 DEADLY WRITIN',
READIN' & TALKIN' PROJECT
(DWRAT)

A DEETYA Indigenous Education
Strategic Results Project

FINAL REPORT:
"I Think we're on to something here!"a

1 When Tina, a Year 3 student discovered for the first time that 'restaurant' and 'elephant' both ended in 'ant', she exclaimed 'I think we're onto something here'.

1999
PROJECT PERSONNEL

School Principal: Julie Bishop Dip T, Grad Dip Ed (Language and Literacy)
Co-ordinator: Bronwyn Parkin B.A., Grad Dip Ed, Grad Dip Comm & School, M. Ed
Co-researcher, functional grammar adviser: Rose Ashton Dip T, B Ed, Grad Dip Ed (TESOL)
Classroom Teachers: Cathy Norris, Caterina Mancini, Denise Squire, Travis Bartlett
Aboriginal Education Worker: Muriel O'Loughlin
Aboriginal Education Teacher: Anne Hamnett
Aboriginal Parent Literacy Workers: Teresa Branson, Annette O'Loughlin

Reference Group:
Ms. Jenny Barnett           Senior Lecturer, Language and Literacy Research Centre, School of Education, Underdale Campus, University of South Australia
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Barbara Comber
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Paul Hughes
Ms. Jillian Miller          Principal, Kaurna Plains School, Adelaide
Ms Debbie Moyle             Chair, ASSPA Committee, Salisbury North R-7, Senior Project Officer, Aboriginal Early Childhood, Aboriginal Curriculum Centre, Enfield.
Dr. Martin Nakata           Director, Aboriginal Research Institute, Underdale Campus, University of South Australia
Mr. Greg Wilson             Project Officer, Aboriginal Languages, S.A. DETE
SUMMARY OF INTENTIONS AND ACTIVITY
Aims of project

To improve the oracy and literacy outcomes of targetted Aboriginal students from Reception to Year 7 at Salisbury North R-7 school through an action research project focussing on teaching/learning practices in standard and Aboriginal English (DEETYA agreement with Aboriginal Education Unit, Enfield, November 1997)

Rationale

The literacy levels amongst Aboriginal students are significantly lower than the general population on all measures (Masters and Forster, 1997 p225, MCEETYA 1995). There is little classroom based research on effective literacy pedagogy, particularly in urban schools, nor on how urban Aboriginal children take up the offered curriculum (Gray, B., 1990, Malin, M., 1994, Parkin, B. 1998, Slattery, S., 1994, Munns, G. and Connelly, J., 1996, Munns, G. et al, 1999).

What we did

Classroom teachers and Functional Grammar adviser recruited

Volunteers for the project were recruited from within existing staff once staffing was known for the year. Because our staff is large, we were able to find volunteers for each year level required: Reception/1, 2/3, 4/5 and a 5/6/7. In addition, DWRAT funds were used to pay the ESL teacher as co-researcher for a fractional time of 0.3. This teacher has significant knowledge in the field of functional grammar, providing the expertise needed for successful scaffolded literacy.

Initial and ongoing theoretical input

The classroom teachers involved in this project have been exceptionally committed. At the same time that DWRAT was beginning, the S.A. Education Department decided that teachers who put 37.5 hours of their own time into Training and Development could have a week off at the end of the school year. While equity issues have still to be addressed, this new policy has proved a boon for DWRAT. It is much easier to meet outside school hours than arrange reliefs and disrupt classes. Classroom teachers have given significant amounts of their own time, including Saturdays for training and planning.

DWRAT held an all Saturday workshop early in February of this year. Other school staff were invited to attend the morning session: the fact that we had a total of 15 staff demonstrates the commitment of teachers in this school. Input included an address by Dr Martin Nakata on the role of literacy in Indigenous students’ lives. The DWRAT Coordinator talked on the social and cultural nature of literacy and our role as teachers in ensuring that Aboriginal students were able to use literacy as a tool in their own lives.
Finally a significant proportion of time was spent on introducing the idea of scaffolded literacy and discussing how it might work in each research classroom. Further theoretical input has occurred each term, mostly after school or on weekends. We have had visits from the Canberra Scaffolded Literacy team: Brian Gray, Wendy Cowey and David Rose. This input has looked more closely at the steps involved in Scaffolded Literacy. There has been a regular process of reflection on our practice and on the theory as we talk it into reality.

**Regular planning with classroom teachers**

This school believes strongly in planning and time is set aside at the beginning of every term so that each classroom teacher can plan with the staff who support their classroom curriculum: School Service Officers, Aboriginal Education Worker, Special Education Teacher etc. DWRAT staff have been involved with those planning sessions, ensuring that all staff are kept informed about what we are doing.

In addition, many hours have been committed to planning in detail our classroom practice. We have met often with staff after school, and occasionally during school hours. Because scaffolded literacy is so new, there has been a strong need to look at the curriculum in great detail, particularly developing teachers’ understandings of functional grammar. Because the talk and questioning used in Scaffolded Literacy is new and different, we have also spent a significant amount of time rehearsing and recording exactly what to say in the classroom in order to successfully scaffold students’ literacy learning.

We have been extremely grateful for the support of David Rose, from the Wiltja Scaffolded Literacy Project, who has helped us on several occasions with planning.

**Intensive scaffolded literacy lessons**

The Scaffolded Literacy process has been documented by others (Gray, B. and Cowey, W., 1997, Rose, D., Gray, B. and Cowey, W., 1999). It is redundant to reiterate that information here. However, we stress that the way we have implemented the process in our school will of course reflect our own growing understandings of the process combined with our previous knowledge and experience.

Each DWRAT class had a 50 minute scaffolded literacy lesson four days a week. In addition, the functional grammar teacher gave a focused grammar lesson on Fridays to the older three classes. The scaffolded literacy lessons were team taught in various ways, each class teacher negotiating with the DWRAT team. There were always at least two teachers in each classroom, sometimes more, depending on the support available in the time table. It is worth outlining the different ways each class worked as it shows that there are many paths to collaboration:
R/1 class: DWRAT teacher withdrew all Aboriginal students and some ESL students to make up numbers. Until recently, this group was taught separately from the main class, with little joint planning or collaboration between teachers. This term the classroom teacher has agreed to trial scaffolded literacy in the whole class, so that we can see how it works with larger numbers of young children.

2/3 class: DWRAT teacher and classroom teacher shared the trialling of some aspects of the scaffolded reading process, giving each other moral support. Other parts of the process were carried out in small groups, the DWRAT teacher taking the children with fewer literacy skills while the classroom teacher carried on at a faster pace with the rest of the class.

4/5 class: DWRAT teachers demonstrated the process for the first cycle, with the classroom teacher gradually taking over. Initially the DWRAT teachers worked with small groups of the ‘at risk’ Aboriginal and ESL students for some parts. Most recently we have worked as a whole class.

