

## pencil Up!

**Can a class of disadvantaged students each create a powerful 12-page book that includes words from their Aboriginal language?**



“They had seen how it would be **published as an end product**, it made a **big difference** in how much care they were taking.”

*Romana Moylan-McGuirk,  
Year 6 Teacher,  
Brewarrina Central School*

## Bringing purpose to writing

What happens to a child's writing, when you show them how to pick out the 'gold' and place it at the start of the story?

**A case study into the impact of using Littlescribe! as a platform to improve literacy skills, engage students in writing and bring back Aboriginal language.**

Discover what happened when a teacher in Outback Australia changed her methodology of teaching writing, and enabled her class of disengaged, disadvantaged students to experience pride, purpose and progress in their work.

10 Aboriginal children and their dedicated teacher agreed to 'Pencil Up' and the outcome is impressive!



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## Context

Following the 'Beach to Bush' initiative in Term 3, where 200 students across 4 schools wrote, published and shared their own life story, Romana, the Year 6 teacher, initiated discussions with the Littlescribe! team.

She identified the following as issues that hinder student achievement in her class:

- Inconsistent attendance
- Diverse learning needs & learning delays
- Disengagement
- Low self-efficacy

After receiving their printed, collaborative books, and seeing their writing take on purpose, the students had demonstrated an interest in creating their own, original story book. They had been working on writing ghost stories, using traditional Aboriginal stories as a stimulus for ideas, and had already written their first draft.

The literacy levels of the class were generally below or working towards expected outcomes. However, the motivation to write and to improve their writing skills was lacking. The class of 10 students had the support of three Aboriginal Education Officers throughout the day.

*"I think a lot of the time, because I'm aware that our children are below national average... I sometimes worry that I am not pushing them enough."*

*Romana, Brewarrina Central School*

**School:**

Brewarrina Central School

**Location:**

Brewarrina, NSW

**Type:**

Rural & Remote

**Enrolment:**

Approx. 150 students K-12

**Motto:**

Safe, respectful learners

## School background

Brewarrina Central School is located 800kms north west of Sydney, caters for students from Kindergarten to Year 12, 97% of whom identify as Aboriginal.

There is a strengthening school and community partnership through working closely with the School Reference Group and Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG). A Senior Leader Community Engagement and Aboriginal Educators act as vital links between the school and community.

Brewarrina is predominantly a rural area, with a large Aboriginal population. The main township is Brewarrina, with smaller population centres in outlying areas. The school is committed to the ongoing employment of local Aboriginal people in a range of roles. The school embraces the local Ngemba culture and language and recognises and values the cultures of all people who live in the Brewarrina area.

Brewarrina Central School supports the students and families to ensure they are ready and equipped for school. It provides a wide range of opportunities for students both within and beyond the classroom.



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## The Project

### Aims of the project

Romana wanted to address the following in their writing:

- Improved use of descriptive vocabulary
- Improved structure of writing
- Increased independent writing skills
- Engage students to write for purpose
- Provide students with an audience
- Revising and editing skills
- Embed the Ngemba

## Who reads your writing?

The session started with the class being asked, 'Who reads your writing?' with the response being, "our teacher", "nobody" and occasionally "mum and dad".

"Who would you WANT to read your writing?"

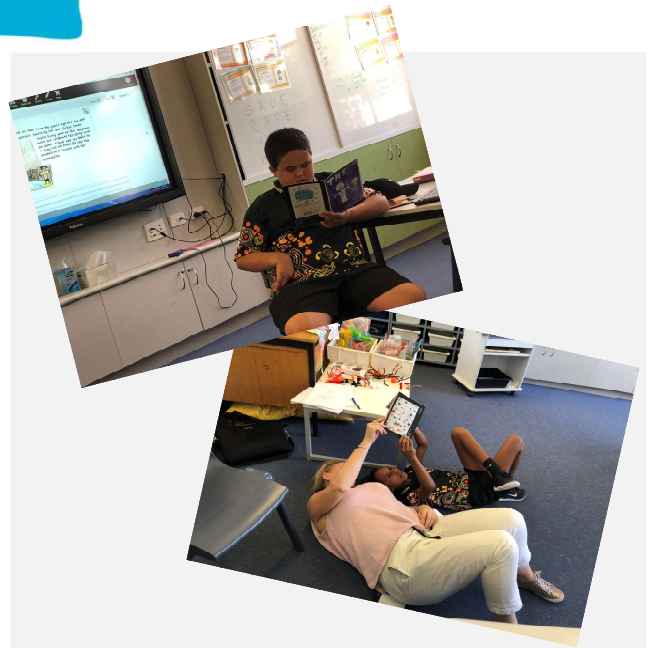
This is where they got creative, excited, and a little 'Megabonkeramus'!

