

DVD Presentation

Introduction

1. Ladies and gentlemen - thank you for coming here today. We must build on the positive sense of hope expressed by the Indigenous young people you have just seen and heard in our brief presentation. We must seize the opportunity to act boldly for all Indigenous children so that they truly benefit from the Education Revolution promised by the Rudd Government.
2. But before I share my thoughts with you about *The Way Forward*, I want to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we meet and express my gratitude for being here in this place.
3. I also want to acknowledge the importance of this day and position what I'm doing today in its proper context. Tomorrow marks the beginning of Reconciliation Week. Today is National Sorry Day. On 26th May 1997 the *Bringing Them Home* report was tabled in Federal Parliament. This Report documented the abuse perpetrated on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities over many years via the removal of children from their families.
4. Over a decade of denial ended on the 13th of February this year when our new Prime Minister Kevin Rudd offered a formal apology to members of the Stolen Generations. What a momentous occasion... a time when the psyche of Australia was adjusted in a way that saw us evolve just a little bit more. For me the country felt different after that... somehow I felt I could stand with others and say I was proud to be Australian. I have never ever felt like this before. I hope I continue to feel it.
5. Like many others I thought the Prime Minister's speech was something of a masterpiece. Above all, what stood out for me watching in the Gallery was



those old people... *our* old people... being honoured in a way that had never occurred before. The PM said:

“... the Stolen Generations are not intellectual curiosities. They are human beings, human beings who have been damaged deeply by the decisions of parliaments and governments. But, as of today, the time for denial, the time for delay, has at last come to an end”.

6. He went on to express his determination to change in fundamental ways the relations between black and white Australia, when he said:

“We have come together to deal with the past so that we might fully embrace the future. We have had sufficient audacity of faith to advance a pathway to that future, with arms extended rather than with fists still clenched...”.

7. More recently, The Prime Minister has promised that he intends to report on the first day of every parliamentary year on the progress of his government in tackling Indigenous disadvantage – including the shameful 17-year life expectancy gap and the equally shameful gaps in outcomes from Indigenous education.

8. The Rudd Labor Government has brought down its first Budget. The Appropriation Estimates are being debated in Parliament. The priorities have been set and funding is being allocated. The administrative machinery is being aligned in the public service. This government promises an Education Revolution and its position is clear: by lifting educational standards Australia will become a more productive, prosperous nation. We will improve our position in global markets, we will benefit in terms of social capital and be a fairer society -- providing greater life opportunities for all Australians.

9. My position today is clear also: if we lift the education standard for Indigenous Australian children, we lift the overall education standard of all

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Australians. If an Education Revolution is really on then I am armed and ready to get it on. I want to make sure that Indigenous children can get their rightful piece of it. It's time for the rhetoric to be matched by realities that reflect a real difference in the lives of all our children. How do we make sure that Indigenous children, their families and communities, directly benefit from the Education Revolution? How will those shameful gaps be bridged?

10. Today I present an agenda for action - *The Way Forward* – for Indigenous education in Australia. This agenda has five fundamental strategies that must occur simultaneously. The fundamental strategies I will outline today emulate, to some extent, those which contributed to the dramatic transformation of Cherbourg State School during my time there as Principal.

11. Let me also say that revolutions are about providing the entire nation, not just particular regions, with a sense of hope; with something different and more positive to believe in; with something truly great to aspire to. Given our country's historical record with Aboriginal children, I challenge you to contemplate a more noble aspiration than the pursuit of a stronger smarter future for them.

12. The five most fundamental strategies to ensure Indigenous Australian children get a piece of the education revolution are:

#1: Acknowledging, embracing and developing a positive sense of Aboriginal identity in schools

#2: Acknowledging and embracing Aboriginal leadership in schools and school communities

#3: 'High expectations' leadership to ensure 'high expectations' classrooms, with 'high expectations' teacher / student relationships



#4: Innovative and dynamic school models in complex social and cultural contexts

#5: Innovative and dynamic school staffing models, especially for community schools.

13. For each of these strategies I want to say something about

- What's involved -- what does it mean?
Why is it important?
- What does it look like in practice?
- What impact will it have?

