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Marrung Ngarralyn (Awabakal and Worimi words meaning *good talker*) – poetry workshop

Dr Lorraine (Lorri) Beveridge
Education consultant and sessional academic

This article details the teamwork of curriculum advisors and their Aboriginal education team on an instructive journey that culminated in an online poetry workshop, as well as the compilation of a book to be released by the Aboriginal education statewide staffroom later in 2022. The future publication will incorporate lesson plans, curriculum links, recordings and work samples of student poetry from the workshop and will be made available to all schools. The schools involved included Tea Gardens, Tanilba Bay, Grahamstown, Raymond Terrace, Fern Bay, Carrington, Weston and Fennell Bay Public Schools.

Background and rationale

The Maitland and Adamstown Aboriginal Education and Curriculum Advisor teams, along with interested school-based teachers, formed an alliance in 2019 to ensure authentic Aboriginal content in primary English classrooms. They aimed to address the unacceptable achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in a pragmatic way, by improving reading and writing through the vehicle of quality, authentic Aboriginal texts, building cultural pride for Aboriginal students and awareness for non-Aboriginal students.

Initiating the Marrung Ngarralyn poetry workshop

The poetry workshop, titled 'Marrung Ngarralyn', took some time to form, ripen and reach fruition. Its focus was on the way poetry stirs the imagination and is a whimsical means of sharing inner thoughts and emotions.

Kirli Saunders, a proud Gunai woman and author of the compelling verse narrative *Bindi*, planned to be a poet in residence at the Murrook Culture Centre, Williamtown, run by the Worimi Aboriginal Lands Council. A day was organised for schools to come together, to celebrate Aboriginal culture through sharing and writing poetry, learning with and from each other. However, due to ongoing COVID lockdowns the event was postponed, twice.

In lieu, 'Murrung Ngarralyn' as a virtual poetry workshop, was coordinated through the involvement of 8 schools and approximately 500 Stage 3 students and teachers. Prior to the workshop, schools engaged in an English unit focusing on the verse narrative, *Bindi* by Kirli Saunders, and other Aboriginal texts, including *Mrs Whitlam* by Bruce Pascoe, *Alfred's War* by Rachel Bin Salleh and Samantha Fry, and *Young Dark Emu* by Bruce Pascoe. The unit is titled 'Daore, karrat and canbe (earth, rain and fire)' using Gundungurra Aboriginal language from the focus text.

Daore, karrat and canbe (earth, rain and fire)

The NSW English K-6 syllabus provided the nucleus for this unit, designed for students in Stage 3, and the outcomes were used to build rich learning experiences.
- EN3-5B - discusses how language is used to achieve a widening range of purposes for a widening range of audiences and contexts
- EN3-6B -uses knowledge of sentence structure, grammar, punctuation and vocabulary to respond to and compose clear and cohesive texts in different media and technologies.

Learning was enhanced through identifying the connections across curriculum areas, including science and technology, geography, history, creative arts, and personal development, health and physical education.

The Cross-curriculum priorities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures and Sustainability are addressed throughout, especially in relation to fire management and traditional Aboriginal land management practices. Through quality literature, discussion and understanding the general capabilities Critical and Creative Thinking, Intercultural Understanding, and Personal and Social Capability, (ACARA, 2022) students learn to explore and reflect on themselves, others and their world.

The National Literacy Learning Progression: Version 3 (ACARA, 2020) elements: Speaking and listening, Reading and viewing and Writing supported teachers to identify stages of literacy learning reached, and plan the next steps to progress learning.

The focus English textual concepts (English Textual Concepts and Learning Processes, 2017) included **genre** (texts with similarity in form and function), **perspective** (the thinking that the composer and readers bring to the text), and **point of view** (how we as readers are situated to perceive the content of the text through the eyes of the main character, Bindi). **Narrative, character** and **code and convention** were also revised throughout the unit.

> ... poetry stirs the imagination and is a whimsical means of sharing inner thoughts and emotions.

Virtual conference

The schools involved spanned three Aboriginal language groups, including Awabakal, Wonnarua and Worimi. Participating schools are proud of how students are learning the languages of Aboriginal people in classrooms, drawing on the knowledge of local Elders and Aboriginal Land Councils.

Awabakal Acknowledgement of Country

The Awabakal people are those Aboriginal Australians who identify with or are descended from the Awabakal tribe and its clans, from the coastal areas of the Mid North Coast region of New South Wales. Fennel Bay Public School, and Carrington Public School were the schools who participated from Awabakal Lands. This Acknowledgement was delivered by Jesse from Fennel Bay Public School.