5/6/7 class: a mixture of whole class and small group work: the classroom teacher has been very keen to learn and take over the process. Generally the DWRAT team has demonstrated once or twice, and then the teacher has taken over with planning support and detailed notes provided.

Throughout the project, functional grammar is implicitly and explicitly taught as a way of understanding text. The aspects on which the functional grammar adviser, Rose Ashton, has focused in the first six months are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year R/1</th>
<th>Year 2/3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structure of narratives</td>
<td>Structure of narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation of time and place</td>
<td>Modality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Antonymy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Similes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 4/5</th>
<th>Year 6/7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structure of narratives</td>
<td>Structure of Information Reports and Narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processes – material, mental, verbal</td>
<td>Theme/Rheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modality</td>
<td>Modality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation of place, time</td>
<td>Nominal groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuation – commas, speech marks, exclamation and question marks, italics, bold font</td>
<td>Lexical cohesion – Synonymy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominal groups which are collective nouns</td>
<td>- Hyponomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical Cohesion – Reference Items</td>
<td>- Antonymy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Ellipsis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Reference Items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Etymology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reading Support Program from Aboriginal Parent Literacy Workers**

In addition to working on classroom literacy curricula, we were keen to find ways that Aboriginal parents could have a recognised and valued role in the school, at the same time supporting their children’s literacy learning. The Reading Support program evolved from an original series of workshops for parents on language issues, particularly dialect and register. Parents examined the difficulties which children might encounter with those
issues in school. The original intention had been that we would find ways for parents to support classroom literacy programs, armed with their new knowledge. However, literacy learning is so complex that it would have been difficult to achieve successfully. Instead, a more manageable role was devised for Aboriginal parents, and a new series of workshops run early in 1999.

Based on the theories of Marie Clay and Brian Gray (Clay, M., 1999, Gray, B., Cowey, W. and Graetz, M., 1998), a training program was developed to teach parents an educationally useful way of listening to children read. Parents attended a series of five workshops, and two follow up sessions after they had been working for a while. We currently employ two parents who work for a total of four day per week, supporting the reading of all Aboriginal children Reception to Year 3. To make sure it runs smoothly, we purchased a complete set of Macmillan Foundations Series readers, Levels 1-17, and the parents have a set routine, based on Gray and Clay, which they work through with children. Each child has a 25 minute session twice per week.

Focused case studies

The conviction of the management team has always been that successful pedagogy should assist all children. We considered that we would not count ourselves as successful unless we had managed to improve the literacy skills of the children most at risk in the research classrooms. Consequently, we identified in each classroom a child whose progress could be the subject of a focused case study.

Three criteria were used for their selection:

- The literacy skills of the child were of considerable concern to us
- They must be children who were settled into the school and unlikely to leave during the study
- They must have participated in pre-project literacy assessments.

One of our focus children did leave during the year, and another was selected to take his place. Permission was obtained from the parents of each child for this closer observation to take place.

Data was collected in the form of notes following lessons, work samples, test results, tape recording of reading, and an interview.
PROJECT PERFORMANCE
Performance targets

That the spread of English profile levels of Aboriginal students in the Salisbury North R-7 school sample reflects the spread of profile levels for the non-Aboriginal school population (from DEETYA agreement with Aboriginal Education Unit, Enfield, 1997).

Base-line data

Baseline data collection

Baseline data was collected in November/December, 1998 and February 1999. Assessments were made of the reading and writing skills of all Aboriginal students in the school, as it was not known which students would be in the research classes in the following year. In addition, as a necessary part of the DART assessment process, the ‘viewing’ skills of Middle and Upper Primary children were also assessed.

The measurement tool for Junior Primary students, ie Years Reception (entry level) – Year 2 was the Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (Clay, M., 1997). Year 3 students who were not sufficiently literate for the Middle Primary test also completed the Marie Clay tests. The tool compares students to a large cohort of their own age, ie 6.0 - 7.3 years, with levels 1-3 being of concern, 4-6 being average, and 7-9 being above average.

Running records were also made of the Junior Primary students reading. They were plotted against national Profile levels, using an adapted version of the scale devised by Gray, Cowey and Rose from the Scaffolded Literacy Project.

The Developmental Assessment Resource for Teachers (DART), published by ACER was the tool for older students (ACER 1997). We would like to acknowledge the cooperation and assistance of Margaret Forster and Wendy Dick from the ACER in our use of the test.

Two versions, a Middle and an Upper Primary test allow for a wide range of literacy levels to be tested. Students from Years 4 and 5 completed the Middle Primary test. Students from Years 6 and 7 completed the Upper Primary test. The test plots students according to their movement within and across the Australian Profile Levels.

The Viewing and Reading tests were marked by individual teachers, using the guides provided by DART. To make sure that we were fair, the Writing samples were moderated by a panel of 3-4.
It must be noted that only two Year 3 students were considered to have sufficient literacy skills to complete the test this year (although the 1998 cohort was able to participate at the end of last year). The other Year 3 students had to be tested using Marie Clay's test.

The students were tested in Viewing, Reading and Writing. Originally we assessed Speaking as well, but the DART assessment criteria in this area gave us insufficient information to plot distance travelled. The data on Speaking is not included in the research project.

The base-line data is included with the post-project data as Appendix 1.

**How improvement was measured**

In addition to the formal tests at the beginning and end of the project, improvement has been measured through the ongoing collection of data in each classroom:

- Audio- and video tapes of literacy lessons, both whole class and small group
- Collection of artefacts in the form of student work samples and teacher journals
- Audio-tapes of teacher planning and evaluation sessions
- Interviews with the four focus students and four classroom teachers
- Questionnaires for the parents of the four focus students and the classroom teachers.

**The outcomes of the project with relation to the performance indicators**

Early in the project, we realised that we could not obtain sufficient information to compare our Aboriginal cohort with the non-Aboriginal cohort in the school. We had whole school data on student writing levels using the First Steps continuum, not Profile Levels, and no whole school data on Reading or Speaking. After talking to David McRae, we decided to use the DART data, which provided us with a national comparison, rather than a local school comparison. This target would be indubitably further away, but nevertheless gave us something to measure against that was nationally recognised.

As mentioned previously, we also decided that the DART assessment criteria for Speaking were insufficient to easily mark distance travelled in a short time, and did not gather data in that area.

**Post project data collection**

All Aboriginal students in the school were reassessed using the same measurement tools in July and August, 1999, 18 weeks after we had begun the project in classrooms. It will be stressed on every possible occasion throughout this report that the time taken to implement our new pedagogy hardly amounts to a full year. In fact, it is a bit more than a term and a half. All successes and failures must be considered in light of that fact.
Most, but not all children have been here for the duration of the project. In addition, some were absent during the testing periods. Because of the need to show distance travelled, the results of children not present for both data collection periods have been excluded.

