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# SCAFFOLDING ACADEMIC READING *and* WRITING *at the* KOORI CENTRE

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## ■ Abstract

This paper describes a “scaffolding” methodology for teaching academic literacy that has achieved outstanding success with Indigenous adults returning to formal study at the Koori Centre, University of Sydney. The paper begins by outlining the background to the Koori Centre program and the literacy needs of Indigenous students. We then describe the methodology, including the approach to teaching academic reading, making notes from reading, and writing new texts using these notes. These are key skills required for academic study, which Koori Centre students need to learn. The paper concludes by describing some of the results for students’ literacy development and changing approaches to teaching in the Koori Centre.

## ■ Introduction

This paper introduces a highly successful methodology for teaching academic literacy with Indigenous adults returning to formal study that has been developed by staff at the Koori Centre, University of Sydney, over the past three years. The Koori Centre provides education programs and support facilities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and offers core subjects in Aboriginal studies across the University. The literacy methodology, known as scaffolding, underpins a pilot project with students in our Tertiary Preparation Course and Diploma in Education (Aboriginal), which prepares graduates for teaching in schools. Since the methodology has proven so useful for our students this paper focuses on describing the teaching strategies. Although the following description is necessarily brief, we hope it may inspire other Indigenous programs to consider taking them on. We begin by outlining a little of the historical background to Indigenous education and the Koori Centre that inspired the scaffolding project, and end with some of the results for students’ literacy development and our changing approaches to teaching.

## ■ The Need for Academic Reading and Writing at the Koori Centre

In common with Indigenous university programs around Australia, a primary goal of the Koori Centre is to provide access to tertiary study for Indigenous Australians who have historically been excluded from higher education. Our students have made a commitment to come back to study, despite past experiences of schooling that were often painful and discouraging. As a result of these experiences, few Indigenous adults who are now re-entering education had successfully completed high school, and many were forced to leave with little more than primary schooling (see Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996, pp. 1-2). This includes students in both our Tertiary Preparation and Diploma courses. It is especially poignant since many of our Diploma students are practising Aboriginal Education Assistants (AEAs) in New South Wales schools and interstate, who have a major responsibility to support Indigenous school students. Like the Koori Centre itself, AEA programs developed as part of a national effort to improve educational participation and outcomes for Indigenous people. This movement has had major successes in keeping Indigenous students in school, and opening up further education for Indigenous adults. However there is

no denying that these improvements have emerged from a history of educational neglect that has left many Indigenous students ill-prepared for the demands of formal study. While many more students are now participating in education, a further challenge is to enable everyone to succeed. We believe that a key to educational success is academic literacy, particularly in regards to reading and writing academic English in preservice teacher education courses.

While all students accepted into Koori Centre programs have enormous potential, many still struggle with the level of academic literacy required. To study independently, university students must be able to read complex academic texts with a high level of understanding, and be able to critically analyse such texts in order to present coherent analysis, argument or discussion in their own written work. They must also be able to structure their essays appropriately, using academic conventions and objective academic language, to demonstrate their mastery of a topic or inform and influence their readers. However, few of our students have had any previous experience of reading academic texts, let alone writing academic essays. As a consequence, many have great difficulty independently reading set articles and completing written assignments. This problem is not made easier by the block release mode of study, which effectively requires students to do the equivalent of four weeks of lectures and tutorials in each one week block, then work independently at home for three to four weeks between blocks, with variable access to community-based tutorial support.

Before starting the scaffolding literacy project, academic literacy teaching at the Koori Centre followed the standard tertiary focus on skills such as referencing, skimming and scanning readings for information, and correcting grammar, spelling and essay structures in students' written work. Our teaching approaches tended to follow the usual academic cycles of presentation and discussion in lectures and tutorials, and reading articles and writing assignments at home. Unfortunately, although each unit of study is accompanied by a set of readings, we found that students rarely read them, so that in-class discussion was often restricted to the information we (and guest lecturers) could present orally, and to students' personal experience. Because students' experience of academic reading was so limited, their written work tended to develop very slowly, so that many were still struggling with academic writing by the end of their courses. We know from experience and from our colleagues in other institutions, that these are common frustrations for Indigenous tertiary students around Australia and internationally. Just as traditional teaching approaches in schools frequently failed to include Indigenous learners, it seems that traditional approaches to university teaching are equally ill-designed for enabling educational success for all students.

