



State Library  
of Victoria

## The Batja Malnigan Journey

Literacy and empowerment

October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012

*Image courtesy Shepparton News*

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### Why bother about Literacy?

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### Prose Literacy skills in Victoria, 1996 – 2006 comparison

	1996	2006	Variance
Levels 1 & 2	48.1%	48.8%	+0.7
Level 3	34.6%	35.7%	+1.1%
Levels 4 & 5	17.3%	15.5%	-1.8%

(Adult Literacy & Life Skills Survey, 2006)

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## Why bother about Literacy?

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*Image courtesy West Gippsland Regional Library Corporation*

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## Making Bridges

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### **Making Books Making Readers**

Devised as part of the Young Readers Program with Kids Own Publishing, a not-for-profit arts organisation

- Literacy
- Empower local communities
- Begin the journey of literacy for families and young children
- Provide cultural background and strengthening
- Form a bridge between oral & print cultures

Each project produces a high quality picture book

The take up of this program amongst indigenous communities has been very strong.

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## Making Books Making Readers Pilot Projects

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### Mooroopna Secondary College

- One of the biggest indigenous cohorts in the State
- Wannik Dance Project
- Good long term contacts with public libraries, schools and indigenous communities in the area

With the support of the Collier Foundation a project was set in motion to try to help overcome disengagement with school and with learning

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## Sharing Heritage, Learning & Literacy

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A three-pronged approach was instigated, involving:

- School
- Parents/carers & community
- Students

Koori Engagement Support Officers (KESO's) would act as mentors and also as go-betweens with family/community to gain their help in marking changes in attitude and attendance amongst the boys and also hopefully to generate enthusiasm for education at home...

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## Indigenous Hip Hop Project

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## Poetry!? Awful Miss!

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### Our Koorie Rap

I'm gonna train hard and I'm gonna sweat  
And I can guarantee I'm gonna be the best  
I'm playing it hard and playing it well  
You know that I'm talkin' 'bout the AFL

(chorus)

When we are rapping my people start clapping  
I'm never gonna stop coz I'm verbally attackin  
Who are we? MRP  
Who are we? MRP

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## Project Development and Cultural Strengthening

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After the Hip-Hop came:

- Traditional dance classes
- Questions at home about what tribes they were from
- Talking with elders
- Traditional drawing
- Keeping a collective journal

All MBMR projects begin with the same project outline. One of their strengths is the flexibility to suit the needs of each project and to allow the boys to tell their own story, in their own way,




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## Transformations

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- Increased confidence
- Increased self esteem
- Increasing school attendance
- Increasing participation
- Increasing interest in traditional dance from a developing core group

Mooroopna Secondary College has developed with the project too

- Flexible & committed
- Media students took the photographs and burned the CDs
- Teachers swapped classes to facilitate the boy's participation
- Timetabling to allow the boys time to develop

This project also brought together local community, ASHE, Rumbalara Football Netball Club, Yorta Yorta Land Council and many other bodies

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## Feedback

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I wish to draw to your attention the positive change that I have noticed in our Koorie students since being engaged in the Batga Malnigan dance program.

They are part of my Homegroup that meets twice a week consisting of a range of year level students from years 7 to year 12. Recently the boys have been attending! Their demeanour is much happier, they are happy to engage in activities and are open to communication.

This is in stark contrast in the past, to either their non attendance, and if present they were 'shut down' and not engaging in any conversation or activity at all.

I congratulate you on this initiative I personally can see a sense of pride and a new self confidence becoming evident in these wonderful young men. I look forward to watching their continued development and becoming the fine young leaders I believe they are destined to be.

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## Batja Malnigan

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The boys formed a traditional dance group, with plenty of regional bookings.

They even do workshops!

They have been featured on local TV, and in the papers

Their community is so proud of them.

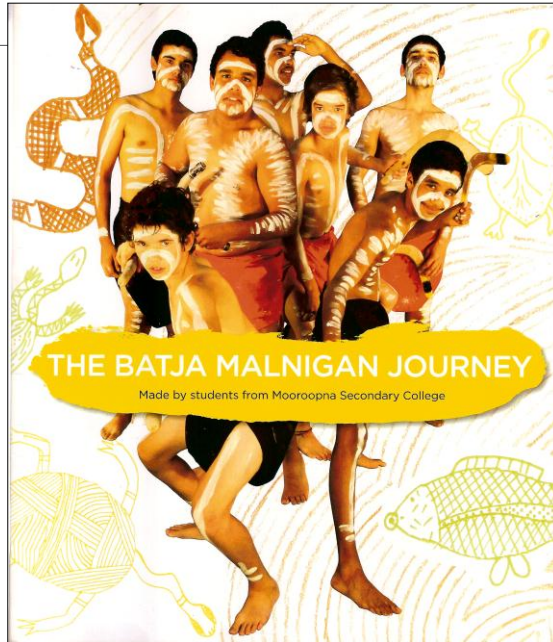
They are proud of themselves.

These boys have given themselves a future, found their identity and are developing as community leaders.

### **Literacy empowers**

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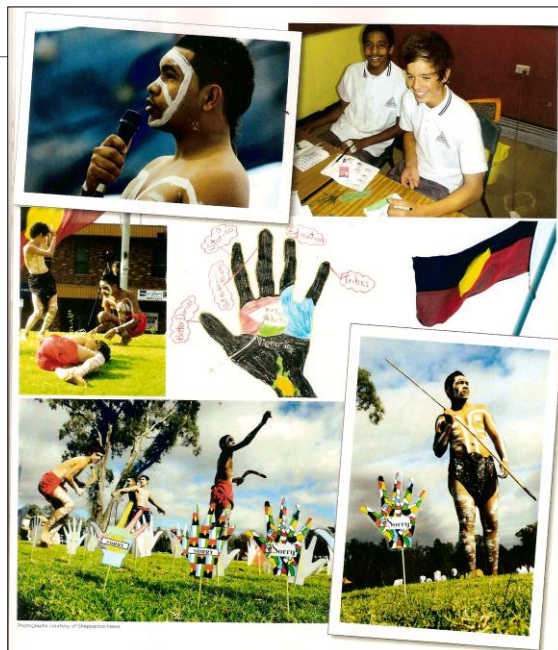
The Batja Malnigan Journey



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## The power of literacy...

To be literate is to become liberated  
from the constraints of dependency.

To be literate is to gain a voice and to  
participate meaningfully and assertively  
in decisions that affect one's life.

To be literate is to gain self-confidence.

To be literate is to become self assertive.

To be literate is to become  
politically conscious and critically aware,  
and to demystify social reality.

Literacy enables people to read their  
own world and to write their own history.

**In a nutshell, literacy empowers.**

Yusuf Kassam

Kassam, Y. (1994:33), "Who benefits from illiteracy? Literacy and empowerment" in Morsy, Z. (editor) *The challenge of illiteracy: from reflection to action*. New York: Garland Publishing.