

Scaffolding Reading and Writing for Indigenous Children in School

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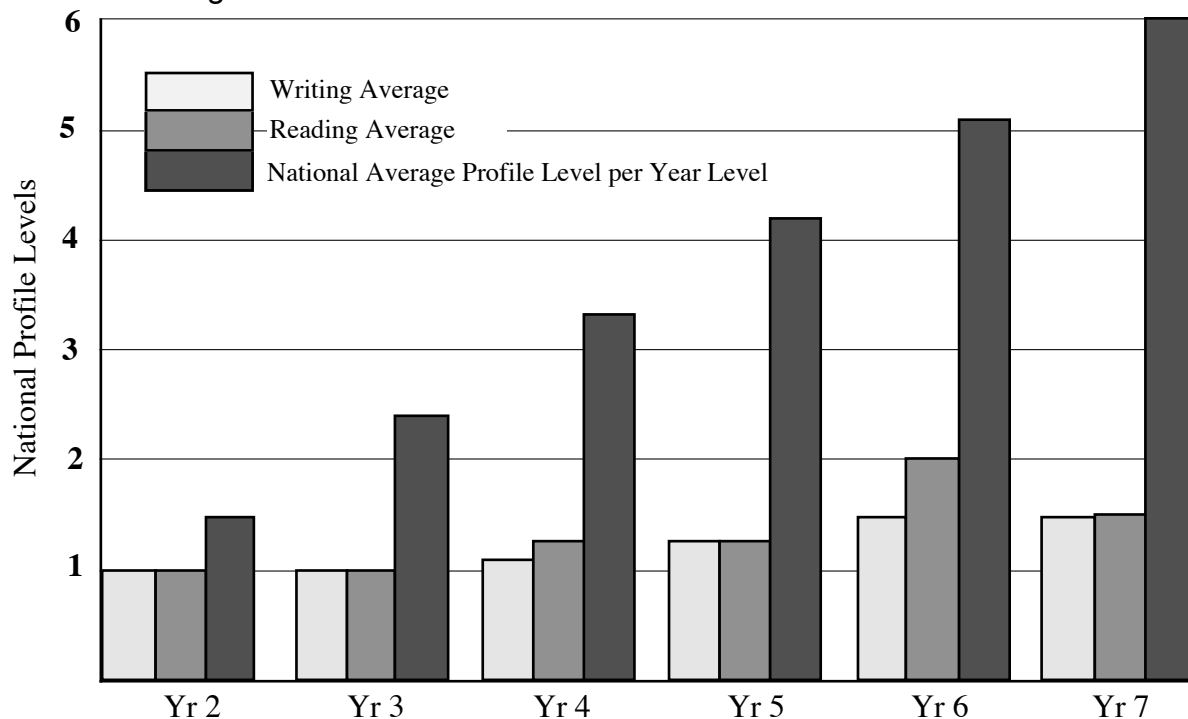
In this chapter we report on a literacy teaching approach that is enabling indigenous learners to successfully read and write texts that are appropriate for their school years, across the curriculum. The approach employs a sequence of strategies that provide scaffolding support for students to read complex texts fluently and accurately, and then to use the features of literate language that they are learning to read in their own writing. These strategies have grown out of work with indigenous students in Central Australia during the 1980s, and have since been further developed in the Schools & Community Centre, University of Canberra, with school students from all backgrounds experiencing severe literacy difficulties. They are currently being refined and successfully implemented in work with indigenous students from Central Australian communities in primary and secondary schools. The chapter begins by reviewing the needs of indigenous students for improvement in school participation and achievement rates and some current responses to these issues. This is followed by a discussion of the scaffolding literacy strategies, in the context of some of the kinds of texts that indigenous students may hear, read and write during their school career. The first of these is a traditional Western Desert Dreaming story, transcribed and translated to exemplify the kinds meanings and wordings that are familiar in the oral modes of both indigenous languages and English. This is then compared with examples of English narratives and factual texts that students are now reading and writing in the schools we are working with.

The need for improving literacy achievements

A series of reports have been published in Australia documenting alarmingly low levels of literacy in indigenous community schools. In 1996 for example, a major Northern Territory survey reported that "students in remote Aboriginal schools are, at best, three (3) years behind their urban counterparts and, at worst, seven (7) years behind" (NT Public Accounts Committee 1996: 13). These results for

indigenous students are consistent with the findings of the recent National Literacy Assessments (ACER 1997), and with assessments of students' reading and writing that we have conducted across remote community schools in South Australia, and in the Wiltja high school annexe program for central Australian indigenous students in Adelaide (Schools & Community Centre 1998). The results of this survey are briefly summarised below. In the survey, writing samples were collected for each student in primary and secondary classes, and analysed against the criteria and example texts for the National Profile Levels (ACER 1997). Running record analyses of reading were collected for each student in primary and secondary classes, and their results set against the reading criteria for the Profile Levels. A student assessed as operating within Profile Level 2, for example, would be able to read a text rated at this profile level with 90% accuracy. We found a clear pattern of widening gaps between indigenous students' literacy outcomes at each year level, and the average expectations for their years in the Profile Levels. Figure 1 illustrates these widening gaps in primary school years. It compares class averages for reading and writing at each year level in the community schools we surveyed, with the national average Profile Level for each year level.

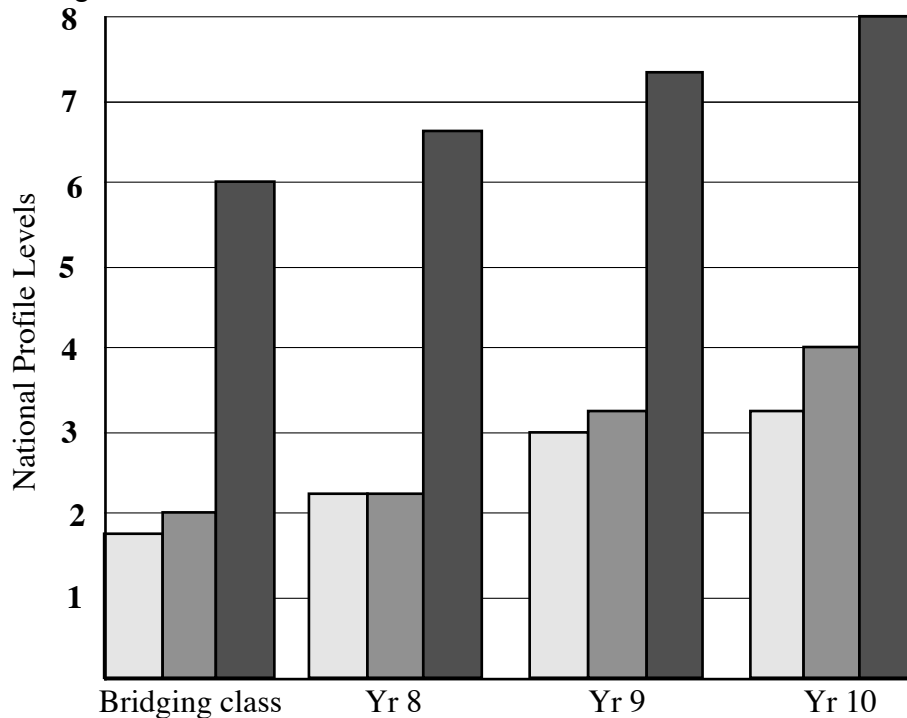
Figure 1: Reading and writing levels in remote SA community schools against national averages



In Year 2, students' average performance would be classified as 'emergent literacy'. This is already behind the general pattern in Australian schools, since most mainstream students are normally writing by Year 2. This lag in literacy

achievement was even more marked in Year 3, when still no students had progressed beyond Profile Level 1. By Year 4 only 10% were now at Profile Level 2, while the remainder were still emergent writers. There was a very slight improvement by Year 5, with 25% at Profile Level 2, but still no students were writing above junior primary level (Profile Levels 1 and 2). By Year 6, half the students were writing at Profile Level 2, and 20% at Profile Level 3. However it is a matter of serious concern that by this time, no students were reading and writing above middle primary level (Profile Level 3), and 40% were still emergent writers. By Year 7, literacy levels actually fell, with none above Profile Level 2, reflecting the enrolment of the most successful students in the Wiltja high school annexe program in Adelaide. The progress of this group is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Reading and writing levels in secondary annexe program against national averages



Even this most successful group of indigenous students are severely disadvantaged going into mainstream secondary schooling with middle primary level literacy skills. There is a slight improvement following a year long bridging program, but only a fraction of that required to engage successfully with Year 8 (high school in SA and NT begins in Year 8). There is then an improvement of one Profile Level per year for Years 9 and 10, representing attrition of weaker students as well as improvement for those remaining. By Year 10, the average literacy levels of these students are equivalent to the average Profile Levels for Year 5 primary school. For the 80-90% of young indigenous people remaining in their

communities, who do not have access to formal education beyond junior secondary years, opportunities in schooling, training and employment are very limited. In the face of the figures from all these reports, there can be little doubt that academic literacy is one of the major contributing factors in the problems facing indigenous Australian communities. Such problems include the lowest high school completion and further education rates for any group in Australia, the highest unemployment levels, the lowest per capita income, the worst health statistics, and tragic levels of imprisonment and substance abuse amongst both adults and young people.

