Indigenous Australians from the colonial, non-Indigenous constructed or imagined

perspective, rather than from the perspective of Indigenous peoples' lived realities. While stereotypical depictions of Indigenous people in media and film are not necessarily intentional, the difficulty is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are a diverse, heterogeneous group that do not always share the same cultural or social values (Perso & Hayward, 2015; Purdie, Milgate & Bell, 2011). Urban-living Indigenous people, for example, experience different lifestyles compared to remote-living Indigenous people.

ROLE OF TELEVISION IN INDIGENOUS SCHOOL READINESS

Television viewing as an educational practice tends to generate binary and often passionate views either for or against its use. It is argued here that educational television can be used beneficially in the hands of skilled educators, when accompanied with class discussion and analysis, and when purposely embedded into teaching and learning programs. But there is the potential for some negative effects, which have to be acknowledged in order to mitigate against them.

Potential negative effects

The CCCH (2009) reports that television can both positively and negatively affect child development and a child's worldview (i.e. how he or she sees and understands the world), because children view television while they are developing socially, cognitively and emotionally. The CCCH (2009) argues that watching television can have a particularly detrimental effect on children aged two years and under. CCCH also indicates that the negative effects of television viewing are generally linked to the type of television content watched, and identify a wide range of potentially, negative effects including:

- anti-social behaviour (e.g. if watching violent content)
- weight gain (e.g. from decreased physical activity)
- impaired language development (e.g. parents speak less to their children when watching television; and background noise can distract children when listening and speaking)
- disrupted sleep (e.g. television can affect the quality of sleep)
- perpetuation of stereotypes (e.g. physical stereotypes, as well as ethnic and racial stereotypes).

These findings however, are not necessarily linked to the effects on children of watching educational television programs. Awareness of these potential flaws is important if teachers are to take a critical approach to teaching and learning with educational television.

As highlighted above, in the US for example, there is a danger that educational television programs, although well-meaning, can portray peoples and cultures through unrealistic stereotypes. In Australia, research by Peters-Little (2003) has argued that television in 20th century Australia

has tended to feature stereotypical representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, as either 'noble' or 'savage', thus failing to showcase the diversity of Indigenous peoples and their cultures. In more recent years, these stereotypes are being challenged as stereotypical representations of cultural groups can be harmful, regardless of whether or not Indigenous people are portrayed in a positive or negative light.

Potential benefits

The use of educational television is also recognised as providing benefits for children's learning, but there is limited recent evidence concerning the impact of educational television on the school readiness of Australian Indigenous children. Educational television programs however, have been found to have a positive influence on child development more generally (Lonsdale, 2010). Saltmarsh (2011, p. 28) states that

> … *the representation of schooling and school children in television … is considered as one important site for the production and consumption of shared meaning.*

The stories in *Little J & Big Cuz* are underpinned by the representations of school and one Indigenous family's interactions with it. Television can portray what it entails to participate in the Western schooling culture, thus potentially leading to shared imaginings and understandings of Australian school life across diverse cultural groups. Conversely, culturally-sensitive educational television programs can provide non-Indigenous children, teachers and parents with insights into the strengths Indigenous children can bring to school.

In the context of improving school readiness, educational television programs can present information about unfamiliar cultural perspectives for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, which can enhance their school readiness by expanding each child's worldview, and increase their exposure to and knowledge of difference (Norris, 2010). Vicariously providing children with the opportunities to watch how Indigenous families relate to each other, and to non-Indigenous people, enables the children, with teacher guidance, to undertake reflections and personal inquiry about how to see and interact with cultures other than their own in their classrooms (Norris, 2010). It is one way that a strengths-based approach to Indigenous school readiness can be promoted.

INDICATORS OF EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS CHILDREN'S SCHOOL READINESS

The research and experiences gained from previous educational television programs can inform the design of current educational television such as *Little J & Big Cuz*, which has the aim to improve the school readiness of Indigenous children. High-quality educational television requires that all

aspects of its pre-production, production and post-production take account of Indigenous cultural sensitivities.

Building on the background literature review used to inform the development of *Little J & Big Cuz* (Lonsdale, 2010), the following indicators point to the types of considerations to be taken into account in order to support Indigenous children's school readiness through educational television programs:

- Model the school environment, including the physical space and classroom culture.
- Provide educational content using both Indigenous and Western learning and teaching styles.
- Teach educational content using unique Indigenous contexts.
- Develop content that incorporates, connects and values both Indigenous and Western worldviews.
- Create a bridge between Aboriginal English (AE) and Standard Australian English (SAE).
- Develop pedagogical methods that either reduce the demand for children to 'code switch'[2] between cultures or make 'code switching' easier.
- Include Indigenous families and wider Indigenous communities as part of the content, including modelling family educational assistance at home and family contact with teachers and school.

These indicators provide 'watch points' for the development of the case studies highlighting the use of *Little J & Big Cuz* in early childhood education settings.

Model the school environment: physical space and classroom culture

Asking children to explore issues that directly, indirectly or vicariously interact with their personal and social identities requires safe physical spaces to be portrayed in the television program. In such programs, the portrayed classroom culture shows the children as valued, cared for and respected. It is important, when modelling school environments in Australian educational television programs, that the visuals and audio scripts provide the children with opportunities to see how they can learn from one another's varied experiences and perspectives, and that teachers can skilfully draw on children's own experiences to enrich the curriculum.