The Koori Centre recognised the need for an approach that would accelerate students' literacy development in their

first year of study and enable them to take charge of their learning. In 2001 we began collaboration with David Rose in the Faculty of Education, who had developed scaffolding literacy strategies for Indigenous secondary students (Rose, 1999; Rose et al., 2000). These strategies had been independently evaluated as up to three times as effective as other literacy approaches (McRae et al., 2000), and the Koori Centre team found that they could rapidly improve the reading and writing skills of Indigenous adult learners.

### ■ Scaffolding Reading and Writing

The term "scaffolding" refers to the support that a teacher can give learners so that they can work at a much higher level than is possible on their own. Ninio and Bruner (1978) first used the term to describe how learning takes place in families, following the social learning model of Vygotsky (1978). Scaffolding support enables learners to successfully practise complex skills and as they become independently competent, scaffolding is gradually withdrawn. An example is the guidance that a skilled artisan provides to an apprentice as they learn to complete a specialised task. In this process, the teacher models and explains each activity in a task, the learner watches and listens, and then practises the activity as the teacher guides them to do it accurately. In each step the learner takes over more control of the task until they are independent. This mode of teaching and learning is common to all cultures, including Indigenous Australian communities. By these means we learn most of the tasks that are part of everyday life, as well as many of the specialised tasks for making a living.

On the other hand, learning to read and write are unique kinds of tasks, because they involve not simply physical activities, but recognising and using meanings. So scaffolding strategies for reading and writing are designed to focus learners' attention on patterns of language and to recognise the meanings they express. In academic reading and writing these language patterns are highly specialised, and often involve dense abstract concepts and technical terms that are part of academic fields. They are very different from the language patterns that most of us use in everyday spoken discourse, and are often impenetrable for adults with limited or no experience of tertiary study. However, through the use of scaffolding strategies a teacher can support learners to read and write far more complex texts than they normally could on their own. This supported practice allows learners to develop reading and writing skills that they can then use independently.

In the scaffolding process, these literacy skills are practised at three levels simultaneously: first they enable learners to recognise, comprehend and use meanings; second to interpret meanings in terms of the academic field they are studying plus their own reflective experience; and third, to critically analyse how authors construct meanings and to choose how to construct such meanings themselves. Critical literacy is often

promoted as essential for academic study, but this high level skill is only possible where learners can comprehend and interpret authors' meanings. The scaffolding strategies used at the Koori Centre overcome the false boundary that is often drawn between "critical" and "mechanical" skills in literacy by integrating the tasks of reading and writing, of learning in various academic fields, and of critically analysing texts.

The starting point for the scaffolding process is with reading, and what students learn about the patterns of written language through reading is then applied in their writing. The strategies involve two steps that prepare students for reading academic texts, first at the level of the text itself, and second within specific sentences and paragraphs. Detailed reading of a text is followed by note taking, and then writing a new text from notes.

### ■ Preparing for Reading

Academic texts present difficulties for inexperienced readers in two ways. First, the subject matter, including terms used in the academic field, is likely to be very unfamiliar, so even if learners can read a text fluently, they cannot necessarily begin to understand, let alone interpret or critique, the ideas expressed in it. Second, since the patterns of language in academic writing differ from the patterns of language in everyday speaking or writing, reading academic texts can be such a struggle that understanding becomes extremely difficult, if not impossible. This means that preparing for reading must work on two levels: the first is to orient learners to the field of the text before reading, and the second is to interpret the information expressed in the wording of each sentence.