Indigenous communities are very aware of the relationship between these problems and English literacy outcomes in their schools, and are increasingly demanding higher standards of English literacy teaching. For example, Chris Japangardi Poulson of Yuendumu NT, is quite clear about the root cause of unemployment in his community, "At the moment not enough English is taught in school and because of this there are many Aboriginal people who cannot get work of any kind" (1988). Yami Lester from the Pitjantjatjara communities, has high expectations for the children learning English, "If they read and write and speak English they can work in offices, they can go to college or university. They can learn to be accountants, mechanics, electricians, plumbers, builders. If we don't get a good education for them, we're always going to have white advisers in the communities" (1993). Martin Nakata of Torres Strait is critical of paternalist ideologies that devalue English literacy teaching in indigenous education. "I suspect, in fact I know, that the teaching of English is geared down, ...and the arguments for teaching traditional languages are in the ascendancy because linguists and anthropologists tell us we won't have an identity without it. ...I think that the understanding of the historical call for English might help proponents of bilingualism to really think about all the possibilities in trying to meet Islanders' need for English, or at the very least, to not override the urgency of effective English teaching" (this volume).

Together with these indigenous leaders, teachers and education departments are generally also very concerned about the serious problems with English literacy confronting indigenous children in school. The range of responses to this discouraging situation, quoted in major reports such as Provision of Education Services to Remote Aboriginal Communities in the NT (Public Accounts Committee 1996), Desert Schools Report (NLLIA 1996), and the National Literacy Assessments (ACER 1997), fall into two broad categories. One type of response has been to assign responsibility to the students, and their families and

communities, to contribute to improving their literacy by changing their behaviours or language practices in the home. Factors that are frequently cited include regularity of attendance, students' attitudes and behaviour in the classroom, a perceived lack of oral competence in English, and low levels of support for English literacy in the home and community. Another type of response assigns responsibility to teachers to change their modes of interaction with students in the classroom. This category includes Malin's (1994) findings that common behavioural control strategies used by teachers should be modified to avoid alienating young indigenous children, and Malcolm's (1979, 1991) proposals that teacher directed lesson topics and questioning sequences be dropped in indigenous classrooms in favour of topics and interactions controlled by the children.

While each of these responses may have some relevance to the problems of indigenous students' participation in school, none seriously address the issue of how teachers can provide students with access to the academic-literate discourses of schooling, at levels appropriate for their ages. These responses are unlikely to lead to effective outcomes, either because they focus on factors that are largely out of teachers' and schools' control, or because these factors are less the causes than the consequences of our failure to teach indigenous students effectively. While the second response type does address aspects of teaching, the focus is on features of classroom interaction at the expense of learning goals. These responses are widespread in community schools and departments, as they seem to provide plausible reasons for continuing low achievements of indigenous students. As a result their effect has been to divert efforts from the difficult problem of providing access to academic-literate discourses, and the schools' primary responsibility for doing so. Far from providing such access, teaching practices in most of the classrooms we have observed are clustered primarily around activities that are least taxing to students, and which consequently produce little educational progress, resulting in the outcomes shown in Figures 1 and 2. Similar observations have often been made in other studies of indigenous community classrooms, such as M. Christie (1984), Harris (1985) and Folds (1987).

The reasons for such low levels of academic activity can be viewed from two perspectives. On one hand, teachers report that if they push students in community classrooms into academic tasks that are too unfamiliar, communication between teacher and students becomes difficult, as Malin and Malcolm report, and classroom behaviour tends to deteriorate. Consequently behaviour management comes to be the implicit determining factor in classroom

practices, rather than academic goals, which come to be pitched at a level that will ensure a manageable class. Over time within the school culture, this pattern leads to the second factor - the low expectations that teachers have, in comparison to what they would expect of a mainstream class, for the academic progress of indigenous students, and the low expectations that these students tend to have of themselves. The outcome, as Harris (1985) and Folds (1987) point out, is that for much of the time indigenous children are typically engaged in what is commonly referred to as unproductive 'busywork'.

The most effective and pervasive teacher coping strategy is busywork based on worksheet activities. Busywork activities in the settlement schools use copying, colouring and drawing which are capable of holding the attention of the Pitjantjatjara children, and this makes them highly attractive to teachers. Engaged in colouring or drawing on worksheets, the children often work away quite happily for half an hour or so at a time (Folds 1987:48-9).

Current literacy practices

In junior primary classrooms surveyed, we found that literacy activities consisted largely of copying, firstly letters from the alphabet, and then sentences or brief texts, memorising and reciting big book stories read to the class, as well as low level 'phonemic awareness' drills. No child was independently reading or writing by the end of Year 2. In middle primary classes, the most common reading activity consisted of individualised reading programs, using picture readers from remedial reading programs, as well as listening to the teacher read and sometimes reading aloud to the teacher. Writing activities included journal writing, in which learners attempt to write texts from their own experience or from oral discussions, and a great deal of copying from the board. These individualised activities are derived partly from common progressive philosophies that promote 'child-centred' teaching approaches in mainstream classrooms, in which most students come to school with extensive experience of reading in the home. In the context of indigenous community schools, their outcome is to reduce the opportunities for interaction around academically challenging tasks. This in turn reduces the potential communication problems between teachers and students, but leaves indigenous students largely to try and learn to read and write for themselves. The proscription in 'whole language' approaches against teacher intervention in children's creativity exacerbates this problem.

The same activities were continued into upper primary classes, with some

students reading slightly higher level texts in their individualised programs, and writing slightly longer recounts of personal experience. However a significant number had not learnt to read or write independently at all, but had instead developed elaborate self-taught coping strategies such as memorising reading books, or surreptitious copying. The majority were still reading basal readers in their individual reading programs, right up to Years 6 and 7, and writing no more than simple recounts. In all years, by far the most common writing activity was copying from the board, and all students exhibited some level of dependent behaviours such as continual appealing to teachers while reading. Over the course of the primary years, individualised reading and writing activities led to widening gaps between those children who were able to make some progress in their literacy skills, and those who barely advanced at all. This created greater problems for teachers, who found themselves forced to teach to a level that at least the majority could easily engage in, in order to minimise disruptive behaviour from students who could not engage in academically challenging tasks.

We found that the basal readers used in the individual reading programs encourage indigenous students to perceive reading as a ritual practice of the school that has no pleasurable or communicative function. As a consequence students do not choose to read books because they are interesting or enjoyable, but because they are the only books they can read by 'sounding out' letter-by-letter, or memorise and appear to be reading, and so get praise from the teacher when they finish them. The handful of students we observed who had learnt to do more than sound out new words letter-by-letter were reading more complex texts, but without the comprehension necessary to get enjoyment from what they were reading. Because students are not learning how to engage with literate texts, they have no models on which they can draw in their writing, at the levels of subject matter, text staging or of literate types of meanings and wordings. The outcomes for writing by all students are recycling of a very small range of brief texts, almost all simple recounts or observation-comments, using an extremely limited range of vocabulary and other language features (Gray 1986, 1990, Rose 1998). No writing samples we collected from community schools were recognisable as factual texts, except where they were copied from the board. The following example (Text 1), written by a 12 year old upper primary student, is typical of students' journals, the main context for independent writing.

Text 1 Tuesday 3/6

Yesterday I was playing games and after that I saw Craig was coming. I went to play on the trampoline and Last Night we were playing hide and seek. I went home. I went to sleep. This morning Me and Craig were playing game's and we came to school.

Three weeks later, this student had a more unusual personal experience to recount (Text 2). In response, the teacher's encouraging comment was 'Excellent interesting story. Good English'.

Text 2 Wednesday 26/6

Yesterday I went with my dad to Umuwa for Meeting and after that we went to Ernabella for Shop and I saw My auntie and My sister and My brother and we all went to the Shop and me and Winmati and My dad came back to Nyapari. We had supper and after that we went to Slide Night and after that we all went home.

Texts such as 1 and 2 are well below the levels of their writers' oral competence in either their first languages or English. They are also well below most students' potential for both writing and reading. Yet as many teachers will recognise, they are often the only kind of writing produced by indigenous students in community schools, and often also in urban schools. Students such the writer of Texts 1 and 2 are still writing these texts as 'English' activities after six or more years at primary school, and even high school. They are well and truly fossilised at a standard that is set not by their teachers, but by their peers. Throughout remote community schools, indigenous students have taught each other to write these kinds of texts, in the absence of other substantial direction in how to control the language features of written English. As a result, the few students who are able to enter high school programs are unable to independently read and write the texts demanded by the curriculum, and are completely dependent on support teachers to help them with their class and home work. Support teachers in the high school program stated that the level of help students needed to complete their work was so time-consuming that there was no time available for teaching them to read their set texts. This meant that the students remained dependent throughout the junior secondary years, and all but two were unable to complete high school.

