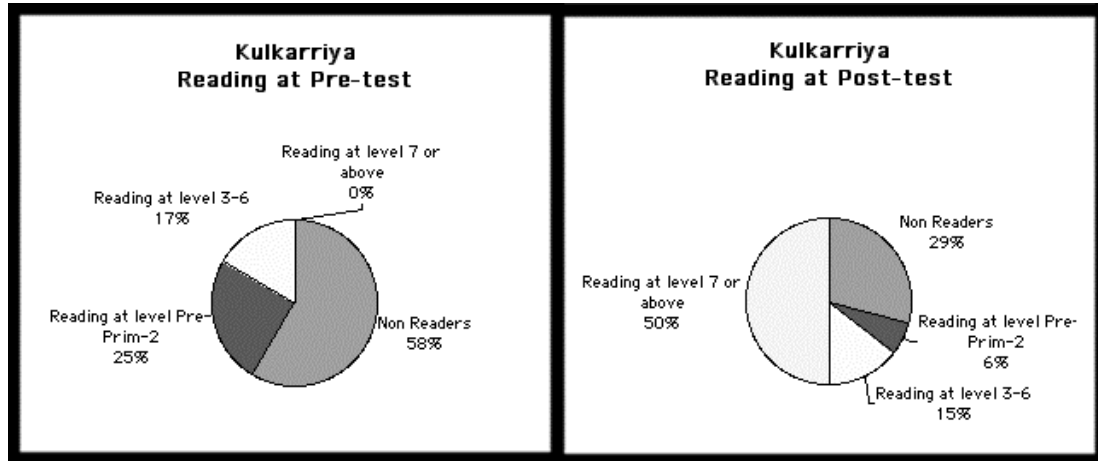


# Scaffolding Literacy

## At Kulkarriya Community School Kimberley region Western Australia

Josh Bell, Principal

The two graphs below contrast the reading accuracy results achieved at Kulkarriya Community School in approximately six months of teaching (March to September 2001). The graphs show that the number of children capable of working independently on text benchmarked above a Year 3 level moved from a low 17% to 65% of the total school population.



The graphs show also the significant fall in the number of children who are non-readers. And, as these graphs represent the pooled reading result across all year levels, it is important to realise that the 29% labelled non-readers in the post test graph includes a significant proportion of year 1 children who make up 16 % of the total assessed school population. Thus, from a situation where a majority of children were classified as non-readers, we now have an environment where the vast majority are engaging and making strong progress in their reading development.



*Playing football in the school yard at Kulkarriya Community School*



*Shanalda Mulligan reading for assessment*

***Before Scaffolding none of the kids in the primary school could read. Now all of them can. They don't read one word at a time now, they read fluently.  
(Vondine Gallagher, Aboriginal Education Worker at Kulkarriya School).***

Scaffolding Literacy is a program that was developed by Brian Gray and Wendy Cowey at the University of Canberra. It was first introduced to us by them as part of a DEST funded IESIP initiative

in 2001. The Scaffolding Literacy program is an accelerated literacy program based on Vygotsky's theory of the "zone of proximal development". The teacher provides the structure for the students to achieve at levels previously considered too high. It is ideally suited to Indigenous students. The English program not only deals with reading but also writing, spelling and speaking.

Scaffolding Literacy is a program that promotes success at all levels. All children's responses are valued as questions are posed in a way that ensures answers are successful. This success leads to;

- Enjoyment, which stimulates understanding and knowledge.
- Maximal participation.
- Children taking control of text independently.
- Introduction to many topics covered in Aboriginal schools.

***We still do Aboriginal language and culture in our school but now we have a good English program as well. Scaffolding works for our kids. (Nita Cox, Kulkarriya School Committee Chairperson).***

On a recent fishing trip with three primary school boys it was starting to get a bit dark as we were making our way back to the car. I encouraged them to hurry up a bit. The response I got was this;

Student 1 - Josh, we're penetrating our way through the bush.

Student 2 – No, no Josh, we're bolting up the bank.

Student 3 – No, no, we're edging our way a little more quickly towards the car.

This was all based on text that we had been studying at school and the children were gently teasing me. However, although the language may not have been appropriate for everyday oral language, it did demonstrate the children certainly had options and choices in their own writing – something they haven't had in the past.

Scaffolding Literacy is a program that relies heavily on effective teaching. It is not a manual or a store of resources that can be picked up and followed in a simplistic manner. A specific interactive teaching sequence is involved which children engage in voluntarily. There are suggested texts for teachers to choose from, many written by authors such as; Paul Jennings, Roald Dahl and Tim Winton just to name a few. The orientation stage of the sequence helps children to understand the meaning behind the text. Teachers have found this process extremely useful in other learning areas where the content of quite difficult passages can be understood and revisited.