To orient learners to the field, a class may begin with a presentation and discussion of the topic, as in typical academic practice, except that the topic is carefully presented to give sufficient background for understanding the text. The teacher then gives an outline of the text and reads it aloud to the students, who may read along if they wish. The outline should briefly summarise the information as it unfolds in each step of the text, in terms that are accessible to all students in the class, and using some of the key words in each step. This preparation before reading enables even the weakest readers to follow the wording of the text, with general understanding, without the additional load of trying to work out what each part of the text is about, or to recognise all the unfamiliar words in each sentence. If it is a long text, just selected key sections may be read, and the reading may be interrupted with discussion of key points, and by preparation before reading each section in turn.

As all learners now have access to the general meanings in the text, an informed discussion becomes possible after reading. This discussion can be more focused and valuable than a discussion that is not based on academic reading, as it enables learners to apply their

own experience and understandings to interpreting the academic field. This process also enables the teacher to guide the discussion to interpreting and critiquing the text; it is no longer only or primarily limited to students' personal experience, or the teacher's explanations. Discussion after reading provides ideal supported practice for systematically interpreting and critiquing texts. Selection of appropriate texts for reading is crucial here. Texts should be relevant to students' experience, to provide a context and motivation for interpreting them. This is a point consistently made by Freire (1972), who advocated starting literacy teaching with words and phrases loaded with meaning and significance for learners. However, our starting point is not just words or phrases, but whole texts. These texts need to be academically rigorous, but written at a level that the class can access without being overloaded trying to understand them. This means that curriculum and instructional sequences should be carefully planned around the texts used in each step. The first texts should be most accessible, with subject matter that is relatively familiar and motivating for beginning students. As the program progresses, texts become gradually more academic in both language and subject matter.

In the Koori Centre, curriculum planning has been significantly influenced by these principles, so that text selection is at the centre of programming, and texts are carefully sequenced as students develop skills and confidence in reading. We try to use texts that are relevant both to the academic subject areas, and to the lived experience of Indigenous adults, such as the example in the following section. Furthermore, preparing and reading texts is becoming a component of everyday classroom practice, rather than expecting students to read all texts for themselves, and limiting class work to oral presentation and discussion. These may be typical academic practices but they do not provide sufficient support for inexperienced students to engage with reading, and they miss vital opportunities for jointly exploring texts.

### ■ Detailed Reading

After reading the text, the next step is then to work through one or two pages of it in detail, identifying the key elements of meaning within each sentence. This enables learners to comprehend and interpret the text's subject matter in greater detail, and to recognise the patterns of academic language in which it is expressed. The teacher guides the class to identify wordings that express key information in each sentence, which they highlight and later use for note taking. This process is known as text marking. We use the term "wordings" because meanings are usually expressed not simply in single words, but in groups of words. Three types of cues enable learners to identify and mark wordings: first their context, including the meaning of the whole sentence; second their position in the sequence of words in the

sentence; and third, what they mean in commonsense or general terms. These are three of the cognitive processes involved in reading – interpreting wordings in the context of the whole sentence and what has gone before, attending to the sequence of meanings in a sentence, and then recognising what each wording means. With these three cues all learners can find, read and understand the selected wording for themselves, no matter how abstract or technical it is. As this process of preparing and identifying wordings is repeated again and again as the class works through a passage, it provides intensive supported practice in recognising and interpreting academic language.

For the sake of clarity we will illustrate this process with a relatively simple example, from a reading on Aboriginal education that is informed by sociology (Hudspith & Williams, 1994, p. 33), which we have used with Koori Centre classes. The first sentence is:

For academic and social success in school all children must learn the rules of interaction and behaviour.

Although it seems straightforward, this sentence can potentially present problems for inexperienced readers in two ways – it contains abstract concepts from sociology such as: “academic and social success” and “rules of interaction and behaviour”, and it begins with a purpose (“for success”), followed by a demand (“children must learn”). To prepare learners to identify wordings, the teacher first paraphrases the meaning of the whole sentence, for example,

Children have to learn the right ways to interact with each other, and to behave in the classroom, so they can succeed in class and make friends in school.