The Scaffolding Literacy approach

To demonstrate how the difficulties in academic progress outlined above can be overcome, we are working with teachers and indigenous students from Years 1 to 10, in community school and secondary school settings. The Scaffolding Literacy

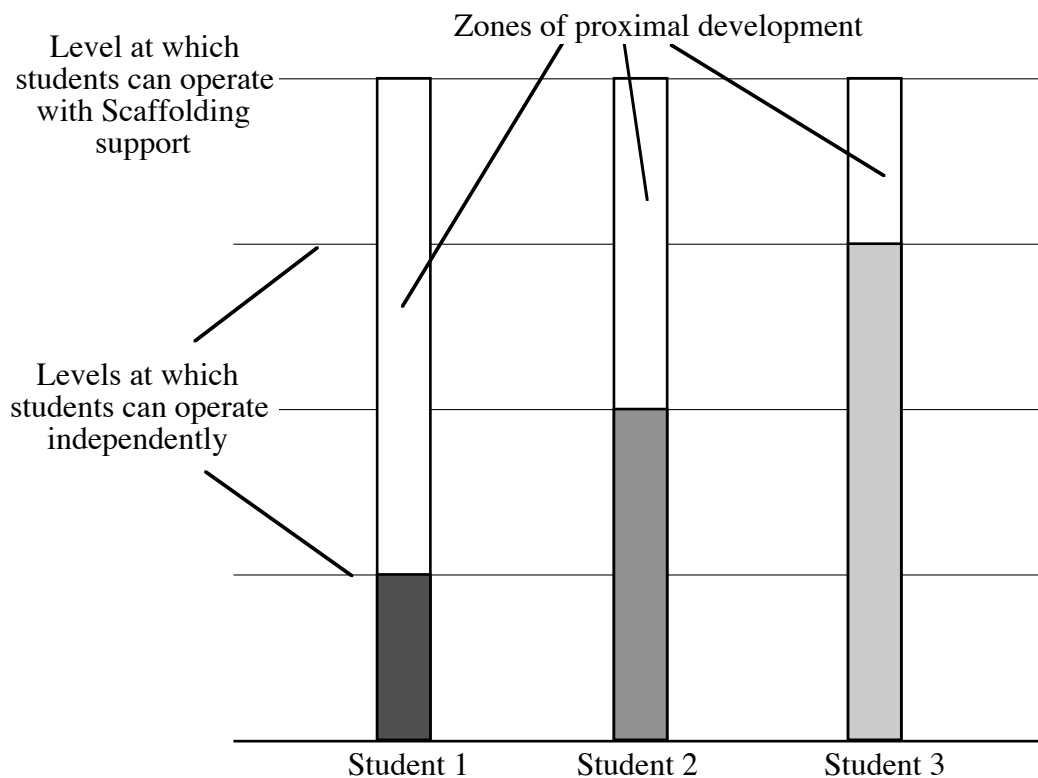
approach we are using was first developed in Australia for indigenous students at Traeger Park primary school in Alice Springs (reported in Gray 1986, 1987, 1990, and in detail in Gray to appear). It was initially developed for younger children, using experiential learning situations called 'concentrated language encounters'. The principle of concentrated encounters was to employ interaction in direct joint experiences, such as learning to ride horses, or hatching chickens in the classroom, that could lead to jointly constructing written texts such as specialised procedures or science explanations. The kinds of shared understandings developed experientially in concentrated encounters at Traeger Park were also constructed around the joint exploration of written texts between teacher and learners. For this reason the teaching sequence developed for concentrated language encounters contributed to the evolution of the 'genre' approach to writing development (eg. Martin, F. Christie and Rothery 1987, F. Christie et al 1990-92, Hyon 1996), which has begun to influence literacy teaching in indigenous education. Scaffolding approaches for use with written texts have been further developed and refined in the programs of the Schools & Community Centre, University of Canberra, for primary and secondary students with severe literacy difficulties (Gray, Cowey and Graetz 1995, in press).

The Scaffolding approach seeks to work with students at or close to their full potential, such as at the literacy Profile Level appropriate for their school year, by giving them adequate support to operate at this level. Scaffolding enables learners to read and write complex texts with the support of their teachers and peers. It does so by initially supporting students to understand the roles of the language features that constitute a written text, as a means to fluently and accurately read the text without becoming overloaded. This shared understanding of the meanings in the text is then exploited as a basis for spelling and writing activities in which the students gradually acquire more independent control over literate discourse.

Three conceptual frameworks inform the approach: a model of spoken and written language, a model of reading, and a model of learning. The model of learning derives from the work of Vgotsky (eg. 1978) who saw learning as a social process, that takes place in interaction between learners and teachers, in what he termed a 'zone of proximal development' that exists between what learners can do on their own, and what they can achieve in interaction with a teacher. The social process of a teacher initially providing maximum support, and the learner gradually taking over responsibility for a task has been referred to as 'scaffolding' by Bruner (1986). This social conception of learning differs from that which lies behind the individualised activities observed in community classrooms, which operate at the level of each

child's independent ability. In contrast our work has shown that indigenous students can be supported to read complex texts fluently that are well above their normal independent reading level, by building up a high level of intersubjectivity between teacher and students through detailed discussion of the texts they are reading. By building up this common ground for discussion, the approach short-circuits the communication difficulties that teachers so often experience in indigenous classrooms. Because it operates at a level above students' normal independent ability, the approach also helps to resolve the problem of a wide range of ability levels in the class. While the best students are learning above their normal standard, even the weakest readers in the class are supported to engage with the texts under focus. The Vygotskian model is illustrated in the following diagram (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Using scaffolding to bridge between students' independent and supported operating levels



The Scaffolding Literacy approach begins with students learning to read complex texts that will later provide models for their writing. The model of reading used involves two sets of skills (illustrated in Figure 4 below):

- orthographic processing of letter patterns in words,
- meaning prediction of the ways in which a literate text unfolds.

Both sets of skills are integral to fluent reading. Experienced readers are able to do so because they can predict the sequences in which written meanings are likely to unfold in a text, at the same time as they automatically process the visual patterns of letters in words. Weak readers on the other hand, bring only low level skills to the task; their meaning prediction skills come only from their commonsense, oral experience, and they frequently attempt to read by sounding out words letter-by-letter. It is for these reasons that students may be unable to read more complex texts than basal sentence readers. They are under too much processing stress, attempting to sound out each word on the page, to attend to sequences of meaning any larger than a short sentence. Scaffolding enables weak readers to use meaning prediction to support their low level graphophonic skills, in order to read a complex text fluently. Such texts then become a resource for developing high order orthographic processing skills.

Figure 4: Model of reading

	Orthographic processing	Meaning prediction
High order skills	Automatic processing of visual patterns in words	Literate meanings of written texts
Low order skills	Low order graphophonics, 'sounding-out' words	Commonsense, oral meanings from everyday experience

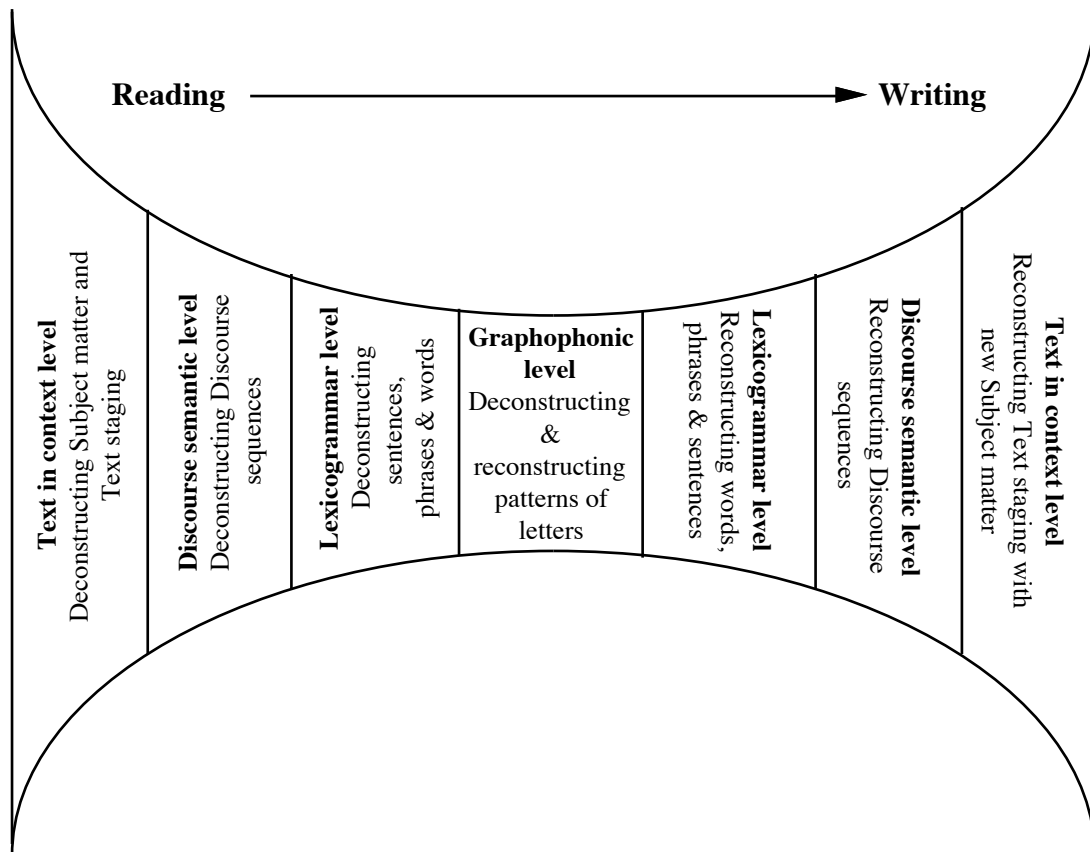
Finally, the model of language used to support learners to make the shift from low to high order reading skills is a functional one, drawing on Halliday's (1994) description of functional grammar. In a functional model, language is conceived of in terms of texts that are exchanged in social contexts, between speakers, writers and readers. Each text involves three levels of organisation, as sequences of meanings, as patterns of wordings that realise these meanings, and as soundings or letter patterns that realise these wordings. This is an integrated model of language in its social contexts, in which each level is realised (ie. expressed, symbolised, manifested) by the next level. It is reflected in our commonsense conceptions of language as meaning, as wording and as sounding or letter patterns, but has been developed through careful analysis of how texts work. These levels of organisation are known technically as *discourse semantics* (sequences of meanings in a text), *lexicogrammar* (including both words and wordings), and *graphophonics* (sound/letter patterns).

