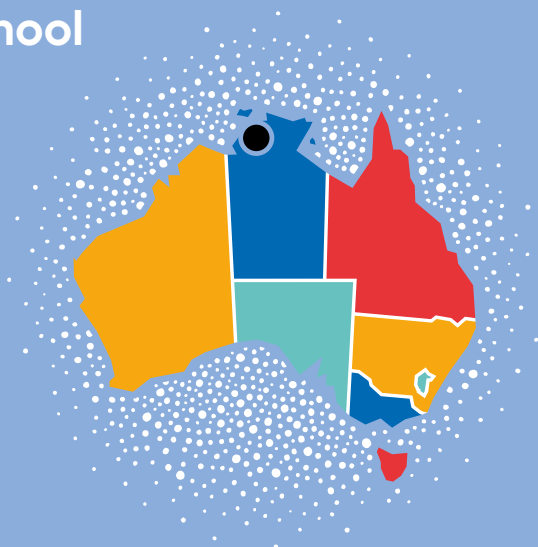


# Is *Little J & Big Cuz* suitable for children in preschool?

Wulagi Family Centre, Wulagi School

DARWIN, NORTHERN TERRITORY



## Acknowledgements

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

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

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 as the author.

Printed in Australia by Allanby Press

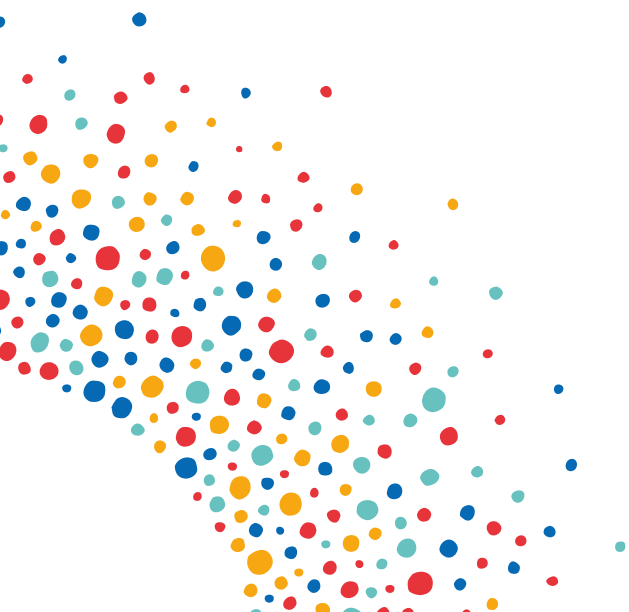
ISBN 978-1-74286-525-6



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

## RECOMMENDED CITATION

Moyle, K. (2019). *Is Little J & Big Cuz suitable for children in preschool?*. Camberwell, Australia: Australian Council for Educational Research.





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

## Wulagi Family Centre, Wulagi School

DARWIN, NORTHERN TERRITORY

### Context

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Guiding learning in the early years

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

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

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

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



Wulagi School, Wulagi, Darwin, Northern Territory.

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

The episodes shown to the children were:

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

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

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

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

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

## Responses

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

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

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

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

## Conclusion

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





A sculpture at Wulagi School.

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

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

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



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