Here, abstract nouns are rephrased as everyday actions, *interaction* as “interact with each other” and *behaviour* as “behave in the classroom”, and *academic and social success* as “succeed in class and make friends in school”. Also the order of the sentence is reversed, so that the core demand comes first with the purpose after.

After reading the sentence, the teacher then gives a commonsense meaning for each element of the sentence in turn, and asks students to identify the words that express this meaning. For example:

It begins by saying why children have to learn how to interact and behave – so they can succeed in school and in their social life.

This gives the position cue, focuses attention on the general meaning of purpose (“why”), and repeats the commonsense meaning. Students can then read aloud the words “For academic and social success” and highlight these words in their own copy of the text. With a large class, it is often valuable to project the text as an overhead transparency, and underline each element as

students identify them, so that everyone can see the exact words. This is particularly helpful for weaker readers – more experienced students will tend to name the words first, but even the weakest readers will be able to read and understand them once they are identified and underlined on the overhead. As a lesson progresses, we have found that all students gain confidence to actively identify wordings.

The amount of wordings that are highlighted can vary, depending on the text, on the experience of students, and the time available. Working with densely written texts, or with beginning students, most of the information in each sentence can be highlighted in this way, but this requires a lot of class time. Alternatively, for practising note taking and summary writing, just those wordings that express key information may be highlighted, leaving aside much of the explanatory and elaborating information. In this way a passage can be worked through very quickly, allowing more time for discussion, for writing or for reading other texts. Making judgements about what and how much to highlight is a vital skill for academic study and note taking that can be practiced and discussed in these sessions.

#### ■ Elaborating Meanings

Once a wording is identified and highlighted, its meaning can be further explained, defined or discussed with the class. We use the term “elaborating” for this step in reading preparation. For example, the next significant element in the above sentence is “the rules of interaction and behaviour”. This can be prepared with:

Then the sentence says that children must learn the right ways to interact and behave.

However, “rules of interaction and behaviour” consists of technical meanings in sociology, beyond the commonsense meaning of “the right ways to interact and behave”. Once students have identified the wording, the teacher can explain (briefly) that sociologists see social life as governed by rules that members of a society learn as they grow up, and that some rules are obvious and well known, but others are more hidden. This could lead to a class discussion about how rules differ between social groups, although it is important not to interrupt the flow of reading too much, and opportunities for discussion will continue to open up as the reading progresses.

Elaborations can also focus on language patterns, so we have pointed out that:

This sentence is about what children must learn, but starts by giving the reason why they must. This is a common pattern in written sentences. To persuade the reader it is often a good idea to start with the reason, before making a demand like this.

So detailed preparation for reading consists of three moves. The first is the teacher's "preparation move" that gives the overall meaning of the sentence, and then the meaning of each significant element of the sentence in turn. The second is the students' "identifying move", in which they name and highlight the wording that expresses an element of meaning. An optional third move is an "elaboration", in which the meaning can be further discussed, once students have identified the words. This cycle of movement is illustrated in Figure 1.

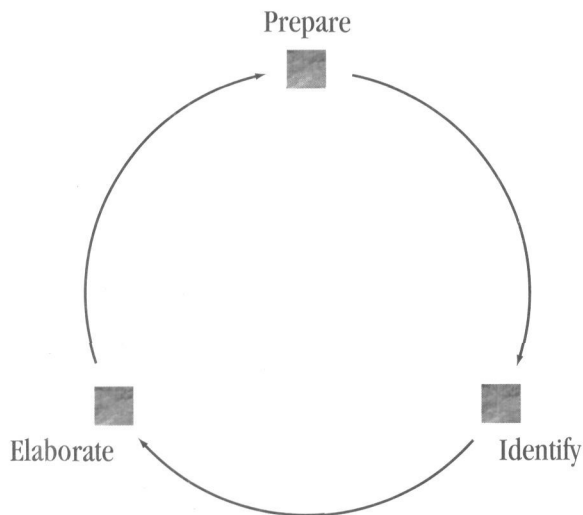


Figure 1. Scaffolding reading cycle.