The Scaffolding Literacy sequence begins with the social context of the text to be read, in a general orientation phase in which teacher and students jointly explore its subject matter, its purposes, and the stages it goes through to achieve its purposes, such as the Orientation, Complication and Resolution stages in a narrative. Secondly, general orientation involves deconstructing the sequences of meanings in segments of the text, at the level of paragraphs and sentences. For example, we might discuss how a narrative segment consists of a sequence of actions involving the characters, followed by their reactions in the form of thinking, feeling or saying. These levels of general orientation, to a text's subject matter, its staging, and its discourse semantic patterns, are common pre-reading activities in many classrooms. However the Scaffolding Literacy approach now goes further, into a high order orientation to the text, at the level of the wordings that realise its meanings. By means of a careful discussion and questioning cycle described below, learners' attention is now focused on the grammatical and lexical features of the text, ie. on the functions of the word groups that make up each sentence and then on the functions of the words within each group.

These levels of general and high order orientation - to subject matter, text staging, meaning and wording - are what enable weak readers to comprehend and fluently read a complex text. By focusing on one level of complexity at a time, they are able to handle the difficult task of reading without becoming overloaded, and to enjoy the experience of reading complex texts.

Once they are able to read a text fluently, and can recognise its words out of context, the Scaffolding sequence then shifts down to the next language level of graphophonics, focusing learners' attention on the letter patterns that make up the words they are familiar with from the text. The sequence then turns to the writing phase, and as it does so it moves back up through the levels of language in the functional model. The first step moves back up to the level of wording, employing the same discussion and questioning cycles to support learners to reconstruct whole phrases and sentences from the text, using what they have learned about the letter patterns in its words, and the grammatical patterns in its sentences. The next step moves up to the level of discourse sequences, using writing plans to reconstruct segments of the text. Finally it moves back up to the level of text staging and subject matter, as learners practise to write new texts that are patterned on the organisation of the ones they have been learning to read and reconstruct. These phases of the Scaffolding sequence and levels of language are illustrated in the following diagram, Figure 5.

Figure 5: Scaffolding sequence and levels of language



As well as informing the strategies used in each phase of the Scaffolding sequence, the functional model of language also enables us to plan a curriculum sequence logically. On one hand it enables us to analyse texts for their level of difficulty, so that we know which books to select for reading orientation at each level of schooling, and we know exactly which language features to focus on at each stage. This also enables us to construct a curriculum for each year and each term, that builds in a rational sequence from easier to more difficult texts. On the other hand the functional language model enables us to select which types of texts to focus on in each area of the curriculum, and how to deconstruct them. In the English curriculum for example, we can begin with brief narrative genres, and move on to short stories and then novels with more complex structures. In the science curriculum, we have begun with the report genre in animal classification, at various levels of difficulty, and then moved on to explanations of natural phenomena such as life cycles. In the social sciences curriculum we can explore genres such as geography reports, historical accounts and discussions and arguments. The materials produced in genre-based writing approaches are invaluable in this regard (eg. F. Christie et al 1990-92).

It should be noted that while the functional model of language parallels our commonsense one of meaning, wording and sounds/letters, it is very different from the traditional 'formal' grammars that still influence school practices. The formal view of language starts at the bottom, with lists of sounds in a language, and then represents grammar as formal structures of words and sentences. Meaning is a marginal element in formal grammars, and whole texts are rarely considered. This view of language is reflected in language pedagogies that begin, first of all with lists of letters and blends out of context (eg. alphabet and phonics exercises), then with lists of words out of context (spelling lists), then with types of wordings out of context (grammar exercises), and use 'remedial' programs of basal readers that have one word to a page, then one phrase, then a sentence or two. In keeping with the formal view of language, these basal readers are focused more on word or sentence structures than on meaning, and so are frequently artificial and literally meaningless.

In teaching indigenous school students to write, we have to start with reading and we have to show students how to attend to literate resources important to their writing development as they read. We can do so using meaningful whole texts which display the kinds of literate resources that authors use. Moreover, we have to prepare students for reading in such a way that they are not cognitively overloaded. It is only when learners are reading a text fluently that they have the capacity to attend to language choices to do with building fine levels of meaning in a text. Furthermore, as later discussion will point out, it is in the very start of the teaching sequence during the orientation phase that students should begin to have their attention drawn towards specific language choices selected by the teacher for development.

In order to scaffold students effectively into reading complex texts fluently, and using the features of such texts in their writing, teachers need to have a strong general understanding of the differences between spoken and written language, and of the features of written English they wish to draw their students' attention to. To this end, we will illustrate in the next section, some features of spoken language, both indigenous Australian languages and English. We will then contrast these patterns of spoken text with some features of written English texts that students are likely to meet in primary and junior secondary schooling.

Spoken and written language

In its spoken mode, the English language makes meanings in surprisingly similar

ways to Australian languages, despite the great depth of time over which their cultures have separately developed (Rose 1993, 1996, 1998b, to appear). This can be illustrated by looking at the language features of a traditional indigenous Australian narrative, and comparing them with their English translation. The narrative below (Text 3) is a brief extract from a story of the Pitjantjatjara people, one of a large number of origin myths that make up the cosmology known in indigenous Australia as the Dreaming (see eg. Stanner 1966). This Dreaming story relates the origin of huge *wanampi* serpents that are said to dwell in the deep waterhole of Piltati creek in the Mann Ranges, SA. In this stage of the story, two women are digging up burrows looking for small game, when one comes across the burrow of the *wanampi* serpents, believing them to be merely large *kuniya* desert pythons. When she tries to pull the tail of the serpent, it nearly drags her back into the burrow.

To follow the *Piltati* story in Pitjantjatjara, it may help to read it aloud, placing the stress on the first syllable of each word. After several re-readings it is possible to attain a reasonable level of fluency, so that the Pitjantjatjara wordings will begin to make sense without the scaffolding support of the English glosses below each line. Each line is a step in the narrative, and is numbered so it can be referred to in the discussion below.

Text 3 *Piltati* told by Nganyintja (transcribed and translated by David Rose)

- 1 kangkuru-rara kutjara tjawa-ningi
two sisters were digging
- 2 watarku minyma kutjara tjawa-ningi tjawa-ra tjawa-ra
heedlessly the two women were digging, digging and digging
- 3 ka watja-nu wanyu wili mantji-la
and (one) told "please long stick fetch"
- 4 ka kutju a-nu
and (the other) one did go
- 5 munu anku-la nya-ngu nyaa nyangatja pupa-nyi wanampi purunpa
and while going saw "what (is) this? crouching like a *wanampi*"
- 6 kuniya-lta palku
a desert python, that is (she thought) mistakenly
- 7 piti tjaa nya-ngu nyangatja piti tjaa
the mouth of a burrow(she) saw "this (is) a burrow mouth"

- 8 wanampi-lta pupa-ra ma-tjarpa-ngu
that *wanampi* lying there had gone inside (the burrow)
- 9 munu kunyu ila-lta ma-ngara-ngi
and it's said close inside was lying
- 10 ka kunyu nyaku-la kuli-nu ka ngayulu kutju-ngku witi-la
and it's said (she) saw it and thought "ah, I on my own will catch it!"
- 11 munu kunyu ma-witi-ntjikitja-ngku ngalya-ila-ra
but it's said in order to catch it as she was pulling it towards her
- 12 nguwanpa ma-tjarpatju-nu palunya
(it) nearly dragged back inside her
- 13 minyma panya paluru pakara wirtjapaka-nu
that woman jumped up and ran
- 14 munu kunyu pitja-la watja-nu wanyu paka-ra pitja
and it's said coming (to her sister) she said "please get up and come!"
- 15 kangkuru watja-lku-na-nta
"older sister will I tell you?"
- 16 ka kangkuru-ngku watja-nu nyaa-n nya-ngu nyaa nyaa
and her sister said "what-you did see? what? what?"
- 17 wala-ngku watja-la nyaa-n wangka-nyi
"quickly tell! what-you are saying?"
- 18 wanyu puta pitja-la nya-wa
"would you please come and look"
- 19 kuniya pulka alatjitu tjarpa-ngu
"an utterly huge python entered (a burrow)
- 20 piti-ngka -ni nguwanpa tjarpa-tju-nu
"into a burrow me nearly dragged inside
- 21 pulka mulapa
"(it's) really huge"

Despite being a traditional, and probably very ancient myth told by a Pitjantjatjara elder, this story shares many of the features of familiar English oral fables. This story is told to entertain children, and in this respect resembles one of the functions of fables. However as a Dreaming story it also encodes levels of meaning that are only known to older people, including abstract principles of social and natural order. Unfortunately there is not the space here to go into these

aspects of the story, since we need to focus on the meanings that are apparent and relevant to young learners.

From this perspective, the story consists of a series of character's actions, followed by their reactions, expressed as 'thinking' and 'saying'. Its staging begins with an Orientation stage that first introduces the characters and then recounts their activities, the women digging (1-2), one sister commanding (3), the other one going and seeing a burrow (4-7), the serpent entering and lying inside the burrow (8-9) the woman thinking and then pulling the serpent (10-11). This apparently everyday sequence of activities builds up an atmosphere that is suddenly shattered in line 12, when the *wanampi* serpent nearly drags the woman back into its burrow. This Complication is followed by an Evaluation as she runs back to her sister, excitedly telling her what she has seen. The dialogue between the two sisters from 14 to 21 is a crucial resource here, for building the feeling of excitement, and also for constructing the characters as a deferential younger sister, who first saw the serpent, and the dominant older sister who demands to know what she has seen. (Because this extract is part of a much longer narrative, the Resolution stage is not included here.)