Comparing DWRAT and non-DWRAT classes
While it might seem sensible in some ways to have compared DWRAT and non-DWRAT classes, there are several reasons that this would have provided little useful data:

- Many teachers in the school have been involved in at least two days of training and development involving scaffolded literacy, and have implemented some of the strategies in their classrooms, including non-DWRAT classrooms.
- All Junior Primary Aboriginal children, both DWRAT and non-DWRAT, have been involved in the Reading Assistance program with Aboriginal Parent Literacy Workers.
- Because we were keen to improve the literacy outcomes of those children most at risk, we were keen that the 'at risk' students be placed in the research classes.

However, I have made an exception where some of the DWRAT Year 1-3 students seem to have made big jumps in comparison with other students. I note these jumps as points of interest. Long term observations would more clearly show their significance.

Discussion of pre- and post-project data

Reception Reading (Appendix 1, page i)
There are only two Aboriginal students in Reception. One child was considered at risk, the other not. In six months, both children are within the average or above average range for letter identification and concepts of print. No information is available on their profile levels for reading.

Reception Writing
Both children are still 'at risk' in their writing vocabulary, but one child has moved from 'at risk' in the dictation test to average.
Year 1 Reading (Appendix 1 page ii)
Students 5 and 6 are DWRAT students. It does seem interesting that in letter identification, sight words and concepts of print, these two children have increased so far, in comparison to the other students. (Student 11, a non-DWRAT student, has also made a large jump in sight words). All Year 1 students have moved up at least 0.3 of a Profile level, some making sense of text for the first time.

Year 1 Writing:
Similarly to the reading results, the DWRAT students seem, according to these tests, to have moved ahead rapidly. Both their dictation and writing vocabulary have improved to average or above average.

Year 2 Reading (Appendix 1 page iii)
Students 14, 15, and 16 are DWRAT students. Student 14 is the focus child for the class, and his progress will be discussed later. The number of students who have reached the highest score is partly explained by the fact that they are all about 8 years old, and 12 months older than the cohort against which they have been measured. All students have moved at least 0.6 of a Profile level in reading. The fact that two students are reading at Profile Level 3.3 in Year 2 is extremely encouraging.

Year 2 Writing
This test advantages children who can write short phonetic words, in that it only counts the number of words and not the complexity. Not only have the DWRAT students increased the number of words they can write in the 10 minutes allowed, but in this year level (not the Year 1’s), the complexity of their written vocabulary in this test is of worthy of note. Here is a list of the words recorded by the five students assessed:
Year 3 Reading (Appendix 1 page iv)

It should be noted that all Year 3 students are at least 1.3 years older than the cohort against which they are being measured in the Marie Clay Observation Survey. As mentioned before, only two of our Year 3 children had sufficient reading skills to be able to complete the DART assessment test for Year 3.

By Year 3, notions such as Concepts of Print, and Letter Identification should be well and truly developed. While this is not so for all Year 3 students, all students have shown improvement over the past six months. Students 17, 18, 19 and 20 are DWRAT students. Student 24 is on a Negotiated Curriculum Plan, which qualifies him for support under the Students with Disabilities policy. He has also been given additional support from the Aboriginal Education Team.

Worthy of note is the improvement in sight word vocabulary over the six months. The other interesting data are the Profile Levels for reading. There seems to have been a remarkable improvement in the level at which children are able to read independently, even over the short term.

Year 3 Writing

Looking at the Dictation data, four of the five children are able to hear all sounds in a sentence. The scores in writing vocabulary again fail to reveal the richness of many of the Year 3 students’ writing.
Year 4 Viewing (Appendix 1 page v)
Because of the need to show distance travelled, it has been important to compare the achievements of the same cohorts of children. Consequently, it makes sense to compare the pre-test data from the same cohort of students when they were in Year 3 last year, with their performances in Year 4 this year. The same process has been used for all year levels.

This cohort shows interesting data in viewing. As Year 3 students, the spread of achievement was spread from Profile Level 1 to Level 4, with the median above the national median. As Year 4 students, the median has actually dropped slightly. However, according to this test, the tail of ‘at risk’ students has at the same time diminished.

Year 4 Reading (Appendix 1 page vi)
As Year 3 students, the scores for reading ranged from Profile Level 1 to Level 4, with the median at the beginning of Level 3. The tail of ‘at risk’ students was long. In Year 4, the median has moved upwards, about level with the national Year 3 median, and the tail has shortened. This suggests that, according to this test, the ‘at risk’ student is catching up at this point.

Year 4 Writing (Appendix 1 page vii)
Under test conditions, the writing skills of this cohort do not seem to have been impacted by DWRAT to any great extent. The median has risen, but not a great deal, and it is still to a worrying degree below the national Year 3 results. Only one of the four children is working at Profile Level 3 and the tail is still the same distance below the middle 50% of students. Three of the four students would have to be considered still at risk according to these results.
Year 5 Viewing (Appendix 1 page viii)
As Year 4’s, this cohort’s viewing skills spread from Profile Level 2 to Level 5. This year, as Year 5’s, the best of them has performed slightly worse. However, most encouraging is that the tail has again moved, and the median has also moved from well below the national Year 5 median to slightly above it.

Year 5 Reading (Appendix ix)
Some more fascinating data. According to this test, in Year 4, this cohort was spread from the top of Profile Level 1 to beginning Level 5. The median was well below the national scores. This year, the most highly skilled student is in solid Level 5, and the ‘at risk’ tail has caught up to solid Level 2, almost beginning Level 3. Unfortunately, the median has fallen slightly, and is in fact still below the national Year 3 median.

Year 5 Writing (Appendix 1 page x)
In Year 4, the median of this cohort’s scores was well below both the national Year 5 median and the Year 3 median. This year the median has moved upwards about half a Profile level in six months. It is still well below the national Year 5 scores. The most ‘at risk’ students have moved from Profile Level 1 to Level 2.

Year 6 Viewing (Appendix 1 page xi)
As Year 5’s, this cohort did quite well in viewing. Their median was above the national median for Year 5. As Year 6’s, the results are looking hopeful. The student who performed best in the test is at Profile Level 5, the median has moved to Level 4, and although there is a tail, that student is not far behind the others, and has still improved almost a whole profile level in six months.

Year 6 Reading (Appendix 1 page xii)
As Year 5, the median of this cohort was well below the national Year 3 median, with a tail of ‘at risk’ students well below that again. This year the student who scored the highest is almost at beginning Profile Level 5, and the tail has moved from low Level 2 to solid Level 3. Most encouragingly, the median has moved to become level with the national Year 5 median.

Year 6 Writing (Appendix 1 page xiii)
As Year 5’s, all our students in this cohort were below the national Year 5 median, even those who scored best in the test. As Year 6’s, their median has moved to level with that national Year 5 median, with one student at beginning Profile Level 4. A tail has developed which means someone has not moved as fast as the others.
Year 7 Viewing (Appendix 1 page xiv)
As Year 6’s, this cohort’s scores were all just above the national Year 5 median. As Year 7’s, they have moved at least half a Profile Level to a median at Level 4. One student has done slightly better than the others, one slightly worse, but they have all moved.