14. Keep in mind that it is how these strategies combine - their synergies - which really matters in delivering better schooling outcomes for Indigenous children. It is in classrooms -- in the dynamic relationships between teachers and students -- where the combined impact of these strategies is crucial. Let me reiterate here... Classrooms -- the places where teachers stare children in the face -- this is the sacred space which is most important. This is the front line of our education revolution.

Strategy #1:

Acknowledging, embracing and developing a positive sense of Aboriginal identity in schools

15. At the Indigenous Education Leadership Institute we maintain the Education Revolution must ensure quality education outcomes for Australia's Indigenous children. I state categorically that this does not mean we should ever contemplate a watered down perception of what might be considered

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quality education. We must demand that Indigenous Australian children have access to that which we would consider quality education outcomes for any Australian child.

16. This means a standard that enables them to participate meaningfully within and across Australian and other societies - well beyond the particular community where they were born and raised, if they so desire. It also means providing opportunity for them to develop and understand -- with positive insight -- their own Aboriginal identity, or Torres Strait Islander identity. Having a clear sense of belonging -- knowing kin and country and understanding who we are and where we come from -- is central to both self-development and community development.

17. Developing a belief in being and behaving in 'strong and smart' ways was what I emphasised as principal of *Cherbourg State School* and what we do at the Institute. We want to challenge the misguided notion that the more education we seek the less Aboriginal we somehow become. The truth is, the stronger we become in our Aboriginal identity, the greater the scope for us to get smarter. Aboriginal children must know this.

18. When we acknowledge, develop and embrace a positive sense of Aboriginal identity within schools, we also create the space to challenge the extent to which all of us, including Aboriginal children, including teachers, collude with a watered down perception of what being an Aboriginal student is all about. Let me explain what I mean here.

19. When a teacher accepts without challenging that Aboriginal children are usually a few years behind in literacy, they collude with a watered down perception of being Aboriginal. When a principal fails to report to those in authority the chronic absenteeism of some Aboriginal children, they collude with a watered down perception of being Aboriginal. When a school simply



observes without challenging a notion that Aboriginal children tend to be missing every Thursday and Friday, they collude with a negative perception of being Aboriginal. When educators lack the courage to stand up to Aboriginal children who say ‘You’re just picking on me because I’m black’ -- they collude with a watered down perception of being Aboriginal;

20. Please don’t think for a moment that the strength to attend to such challenges only resides with Aboriginal educators, or only with men who are educators. It resides with those who are passionate about our profession, and refuse to collude with watered down perceptions of any student. Lisa O’Malley, Principal of *Mapoon State School* is a tremendous example of young non-Indigenous educator who has achieved significant transformation in Indigenous student outcomes with her ‘Brave and Brilliant’ philosophy in Western Cape York Peninsula.

21. It is important here to note the significance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies in schools; *not instead of* the pursuit of improving literacy, numeracy, and overall school performance, but rather, *as part of* the pursuit of improving such performance.

22. This is why we are looking closely at the latest moves towards a national curriculum -- even if it seems to be currently limited to national syllabus statements in English, Mathematics, Science and History. We also have some fears, based on our past experience. After all, it wasn’t so long ago that we were told with great hypocrisy “forget about Australia’s black history, but never forget Gallipoli”.

23. In collaboration with other prominent educators in Queensland, the Institute has commissioned a set of seven papers on Indigenous studies in the national curriculum. We want to draw on the expertise of educational researchers working in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA. We



want to ensure that we learn from the world about how Indigenous perspectives can be an inherent source of strength and wisdom in the schooling of the young -- not some addendum to the main game.

24. We also want to learn from Indigenous community members across Australia – the first and continuing educators of our young people. We acknowledge innovations currently underway in providing safe places for learning and engaging with the wider community - for example *Durithunga* in Yugambah and Yuggera country in Logan City, south of Brisbane. *Durithunga* yarning is a crucial element of their *Knowledge House* initiative, which brings community members and professional educators together. Buy-in from teachers is encouraged in Homework Hubs and Action Learning projects. Positive relationships and consistent school practices are emphasised. Space is provided for Indigenous student leadership and mentoring for positive life pathways..

