

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

Batchelor Institute of Indigenous
Tertiary Education

BATCHELOR, NORTHERN TERRITORY



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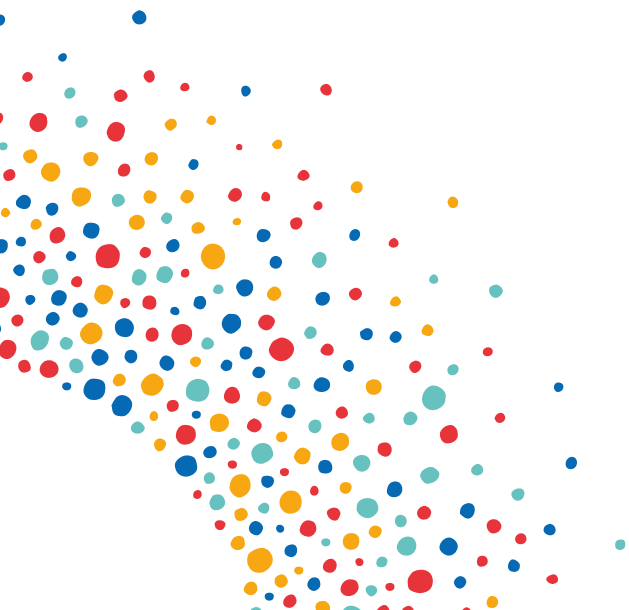
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Context

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

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

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

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

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

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



The front gate of Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education.



Map of northern Australia

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TEACHABLE MOMENTS

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

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

APPLYING THE KEY MESSAGES

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



'Big Plans'.

ADOPTING AND ADAPTING THE KEY MESSAGES OF 'BIG PLANS'

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

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

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

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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

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

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

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

RELATIONSHIPS

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

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

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

CREATIVITY

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



‘Goanna ate my homework’.

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

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

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

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

PROBLEM-SOLVING AND ASKING FOR HELP

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

HANDLING PERSONAL EMOTIONS

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

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND INTERACTIONS

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

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

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

DIFFERENT FOODS

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

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

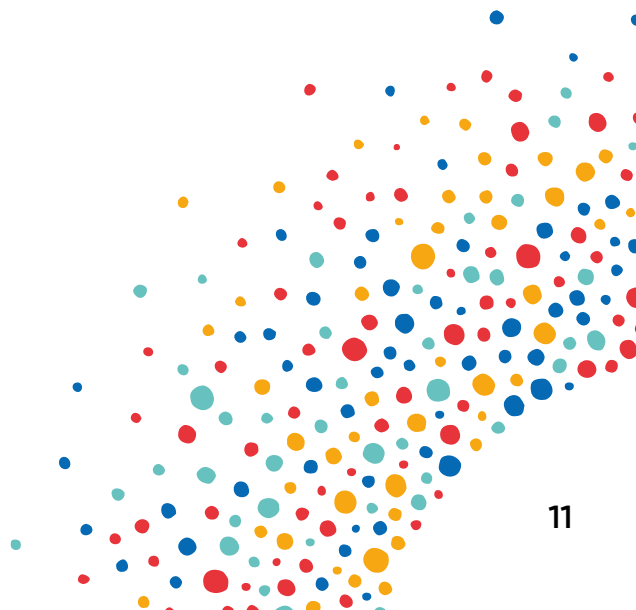
OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

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

Conclusion

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

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





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