Year 7 Reading (Appendix 1 page xv)
In Year 6, these six students were all below the national Year 5 median. In Year 7, their median has moved to above the Year 5 median, and all students have moved. One student has scored slightly below the others, but they are all quite similar in scores.

Year 7 Writing (Appendix 1 page xvi)
This cohort has jumped a whole Profile Level in six months according to this data. The median has moved from below the national Year 5 median at beginning Level 3, to beginning Level 4. One student has obviously not moved a great deal, moving from Level 2 to beginning Level 3.

Four case studies

As explained above, we decided, as part of the research design, to identify four students, one in each class, for closer observation. We were determined to improve the skills of children at risk, and these case studies would give us more detail about how we were going.

Harry² (student number 6)
Harry is in Year 1, aged six years old. He had trouble in his previous class with behaviour, had speech problems, and was generally not happy with school. His absences from school were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Late</th>
<th>Absent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Term 4, 1998</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 1, 1999</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 2, 1999</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We were very concerned about Harry’s literacy development; his 1998 results clearly marked him as at risk (student 6, appendix 1, page ii). He has had a great deal of help in small groups or one-to-one this year.

² The names of all students referred to in this report are pseudonyms.
The results from the Marie Clay Observation Survey show the dramatic leap in some of Harry’s achievements over the past six months. His concepts of print show a growing understanding, and he is reading independently at Profile Level 1.3. Harry is able to read a scaffolded text of Level 1.7.

Another indication of his development is his writing vocabulary. Here is a comparison of his December and August words:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Vocabulary, December, 1998</th>
<th>Writing Vocabulary, August, 1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>Harry up mum dad look fat pond Rosie he sat the and hat hen went foot for cat rat Matt she</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There has been other evidence to suggest a change in Harry’s participation in school.

- although lateness is still a problem, his attendance has improved, and he has stopped giving his mother such a hard time about coming to school.
- Harry’s behaviour and confidence in the small group have changed remarkably; at the beginning of the year he spent a lot of time fighting and bickering with his cousins, or removing himself from the group to lie in a corner. Now the video footage shows him in the front row and demonstrating close attention to the text we are studying. The challenge now is to get him to let other children have a turn!
- Harry has a very good visual memory, and is able to quickly learn how to read and write the words we are studying from the text. The scaffolded literacy has enabled him to use that skill while his aural skills, hampered by his speech, catch up.

We have kept Harry’s parents informed about his progress and what we are trying to do and a very positive relationship has developed between school and home. Harry’s parents have been very supportive and interested in what has been happening. The Aboriginal Education Worker in our school. Muriel O’Loughlin, has been proactive in keeping an eye on his attendance, telephoning home if he has not arrived, and on occasion picking him up from home.
Before he started this literacy, Harry couldn't read any book. Now he sits down with a book confidently and is able to finish it off. He talks confidently now, as before he wouldn't say much. (Harry's mother)

Daniel (student number 14)
Daniel is in Year 2, aged 7 years old. He is a cheery, charming child who wins the hearts of everyone he meets. He travels with his brothers each day from their home in the country because their parents like our school so much. Consequently, this means some lateness, but his mother always gets them to school eventually:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Late</th>
<th>Absent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Term 4, 1998</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 1, 1999</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 2, 1999</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Like Harry, we were concerned about Daniel's literacy development. His 1998 results were a worry to us (student 14, appendix 1, p iii). The assistance he has received has been mostly in the form of small group work with me, in a class which participates in scaffolded literacy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of assistance</th>
<th>Time given</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intensive literacy lessons in group of six children</td>
<td>50 minutes per day, four days per week in Term 1, more whole class activities in Term 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading assistance with Aboriginal Parent Literacy Workers</td>
<td>25 minutes per day, twice per week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results from the Marie Clay Observation Survey show that Daniel has improved strongly in some aspects of the test, while others are still lagging behind. His letter identification is now fine and his concepts of print are within average for his age. He was obviously not familiar with the sight words in the test, although that has improved significantly when tested with the words we have been working on.

Daniel's independent reading Profile Level has moved 0.6. At this level he is able to read several sentences to a page of repetitive text. This level is still of concern at Year 2. Nevertheless, the fact that he is able to read with confidence a scaffolded text at reading Profile Level 3.0 is an encouraging sign.

Daniel's ability to hear the sounds in a word in a dictation test is now well above average for his age. Although not as marked as some of the other Year 2 students, Daniel's writing vocabulary has improved. Here is a comparison of his December and February words:
"I think we're on to something here!": Final Report of the DWRAT Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Vocabulary, February, 1999</th>
<th>Writing Vocabulary, August, 1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I, dad, big, mum, Daniel, dog, pig, my, to</td>
<td>help, lion, Beast, Daniel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sat, fat, mat, cat</td>
<td>ball, mouse, Damien</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>all, lived, Melvin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>foot, back, Daniel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>look, ran, Bradley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sing, over, Braden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ring, and, Leah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>went, to, Brian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Luke, his, Mum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leah, ball, Dad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>maybe, one, was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resting, day</td>
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</table>

Apart from test results, it is Daniel’s attention to text and to the challenge of learning about literacy that has shown the most change. Video footage at the beginning of the year shows his body turned away from the overhead projector, looking at something else around the classroom. When reading ‘The Sunflower that went Flop’, Daniel was asked to find the words that tell us where the sunflower was growing. On the two occasions when I was observing, he pointed to the illustrations rather than the text.

In contrast, Daniel walked in late to our small group session one morning while I was holding up sight words from the text we were studying. Daniel accurately called out ‘ruins’, with a big smile on his face. He has driven us all mad with his enthusiasm for reading the ‘Lion and the Mouse’ to anyone who will listen, and has been able to reproduce a significant proportion of the text independently. Here is a sample:

```
Oh Prdon Ples da notect
me, if ou spiv me Sumbly
I mabe abl to do
sumten to help ou
he got Cor ind a net
and spiny and fey he see
```

My boys are reading more fluently. I have noticed an improvement in their reading and confidence. I approve of the DWRAT program. My children are benefitting from it.

(Daniel’s mother)
Tina

Tina is in Year 5, aged 11. Of all the students at risk, Tina was and still is one of our greatest concerns. She was new to the school in Term 3, 1998, and was noticeable mostly by her absence, and the fact that it seemed she did not know all the letters in the alphabet. Tina’s relationship with school was demonstrated very clearly by the fact that she just stayed away.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Late</th>
<th>Absent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Term 4, 1998</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 1, 1999</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 2, 1999</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tina’s performance in the DART test can be seen as large dots on the box graphs in the Year 5 data (appendix 1, pages viii, ix and x). Her pre-project test results, as a Year 4, confirmed our concerns: her viewing and writing scored at beginning Profile Level 2, while her reading score was at Level 1.