25. Like my emphasis on being stronger and smarter, *Durithunga* is designed around positive capabilities of being Aboriginal. It also creates the space within which young Indigenous people can imbue a meaningful understanding of a complex social circumstance in which they might be located. Such understandings create greater scope to break free from such seemingly inescapable cycles of poverty, domestic violence, alcoholism, child abuse and other drastic dysfunctional dynamics. Put simply, even young children can understand that these dynamics are the legacies of other historical and sociological processes, ***and not the legacy of being Aboriginal.***

26. *Durithunga*, *Brave and Brilliant Mapoon* and our *Institute* - what we have in common is that we challenge the typical collusions with negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people often encountered in the wider Australian

community. We know that such collusions are corroding the strength of our Indigenous young people.

Strategy #2:

**Acknowledging and embracing Aboriginal leadership in schools
and school communities**

27. From the outset I want you to notice that I am not articulating the need to develop leadership capacity in Aboriginal communities. I am arguing that in many places, very good Aboriginal leadership exists, yet goes completely unnoticed and unappreciated. This is also where the previous government got it wrong with their efforts in Indigenous communities -- particularly the Northern Territory Intervention -- where the previous Government and the people who advised them got it so very, very wrong. .

28. Rather than just assume that Aboriginal communities are so hopeless and despicable, to the extent that we must send in the army to fix things... let's realise that there are many solid Aboriginal people who are deeply concerned about the dysfunction they are forced to tolerate. These are people worth acknowledging in and investing in.

29. Having worked with many schools throughout Australia I can say to you with certainty, that in school communities where school leadership meaningfully acknowledges and embraces Indigenous leadership, transformation occurs. When school principals and other school leaders work respectfully together in the interests of stronger smarter futures for their children, it just happens. It can't NOT happen.

30. Some of these Indigenous community leaders are already working in schools as Education Assistants or Teacher Aides. They are often described as the most valuable asset in schools. They field the hurt, confusion, anger



and frustration of children from communities trying to cope with day to day life and then trying to learn. These are people who work tirelessly in schools, getting paid very little and not even knowing if they have a job after Christmas if the Commonwealth money runs out. Let's invest seriously in them so they can get on with their jobs supporting and inspiring children -- without having to worry about whether the dollars are in the school so they can keep working. It crucial that the roles and potential of Indigenous Education Workers is valued in Australian society and it is time we considered a more serious commitment to their roles, paralleled by quality credentialing and career paths.

31. At another level, an example of excellent school community practice is the *Families as First Teachers* program operating from 2005 at Kuranda State School, north of Cairns. This program helps families support the early literacy and numeracy of their pre-school aged children. Parents are trained in supportive learning strategies and materials. Indigenous and non-Indigenous school staff work directly with community volunteers and young children in community settings, beyond the confines of the school fence. This innovative engagement process has now proved transferable to several other school communities in Far North Queensland.

32. Another example of embracing cultural identity and leadership as part of our pursuit of improved literacy outcomes is provided by the innovative work of the Music Outback Foundation. Musicians work with community members and teachers to retrieve and renew cultural stories as valued resources for student literacy development. First they turn these community stories into songs sung by desert children in the local language. Then the song is translated into English and turned into a learning resource, with the addition of children's drawings. Steve Berry from the Music Outback Foundation tells me that he is now hearing from a new generation of children who have grown up singing these songs at home with their older siblings – becoming their

versions of nursery rhymes, a crucial support for early language development.

Play video.

33. This is proof that educators can achieve higher-order intellectual outcomes through locally-relevant learning experiences with all children – whether they in the city, or in the bush, or in the desert.

34. The Kuranda *Families as First Teachers* and the work of the Music Outback people are both inspirational and practical programs. They demonstrate the importance of educators working closely with community allies -- to improve the literacy of children, to turn capacity into capability. They remind us that leadership matters in raising the bar for Indigenous children.

Strategy #3:

‘High expectations’ leadership to ensure ‘high expectations’ classrooms, with ‘high expectations’ teacher / student relationships

35. Published evaluation studies indicate that school leaders have indirect but important impacts on student learning outcomes. A report compiled last year for the Australian Council for Education Leaders identified five clusters of leadership behaviours as being crucial for quality student outcomes:

- 1) Establishing clear goals and expectations
- 2) Adopting strategic approaches to the provision of resources
- 3) Planning, coordinating and evaluating the curriculum and teaching
- 4) Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development
- 5) Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment (Robinson, 2007).