The scaffolding process also helps teachers and AEW'S to understand further the structure of the English language and the different writing styles of authors.

*An AEW at our school often asks the High School teacher if she can be a student during the literacy lessons as she finds it develops her skills as well as the students.*

The Scaffolding Literacy program sets its primary focus on the narrative genre, as this is a very powerful and enriching resource for writing development. The program explores the communicative purposes for which authors make different language choices as they construct their texts. It aims to extend children's language development beyond oral language and into literate language. The children experiment in their own writing with the kinds of word and structural choices made by various authors. In the process, they produce their own impressive text.

The following are just some samples of the kinds of text development that is being achieved by the children in this school.

The first two samples are texts written by children prior to the start of the program. They show children who are struggling to find the language resources necessary to express their ideas. This is a problem that is all too common for Indigenous children.

PRE -PROGRAM

*Text 1: Volcanoes, by Junior Till*

<p>Maybe the sun is making the lava runny then the lava is very hot. Then the volcano and volcanoes rise up. It goes through the cracks and go up and busts.</p>	
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*Text 2: Volcanoes, by Shanalda Mulligan*

<p>Under the crust it is a layer called the crust. It is very very very hotter then if you go in the mountain mountain will break and it will spread all over the lava will burn all the trees and camp it will burn the grass and some people and all the animals and some fish animals some little animals up the mountain. It is very hotter than a fire it will kill people in the city or the overseas it will kill a little baby. And baby will die some other days it is very very hot the animals body it is small horrible. Sometimes volcanoes is very bad to people it is very silent to people. Some other days people can die from volcanoes volcanoes is hot then a fire little baby can die from volcanoes it is very hot volcanoes is very very hot hot people climb up the tree volcanoes can crush the trees big rocks are hotter hotter and hotter animals are good to people and to little kids one thing it is volcanoes is very very very very hotter. When you Runaway the volcanoes</p>	
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DURING PROGRAM

The second two examples were written by the same children who wrote the previous texts. These however show the growing assurance in their expressive capacity that is developing.

*Text 3: The Dead Sun, by Junior Till*

<p>The Dead Sun I had finished swimming and was home at last when the sun died. There was no wind, no cloud, no explosion, no explanation. one noon I looked at the sky and saw the dead sun. The air suddenly got cold. The trees stiffened with ice. I become cold, I held my jumper, lit a fire, trying to understand it.</p>	
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*Text 4: Tears of the Waterfall by Shanalda Mulligan*

*Tears of a Waterfall*

Jayna had finished eating and was licking the plate when all the people started crying. Nobody had died, nobody had seen a snake, no lightning was striking, there was no explanation. It was 12 o'clock at night and she was licking her plate and she heard people crying. The air was filled with lots of sorrow. People's tears were falling like a waterfall. Jayna walked to the park trying to understand it.

*Tears of a Waterfall*

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These skills are being reflected in the children's independent writing. The following piece of writing (*Shallums Drowning First Draft*) demonstrates use of simile and clause expansion. This text is a long way from "on the weekend we went hunting recount" which reflects the typical difficulties faced by Indigenous children when they attempt to construct literate discourse. At the beginning of 2001 this Year 5 child could not read beyond a first year text level. Now she is working confidently with Year 5 reading material.

*Text 5: Shallums Drowning, by Tarni (First Draft)*

Later one afternoon Shallum, Yvette, Jenny, Kelly and Jayna were walking down the river road. As they arrived they saw Shallum slice through the water like a hot knife through butter. Then Shallum floated away like a surf boat sliding down the face of a wave. Shallum started to die so Shallum sank down. When a wave arrived and washed Shallum away.

Then Kelly started looking for Shallum. A while later she saw Shallum black hair almost submerged. When I turned to look back I saw Kelly getting flowers from the top of the branch to throw in the water for Shallum death. Shallum eyes were not able to see, his eyes slid back, he had reached the log and started sinking further down.

Kelly started to panic in fright her blood was racing through her veins. Jayna started saying "Poor Shallum drowning, the fat cat I would not help him because he does not let me play with him".

So Shallum could not come back to life and that's The End of Shallum's Drowning in the log place.

The following piece of writing is by a boy who only 12 months ago found it difficult to read even the most repetitive and simple pre-primary text.

*Text 6: by Tyrone Skinner*

Sammo Cox was incredibly big, fit and tall. He had big rhinoceros eyes, a wide mouth and one of those hot balloon faces that looked exactly as though it had been pumped up. He was like a rocket ready to lift off.

The scaffolding program is still developing at our school. We believe the gains will be even stronger when the program is allowed to stabilise and become fully established in our school over the next few years. For us it has been taught formally for a little over 12 months and already the results are astounding. This is a very exciting time for our school.