Importantly, the teacher's explanations are kept to a minimum, so as not to distract students from the task of reading the words. Just enough preparation is given for students themselves to identify each wording, and this provides a strong basis for them to take on more complex information, such as the technical meaning of words, or the structure of sentences and texts. The effect is for students to gain access to complex meanings that were previously locked away in academic language. As a result all students can immediately read a highly academic text with comprehension, and access to these new meanings opens up and provides a focus for class discussion. This allows adult students to interpret their own experience in the light of their reading. For example, further on in the same text is the sentence:

Due to different home socialization practices, Aboriginal children may have greater difficulty than their white, middle class counterparts in discovering and understanding these rules (Hudspith & Williams, 1994, p. 33).

Again this sentence begins with a reason, before making a statement that could be seen as contentious. It can be prepared with:

Aboriginal children may find it harder than children from middle class non-Indigenous families to

understand the rules, because they are raised differently at home.

The first element can then be prepared with: "It starts by saying why Aboriginal children may find it harder – because there are different practices for raising children". Once students identify and understand the technical meaning of different home socialisation practices, they can interpret this sentence in the light of their own experience. In the Koori Centre program, this sentence generated an intense discussion about Koori socialisation practices and the difficulties of children in school. So the scaffolding process continually involves critical literacy, as students tease out and interpret what writers are saying and how they are saying it.

### ■ Drawing Attention to Text Patterns

Beyond these elements of meaning within each sentence, and the patterns of sentence structure, there are larger patterns by which whole texts are organised. For example, an academic article may consist of a chain of reasoning with a sequence of arguments, each of which is a few sentences or a paragraph long. Each argument may include an opening statement, followed by a sentence or two that further elaborates or explains this statement, followed by an example or by evidence. Such larger patterns of written language are also discussed during reading preparation, especially drawing attention to patterns that are repeated. Recognising these text level patterns is crucial for reading complex texts with comprehension, and for using them in writing. The following lesson illustrates this by using the last section of Nelson Mandela's (1995) autobiography *Long walk to freedom*, a stirring piece of writing with a powerful topic – Mandela's growing commitment to the freedom of his people (see Appendix).

In this excerpt from the lesson the teacher first prepares with the meaning of the whole paragraph "why he joined the ANC", and the role of the first sentence in the story, "what he learnt in Johannesburg". These layers of preparation enable most students to read the sentence with full understanding of the author's intent. The teacher then elaborates with more abstract information about a language pattern that is repeated through Mandela's text ("It's the word 'but' that tells us this is not what he expected") and which the students need to attend to:

**Teacher:** This whole paragraph now tells us why he joined the African National Congress (ANC) and became a freedom fighter. It starts off by telling us what he learnt in Johannesburg. So what are the words that tell us what he learnt?

**Students:** But then I slowly saw that not only was I not free, but my brothers and sisters were not free.

**Teacher:** (underlines) Yes, he slowly learnt that not only was I not free, but my brothers and

sisters were not free. But that's obviously not what he expected. It's the word 'but' that tells us this is not what he expected.

The scaffolding cycle is then repeated for the next sentence. First the word "curtailed" is identified and defined, but the elaboration that follows becomes a rich discussion of Mandela's intentions and the racial context he evokes. The students come to recognise the intended effect for themselves, and relate it to their own experience:

**Teacher:** The next part means his freedom was limited. Can you see the words that mean my freedom was limited?

**Students:** It was curtailed.

**Teacher:** Curtailed, exactly. Curtailed is another word for "his freedom was limited" (underlines). And it was not just "my freedom" that was curtailed; who else's freedom was curtailed?

**Students:** Everyone that looked like I did.

**Teacher:** Yes, but the freedom of everyone who looked like I did (underlines). Why do think he uses the words "everyone who looked like I did"?