36. I want to add to this by asserting the need to create and maintain professional school environments that are respectful and passionate about our profession as educators, as well as harbouring a sense of commitment and accountability to the pursuit of improving student outcomes. Such environments are maintained in a context where relationships between school leaders and teachers are framed by the need for support, development, monitoring, challenging and intervening as appropriate (Sarra, 2004).

37. Working in the UK context, Professor David Hargreaves has argued that contemporary governments need strategies to enable knowledge transfer laterally within their education systems. Instead of continuing to act as the hub through which all new policies are routed, education departments must enable innovation networks to develop. Drawing on his knowledge of the emergence and operations of networks, he explains how schools can be linked together so that small-scale innovations in teaching practice catch on quickly and easily. The overwhelming need, he says, is “to engineer an educational epidemic which would truly qualify as a transformation” (Hargreaves, 2003).

38. Over the past few years the Institute has built the foundations of a national network of schools transformed for Indigenous education. Professional learning programs delivered through our Institute emphasise ‘high expectations’ models of school leadership -- ones focused on high quality student learning outcomes which:

- 1) recognise the need for cultural transformation for sustainable change,
- 2) challenge assumptions and beliefs about the learning capacities of Indigenous children,
- 3) shift mindsets about approaches to teaching, and
- 4) use collaborative approaches to engage community members in the schooling of their children.

39. We emphasise the relational accountabilities of school leaders – in supporting, developing, challenging, monitoring and intervening – what happens in their school communities. Through the creation and support of a network of 60 + *Stronger Smarter Learning Communities* throughout Australia we reckon we can work with colleagues in a respectful way to deliver dramatically improved education outcomes for our children.

40. Examples of school leaders we work with who have already changed the tide of low expectations of Indigenous children:

- *Rutherford Technical College*, Maitland, NSW. Diverse secondary school pathways - Paul Treacy.
- *Mt Margaret* remote Aboriginal community WA - Jennifer Greenham.
- *Garbutt State School* in Townsville - Peter Abel
- *East Kalgoorlie Primary School*, WA - Donna Bridges
- *Western Cape College*, FNQ - Ian Mackie
- *Murray Bridge High School*, South Australia - Marilyn Klem
- *Kuranda District State College*, FNQ - Chris Capra
- *Glenroi Heights Public School*, NSW - Jane Cameron.

41. It gives me tremendous pride to know that the words ‘strong and smart’ exist on the walls of classrooms and schools throughout Australia. But it doesn’t just have to be strong and smart. Other catchcries include:

- Brave and Brilliant
- Smart Way
- Proud and Deadly
- Deadly and Smart
- Clever, Confident and Caring

At some level of course these are just words. At a much deeper, more profound level, they signal clearly the kind of Aboriginal students such schools are designed for.



42. I acknowledge the hard work of my professional colleagues in these diverse schools, and of many others in the communities they serve. I join with them in celebrating their successes. They are making a big difference to the lives of many Indigenous young people, their families and communities. But at present their efforts are scattered and their impacts are sporadic and difficult to sustain. Embedding reforms within a school and throughout the communities they serve takes time and energy. These resources are easily dispersed and often wasted, thereby often dispiriting the reformers.

43. In the education revolution, educators must have places in which watered down perceptions of Indigenous children must be challenged. The schools I've just mentioned create such places. In this education revolution, if we want educators to see Indigenous children as high calibre students and communities as highly engaged, then we must highlight and network such places. This way, it can be clearly observed, learned from, and emulated to the extent that this becomes the new reality of schooling for Indigenous children.

Strategy #4:

Innovative and dynamic school models in complex social and cultural contexts

44. 'High expectation' school leadership also emphasises maximum engagement in school learning by secondary students. At present the Year 12 retention rate for Indigenous students is roughly half that for non-Indigenous young people. We need to ensure there are multiple pathways for retention of Indigenous students to Year 12 or its vocational education equivalent.