Responses included footballers, movie stars and the Royal family! They talked about their Aboriginal Elders reading their work, and decided they really wanted to scare 'Uncle Charlie' with their ghost stories!

So, the challenge was set... every student had to commit to doing their 'best' writing, and we would find them a real audience for their work. The students were highly engaged by this idea of having a real audience.

## Quality examples- written by other children!

The students were invited to read and view a range of digital and for-real-life examples of LittleScribe! Books, written by children like them, and they were very motivated by seeing what their work would end up looking like. The appeal of the finished product was very engaging and a big driver for them. Students chose to read the LittleScribe! books during their silent reading time after lunch.

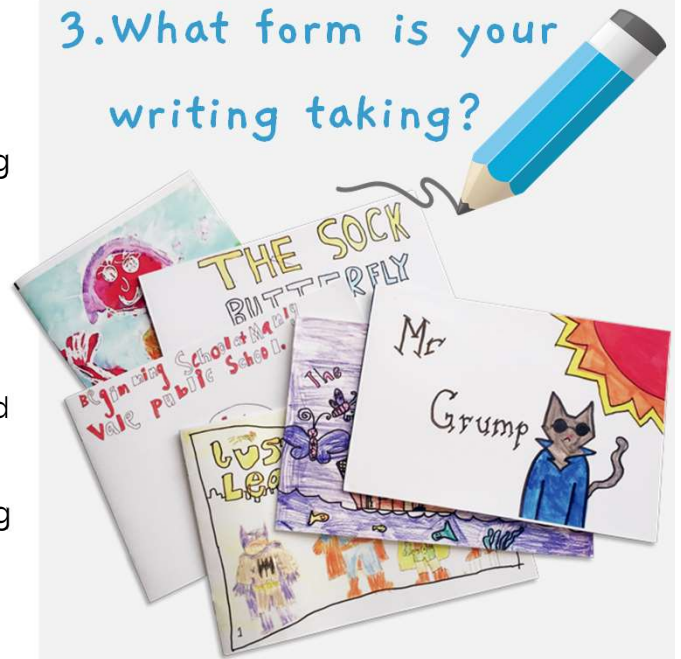


## 3 Powerful Questions...

1. Who reads your writing?

2. Who would you like to read your writing?

3. What form is your writing taking?



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### Identifying the great writing that was already on the page!

The aim of the lesson was to restructure the stories they had already written in order to create a more interesting 'hook' or story opening and then consider which parts of the story could be edited out or altered. The focus of the lesson was to value what the children have already produced and engage them in making decisions around their writing that would create a more effective story.

The teaching strategy was to avoid having to do more drafting or rewriting and showing students how to literally cut up and reorganise their work.

According to Misty Aoniou, Associate Professor in Language, Literacy and TESL at The University of Canberra, great writers "make deliberate choices in their writing" but that teachers do not necessarily know how to do, or how to teach this.

Great writers "know when they start their sentence with words about where (adverbial phrases) rather than who, that their reader will be pulled into the setting rather than focused immediately on the character. They know that describing a character through their actions (adverbials) can sometimes be more evocative than describing their appearance (adjectivals).

Most of our kids neither know these things, nor how to organise their writing to achieve them."

Source: 'Grammar matters and should be taught – differently', *The Conversation*, 17 April, 2014

By showing the students, and Romana, how to restructure writing to have a greater impact on the reader, they could all see that the 'gold' in their writing was already there – it just needed highlighting.

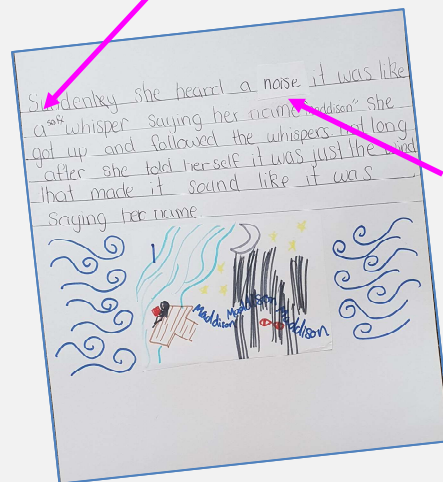
### Your writing, your rules!



