

Back to School

Unlocking the mystery of English

EDUCATORS from throughout the Barkly have learned how to help their students unlock the mystery of the English language.

A group of six trainers from Sydney demonstrated a type of literacy instruction, founded in America, which has been very successful in trial schools in southern states.

The course was funded by the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation whose chairman, Mary-Ruth Mendell, was in Tennant Creek to help conduct the workshops.

Based on the Spalding method, the writing approach to reading teaches students about how words are constructed, what sounds are produced by letter blends and how it all applies in the context of reading.

It is a total language arts approach which provides sequential, multisensory instruction in spelling, writing, listening and reading comprehension.

"We are teaching teachers how to look at literacy and understand how it works," Ms Mendell said.

"This program helps teachers develop a clear picture of how the English language works.

"They can then plot their students' literacy needs on a 'landscape' and can tailor the learning outcomes for each student, ensuring no-one is left behind.

"If teachers understand spelling and language rules and concepts they can pass the information on to students in structured and meaningful ways."

Ms Mendell said the

collaboration between corporate Australia, the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation and the Northern Territory Government.

"Coca Cola Australia Foundation has come on board as the corporate sponsor for this program and Tennant Creek will be one of the showcase schools."

The High School was one of the first to embrace the WRAP program, first incorporating it into the curriculum two years ago.

Senior English Teacher, Julie-Anne Spina, said students have taken really well to the program, especially those who were struggling with reading.

"We started using WRAP in English classes, but now it is used in other curriculum areas such as maths and science."

Ms Spina said every

teacher in the High School as well as other interested community workers attended the workshops held at the end of last term.

During the school holidays, a group of teachers went on to complete a higher level of the program.

"We like the program because it works and it's having a huge impact on those students who are now making sense of reading and writing for the first time in their lives," Ms Spina said.

The WRAP program has been running in Sydney's Redeemer Baptist School for eight years and staff in that school have been trained to support their students' literacy needs.

"It has been interesting to see the parallels between the learning experiences of the

local students here in Tennant Creek and the students from the city," Ms Mendell said.

"Many have come from families whose first language is not English or have come from overseas to study in Australia.

"They have no long-term experience with the English language and many of them only speak English at school."

Meanwhile, the trainees will be back in Tennant Creek at the end of the year to help the teachers implement the program.

"These teachers and community workers have undertaken this certification because they really believe in their students and want them to benefit from the method," Ms Mendell said.



● Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation chairman Mary-Ruth Mendell.

writing approach to reading program is particularly appropriate for the literacy needs in Tennant Creek where many of the students are learning English as a second language and have other special learning needs.

"This program is the first initiative within the Tripartite Philanthropy Agreement which is a