Kaayi yaandiin, ngaduwa
Hello everyone, I am (insert name)
Ki-ee yar-din nudawa (insert name)

Dhumann ngaduwa bangayi Awabakala barayidha ngayin
I acknowledge that today we are on Awabakal land
Dooman nudawa bang-i-eye Awabagala burra- yi-du nayin

Dhumann ngaduwa ngarrakel yalawaa, yalawan, yalawanan
I acknowledge our ancestors, our elders and all of those who have gone before them
Dooman nudawa nurrugul yulawa yuluwun yuluwunnun

Nhunda, Kumba, Kumba
Thank you
Noonda Koomba Koomba

Figure 1: Awabakal Acknowledgement of Country

Wonnaruah Acknowledgement of Country

Before European colonisation, Wonnarua, Awabakal and Darkinjung Koori people occupied most of the Hunter Valley region. Mitchell and Kyle from Weston Public School delivered the Acknowledgement.

Worimi Acknowledgement of Country

The final Aboriginal land we traversed virtually during the poetry workshop was Worimi land covering Port Stephens and the Great Lakes. The Acknowledgement was delivered by Belinda from Tanilba Bay Public School.

Learning and teaching activities

Introductory activities can inspire students to 'flex their writing muscle'. Figurative language consists of words and phrases that mean more than the literal. Initially the class brainstormed and created a list of metaphors about home to use in constructing a poem.

Bindi summary as a directed drawing activity

In this activity, students completed a directed drawing task, summarising each section of *Bindi*. By using an A3 sheet of paper folded into 4 sections, students copied the title page illustrations, then wrote key vocabulary words from each section of the text (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Carrington Public School students complete the directed drawing activity

Poetry sharing

The first poetry writing activity involved reviewing the poem that introduces the main character, Bindi. In this section, readers learn about Bindi's family, home, friends and recreational activities.

The structure of the poem was used as a model for students to draft their own poems about themselves. Later, students gathered in a 'yarning circle' (a place of equality and respect) to share and listen to each other's poems. After this oral presentation, students went back to classrooms to edit and type up their poems.

Figure 3: Teacher example of *Bindi* directed drawing activity

Marrung Ngarralyn poetry workshop

Activity 1

Figure 4: Fennell Bay Public School sharing 'Being Bindi' poems

Prior to the workshop, students had produced their own free form (concrete) poem about themselves using the poetic form and style of 'Being Bindi' as a scaffold. Using Zoom to facilitate communication across schools, representatives from each school shared their personalised and innovated versions of the introductory poem, 'Being Bindi'. An example of student work is presented in Figure 5.

Being Jack
At school
on the first day
they split us up into table groups
to learn about our classmates.

When they ask

I say:

'Hello, my name is Jack.

I live with my mum, dad and older brother.

We live in a grey house
with a steep driveway
backing onto a long road.

Nan and pop live two hours away.

We have one dog named Bella.
Mostly you will find me out fishing with my dad
on our boat catching flathead.

If not there, I am chilling out at home.
That's all about me.'

Figure 5: Student work sample

Activity 2

The poetry writing in activity two was based on *The Last Dance* by Sally Morgan, a children's picture book consisting of a series of poems about endangered Australian animals. Ideas for this activity were sourced from *Teaching Poetry for Pleasure and Purpose* by Sally Murphy, a PETAA publication. In praise of Murphy's book, popular children's author Jackie French claims, 'This book gives kid-tempting ways to introduce poetry, that strange format that in a few words can change the way we see the world' (French (2020), in Murphy, 2021 p 9).

Students revised poetic technique including shape poems, accent and alliteration. They used language structures to write their own poems incorporating grammar outcomes for the NSW English K–10 syllabus.

koala
in the tree tops
she scrambles
As the fire closes in on her

Figure 6: Poetry work sample, Carrington Public School

Eagle
As the majestic eagle glides across the sky
She is looking for something
to feed her young.

Figure 7: Poetry work sample, Weston Public School
(Image: 'Golden Eagle on Seedskadee NWR' by Tom Koerner/ USFWS at USFWS Mountain-Prairie. Licensed under CC BY 2.0.)

Cassowary
Across far north Queensland
She hunts in the rainforest
Searching for food.

Figure 8: Poetry work sample, Grahamstown Public School (Image: Cassowary [untitled] by Finy. Available under the Pixabay License.)

Activity 3

Activity three in the workshop was led by Mitch King, a hip-hop performance artist and a proud Yaegl Bundjalung man from the Far North Coast region of NSW. Mitch is a creative producer specialising in hip hop music and dance.

Mitch outlined what is important to him when he creates and performs rap poetry. Rap is the poetry of hip-hop, a powerful culture of words and song, combining art and movement. Mitch described the creative process as 'getting into the flow'. He completed a range of activities with students during the workshop, outlined in the following sections.

Figure 9: Mitch King addresses the workshop attendees

The morning rap

Mitch modelled a simple rap poem with a musical beat. He demonstrated how to get started with rap poetry. He wrote, then read aloud the first four things he did this morning, in order, with actions. A repeated rhythm was played. (Search for rap rhythms which are freely available on the internet.) Mitch modelled how he linked his 4 written steps to the beat, making the words flow. Mitch explained 'flow' to students and how to make their words flow to the rhythm.