Students were shown how they could cut and paste paper over any 'errors' in order to avoid re-writing or reworking. They were also shown how to make a visual focus on key words in a particular text by using elements such as speech bubbles.

They are the authors and have control over their work – this can be very empowering.

A missed word added in,  
made to look intentional



Paper  
stuck  
over a  
mistake

"It is really interesting the structure of taking their story they have already written and picking something as a sizzling start and using that and reworking it."  
Romana, Class Teacher



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## Developing visual literacy skills

With support staff and the classroom teacher, Romana, the Littlescribe! team worked with students to show them how to structure their work into a book and plan the visual elements of the story. We discussed how to organise a text in different ways and the children reflected on how some of their favourite authors present their writing and illustrations.

The technique of dividing an A4 page into 8 smaller sections and then using that to structure the pictures for the story was demonstrated and used. This proved to be a more manageable and less daunting task than having to design 8 A4-sized pages. The creation of these smaller drawings then drove the conversation about layout and design.

This technique encouraged many students to stop writing in straight lines across the page, and start experimenting with using the text as part of the visual. Their awareness of appealing to the reader was enhanced, as was the pride in their work.

## Empowerment and ownership

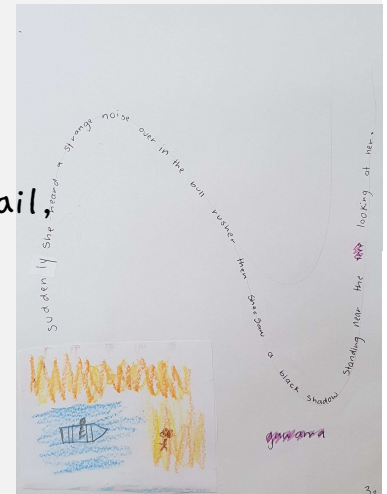
The idea that they are the authors and the decision makers about their own writing was something that was new to these students, however very engaging. The permission to create a text where the writing did not have to be on lines going across the page was confronting at first for some of these children, but once they saw the effect and the impact this could have on THEIR book, it was empowering.

**Fold an A4 page into 8 smaller sections. Use that to draw an image for each page of the book. Cut out and stick each picture onto the page before writing the text.**



The layout of the text follows the shape of the sun, instantly drawing in the reader.

The text follows a trail, creating suspense in this ghost story.



We all went together,  
Swam out to the middle  
of the river. It was very  
deep. I couldn't touch  
the ground.



The image has been cut out and stuck on the page, encouraging experimentation with layout.



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## Bringing back the local Aboriginal language

The use of speech bubbles and sticky notes to integrate the local Ngemba language was demonstrated, and some students have chosen to take this approach within their ghost story. They have written words in English, with a Ngemba translation highlighted on the same page.

These books, now published in the LittleScribe! digital library, are tagged as being written in both English and Ngemba. A live library of Aboriginal languages is now being developed, and the school is excited by this. The development of an Aboriginal dictionary as a part of the pedagogical framework of the school was discussed with Romana and the school principal, and will form the foundation of further writing projects.