Below the level of text staging, each step in the sequence (that is presented in Text 3 as a numbered line) is generally either:

- an action, eg. *two sisters were digging*, or
- a character's reaction as 'thinking' or 'saying', eg. *and the woman thought "ah, I on my own will catch it!"*.

Each action is realised as a clause, which in writing is written as a simple sentence with a capital letter and full stop, eg. 'Two sisters were digging.' Whether it is spoken or written, the clause is the integral unit of meaning in the grammars of all languages, expressing various kinds of 'doing', 'thinking/saying' or 'being', so sentences have evolved in writing to denote a clause. In the reaction, there are two clauses, one expressing the 'thinking' *and the woman thought*, and the other 'what was thought' *"ah, I on my own will catch it!"*. In writing this would be written as a complex sentence, eg. "Ah, I alone will catch it," she thought.

Finally line 21 is a description, a kind of 'being' - 'it is really huge'. The Pitjantjatjara clause is simply two words *pulka mulapa* 'really huge', but English descriptive clauses require a 'being' verb 'is', as well as a subject 'it', so it is translated above as '(it's) really huge'. So in both English and Australian languages, steps in the sequence of a text are expressed by clauses, of which there are three general kinds - 'doing', 'thinking/saying' and 'being'.

The next level of meaning is expressed by the groups of words that make up each clause. In the story each word group is glossed underneath in English. These word groups express three general types of meanings:

- processes eg. *tjawa-ningi* 'were digging',
- participants in these processes that are 'people' *minyma kutjara* 'two women', or 'things' *piti tjaa* 'mouth of a burrow',
- circumstances associated with them, such as 'places', *piti-ngka* 'in a burrow', 'qualities' *watarku* 'heedlessly', *pulka mulapa* 'really huge', or 'times'.

These meanings expressed by groups of words in Australian languages can generally be translated directly into an equivalent word group in English.

Sometimes the meaning will be realised by two or more words in English, such as 'were digging' or 'in a burrow', but as one word with an ending in Pitjantjatjara, *tjawa-ningi* and *piti-ngka*, but the unit of meaning is the same.

The next level of meaning is realised by each individual word. At this level, most words can also be translated directly from Australian languages into English, for example *minyma* 'woman', *kutjara* 'two'. On the other hand, some words can't be translated into one word in English, for example *wili* means 'a long flexible stick for poking into burrows to feel for animals'. This is an item of technology that is important in Australian cultures but has no equivalent or name in English. Since the technology and other fields of English culture have expanded so enormously over the past few centuries, there are now a great many English words that do not translate directly into Australian languages like Pitjantjatjara.

All of the features of wording and text structure that we can see in this Dreaming story can also be found in the literate English texts that students meet in primary school, but they are often employed in patterns that differ from speaking. A major reason for this is that the resources of oral storytelling, of intonation and voice quality, as well as the shared knowledge between speaker and listeners, have to be replaced in writing by the resources of the wording alone, and the sequencing of wordings. Some features that are infrequent in speech are major components of writing, and there are also many features of written English that are simply not part of typical spoken discourse. An obvious example is the richer vocabulary required in writing to express descriptions and exact meanings, but this applies equally at the levels of word groups, sentences and text stages.

A useful starting point for looking at these features that is comparable to the *Piltati*

story is the Aesop's fable *Lion and the Mouse*. The following extract (Text 4) is from an illustrated version of the fable, at reading Profile Level 3. We have often used it to teach reading with younger readers whose starting point was at Profile Levels 1-2.

Text 4 *The Lion and the Mouse* retold by Patricia Scott (1993)

One day a lion was resting when a little mouse, who lived nearby, ran playfully over his back and down over his head to the ground.

The lion stirred and, reaching out, caught the mouse beneath his paw. "Mouse," he said, "you have disturbed my sleep. I think I will eat you."

"Oh, pardon, my Lord," said the mouse. "Please do not eat me. Perhaps, if you forgive me, someday I may be able to do something to help you."

The lion laughed. "You, a little mouse, help me, the king of the beasts?" He laughed again, but he lifted his paw, allowing the mouse to go free. With a hasty "thank you", the mouse ran off before the lion could change his mind.

At the level of text staging, the overall unfolding of *The Lion and the Mouse* is comparable with that of the *Piltati* Dreaming story. The Orientation in the first paragraph is followed by a Complication in the second, that is reacted to by the mouse in the third, and resolved in the last. Again the relative status of the characters, as a dominating Lion and deferential Mouse, is constructed in their dialogue. However below this level, although the language features of the written text are comparable to the spoken one, the way they unfold is quite different. Rather than unfolding as a simple sequence of events and reactions, each step in the written story is expanded, elaborating on the events, the characters or the locations. For example the first sentence begins with an apparently simple statement:

1 One day a lion was resting

If we were drawing only on oral experience, we would expect this sentence to be completed with a place, such as *under a tree*, since actions in oral stories tend to include little more additional information than where or when it occurred. This is also a typical structure in the *Piltati* story, such as *it nearly dragged me into a burrow*. However in the written fable, this typical pattern is interrupted with the following expansion.

2 when a little mouse

Now from our oral experience we would expect the sentence to be completed with the mouse's action, such as *ran*. However, instead of going straight to the action the mouse's character is first elaborated with a quality that is relevant for its role later in the story (since he passes by again and rescues the lion from a hunter's net he is caught in).

3 who lived nearby

Only now that both characters are introduced, and the character of the mouse is expanded with a significant quality, does its action occur.

4 ran

Again, we might expect this action to be completed by a location, perhaps *over the lion*, but instead we learn how the action happened, further elaborating on the mouse's character.

5 playfully

Now finally, after the mouse and its action have been expanded with qualities, this complex sentence is completed with the location of the action. Nevertheless even this is not simple, but consists of three locations in sequence.

6 over his back -> and down over his head -> to the ground.

Note that 'his back' and 'his head' refer to the lion in the first clause, not to the mouse in this clause. So the reader must not only be able to negotiate this complex sequence of actions, descriptions, qualities, and sequence of places, but also recognise which of the characters is being referred to at any point.

Within each sentence of *Lion and the Mouse*, each clause or word group exemplified in lines 1 to 6, may be part of students' commonsense oral experience. Like the spoken *Piltati* story, each of these chunks of meaning consist of actions, descriptions, places, times and qualities. However the way they are sequenced in the sentence here is not typical of spoken language but of writing. Instead of a simple sequence of actions in places, in writing the characters, the events, and even the places are continually expanded with more information. This is because writers cannot assume that their readers share any knowledge about these features of a story, whereas speakers usually can, particularly in the experience of young children. So without an orientation to written ways of meaning young learners are likely to have great difficulty understanding what the story is about,

since the meanings that they expect to occur at each point do not occur. Instead there is some type of expansion of meaning that they do not expect, making the sequence of meanings in the text difficult for these readers to predict from their oral experience. To be able to independently predict the sequence of meanings, they need experience of how stories are written in English. Their problems in meaning prediction will also be greatly compounded if their graphophonic skills are weak, so that they are simultaneously under pressure, trying to decode the letter patterns in unfamiliar words such as *nearby* or *playfully*, and simultaneously to predict unfamiliar sequences of meaning. These are the kinds of problems experienced by indigenous students learning to read written English.

Despite its considerable differences to spoken ways of meaning, *Lion and the Mouse* is still only at reading Profile Level 3 (middle primary level). In order to engage successfully with the secondary school curriculum, students need to be reading and writing at Profile Level 5-6. It is essential that indigenous students in upper primary years learn to read such texts, yet we found very few who were able to independently read texts at the level of *Lion and the Mouse*.

Curriculum sequencing

Just as we were able to identify differences between spoken and written ways of meaning in *Piltati* and *Lion and the Mouse*, the functional model of language allows us to identify exactly how texts become more challenging as we move up through a curriculum sequence. The following (Text 5) is an extract from a short story by Paul Jennings at Profile Level 4. At this reading level, texts are beginning to resemble adult fiction in many ways. They are becoming much longer, with multiple segments that are mini-stories in themselves. Within each segment there are more complex narrative structures, with long stages, especially long Orientations and Complications that build up the scene, the characters and the atmosphere. Elements are introduced early in the text that are significant later, and there are usually multiple participants to keep track of. In order for the whole text to make sense, readers need to be able to hold all this information in their minds as it unfolds. To do so they should be under no processing stress decoding its words at the graphophonic level. It is for this reason that this level of text becomes appropriate towards the upper primary years, as students acquire sufficient experience of reading for automatic visual processing. Older students with low graphophonic and meaning prediction skills need a high order orientation to read this level of text. Teachers in the programs we are working with have done so successfully, leading to text patterning that we will exemplify below.

Text 5 from *A Good Tip for Ghosts* by Paul Jennings (1994)

A little way off behind some old rusting car bodies, I thought I heard a noise. Pete was looking in the same direction. I was too terrified to move. I wanted to run but my legs just wouldn't work. I opened my mouth to scream but nothing came out. Pete stood staring as if he was bolted to the ground.

It was a rustling tapping noise. It sounded like someone digging around in the junk, turning things over. It was coming in our direction. I just stood there pretending to be a dead tree or post. I wished the moon would go in and stop shining on my white face. The tapping grew louder. It was coming closer.

And then we saw it. Or him. Or whatever it was. An old man, with a battered hat. He was poking the ground with a bent stick. He was rustling in the rubbish. He came on slowly. He was limping. He was bent and seemed to be holding his old, dirty trousers up with one hand. He came towards us. With a terrible shuffle.