**Students:** Same colour. Same race. All in the same race.

**Teacher:** Yes. Why doesn't he just say black people?

**Students:** He doesn't mean just black. 'Cause there are Indians too.

**Teacher:** There are Indians, that's true.

**Students:** Are they called coloureds?

**Teacher:** Coloured's a word that people in South Africa use for people who aren't White, yes.

**Students:** He doesn't want to discriminate. He didn't want to generalise.

**Teacher:** Maybe that's what it is, maybe discrimination is the key. Why would you discriminate against people just on the basis of what they looked like?

**Students:** It actually hits home. It's actually easier to understand. It has more impact.

This discussion of the author's intent then leads to a scaffolding cycle in which the teacher draws students' attention to a larger pattern of Mandela's text, his growing ideas about freedom. By pointing back to the wording of the text that has been previously identified and discussed, the teacher prepares the students to identify this pattern for themselves:

**Teacher:** You see what's happening here is that his idea of freedom is growing. So what did it start with? (pointing at text).

**Students:** Himself.

**Teacher:** Himself - as a child. Freedom just to run around as a child. And then freedom to? (pointing at text).

**Students:** To stay up late. Marry and have a family. For his people to live their lives with dignity and self-respect.

**Teacher:** Yes, so now it's not just freedom for himself, not even for his own family, which is what he wanted as a young man.

**Student:** It's turned into freedom for his whole people.

**Teacher:** So it's growing all the way through.

These scaffolding cycles enabled these students, not just to read the text with full understanding, and to engage in a rich discussion about its context and comparisons with their experience as Indigenous Australians, but also then to write a text of similar power, using Mandela's language patterns to tell a story of their own.

### ■ Making Notes and Writing

The next stage of the scaffolding sequence is to take detailed notes from the text. These notes will include much of the information that has been highlighted during reading preparation. Indeed what we choose to highlight is partly guided by what will later be written as notes. To begin with, notes can be written in point form on a whiteboard, with students telling the scribe what to write from their highlighted copies. Students can take turns to act as scribe. This is important, as all learners need to actively participate in order to independently practise later. Notes will often consist of a series of topics, with the notes from each sentence presenting new information about the topic. These patterns of information in the text can form a framework for writing the notes, with a heading for each topic. In addition, groups of notes can be given labels in a column to the left of the board, such as "opening statement", "example" and so on. This makes the structure of the text explicit, so that it can later be used for writing.

In the writing stage, the labels for text patterns then provide a framework for writing a new text using the notes. Again students can take turns to scribe the new text on a whiteboard, with the class deciding how to use their notes in new patterns of academic language. Some of the wording of the new text may be similar to the source text, but the structure of sentences and their ordering may be different, and much of the wording will be the students' own. Reconstructing a text in this way is a highly supportive strategy for practising academic writing. However beyond this level, notes can be used to construct new arguments, and ultimately whole new texts.

These sets of strategies support students to practise a complex range of skills in academic literacy. The first is actively reading academic texts to interpret unfamiliar, abstract and technical meanings. The supported practice in recognising meanings expressed by academic language, both within sentences and in larger patterns, gradually enables students to apply these skills to academic reading in general. The practice with identifying key information and note taking develops skills in research. The practice with writing new texts from these notes then develops skills in organising and

writing academic essays, using information from other sources without the risk of plagiarising.

Together with these broad skills in reading and writing, other features of academic language can also be practised. For example, quoting and referencing can be practised in the context of note taking and writing the new text. Thus certain kinds of language resources can be teased out during and after reading preparation. These include resources that writers use for adjusting objectivity, for example, from "I think" to "it is widely acknowledged", and resources for connecting sentences and text segments, with varieties of cause and effect (therefore, thus ...), comparisons (by contrast, on the other hand ...) and ordering (first, in addition ...). Such language resources can be identified and highlighted in the reading text, and listed on the board for comparing and later use. Students can then build up collections of these resources for their own writing.