45. It is clear that we need to remodel secondary education for remote Indigenous students. This has to be done in ways that better address both regional diversity and the differential complexities of these communities. Regional residential or boarding school facilities are recommended for those remote Indigenous students coming from small communities where they have completed primary schooling and where secondary schooling is:

- either not available, or
- not able to be provided to a sufficient standard, or
- where current dysfunctional aspects in the communities may make successful secondary schooling an unlikely prospect for most students.

46. There should be a preparedness to revolutionise existing models of schooling outside of the traditional 9-to-3 arrangements. We need to embrace more holistic and engaging approaches, with a variety of peer engagement opportunities. We need more positive Indigenous mentors, providing support and leadership to students coming of age as young adults. Guaranteed placements in school-based traineeships and apprenticeships are also key requirements. To achieve these ends we will need to attract and retain high-quality staff – professional educators as well as youth workers and support staff, and from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds -- more on this later.

47. There are now several excellent purpose-built regional models of state colleges with attached residential facilities (e.g., *Western Cape College* in Weipa, *Spinifex State College* in Mt Isa and *Tagai State College* on Thursday Island in Queensland). In these Colleges Indigenous students from remote locations can obtain quality secondary schooling while still maintaining regular contact with their families and communities. As part of quality remodelling of schooling, we also need to rethink notions of the efficacy of outstation

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schooling. Serious levels of infrastructure development will be required to extend secondary residential provisions across central and northern Australia. It is good to see that an additional student hostel in Weipa and three more regional residential facilities for the Northern Territory have been announced in the current Commonwealth budget.

48. We also need to rethink assumptions about excellence via public or private provision of schooling. Recently there has been much said in the media about 'cherry picking' just some Indigenous secondary students to attend private boarding schools located away from remote communities as 'the solution'. Removing people with a strong sense of belonging away from the places they belong to is neither right nor sustainable. If we merely select some 'winners' and take their hearts and minds away from their families and communities, we risk concentrating the extent of juvenile delinquency in communities, thus creating a warped sense of what is normal behaviour. For those who have been 'cherry picked', there is the very real risk of seeing them turn on their own people, in ways that are not respectful, and in ways that can tragically disenfranchise them, to leave them in 'no man's land'.

49. In the past, many remote Indigenous students have found it too emotionally difficult to make the adjustments required for secondary schooling success when it is located so far away from their families and communities. And those who 'succeed' outside the community may have little incentive to return to it. This may be an option for some -- but it is not and should not be viewed as a panacea for all secondary-aged students living in remote communities.

50. All secondary schools serving Indigenous students need to rethink their systems of connectivity with students, their families and communities. Residential students, in particular, need regular and ongoing contact with their families and communities. This should be recognised as a crucial component



of retaining their Indigenous identity and strength. It should also be facilitated by innovative and effective use of ICTs. Personal case management and guaranteed service delivery agreements should become the norm rather than the exception -- as have diverse school-to-work pathways via traineeships, apprenticeships and other VET programs.

51. Successful completion of secondary schooling should provide alternative and positive rites of passage for all Indigenous young people. We need to circumvent their entrapment in the juvenile justice system. The rate for Indigenous young people aged 10-17 years under juvenile justice supervision is over ten times that of their non-Indigenous counterparts. Young mothers should also not have to sacrifice their completion of secondary schooling. All the available evidence worldwide suggests that investment in enhancing female educational standards is perhaps the single most important investment the State can make to break the cycle of disadvantage and dysfunction.

52. The most successful and 'connected' programs consistently provide positive role models and mentors for Indigenous young people in their transition to adulthood. In an increasingly competitive and differentiated educational market, there is much room for more innovative models of secondary schooling to boost Indigenous retention rates. It's time our national creativity and innovation was harnessed to ensure the futures of all Indigenous young people.

Strategy #5:

Innovative and dynamic school staffing models, especially for community schools

53. Let me say it straight: existing staffing arrangements are not often producing improved outcomes for many Indigenous students in schools,

particularly in rural and remote locations. If the Education Revolution is to have significant impact in schools for Indigenous education then it is time to challenge some mindsets, such as the following:

- 1) These are the rules, regulations and procedures for staffing.
- 2) This is the staffing entitlement for that school.
- 3) You have to work in this school for X years and then you can transfer out to a more desirable location.
- 4) We can't employ Indigenous workers in schools on a long-term basis because of the funding arrangements.