Tina has recently qualified for a Negotiated Curriculum Plan under the South Australian ‘Students with Disabilities’ policy. I don’t believe that she is unintelligent, rather that she has missed out on important bits of schooling, but this classification does mean that she will get more one-to-one assistance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of assistance</th>
<th>Time given</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intensive literacy lessons in group of 10 children</td>
<td>50 minutes per day, four days per week in Term 1, more whole class activities in Term 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance with sight vocabulary and reading from Aboriginal Education Worker</td>
<td>50 minutes per day, twice per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Support</td>
<td>About to happen, times to be determined</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results from the DART tests show just how much Tina has improved in the past six months. Her viewing skills, according to the test, have moved one whole profile level. Her reading scores have moved from Profile Level 1 to beginning Level 3. Her writing has not yet caught up. At the beginning of the year, Tina’s independent reading profile level was 1.6. We have not yet gauged her current independent reading level, but she is reading scaffolded text at Profile Level 4.

This improvement has coincided with a dramatic improvement in attendance. We wonder whether the success is due to the more regular attendance, or attendance due to success.

Most rewarding about Tina’s success is the change in her confidence level. She walks with her head up, no longer down, and will put her hand up in whole class settings, willing to take the risk of talking in front of her peers. In the small group setting, Tina is absolutely focused on the literacy task, and admonished students who distract her.
Two anecdotes tell part of Tina’s story:

During Term 1, Tina approached the Principal in the yard with her new book, *The twenty elephant restaurant*.
Tina: I can read this book. *(Sits down in gutter with Principal and reads a page)*
Principal: Well, that’s deadly, but I bet you can’t read more.
Tina: I can. *(Reads four more pages)*
Principal: Nothing to say. Knows Tina would never have approached her of her own accord to read one term previously. Puts on sunglasses to hide eyes.

Later, in Term 2, Tina approached me while I was on duty. In her hands was a thick reference book on astronomy. She interpreted for me the photographs of Mars, and told me she was going to be an astronaut. Her confidence has grown enormously. I only hope we can assist with literacy skills to match.

Tina’s spelling has improved with scaffolded literacy, but my observations support the test results, that her fragile skills tend to fade when called upon for any extended text. Nevertheless, we are working on it.

Tina’s classroom teacher has been overwhelmed with the change. She identified as a positive in her evaluation of the project: *being able to be there when students like Tina ‘get it’ – the pride and sense of accomplishment she has is what makes this teaching game all worth it.*

Tina’s mother has noticed the difference in her daughter’s behaviour:

*Tina is reading much better. She still asks for help with hard words. She reads a book confidently and is able to finish a book on her own. Keep it going. It is helping Tina and her brother a lot. I am pleased with their progress.* (Tina’s mother)

**Joanna (Aged 11 yrs:7 mths)**

Joanna is in Year 6 and has attended the school for 6 terms. She has been on a Negotiated Curriculum Plan under the Students with Disabilities policy for most of her school life, with a specific learning difficulty. Joanna travels from a distant suburb each day:

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Late</th>
<th>Absent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Term 4, 1998</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 1, 1999</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term 2, 1999</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Joanna was a quiet student in class. She sat at the edge where possible, head down so as not to attract attention. She did not put her hand up in whole class lessons. In small group work, Joanna often lay stomach down on the floor, with her hair covering her face. She did not volunteer information unless asked. Joanna also spent a lot of time going to and coming back from the toilet in lesson time. She walked slowly. In fact, Joanna seemed to
lack energy to such an extent that it was suggested that she be tested for an iron deficiency. She does not have one.

Joanna’s performance in the DART test can be seen as a large dot on the box graphs in the Year 6 data (appendix 1, pages xi, xii and xiii). Her pre-project test results, as a Year 5, confirmed our concerns: her viewing and reading scored at beginning Profile Level 3, while her reading score was a solid Level 2.

Joanna gets a range of classroom support from the Aboriginal Education and Special Education teams.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of assistance</th>
<th>Time given</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intensive literacy lessons in group of 10 children</td>
<td>50 minutes per day, four days per week in Term 1, moving to whole class activities in Term 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Support in a group of 4</td>
<td>50 minutes per day, four times per week</td>
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</table>

The results from the DART tests show that Joanna’s viewing and reading skills have improved by about half a profile level. Her writing skills have not improved under test conditions, but when scaffolded in class, there has been a remarkable improvement. Here are samples of her writing under test conditions, compared with her ‘Spooky story’.

**Spooky Story (Rough copy unavailable)**
A little way off behind some trees I heard a tapping noise. I felt goose bumps run up my body. I shivered with fear. I tried to scream but nothing came out. It was a crunching noise. It sounded like somebody walking in the leaves. But I knew nobody was home in my family. The noise grew louder.

And then I saw it. Or whatever it was. It was tall and white, glowing like a bright light. One bone fell down off his body. I wished I was at home with my mum in my nice warm bed. I ran through the tall dark trees. The leaves were on the ground.

It was a white skeleton. It was just staring at me. He was holding an old dirty hat. He was walking towards me. With a terrible shuffle. Its bones were shining bright white in the moonlight. He was limping. His back was bent. He had one hand on his back. His other hand was out to get me. He was saying ‘I'm going to get you!’

And then I noticed it. The skeleton - it had no insides. You could see right through it. It was the skeleton from the death.

**Text from DART Assessment task**
This map is in Adelaide. One day I was walking in the city I did not know where the place were and then I saw a map the map took me were I have to go the lady have me the map. To do shopping in the city. And then I say a crack in the city as I was crossing the road it was a red car and a white car that had a crash. And than I went to the pool. And then I went back to the lady at the shop and then I saw a one mory crash when and I saw my mum.
Joanna’s skills have grown slowly and we are beginning to see signs of a growth in confidence. One sign is the fact that she will put her hand up in class now from time to time. Another intervention that assisted her was showing her DART results so that she could see that she was learning.

Joanna was very proud of her ‘Spooky Story’, written after studying a Paul Jennings text. She not only took control of the writing process, but she typed out her story with some assistance. When she took her story to school camp and voluntarily read it out in front of an audience of 60 children and adults, I cried.

**Did we achieve our targets?**

There are two ways in which we have not achieved the specific goals set out at the beginning of this project. One is that we have not explicitly addressed the Speaking curriculum either in testing or classroom programming. We decided that because of the reduced time-line it was more important to do one thing well than spread ourselves too thinly to show significant improvement. I believe our decision is vindicated by the test results.

Secondly, we changed our targets because of lack of available local school data. Subsequently we did not explicitly negotiate an end point. Instead, our aim with Junior Primary students was to move them to Stanine levels 4-6, the ‘average’ scores, and with Middle and Upper Primary students to assist students in moving as far as possible towards the national medians as provided by DART.