### ■ A Scaffolded Literacy Curriculum

The academic literacy curriculum we are developing in the Koori Centre covers a range of texts that students will need to read and write in their academic study, including types of reports, history texts and arguments. The curriculum sequence develops in steps from more familiar kinds of texts to more complex and abstract ones. As far as possible the texts selected for working on come from required readings in other subjects in the course. However the starting point for the curriculum is not with specifically academic writing but with biography (e.g., Mandela's *Long walk to freedom*), in order to start developing the skills of recognising and using patterns of literate language in a familiar kind of text. After reading this text in detail, students in the Koori Centre program chose to pattern a new text on it, with education as the topic, of which an extract is presented below.

#### *Diploma students' writing, 2002, Koori Centre*

##### *"Long Journey Through Learning"*

As a child I learnt without knowing I was learning. I was learning from the adventures of life. I learnt how to ride a bike in the backstreets of Redfern, how to catch crayfish with a stick down at the riverbank, how to make chewing gum from tar off the road, and to play touch footie with my cousins and friends. As long as I listened to my elders and respected them, I learnt everything I needed to know.

It was only when I started school, and I had to learn heaps of new rules, that I felt scared and dumb. From my first day at school I wanted to learn simple things, everyday things like how to make friends, win fights, but stay out of trouble. Later, growing up as a teenager in high school, I longed

for more important things, to succeed at schoolwork, to be treated equally, to go to parties and eventually leave school and get a job. But then I slowly realised that not only I needed an education, but my family also needed a role model. I discovered that it was not just my confidence and opportunities that were limited, but the future prospects of my people. That is when I decided to take the next step, and that is when the desire for my education became the greater desire for the education of my people.

It was this urge to fulfil my potential, to live my life with confidence and respect, that gave me a goal in life, that transformed an intimidated person into a confident one, that drove an idle person to become a hard worker, that turned a lazy person into a motivated student, that forced someone who felt like a failure to become a success.

After jointly producing this text in class, students then wrote individual texts at home, using the same text patterns, all successfully and some with stunning results. The practice with reading and writing literate language patterns with a familiar text type and subject matter provided a strong basis for students to then develop these skills with more academic texts.

### ■ Results

Improvements in reading have been demonstrated by students' ability to write summaries of their set readings. As part of their assignments, students have to write summaries of selected readings, and all students have been able to complete these tasks effectively. Students report that they have been using the reading strategies practised in class in their reading assignments across the curriculum. This has enabled them to identify key information in their readings, and to use this information in summary writing, as well as in essay writing in all subjects. These outcomes contrast with students' problems with reading before the scaffolding program, when many were reluctant to attempt to read the set articles at all. The program has given students clear strategies and a framework for approaching academic reading more confidently.

Improvements in writing have been demonstrated by the contrast between students' writing on entry to the Koori Centre programs and their written work following the scaffolding literacy process. Students, who previously struggled to write, now have a growing awareness of how to organise their essays, use information from readings, analyse and discuss this information and use the objective style of academic language to express their judgements.

Developing skills and practice in reading and writing have led to an overall improvement in each student's confidence and engagement in their tertiary study. Students are more willing to participate in class



discussions, contribute their own opinions, use analytic thinking and develop arguments. Across the curriculum students are more willing to explore issues in both class discussion and written assignments. During in-class writing practice, students who were previously reluctant to contribute are now confidently writing and independently editing group texts.

Finally, Koori Centre staff members involved in the program have shifted the way they approach teaching practice, preparation and evaluation. The program has helped staff to think about the selection of appropriate texts for student reading assignments and the integration of curriculum content of other subjects with literacy practice. Skills practised in academic literacy are therefore being reinforced in other units of study.

The scaffolding literacy program at the Koori Centre is evolving with the input of both staff and students. Students are now able to clearly articulate the skills they need to develop and these have been built into the program. We now have an outline of the literacy curriculum over the course of a year's study that addresses the students' academic literacy needs. We are continually evaluating and improving the strategies as we find out what works most effectively for Indigenous adult learners in preparing for tertiary study.