54. If the education revolution is really on these are key issues that require frank discussion and urgent planning. Let's acknowledge the challenges and do something about it now. Let's say to principals and teachers that we understand these schools require high-calibre people on a continuing and sustainable basis. The data says that these schools clearly need the best quality teachers. Let's contemplate ways to give them the best. It is often the case that new teachers are sent to remote communities to learn their craft. Many reflect positively on their experience yet would not contemplate a long-term return to such places. Not because they dislike them, but understandably because they have 'done their time'. I acknowledge and understand this. They have families and other priorities.

55. Let's acknowledge this but create opportunities for all accomplished teachers and school leaders to embrace the challenge and privilege of teaching in remote Indigenous communities. Rather than filling the pockets of those teachers who are prepared to make the 'sacrifice' of going remote, in the interests of paying off their second or third mortgages. Let's harness the passion and enthusiasm of young 'rookie' graduates, along with experienced and exceptional teacher leaders.

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56. Some of the *2020 Summit* ideas will potentially have great traction in remote community schools, if we think creatively about staffing arrangements. For example, why not have recent graduates being able to pay off their HECS debt through community service in Indigenous communities and schools. And we need late-career Golden Gurus to address the vacuum about to be created by the impending retirement of the baby boomers -- many of whom are school leaders or senior teachers in our schools. Providing short- and medium-term opportunities to 'give back' to our profession will appeal to many of our colleagues -- mentoring young teachers and providing much needed expertise. We could build on these ideas and others that are currently working -- such as teacher and principal exchange programs, peer mentoring, artists in schools, visiting 'experts' and professionals.

57. Better pre-service teacher programs and improved induction programs - including community induction and mentors for recently arrived staff - are essential for Indigenous education. We also need education authorities to value and fund a handover period between outgoing and incoming school leaders to ensure greater continuity in leadership and sustainability of impact on student outcomes.

58. We need greater flexibility in the school calendar to better address the wet/dry seasonal issues in northern Australia. We also need to be more flexible about teaching hours to better engage and meet the particular needs of students -- say for vocational training or residential programs. We have to deal with schooling flexibility issues, change employment conditions for our Indigenous workers and provide real career paths for those who want them. We need thoughtful discussions at a national level, informed by regional and local conditions. Above all, we need to engage State and Commonwealth Labor governments with the Australian Education Union and its affiliates to resolve these issues.

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Concluding remarks

59. In a speech on Australia's Welfare delivered on 6th December 2007, the Secretary of the Treasury, Dr Ken Henry commented on the importance of Indigenous education -- for both individual development and for community development. The two goals go hand-in-hand, he said:

"People who are educated have greater freedom to choose lives of real meaning and real value. Indigenous education is, therefore, important for its own sake; a valuable 'end' in itself. It should also be seen as a key component of Indigenous development."

60. The Prime Minister has apologised for the nation's past failures. Today is National Sorry Day; tomorrow the beginning of Reconciliation Week. We are determined that we never again have to experience the inequities and indignities heaped on previous generations. *The Way Forward* will deliver Indigenous Children of the Education Revolution. I believe the nation is ready for the positive directions it advances for Indigenous education. The synergy emerging from the active and simultaneous engagement of the five strategies outlined earlier will ensure transformation of Indigenous education in all parts of our country.

61. Today I have articulated for you the five most fundamental strategies to ensure Indigenous Australian children get a piece of the education revolution. I present them to you as an educator, an Aboriginal man, and an Aboriginal father demanding our children are located in schools with teachers that believe in them as much as I do. This is not something we are theorizing about. This something we know. We know it from our experience of growing up Aboriginal in this country and in always having respect and high expectations for our people



62. Of course the education revolution for Indigenous children is not just about educators and parents. To that end I challenge those in health agencies, justice agencies, family and community service agencies, to articulate what they think is their part to enhance a stronger smarter pursuit for Indigenous children of the education revolution.

63. I acknowledge the challenges we contemplate are great, but not insurmountable. This is something we can do!

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