As mentioned previously, the DWRAT team worked in classrooms for 17 weeks before we began retesting. Given this extremely short time-line, in comparison with the initial term of one year, we believe the test results are reasonable, and in some cases very exciting. What the generalised DART results do not show are the students who have not moved very far at all, and the tests have identified some students who were previously considered to be managing who are now of concern. We have not increased the skills of all students in the research group, but we have been pleasantly surprised by others. One hopeful observation is that in many cases in the Middle and Upper Primary data, the ‘tail’ in the box graph of those students furthest behind has shortened, indicating that they have caught up a bit.

However, the results are extremely short term. We do not know if students’ skill development will continue at this pace. Unless we continue this project with a longer term study, we are unable to determine the sustainability of the growth.
ANALYSIS OF PROJECT PERFORMANCE
Aspects of the project activity which had the most positive impact

Reading Support Program with Aboriginal Parent Literacy Workers
The employment of Aboriginal Parent Literacy Workers has had a positive impact in two ways:

- Firstly, it has enabled Aboriginal parents to be employed in the school as skilled workers with status. There is now a place for Aboriginal parents to work with their children, and the program has strengthened the trust between school and the Aboriginal community. We are about to embark on a second round of training sessions for parents, this time involving three new schools who are interested in what we have done. The trained workers from our school are now in a position to assist in running the workshops. It has certainly been an empowering involvement for the parents involved.

What I’ve learned most about is the different reading levels of children, and how, if they get the meaning of what they are trying to read, they can read it. (Aboriginal Parent Literacy Worker)

- Secondly, the Reading Support Program is not just a new way of enabling parents to have a valid and productive role in the school. It has in many cases significantly improved the reading abilities of the Aboriginal Reception to Year 3 students. This improvement is indicated at all four levels of the Junior Primary classes, with improvements ranging from 0.3 of a profile level to 2.7 profile levels in the case of one Year 3 student. With scaffolding support in their reading, the Junior Primary students have moved on average 0.9 profile levels, with the older students generally moving more rapidly than the younger. Preliminary testing suggests that although many students still have a problem with decoding new words, they are reading for meaning, rather than stabbing at print. When they read in a way that doesn’t make sense, they are now stopping to reexamine the word, rather than continuing on regardless.

Scaffolded literacy process
We acknowledge with gratitude the assistance of Mr. Brian Gray, Ms. Wendy Cowey, and Dr. David Rose in trialling the scaffolded reading and writing process in our research classrooms. At the same time, the DWRAT team takes responsibility for our interpretations, modifications and implementation of ‘scaffolded literacy’ in our school.

Regardless of the test results, the feelings generated by this project have been overwhelmingly positive. A paper given by members of the DWRAT team at a teaching seminar in Term 2 was entitled ‘The best term we’ve ever had’. We have had comments
from teachers such as 'at last I know there's some solution'. Several positive aspects of the process are worthy of note:

- The sense of being a community of learners, of joint engagement, teachers and students in discussing language and text has been rewarding. One teacher said: the development for myself and some of the students of a passion about how language works has been a positive...we've become 'language detectives'.

- Student transfer of linguistic patterns and spelling knowledge into their own writing has been noted just by DWRAT teachers. One of the school special education teachers has noticed a change in the writing of the research students with whom she works.

- Salisbury North school is perceived by many as one of the northern suburbs 'tough' schools, not one noted for its academic excellence. The project is providing teachers and students with the notion that academic rigour is attainable. This has been an opportunity to debunk the mythology that Salisbury North R-7 students are....lacking and therefore deficit. (Teacher at DWRAT review workshop).

- From another teacher: the constant repetitiveness of the use of the texts has meant that students who would normally feel inadequate have had an opportunity to feel successful in literacy.

- Another teacher said It (the project) gave both the children and myself a sense of power and strength when dealing with text that I am sure many of us did not have before.

- For all teachers, the collaborative nature of the project has been tremendously rewarding. We have had to develop a great deal of mutual trust in order to take risks with new learning, not just in front of a class of children, but with our peers.

- As for a lot of learning, when we have seen a new light, the old way isn't good enough any more.

- We have noticed a change in the power relations between student and teacher. You can't be a community of learners, taking risks together, and keep the same distance.
Despite the apparent didactic nature of scaffolded literacy, students do challenge and question more, and not always in the context of the text. They learn to take control.

We have tried to ensure that other teachers in the school have been kept informed of our progress, and our enthusiasm has rubbed off. Several are keen to work with the research teachers and implement scaffolded reading and writing in their own classrooms.

Effective teacher development
As mentioned above, one of the overwhelming positive responses from teachers has been the enthusiasm for the collaborative teaching. The classroom teachers have worked extremely hard in learning new knowledge about functional grammar and changing old pedagogical patterns. I believe that the way we have gone about this process is leading to long lasting change. When asked to rate how they would go on their own, three of the four classroom teachers circled 7-10 ie confident to very confident, as long as they were provided with scaffolding notes. As one teacher said You can’t go back. I am confident that three of the four teachers are able to manage scaffolded literacy on their own, as long as we are able to assist them with selection of text and supporting notes. The fourth teacher is growing in understanding and commitment. I believe she will be capable of carrying the process on by the end of the year.

Key factors that have supported this success

Committed Principal
This factor is fundamental. The Principal supported the project in so many ways: in initiating the submission, identifying classroom teachers who might be involved, arranging class lists so that we had enough Aboriginal students in each research class to give us some good data, freeing up the research coordinator from some school business so that I could be focussed on the task, liaising with the Aboriginal community and keeping them informed, monitoring as we went along, making sure that everyone was happy, thinking about where we go from here. It has been a great privilege to work with her.
Reading Support Program

Manageable and achievable process for parents
The system we have devised requires parents to go through a step by step process each session. They know what they are doing, and they can see through their records that children are indeed progressing.

Support from the Aboriginal Education Worker
Muriel O'Loughlin has played an invaluable role in liaising with parents, giving us feedback on what might or might not work, and recruited our parents. Her role has been complemented by the Parent Literacy Workers who are assisting in the planning and running of the next round of workshops this term.

Adequate training at the beginning, with follow up support as needed.
We began the program with parents who had completed 5 hours of training. This was sufficient for some to get started, but follow up was necessary to clarify aspects of the process. We have had two more hours of training, as well as a meeting of all parents involved each term, to review each child and discuss any issues arising.

Co-operative and flexible teachers
Classroom teachers have tolerated children being removed from their lessons for 25 minutes at a time for this program. However, some have noticed a difference in the literate behaviour of their children; I have noticed a difference in the children's confidence and willingness to take risks and have a go (Year R/1 teacher).