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## About the authors

David Rose has worked with Indigenous Australian communities and education programs in central and eastern Australia for the past 20 years, as an educator and learner. He is now based at the University of Sydney, and coordinates a national literacy research program with Indigenous school and university programs, entitled "Learning to read: Reading to learn". His books include *The Western Desert code* (2001), a study of the language and culture of Australia's Western Desert peoples, and with J. R. Martin, *Working with discourse: Meaning beyond the clause* (2003), a handbook for analysing social discourse.

Leah Lui-Chivizhe from Erub (Darnley Island) in eastern Torres Strait has worked in the area of adult education and training for nearly 20 years. Since 1998 Leah has been involved in both research and teaching at the Koori Centre, University of Sydney. She is currently Course Convenor for the Tertiary Preparation Course (TPC), a lecturer in Aboriginal studies across a wide range of academic programs, and Chair of the Koori Centre's Research Committee.

Anthony McKnight is a Gamilaraay man from Inverell, who grew up on the south coast of New South Wales in Nowra. He has been a secondary teacher and curriculum consultant in New South Wales schools and, for the past seven years, has worked as a lecturer in the Koori Centre, University of Sydney. He is currently Course Convenor for the Aboriginal studies major, which is offered in block release mode and on campus. His research interests include academic literacy teaching and learning, K-6 numeracy for Koori kids, non-Indigenous assimilation of Indigenous peoples, and Aboriginal participation in sport, recreation and related areas.

Arthur Smith has been a primary and secondary teacher in New South Wales schools who, for the past 29 years, has worked in the tertiary sector, mainly in preservice teacher education. Since 1982 he has been active in Indigenous education and, in particular, preparation of more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers for schools. He is also committed to the more effective education of all teachers in the fields of professional studies and Aboriginal studies. He is currently Academic Coordinator at the Koori Centre, University of Sydney.

## Appendix

Excerpt from Mandela, N. (1995). *Long walk to freedom: The autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (pp. 750-751). London: Abacus.

I was not born with a hunger to be free. I was born free - free in every way that I could know. Free to run in the fields near my mother's hut, free to swim in the clear stream that ran through my village, free to roast mealies under the stars and ride the broad backs of slow-moving bulls. As long as I obeyed my father and abided by the customs of my tribe, I was not troubled by the laws of man or God.

It was only when I began to learn that my boyhood freedom was an illusion, when I discovered as a young man that my freedom had already been taken from me, that I began to hunger for it. At first, as a student, I wanted freedom only for myself, the transitory freedoms of being able to stay out at night, read what I pleased and go where I chose. Later, as a young man in Johannesburg, I yearned for the basic and honourable freedoms of achieving my potential, of earning my keep, of marrying and having a family - the freedom not to be obstructed in a lawful life.

But then I slowly saw that not only was I not free, but my brothers and sisters were not free. I saw that it was not just my freedom that was curtailed, but the freedom of everyone who looked like I did. That is when I joined the African National Congress, and that is when the hunger for my own freedom became the greater hunger for the freedom of my people. It was this desire for the freedom of my people to live their lives with dignity and self-respect that animated my life, that transformed a frightened young man into a bold one, that drove a law-abiding attorney to become a criminal, that turned a family-loving husband into a man without a home, that forced a life-loving man to live like a monk. I am no more virtuous or self-sacrificing than the next man, but I found that I could not even enjoy the poor and limited freedoms I was allowed when I knew my people were not free. Freedom is indivisible; the chains on any one of my people were the chains on all of them, the chains on all of my people were the chains on me.

It was during those long and lonely years that my hunger for the freedom of my own people became a hunger for the freedom of all people, white and black. I knew as well as I knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred, he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity.

When I walked out of prison, that was my mission, to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both. Some say that has now been achieved. But I know that that is not

the case. The truth is that we are not yet free; we have merely achieved the freedom to be free, the right not to be oppressed. We have not taken the final step of our journey, but the first step on a longer and even more difficult road. For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others. The true test of our devotion to freedom is just beginning.

I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment for with freedom come responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended.

