

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

Marion Primary School  
ADELAIDE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA



## 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 Triantafilakis.

Copyright © Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd, 2019  
19 Prospect Hill Road, Camberwell, Victoria, 3124, Australia

[www.acer.org](http://www.acer.org)

This report is copyright. All rights reserved. Except under the conditions described in the *Copyright Act 1968* of Australia and subsequent amendments, and any exceptions permitted under the current statutory licence scheme administered by Copyright Agency ([www.copyright.com.au](http://www.copyright.com.au)), no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted, broadcast or communicated in any form or by any means, optical, digital, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the written permission of the publisher.

The Australian Council for Educational Research must be attributed as the copyright holder of this publication and Kathryn Moyle and Kevin McRae as the authors.

Printed in Australia by Allanby Press

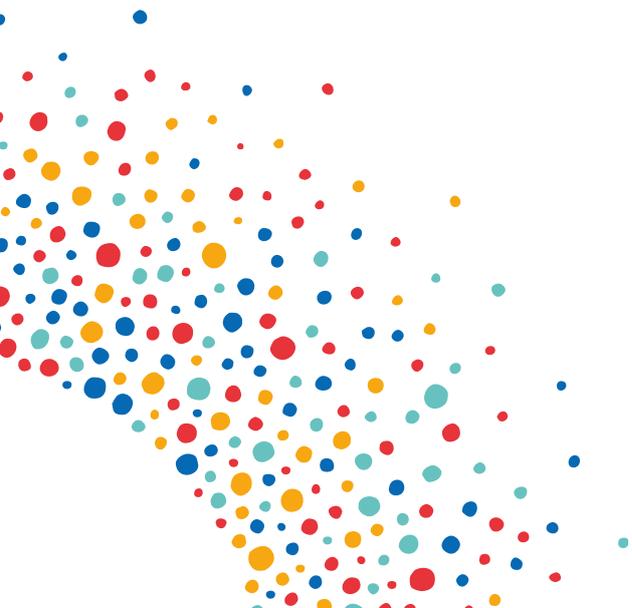
ISBN 978-1-74286-520-1



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

## RECOMMENDED CITATION

Moyle, K. & McRae, K. (2019). *Supporting social and emotional learning with Little J & Big Cuz*. Camberwell, Australia: Australian Council for Educational Research.





# 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 Aunty Eileen reported that a great strength of *Little J & Big Cuz* is the positive spotlight it shines on Indigenous cultures.



[www.littlejandbigcuz.com.au](http://www.littlejandbigcuz.com.au)