Flexibility
If we want parents to be involved, we have to take into account other concerns which affect their attendance from time to time. We balance our need for regular attendance by parents with the flexibility needed for the rest of their lives. Within the boundaries of departmental processes, we try to negotiate and accommodate parents' needs.
Scaffolded literacy program
Reasons for success for the teachers:

Skilled staff
Highly skilled DWRAT staff with significant knowledge about literacy and functional grammar have also been of fundamental importance. They have also had skills in working collaboratively with staff and they had already established relationships with staff. Highly skilled and generous support from the Scaffolded Literacy team has also allowed us to move more quickly. In addition, half of the teachers in the project had already completed the Functional Grammar course and were familiar with grammatical concepts they had to teach. The shared vocabulary made the planning and implementation easier.

Detailed support notes
Brian Gray, Wendy Cowey and David Rose supported us on many occasions with the supporting notes to accompany texts. One of the reasons this process can be taken over by teachers is the detail of notes provided. When teachers start scaffolding, we put words into their mouths. We help them develop the language for talking about text because generally teachers do not have sufficient understanding of text and grammar. They have never been taught it.

Mutual trust and collaboration amongst staff
Collaboration between staff was critical. It took time to build mutual trust. One important facet of this has been the willingness of DWRAT research staff to teach, model and trial scaffolded literacy in classrooms alongside classroom teachers. It created a climate of enquiry, and learning together and willingness to take risks.

Reflection and planning time
Sufficient, focused, and ongoing training and development, at the beginning of the project, and throughout was fundamental to success. We reflected and planned at least twice per term, and as needed when new parts of the process were about to begin.

Sufficient funding
The SRP funding allowed us to buy the necessary resources for teaching; books, white boards, people and time. It also provided resources for research, for documenting what we had done to show others; a good video camera, some cassette recorders, and transcriptions of classroom talk.
Reasons for success for the students

Repetition
The repetitive nature of the process does not bore students, it gives them a chance for success.

Small steps
The slow and steady nature of scaffolded literacy means that the process is achievable by all students; no quantum leaps needed. New learning builds on old learning in clearly apparent ways. There is no mystery in this process.

Spelling
Because spelling within this program employs students’ visual acuity, and is not just reliant on phonics. This seems an important difference. We have observed children, Aboriginal and ESL, unable to ‘sound out’ words, who could write whole sentences using their visual memory. It is becoming increasingly clear to me that this reliance on aural acuity disadvantages children whose pronunciation is so different from standard English.

New vocabulary
Teachers and students alike develop together a language for talking about language. This unlocks the secrets about why one piece of writing is successful and another is not. We are no longer working on hunch. We can show students how to do it themselves. Students are developing a sense of control over their own writing and a critical eye for other people’s writing. Can I put that mark in to show that she is excited? (Year 1 ESL student).

New confidence builds confidence.

Consistency and familiarity
There are many reasons why students are successful within the reading support provided by Aboriginal Parent Literacy Workers. Some are well documented by Marie Clay. Students know what to expect when they arrive for a session; the routine is clear and predictable. In addition, the warmth with which they are greeted, and the familiar Nunga English with which they are greeted moves the school experience further along the continuum towards home. For students who are placed in that transition from home and school, this must be a comforting and reassuring experience.
Aspects of the project which were least successful and why
Teaching is generally a very isolated activity, and it is not easy for some teachers to take the risk of co-teaching. While five out of the six teachers involved in the DWRAT project reflected together on their own practice and trialled and implemented new pedagogy, it took longer for one teacher to agree to work collaboratively. However, just this term she has allowed me to work with the whole class. While the scaffolded literacy process is very new in this room, we are already being taken by surprise by what some Reception and Year 1 students can do.

The following aspects are not ‘least successful’, but questions and issues which remain clouded or partially answered in the short time span of the project. These issues we identify as providing possible direction for further research:

Literacy as a social tool
The DWRAT management team is committed to the notion that understanding literacy as a social tool is crucial to the teaching of Aboriginal students. In order to use effectively the literacies they learn at school, they need to recognise and practice their uses in the real contexts of their lives. While scaffolded literacy has been successful in raising student awareness of the linguistic structures and features of written text, it does not necessarily make explicit the social nature and purposes of literacy. At this stage in the project, our team is only just beginning to work out how to transfer the knowledge about written narrative texts to the study of transactional texts, written or spoken, that students need to operate successfully in their communities. This remains a nagging concern and one we need to follow up if Aboriginal students are going to use this new knowledge successfully in their lives outside as well as inside school. Without this transfer to real lives, only school literacy uses are really affected. We think that transfer is possible, but we want time to explore the issue.

Keeping all stakeholders informed and confident
One of the underlying tenets of the school is that small group work with an informed adult is a very valuable context for students’ learning. Consequently our school resources are organised so that each class has one lesson per day with two or three adults in attendance. However, teaching literacy through scaffolding is highly skilled, and requires a substantial theoretical base. The School Service Officers and Parent Literacy Workers who had previously played important roles in literacy lessons were sometimes left bewildered and unsure of their roles. If this program is to be maintained, attention must be paid to the training and development of School Service Officers, Aboriginal Education Workers and Parent Literacy Workers.

Time tabling
Organisational issues still need to be resolved. Parts of the scaffolding process can be done successfully as a whole class, while other aspects are best achieved in small groups. The process does not cycle neatly over a five day time-table. We are still trying to work through this issue.
Supporting different ability groups
We are still grappling with the issue of how to deal with heterogenous groups of widely differing abilities: sometimes it works well, sometimes the advanced students are bored or the strugglers are left behind. We can see the potential for scaffolded literacy for extending the advanced students, but need more time to address this issue.

Development of text support notes and choice of text
We still have a great deal to learn about what makes a text useful to study, and at this stage rely considerably on the advice of the scaffolded literacy team in our text choices. In addition, the support notes support the teacher in the teaching of texts which allow them to become independent so quickly. Because of the highly skilled nature of text analysis, we are almost always reliant at this moment on text notes supplied by the Scaffolding Reading team, although we have done some ourselves. As materials are developed this will change, but currently resources are scant.

Pace
The past six months have been a very intense experience. We think we have made a difference, but if we continue like this we will have burnt out in another year. We have yet to find a pace for change which is sustainable in the long term.

Resources needed for sustainability of Reading Support Program
The organisation of the Reading Support Program took considerable time, in no small part due to the paperwork required by the department in order to get parents employed. The Principal and I would have spent 40 hours dealing with issues arising from the employment of Parent Literacy Workers. This has continued to be the bane of our existence, as contracts must be worked out a term in advance. If for some reason parents have not completed the contract, we spend endless hours negotiating to make up time. We are working on this aspect. The supervision and support of parents, as well as monitoring student progress and attendance is also time consuming, and could be accomplished part time by a skilled parent. We are currently looking for more funding for the year 2000 so that we can continue the program. We have an Aboriginal parent who is being trained for a supervisory position.
Attendance
Our data poses issues about attendance, at least in the short term. We have collected attendance and lateness statistics from the past three terms. Some of our students, such as Tina and Harry, have improved a great deal, despite their days away and lateness. Tina’s Year 2 brother, with even more days away per term, was able to complete the DART test and is reading independently at Profile Level 3.3. On the other hand, some students who are absolutely regular attenders did not show much growth at all. Our hunch is that the relationship between participation, success, curriculum content, pedagogy and attendance is complex and needs closer inspection. Our data might be useful for investigating the relationship between attendance and learning. We are willing to make it available for further enquiry.