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[2] Code-switching refers to process of moving from one linguistic code (i.e. a language or dialect) to another, depending on the social context or conversational setting.

Provide educational content using both Indigenous and Western learning and teaching styles

There is some disagreement among researchers about whether Indigenous peoples have different, culturally specific, learning styles in comparison with non-Indigenous peoples. Overseas studies suggest there are culturally preferred ways of teaching and learning. For example, Salter (2002) identified different views and expectations in Māori children as they entered school, compared with their non-Māori peers. In a cross-cultural study involving Indigenous students in Australia, Norway and the US, the importance of a sense of relatedness to the content, philosophy and worldviews of their respective communities was identified as being important to the formation of engaged and confident learners (Lillemyr, Søbstad, Bang, Marder & Flowerday, 2007; 2008a; 2008b). A sense of relatedness was found to be central to the development of these Indigenous students' self-concepts, which influenced their learning at school. These researchers also reported on the importance of play to support children positively interacting with others, gaining social skills and fostering creativity and experimentation.

Teach educational content using unique Indigenous contexts

Many Indigenous communities are keen to see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, knowledge and cultures negotiated into teaching and learning programs, so their knowledge is represented in the content taught within preschools and schools. Involving family members in the teaching of Indigenous cultural content shows respect and values their knowledge. Further, incorporating Indigenous characters in the storylines of educational television presents role models for the Indigenous children.

Develop content that incorporates, connects and values both Indigenous and Western worldviews

A worldview is a set of beliefs and values that are honoured and upheld by a number of people and influences how a person or group interacts with the world around them, including land, animals, and people. Many communities pass on their respective worldview to their children to ensure worldview continuity. The role of education is central to these processes. As people interact and learn from one another, educational television is one way that children can learn about and acquire the beliefs of their own and other worldviews.

Create a bridge between Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English

The Australian Primary English Teachers Association (PETA) explains that everyone brings assumptions to the classroom, based on their own culture and experiences, and that some of the most difficult assumptions to unravel are about the interconnections between language and behaviour (Haig, Konigsberg & Collard, 2005). PETA argues that educators have to recognise that Aboriginal English (AE) the type of English spoken by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people), and Standard Australian

English (SAE) are both spoken in schools. These are two separate dialects and their differences have an impact on education processes.

Haig et al., (2005) indicate that there are differences between the grammar of AE and SAE, as well as differences in the sound systems, which, along with the context of the communication can lead to potential misunderstandings. As such, educators require an understanding of the grammatical forms used in both dialects, and that these can be built through meaningful oral and written tasks. Implications for educational television, such as *Little J & Big Cuz,* relate to the language used in the dialogue inside the 'television classroom', compared to that spoken informally between the family members and main characters.

Develop pedagogical methods that either reduce the demand for children to 'code' switch' between cultures or make 'code switching' easier
Australian research indicates that for Indigenous children and their parents 'code-switching' is part of everyday life when interacting with Western schooling systems (Lewthwaite et al., 2015). They argue that to assist children learn how to interact in at least two cultures, explicit teaching of code switching between AE and SAE is required. This research can be applied to the development of educational television programs where code-switching can be integrated into the vocabulary, language features, text and visual features of the program.

Include Indigenous families and wider Indigenous communities as part of the content, including modelling family educational assistance at home and family contact with teachers and school
Consistent with the research concerning school readiness and the role of families (McTurk et al, 2008; UNICEF, 2012) the inclusion of positive family attitudes and involvement in their children's development and learning, is one of the fundamental cornerstones of supporting children to be ready for school and therefore important to include in Indigenous educational television programs.

These indicators, summarised on page 35 and subsequently discussed, provide insights into aspects of the case studies that highlight how school readiness and transition to school can be supported through educational television programs. The case studies provide practical examples that illustrate how these indicators have been incorporated into *Little J & Big Cuz*, and then are reinforced by educators and parents.

Conclusion

Little J & Big Cuz has the aim to improve the school readiness of Indigenous children. The purpose of the case studies developed through the SRI TV initiative is to support Indigenous children's school readiness and transitions to school. This literature review has demonstrated the powerful effect that educational television can have on broadening children's worldviews and helping them to understand new ideas, details and information. The adverse effects of young children watching television have also been canvassed in the research literature.

Educational television is only one tool in a battery of other connected initiatives. A variety of agencies also work to achieve effective transitions to primary school for Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander children. It has been argued here, that transitions to school involve interconnected, relational and holistic processes in which the child is placed at the centre of these processes. This approach is referred to as an ecological approach, and it is particularly recommended in the literature to be of benefit to Indigenous children and their families. The ecological approach requires all relevant stakeholders (i.e. the child, family, community and school), work together to support their Indigenous children to successfully commence school.

Educational television can have a crucial role in ensuring that the transition process is effective for Indigenous children. It can open up a child's worldview and assist children to understand diverse contexts that differ from their home environment, such as schools. This is of value for building mutual understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Furthermore, educational television can assist parents and families to gain insights into the expectations of the schools, thus providing Indigenous children with critical and essential information about the schooling processes.

It can be argued then, that educational television can have a role to play in preparing Indigenous preschoolers and their families to make the transition to school. The value of these programs however, is considerably enhanced in the hands of highly skilled educators. The SRI TV series, *Little J & Big Cuz* can be a component to improving the school readiness of Indigenous children, but it is only one component among a suite of initiatives.

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