Pete and I both noticed it at the same time. His feet weren't touching the ground. He was moving across the rubbish about 30 centimetres above the surface. It was the ghost of Old Man Chompers.

We both screeched the same word at exactly the same moment. "Run!" And did we run. We tore through the waist-high rubbish. Scrambling. Screaming. Scrabbling. Not noticing the waves of silent rats slithering out of our way. Not feeling the scratches of dumped junk. Not daring to turn and snatch a stare at the horrible spectre who hobbled behind us.

Finally, with bursting lungs, we crawled into the back of an old car. It had no doors or windows so we crouched low, not breathing, not looking, not even hoping.

Features of discourse patterns and wordings in this text, that teachers have focused on in general and high order orientations, include the following:

- A build up of tension in steps as the boys' awareness of the 'ghost' becomes more certain, and they react to their perceptions, eg. *I thought I heard a noise -> It was a rustling tapping noise -> And then we saw it -> It was the ghost of Old Man Chompers.*
- Long sequences of reaction sentences, eg. *I was too terrified to move. I wanted to run but my legs just wouldn't work. I opened my mouth to scream but nothing came out. Pete stood staring as if he was bolted to the ground.*
- Complex sentence Themes (ie. beginnings of sentences that establish circumstances), eg. *A little way off -> behind some old rusting car bodies.* These are important to set the location, time or atmosphere of text stages.

- Other complex chains of elements, eg. *someone digging around -> in the junk, -> turning things over*. These elaborate actions or circumstances, describing them more exactly.
- Complex groups of words around a noun, that provide elaborate descriptions of things or people, eg. *some old rusting car bodies... a rustling tapping noise... his old, dirty trousers... a terrible shuffle... exactly the same moment... the waist-high rubbish... the waves of silent rats... the scratches of dumped junk... the horrible spectre who hobbled behind us...*
- Wide variety of lexical choices that realise exact meanings, eg. *rustling, shuffle, screeched, scrambling, screaming, scrabbling, slithering, spectre, crawled, crouched*
- Metaphors and similes, eg. *Pete stood staring as if he was bolted to the ground... Finally, with bursting lungs,... snatch a stare...* These encourage readers to use their imaginations to picture the events or circumstances.

From a starting point for reading at Profile Levels 2-3, the indigenous students in the upper primary and junior secondary classes we worked with learnt to read this text fluently and accurately, by means of high order book orientation. They then went on to reconstruct and then write new texts patterned on this one. The Scaffolding Literacy strategies that enabled them to do so are outlined as follows.

The Scaffolding Literacy sequence

The scaffolding sequence begins by building shared knowledge around the text, in the Book Orientation phase of the sequence. During book orientation the teacher prepares students for reading a text accurately without stress. Once they can read the text without having to attend to working out words, they can attend to the meaning of the text. Weak readers have difficulty engaging with many of the more complex elements of the language in the texts they read, as illustrated above for *Lion and the Mouse* and *Good Tip for Ghosts*. This then is the language a teacher focuses on in a detailed book orientation. The discussion teachers have with students before they read a text has implications not just for reading accurately, but for their overall understanding of the text and their ability to then 'borrow' from the text in their writing. After a detailed book orientation students are ready to read the text with understanding that can be recalled later during the writing process. Book orientation has four outcomes for learners:

- **Becoming a code-breaker:** Learners' enhanced ability to make sense at a high level allows more mental space to deal with decoding the letter patterns of words.

- Becoming a text-participant: The focus upon the staging of the text and the author's reasons for particular language choices accustoms learners to the precise levels of meaning which good writers build into their texts.
- Becoming a text-user: Drawing learners' attention to language choices at a detailed level shows them potential choices they themselves can employ in their own writing.
- Becoming a text-analyst: Engaging with a story at this level is fundamental to developing critical views about why and how authors make the choices they do in their writing.

The teachers started book orientation on *Good Tip for Ghosts* by reading and discussing the story as a whole with the class, including features such as its staging, sequences of events and reactions, the characters and their qualities and descriptions. The discussion takes the form of a cycle with three phases:

- Preformulation, in which the teacher draws students' attention to features of the text that he or she intends to focus on, giving them information about each feature that they will be able to draw on in the next phase;
- Focus questions, which are carefully framed to enable students to make connections between each feature and its function in the text;
- Reformulation, in which the teacher is careful to accept students' responses to the focus questions, and then elaborates them with additional information that students are able to connect with their own responses.

The function of this discussion is not testing. It is first of all to establish shared understandings that become a basis for interaction between teacher and students around the text, and then to use this interaction to focus learners' attention on its literate language features.

Following this general discussion of the text, the teacher would read a selected passage from an overhead projection, using a coloured plastic strip to keep place so that the students can read along, and their attention can be drawn to the actual wordings that express the meanings they have discussed in the earlier phase. The discussion and re-readings of the text enable students to begin accurately predicting the sequence of meanings in the story, and so to follow the sequence as the teacher reads, even if they are not yet able to identify all its words independently. This text level of meaning prediction then forms a foundation for discussing the more detailed meanings at the level of sentences, phrases and words in chosen segments of the text, again using the overhead projection. This phase of the scaffolding sequence is known as High Order Book Orientation. It employs the same cycle of preformulating, questioning and reformulating

discussion, but with a very detailed focus on the wordings that express each chunk of meaning in the text segment. The following are examples of preformulation, questioning and reformulation used for discussing the first sentence of the extract from *Good Tip for Ghosts*. The discussion begins with the complex Theme of the sentence that establishes how far away the noise was and where it was coming from.

First off the boy who is telling the story tells us how far away the noise seemed. Can you see how the book says that? Can you read it? (*A little way off*) Can you think why it would be more scary to have the noise a little way off rather than a long way off?

Not only does the preformulation and questioning cycle enable learners to focus on the wording of this feature (*A little way off*), and what it means in the story's context (*how far away the noise seemed*), but it also encourages them to think critically about why the author has made this choice at this point of the story (*why it would be more scary*). The teacher then accepts whatever the students say with 'Yes,' and then reformulates it with more information, eg. 'A noise that is close would be really scary wouldn't it?'

Now we find out exactly where the noise was coming from. Can you read what it says? (*behind some old rusting car bodies*) Is it more scary, do you think, if a noise was coming from **behind** the old rusting car bodies? Why?

Once again, the teacher has accepted whatever the students say with 'Yes', then asked a question focusing on the function of this location in the story. Again students responses can be reformulated with more information, eg. 'If the noise was behind something you wouldn't be able to see what it was, would you. You would start to imagine all sorts of things.' Now the focus of discussion can shift to the level of the nominal group that describes the car bodies, and the function of this description in the story as a whole.

Paul Jennings tells us lots of information about the car bodies in the story, doesn't he? That's because if they were old and rusting they were probably real wrecks. It's important that we know about that because later in the story do you remember where the twins hide?

The teacher then points out the where the old car bodies become significant at the end of the passage *we crawled into the back of an old car. It had no doors or*

windows... Then the next focus of discussion is on the wording that tells us the narrator isn't sure about the noise. This lack of certainty is significant because it is the first step in the gradual buildup of tension as the 'ghost' appears.

Now we know where the noise seemed to be coming from, the next part of the story tells us that the boy telling the story isn't sure that he's heard the noise. Can you see how he tells us that he isn't sure? (*I thought I heard a noise*).

Because they are now thoroughly familiar with the sequence of meanings in the text, without having to spell all its words accurately, all the students are able to identify word groups that express each of these chunks of meaning. Discussion and questions always refer to the actual wordings of the text, so that the students learn to use the language of the text to answer them. In this way, they rapidly become familiar and comfortable, not only with the wordings of the story, but with the preformulation, questioning and reformulation strategies used to focus on the task. It is interesting to see how quickly a shift can take place in students, from a focus on interpersonal relationships, and looking for answers either from the teacher or in their own heads, towards focusing on the learning task, and looking for answers in reading texts. The kinds of communication breakdown that frequently characterise teacher-student interaction in indigenous classrooms are thus avoided. This is because the teacher only asks questions she knows the students can answer, avoiding the common frustrating problem of students trying to 'guess-what's-in-the-teacher's-head'. Far from being culturally inappropriate, this mode of questioning is participated in enthusiastically by all the indigenous students in the classes we have worked with. They quickly learn to predict and use the questioning strategies themselves, and this enables them to begin developing critical strategies for engaging with texts.

Initially, as students respond to the focus questions, they can be invited to come out and highlight the words and word groups they have identified on the overhead transparency. This enables the whole class to watch the process and participate. At some point they might also be asked to highlight the words in their own photocopy of the text. Any words that students cannot identify are left without highlighting the transparency. This is then followed by joint readings of the text, with the students reading the familiar highlighted portions, and the teacher reading the remainder. This process is continued until students are reading the selected text segment fluently. With one-to-one or small group work, this highlighting can be done directly onto students' own copies.

A further intensive strategy is to use 'transformations' of sentences from the story, written out on cardboard strips. This can be done individually, in groups, or with the whole class using a board on which the cardboard strips are placed so that everyone can see them. Again students are asked to identify word groups and words in the strips, using the same types of focus questions, but then they cut out these parts of the sentences and put them back into place. This allows students to successfully manipulate the wordings of a sentence, without the added pressure of attempting to write unfamiliar words. Games are then played with these cutups, such as shuffling and getting students to re-arrange them, turning them over and asking the students to identify and then check them. Once the word groups and their sequence in the sentence are thoroughly familiar, they can then be cut up into individual words, and the same games can be played. By means of text marking, reading along with the teacher, and transformations, even the least able readers rapidly learn to read the story. They are able to do so using the resource of meaning prediction in tandem with their limited graphophonic skills, to identify each word in its context in the text.