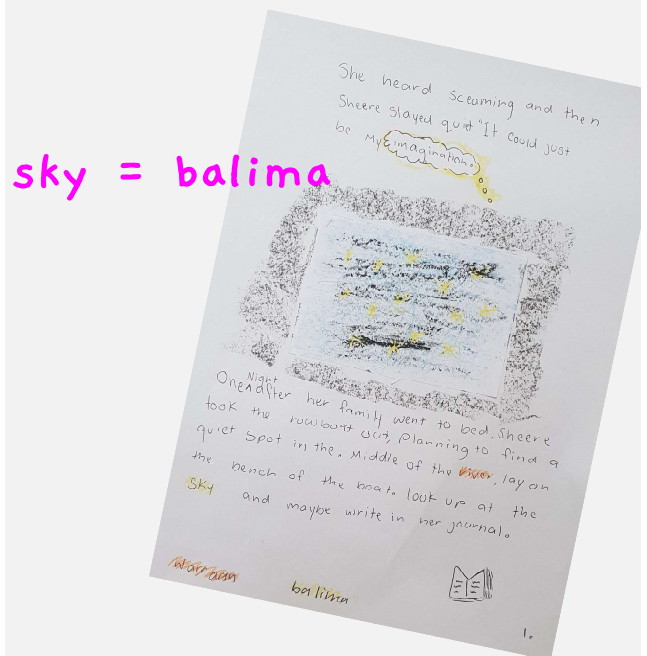
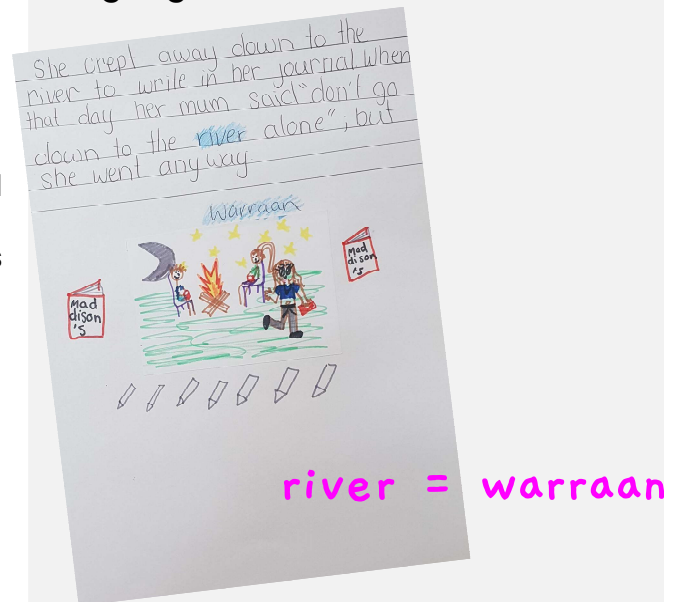
## Outcomes of the project

When compared to work produced in the 'Beach to Bush' project, it is evident that the development of visual literacy and a more engaging and meaningful structure has emerged through the work with LittleScribe!

Romana, the class teacher highlighted:

- ✓ High level of engagement in reading other children's LittleScribe! books
- ✓ Increased motivation using hands-on techniques
- ✓ Application of a range of strategies to improve the writing process
- ✓ The importance of feedback from teacher and others
- ✓ An understanding for her of the quality of work the students were producing and how to bring that to life in the publishing process
- ✓ A commitment to using the community's local language in writing through the use of the LittleScribe! library, and strategies such as speech bubbles and sticky-notes on a page to show translations

## Brewarrina CS students are creating a live dictionary of the Ngemba language



The students' books can be published in the LittleScribe! digital library, and tagged as being written in both English and the Ngemba language.





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### What made the difference?

Romana was encouraged by the work of her class throughout the day, and open to feedback and new methodologies for approaching the teaching of writing.

*"Today, looking at their writing and listening to the feedback from you guys in terms of their creativity and storytelling, I am really encouraged by that and what they have to offer."*

*The biggest thing for me came at the end of the day when I saw how much care they were taking with presentation. Especially for things like their artwork, a lot of the time they don't see a purpose of that outcome so tying in that illustration because it was representing their writing, which they had invested very heavily in... and because they had seen how it would be published as an end product, it made a big difference in how much care they were taking."*

Romana, Class Teacher  
October 2018



**We are excited to see more books written by Brewarrina CS students, and learn more about the Ngemba language and culture.**

### Their writing had purpose and audience

So, what does happen when you show a class of disadvantaged, under-performing students and their dedicated teacher how to pick out the 'gold' that is already in their writing?

Every student, regardless of literacy ability, learning needs or behavioural difficulties, wrote a ghost story and created a 12-page book.

Every one of those students considered vocabulary, structure of the text, illustrations and layout, to hook in and impact the reader.

Every student knew, and was excited, that their writing would be revered, respected and read.

And every student explored and felt pride in writing words from their Aboriginal language.

Prior to the Littlescribe! project, many of the students were frustrated with their writing and not prepared to submit work, either destroying it or refusing to take part in lessons. Through the Littlescribe! process they all knew their writing was valued, and they had permission to own their work. Their strengths in tactile learning methods were used to engage them in writing, and to reduce their fear and reluctance.

## Register Here

### For 2019 Teacher Resources.

Includes Littlescribe writing process, reference books, videos, curriculum links and classroom resources.

A complete package.



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