Cultural inclusivity
The question of cultural inclusivity is a challenging one. Our school works hard at helping Aboriginal students belong and feel safe in the school. It is a place where their home talk and experiences have an important place. However, scaffolded literacy, at this moment, is not focussing on cultural inclusivity. Currently none of the texts we have chosen is directly related to children’s home experiences. The most important criterion for choice of texts in scaffolded literacy is their literacy richness, which gives students access to powerful language in mainstream culture. None the less, for a skilled teacher with a critical orientation, scaffolded literacy provides rich opportunities for making links between literary texts and children’s own worlds, for transforming children’s home experiences into well structured and written texts. It provides a language with which we can begin to study language choices of all sorts of people in different contexts, but it also takes a great amount of time. We need more time to see where this can go. Unless we investigate this issue further, there is the potential that Scaffolded Literacy could be simplified to support school learning in a formulaic way that might play a hegemonic, rather than emancipatory role in students’ lives. This would be a shame when it has so much potential.

What we have learned that could be made more widely known

Scaffolded literacy
We have learned how to scaffold literacy so that Aboriginal students, at least in this short term, are successful learners. There are many aspects that we still need to work on, but we can demonstrate some profficiency and model the process at different year levels. We have video and audiotape transcripts, demonstrating all parts of the scaffolded literacy process with different year levels.
We are keen to talk about the issues involved with scaffolding, to highlight its very real strengths, and problematise the idea that Scaffolded Literacy is some new magic solution that will fix Aboriginal literacy once and for all. No schema in the past have solved literacy problems in isolation, and we support the notion that there is no such thing as a quick fix. We would like to discuss the complexity of issues surrounding literacy, and see Scaffolded Literacy in its wider context.

Aboriginal Parent Literacy Workers
We should soon be able to run workshops for parents on how to support their own children in reading and describe how we have set up our program so that it runs smoothly with small amounts of maintenance. We are able to demonstrate the distance travelled within a few months according to Reading Profiles and talk frankly about what we have achieved, and where we need to continue working.

Conclusion
The past six months have been fascinating. It has been a privilege to have the time, money and flexibility to investigate teachers’ and Aboriginal children’s literacy learning in such detail. The project has provided great direction for future work and raised large numbers of questions. We are in a continual state of praxis; trying to synthesise our new learning with what we already knew about literacy in social contexts.

At this moment, we have built up an Aboriginal Education team in the school which is of high quality; a supportive and knowledgeable Principal, DWRAT Research Co-ordinator, functional grammar adviser, two Aboriginal Education Workers who are committed and increasingly multi-skilled, an Aboriginal Education Teacher who is using DWRAT knowledge in her own work with classes and many teachers who are familiar to varying degrees with scaffolded literacy. We have an assessment process established that should not be so difficult to maintain and a recording system for data already established. We have strong Aboriginal community support. Those who have been in Aboriginal education for some time would know just how rare it is to have all these conditions in place simultaneously.

Because of the dearth of any classroom research in Aboriginal education, let alone longitudinal research, it seems to us a shame not to make use of these conditions. We have data on some children from 1997 as well as all the data from this project. If we have the chance to continue our program with some of the extra resources provided this year, we would have the chance to investigate from the following:

- how Aboriginal children take up the challenges and support of Scaffolded Literacy over the next 12 months and the next couple of years
- document and examine our pedagogical practices in detail
- discover how to make use of Scaffolded Literacy for emancipatory purposes
- what level of support is needed for teachers to effectively change their practices in the long term
- what happens to students’ progress when the skilled and intense support is removed
from the classroom and teachers are mostly on their own
• how to build up the Aboriginal Parent Literacy support and determine its sustainability
• evaluate the effect of the Reading Support program on Aboriginal children’s reading skills throughout their Junior Primary Years
• explore which other aspects of literacy might be supported in this way. It feels like a breach of faith to stop the Reading Support Program when it has already had such important social and cognitive results.

The Principal of Salisbury North R-7 and the DWRAT Research Co-ordinator have between them over 40 years in Aboriginal Education. If we are excited, then there just might be something worth investigating further. At the same time, we view with caution the rapidly increasing enthusiasm for Scaffolded Literacy as the next ‘quick fix’ from people who have heard about it at some conference or other and are keen to visit. If the potential of this process is to be reached, we must ensure that we know what we are doing, and make sure that those who do work with it know what they are doing. This is time to make haste slowly for the long term benefit of Indigenous students

We are determined to continue investigating Scaffolded Literacy next year in this site. We hope that the State and Federal education personnel involved in the Strategic Results Project will support us in pursuing what we have begun together so that we can sustainably increase the literacy outcomes of Indigenous students.

Bronwyn Parkin
Research Co-ordinator
DWRAT Project
25th August, 1999
References


Slattery, S. (1994). Outline of English Language Acquisition (ELA) for Aboriginal students. In National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia, Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education. Adelaide: University of South Australia Printing.
Appendix
Reception Reading Data: Marie Clay Observation Survey

Rec. Sight Words Feb-Aug 1999

Rec Letter ID Feb-Aug 1999

Rec. Concepts of Print Feb-Aug 1999

Reception Writing Data: Marie Clay Observation Survey

Rec Dictation Feb-Aug 1999

Reception Writing Vocab Feb-Aug 1999
Year 2 Reading Data: Marie Clay Observation Survey

Year 2 Writing Data: Marie Clay Observation Survey
Year 3 Reading Data: Marie Clay Observation Survey

Year 3 Concepts of Print Feb-Aug

Year 3 Letter ID Feb-Aug 1999

Year 3 Sight Words Feb-Aug 1999

Year 3 Reading Profile Levels Feb-Aug 1999

Year 3 Writing Data: Marie Clay Observation Survey

Year 3 Dictation Feb-Aug 1999

Year 3 Writing Vocab Feb-Aug 1999
Reading: National Performances

Yr 5 cohort 1999

Form B

Form A

National Yr 5 1999 (9 students)

Yr 4 SN 1999 (same 9 students)

100%

75%

50%

25%

Tina

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DART Middle Primary English

147
Reading: National Performances

Yr 7 cohort 1999

NELS

Form B
27

Form A
28 26
27 25
26 24
25 23
24 21
23 20
22 19
21 18
20 17
19 16
18 15
17 14
16 13
15 12
14 11
13 10
12 9
11 8
10 7
9 6
8 5
7 4
6 3
5 2
4 1

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