After the book orientation it is important that the students read the text until they can read it at close to 100% accuracy. It is not possible for learners to take resources from reading until they can read the model text accurately. Once all students are able to read the story fluently and accurately, it becomes a resource for using its language features in their own writing. The first step in the writing phase of the scaffolding sequence is to ensure that students can identify all the significant words out of context of the text. This can be done using the transformation cutups as flash cards, and playing games such as 'My Pile-Your Pile', until all the words under focus are in the students' pile. They can also be supported to identify words by checking them in the context of the text if they are unsure. When all the students can securely identify words out of context, they then learn to spell them, using Scaffolded Spelling strategies based on 'chunking' of letter patterns.

Scaffolded spelling begins by showing students, first of all how to identify letter patterns that make common word endings, such as *-ing*, *-ed*, *-ly*, *-s*, and so on, and how to chunk compound and multisyllabic words such as *litt-le*, *be-hind*, *rust-ing*, *bodie-s*, *di-rec-tion*. Each single syllable that makes up a word is also chunked into its patterns of Onset consisting of the initial consonant cluster, and Rhyme consisting of the remainder, eg. *l-itt-le*, *w-ay*, *be-h-ind*, *s-ome*, *r-ust-ing*, *th-ought*, *h-eard*, *n-oise*, *l-ook-ing*, *scr-ambl-ing*, *scr-eam-ing*, *scr-abbl-ing*, and so on.

Dividing words into these chunks of common letter patterns makes it much easier for students to remember the spelling of words that they already know from the text, rather than the standard spelling approach that employs lists of decontextualised words that weak readers attempt to memorise as arbitrary strings of letters, like a telephone number. The chunking approach works because it makes explicit the visual letter patterns that constitute the English spelling system, that fluent readers process automatically as they read. By using words that the students already know, within the context of a meaningful text, they are adequately supported to move from ineffective low level graphophonic strategies, such as sounding out, towards automatic visual processing of letter patterns. The teacher may sound out the words as she chunks them, but by saying the letter patterns that make up the word, not the names or sounds of each letter out of context of the word.

In the scaffolded spelling sequence, the teacher may begin by demonstrating with the transformations, by cutting a word into its letter patterns, and then inviting students to cut the remaining words with the support of the class. Each student then uses a small board and eraser on which to practise writing the letter patterns of each word, an activity enjoyed by students at all year levels. One advantage of using erasable boards with indigenous students is that it overcomes the fear that many students have of making mistakes, or of messy writing. Because it is temporary and erasable, they can focus on the task of practising spelling instead of producing a perfect page in their workbook. After students are able to spell each of the words in a sentence, a further step is to get them to write the whole sentence. This can be supported with 'easy spelling', where the teacher writes part of the sentence and the students provide the remainder that they know well. Easy spelling is a co-operative process where teacher and students work together to reconstruct part of a text. In the absence of overload the students are able to develop meaning/linguistic competence at the same time as practising spelling.

By the time the teacher and students have shared a detailed book orientation and carried out the scaffolded spelling activities, much of the deconstruction of a text will have been done. By this time the students will be completely familiar with the model text. They will have a detailed understanding of the text's meaning and will have written some of the text in easy spelling. In addition, they will have discussed why the author made certain language choices when writing the text. They will understand for example that an author plans a text with a sequence of stages, and will have looked at these stages in the model text. The students will also have an understanding about how the author wrote the text. This understanding could

include sequencing words, image building words and how the author included characters' thoughts, feeling and reactions. Once the students can read a text accurately, recognise all the words in the text in and out of context, spell many of the words in the text, and understand the reasons why the author made certain language choices in writing the text, this text can be used to teach the students about writing.

Following this preparation the next step is Reconstructed Writing, a strategy in which teacher and students jointly reconstruct a text. This involves identifying the structure and language resources that exist in a text and rewriting it, using the language of the author. Reconstructing a text may sound like the strategy of *retelling* commonly used by teachers. Although there are some obvious similarities the underlying purpose of the strategy is quite different. While teachers usually insist that children retell a story 'in their own words' the purpose of reconstruction is to use the actual words of the author. Learners with writing difficulties are not aware of the words in texts that are important for making a written text coherent and interesting, rather they expect that the reader will know what they mean. They do not know what they need to write to inform the reader about characters' feelings and reactions, or the amount of description they need to build up images and understanding for the reader.

Since they have never been able to read a text exactly enough to be aware of literary features of texts, they need considerable support to be able to write using these features. This support consists of removing some of the stress of writing for them by helping them take on the actual words used by an author of a text they can read.

Some short texts could be completely reconstructed. However, this strategy would also be used frequently to reconstruct a shorter segment of a longer narrative or even just a paragraph or two. For example, if the teacher wanted to teach students to use image building language they could choose a short section of the text containing a description and work on this. The first step in reconstruction is to jointly construct a 'writing plan' for the text. The plan should be a simple guide to help the students remember the sequence of the writing to be done, and can also remind the students about language features to include. The writing plan will draw on the focus questions used in the high order orientation, and often provide the beginning of clauses, including the conjunctions used to connect clauses in a complex sentences, such as *but*, *as if*, and so on. For example a writing plan for reconstructing the first paragraph of *Good Tip for Ghosts* might take the form of the following.

how far away? where?,
how sure? I heard a noise.
 Pete was looking where?.
 I was how scared?
 I wanted to _____
 but my legs _____.
 I opened _____
 but _____.
 Pete _____
 as if he was _____.

At this point in the reconstruction the student's familiarity with the text becomes apparent. The work done during book orientation initially enabled the students to read the text, now it will provide writing support. The teacher will need to remind the students of earlier discussions or have them again. The students may remember the text exactly. They do not have to remember the whole text parrot fashion, however, but the teacher will want them to remember the sequence of the narrative and much of the literary language you want the students to take over. Good writers borrow from other written texts constantly and have developed from their reading a range of resources they can draw on when writing. Because of this they are able to also develop the flexibility to be 'creative' and invent their own unique style. However, learners without resources cannot be creative because they do not know what they are expected to 'create'. Therefore they must be allowed to borrow the actual words of familiar texts and understand why they are doing this.

The teacher now uses the writing plan to assist the students to say what they are going to write. This is an important step. It is not enough to assume that because the teacher has discussed or pointed out the literary language and made a plan, the students will be able to write it. Typically, weak writers tend to fall back on their habitual methods of writing to produce a product that counts as a 'good try' if they are under any overload. Once the students are completely certain of how to say what they are going to write, they choose the method of writing and write. There are three options which provide increasing levels of support. The least supportive is for the students to write independently. This option would be chosen if the teacher was sure the students were absolutely confident of the content and could spell many of the words of the text correctly. The next option is to use a 'shortwrite'. This strategy involves the teacher and students both writing at the same time. It provides support because the students can take from the teacher's writing anything

they forgot or want to change. The most supportive option is to use dictated writing, in which the teacher writes what the students dictate. There is the flexibility with this strategy for the students to write parts of the text while the teacher writes the rest. This can be done with a whole class on the whiteboard.

Once the writing is finished, the students re-read the completed text. The teacher praises them for taking on the language of the author and reminds them of why it was important to do this. The writing is compared with the model text and students check whether any changes need to be made. Once they are able to reconstruct a text in the way described above, their detailed knowledge of this text can be built on by using it for Text Patterning. Text patterning is a strategy where students use the model text as support for organising the structure of the text, and for learning how to use resources that writers employ to make their writing literate rather than like oral language. The procedure for text patterning includes the following steps:

- The teacher explains to the class that they are going to use the text they have just reconstructed as a pattern for a text of their own.
- A writing plan is jointly constructed, using the original story as a pattern. It is important to develop an overall plan of the staging in the text, and to discuss what information needs to be included in each step.
- Writing begins using dictated writing, shortwrites or independent writing, depending on the amount of support needed. Writing is done for short periods at a time.
- The plan and model text are referred to as students write, and the teacher reminds them of the language choices that the author of the model used in their writing.
- The text is re-read and any changes that need to be made are discussed. The teacher makes positive comments about how the students used the language resources modelled by the author. When the writing is completed it can be presented attractively, and can also be used as a resource for reading and spelling for students.

Before text patterning on *Good Tip for Ghosts*, few students in the classes we worked with had ever written texts above Profile Level 2. A typical student was Grant, aged 15 and currently in Year 8 high school. Before beginning the Scaffolding work with his class, Grant's independent writing consisted entirely of recounts or observation-comments at Level 2, exemplified by the following (Text 6), written after a year of 'bridging' intended to prepare him for entry to mainstream high school. It is an edited final draft.

Text 6 *Going Hunting* by Grant

In the holidays I went back to my land we always go hunting in the car and we shot one kangaroo. Then we cooked the kangaroo in the fire and ate some of the meat and we took the rest of the meat to my family. After that we went back to Ernabella then I went sleep and in the morning I had breakfast and went to the shop. I bought chips and sprite then went back to my house and watched a video about the running man, then I switched the video off and put a computer game in and played on the game. It was good to play and I had fun.

While the subject matter of Text 6 illustrates something of the diversity of Grant's everyday experience in a changing culture, it could hardly be described as a coherent story, in terms of either indigenous or western traditions. It falls somewhere in between, generated out of neither cultural tradition, but rather from the dysfunctional contexts of writing activities in community schools, in which students are not given sufficient direction in how to write beyond stringing events together, one after another. Although it represents the outcome of Grant's seven or eight years of schooling, it certainly does not display the literacy skills he needs to participate successfully in secondary school, at any of the levels we have been discussing, of subject matter, text organisation, discourse sequences, grammar features or lexical choices. In contrast, the following (Text 7) was written by Grant following a Scaffolding sequence with his class, using *Good Tip for Ghosts*. The first paragraph was written jointly with the whole class, with each student taking turns to write a contribution on the board. The remainder Grant wrote using a writing plan constructed jointly with the class.

Text 7 *The Scary Cemetery* by Grant

Close by under some old broken gravestones, I thought I heard a scary sound. Ethan was staring at the gravestones too. I was so scared I was shaking. I wanted to hide but I couldn't see a tree in the dark. I opened my mouth to shout but my tongue wouldn't work.

It was a soft, crying noise. It sounded like someone who was terribly sad. It was coming our way. I just stood there staring in the direction of the crying. I wished I could cover the moon so that I would be invisible. The crying grew louder. It was coming towards us.

Then we saw it. Or him. Or whatever it was. An old woman with a bent broom. She was sweeping a floor, looking for something. She was walking slowly towards us. She was carrying her dirty old broom and in the other hand she had a dust pan. Ethan and I noticed it the same time. She didn't touch the ground. She was floating above the ground. She was moving across the gravestones about thirty centimetres above the ground.

We both shouted the word in the same time "Lets run". And then we ran. We ran through the gravestones. Scrambling. Screaming. Scrabbling. Not noticing the slithering snakes going out of our way. Not even looking back at the gravestones. Not daring to stop and turn and look at the old woman.

Finally I found a gravestone with a door open. So we crawled into the grave. It had no coffin and fresh air, so we sat down. Not talking, not laughing, not even thinking. Why have we come to this horrible cemetery? Silly. Silly. Silly.

In this first step in text patterning, Grant has chosen to stay fairly close to the original story. He has used the wording of the Paul Jennings text for support, where he felt it necessary, but has also felt confident enough to depart from it significantly, in subject matter, and language choices. In further steps in text patterning, he will rapidly become more familiar with the process of writing from a plan, and become confident enough to take risks with new stories. Considering the level at which Grant was writing previously *The Scary Cemetery* was a remarkable achievement.

Scaffolding factual texts

Narrative is a useful starting point for scaffolding indigenous students up to their appropriate level, because it is a genre that is familiar in their oral experience, and is an enjoyable entry point for exploring new or imaginary realms of experience. However learning to read and write factual texts is also crucial to exploring the new worlds of science, society and environment, and other curriculum areas. As we mentioned above, there are very few students from remote communities producing factual texts that are recognisable as reports or explanations, right up to middle secondary levels. The following is a writing sample produced by a Year 10 student at Wiltja, following a lesson in which the field of goannas was discussed, from the perspective of both the students' experience and the field of biology, resource texts were read with the class, and the structure of science reports was modelled.

Text 8 Goannas by Craig

Goannas are native animals that live in isolated place and they are reptiles
Goannas look as same as area where they live in. They camouflage their self with the area their colour looks like yellowish-brown and they eat insect and dead animals

Goannas breed about six eggs

Aboriginals hunt goannas for food and the fat inside the goannas are used for medicine.

Because it followed intensive discussion of the field, and modelling of the structure of science reports, Text 8 is above what this student was normally producing, which was no more than simple recounts that would be classified at Profile Levels 2-3. However it is still well behind what is required of Year 10 students, who should be writing at Profile Level 8 to matriculate to senior secondary school. Writing of this text was followed by a scaffolding sequence taught by a teacher at Wiltja over fifteen half hour lessons, spanning six weeks. First the class learned to fluently read and reconstruct a Profile Level 4 science report on goannas, using the same reading preparation, spelling and text reconstruction strategies described above for *Good Tip for Ghosts*. This report is reproduced below as Text 9

Text 9 *Goannas* from Barry Silkstone (1997)

Australia is home to 25 of the world's 30 monitor lizard **species**. In Australia, monitor lizards are called goannas.

Goannas have flattish bodies, long tails and strong jaws. They are the only lizards with forked tongues, like a snake. Their necks are long and may have loose folds of skin beneath them. Their legs are long and strong, with sharp claws on their feet. Many goannas have stripes, spots and other markings that help to **camouflage** them.

All goannas are daytime hunters. They run, climb and swim well. The largest species can grow to more than two metres in length.

Goannas hunt small mammals, birds and other reptiles. They also eat dead animals. Smaller goannas eat insects, spiders and worms.

Male goannas fight with each other in the **breeding season**. Females lay between two and twelve eggs.

Once they were confidently reconstructing the report at this level, the students were much better prepared to read resource texts at their own age level, within the same general field. This is because they were learning to manipulate the kinds of language features expected in science reports, such as:

- Staging of reports in animal classification of General Classification (first paragraph in Text 9), Appearance (second paragraph), and Behaviour (remaining paragraphs).
- Sequence in Appearance stage from body shape through body parts, and in Behaviour stage from hunting to breeding.
- Clauses that express 'are' and 'have' relations by which science describes and classifies phenomena (most of the clauses in Text 9).
- Complex nominal groups that describe phenomena, such as *...flattish*

bodies, long tails and strong jaws, ...stripes, spots and other markings that help to camouflage them, ...more than two metres in length, and so on.

- Technical terms, like *monitor lizards, species, breeding season* (for more detail about the language of school science see Wignell, Martin & Eggins 1993, Rose 1997).

In the process of learning to manipulate these language features, the students had learnt crucial information about how science classifies species taxonomies, and about how a science report in this field classifies and describes an animal. The next step was then to provide scaffolding for students to read a Profile Level 7 reference text on goannas, in order to get more detailed information on goannas, written in more elaborate forms. This information was then used to elaborate their reconstructed reports, as the Text Patterning stage of the scaffolding sequence. The product was a new text that each student had constructed for themselves on the scaffold provided by the reconstructed report.

In the next phase more scaffolding activities were conducted on high level reference texts about Komodo Dragons, another type of monitor lizard that the students were intensely interested in. The final stage was for each student to produce new texts independently on Komodo Dragons. The following, Text 6, is the first draft of a report produced by Craig, the author of Text 4 just six weeks previously.

Text 10 *Final Report* by Craig (first draft)

The largest of all the lizards would be the Komodo Dragon which has a strong body and also a long tail. The Komodo Dragon has scales all over its body and can grow to ten feet long. The Komodo Dragon has a very visible earhole and you can see their nostrils on the end of their snout. The Komodo Dragon has the same tongue like the goanna in Australia, the tongue is forked like a snake. The Komodo Dragon has teeth, less than an inch long which is covered by spongy gum.

The Komodo Dragon is an Einstein of its own world of reptiles. The Komodo Dragon knows that he has caught food before in an area where there are animals. The Komodo Dragon ambushes its prey, the dragon knows that there is a goat or a deer coming towards him. The way the dragon knows is because it has its tongue sticking out of its mouth. When the animal gets close to the dragon, the dragon does not show a sign of excitement.

The dragon has six-sense which is a combination of smell and taste. When the Komodo Dragon sticks its tongue out, the chemical on the goat or the deer is collected by the tongue. Then the chemical from the goat or deer

drops down to the pond, then information is sent to the brain. The Komodo Dragon then catches the prey and kills the prey. If the dragon bites the prey then it dies in a different way, which is poison from the dragon bite. If the dragon gets its prey it bites its throat and shakes crazily, and then it swallows its prey. The dragon swallows its prey helped by thick gobs of spit. The Komodo Dragon coughs out anything it can't eat, like the horns or fur.

The Komodo Dragon eats once a month and eats incredible mounds of food. It takes several weeks to digest.

This remarkable flowering of factual writing skills demonstrates the potential of indigenous students like Craig to read, write and achieve at the appropriate levels for their years. Despite this potential, Craig's class group had never written texts like this before because they had not been previously taught to read at their year levels, nor how to use the literate resources from their reading, in order to write successfully.

The scaffolding strategies outlined above offer the opportunities that indigenous students are asking for to read and write at their year levels. They are not an instant panacea, but require consistent application within a curriculum framework that is properly sequenced and paced to enable students to make rapid, but realistic progress. Currently we have found, like Malcolm, M. Christie and Folds, that this kind of systematic programming and focused teaching is a rarity in indigenous community schools, where the majority of students' literacy levels are so out of kilter with the mainstream curriculum goals for their years. In contrast the rapid improvements attainable with scaffolding strategies enable teachers to set clear academic targets for their indigenous students, and program and teach to these goals.

The schools we are working with have clearly demonstrated that the scaffolding literacy approach can achieve remarkable results for indigenous students, if they are carefully and consistently applied. They are not difficult for teachers to take on, but they do require a serious commitment at the levels of classroom practice, curriculum planning and school management to be successful. This means that teachers and management in indigenous schools must be able and willing to alter the current focus on behaviour management and on keeping students busy with non-productive activities, including ritualised activities such as individual reading of low level picture readers and endless recycling of simple recounts in personal writing activities. We need to think carefully about how to build literacy learning into each curriculum area, and how to select texts for reading and writing that will

enable students to engage successfully with the curriculum at each stage of their primary and secondary schooling. This is already beginning to happen in the schools we are working with, in all classes from Year 1 to Year 10. From starting positions with literacy documented in Figure 1 and 2, these students are already reading and producing texts that are more appropriate for their years, and will have a much better chance of succeeding in primary and secondary schooling than they or their teachers previously imagined possible. We have no doubt that given adequate support and commitment, the scaffolding literacy approach can enable indigenous students throughout Australia to achieve the same levels of success in education that other Australians consider their right.

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