Students then wrote the first four things they did in the morning to create their own rap poems. Then they played with the beat, rapping their sentences to the beat of the rhythm, practising until they found their flow. Some schools performed their raps to the group via Zoom.

When I woke up,
I played my game
Then I got dressed
And went to school
To do a poetry workshop on
ZOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

Figure 10: Student rap poem, Weston Public School

Rolled out of bed,
Stretched out my arms,
Reached for a muffin
Filled up my tum!
Replied to messages,
Had a nibble,
Made the bed,
And fed the dogs kibble.

Figure 11: Teacher rap poem, Weston Public School

Writing strengths and weaknesses

In this activity, students are asked to reflect on their personal strengths as writers and to consider areas they wish to improve. This is valuable from a Dewian perspective (Dewey, 2018), as it encourages students to think deeply about their writing and how to improve it. At the same time, the activity provides useful practical feedback to teachers on what students feel they need to improve in their writing, prioritising student voice.

Mitch explained that we all, as writers, have strengths and weaknesses. 'Weaknesses are just opportunities to improve, and should be viewed that way', he told the group. The activity included the following steps.

On a coloured piece of paper, students draw an empty shape. Divide it in two. On the left, write the word **Strengths**, on the right, write the word **Weaknesses**. Mitch modelled this activity on screen. 'Writing is a thinking activity. You do it in your head. It's hard! You get a sweaty brain!' he said.

Mitch

Strengths	Weaknesses
· Good ideas	· Can't think of anything to write about
· Creative, likes rhythm	· Writer's block
· Likes to write with a friend	· Not a confident speller
· Writes about nature	

Figure 12: Modelling the strengths and weaknesses activity

Mitch talked about the example above. He explained:

'I like writing weird stuff that's funny. It's good writing with a friend especially when I don't know what to write. The activities I'm going to share with you should help, as they are what I do to unblock my brain. I try not to worry about my terrible spelling. First up, I just write. Get the ideas down. I can go back and fix the spelling later. Just write is the important thing, first up'.

The points Mitch made are valuable introductory class discussion ideas to motivate students to write.

Students made their own writing strengths and weaknesses charts. Mitch reinforced the idea that by reflecting on and identifying our weaknesses we are focusing on **how** we can be better writers, and we are informing our teachers what we think we need to work on in our writing (student voice).

Collaborative writing

In this activity, students composed a collaborative piece of writing by thinking imaginatively and creatively.

Equipped with a page of white paper and a pen, students worked in a small group to produce a piece of shared writing, using the following process:

· Position the paper in portrait orientation. Along the top, write a sentence - the first thing that comes to mind. It can be as absurd as you like, for example: 'Everyone was singing and rapping in the street'.

· Fold down the top of the paper so you cannot see what is written on it. Pass the paper to the left.

· The person receiving the paper does the same, adding a sentence and folding it over, and this process continues around the circle.

· When the paper is completely folded, the last person shares/reads what is written on the paper with the group.

Mitch concluded by telling the group that this activity is great for writer's block and helping each other to get started with writing. Plus, some funny and absurd stories and poems result!

Senses poem

Poetry is a great way of sharing our feelings which is also important for our mental health and wellbeing. Poetry is older than the written word. Poetry is a literary form that belongs to the people, not to be judged by how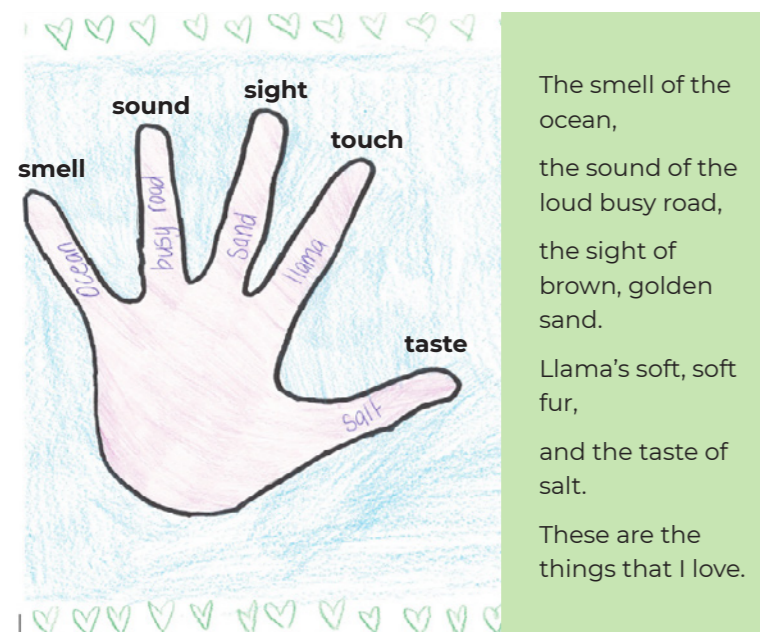 one rhymes or recites words, but how well one arranges words on a page to make meaning (Jordan, 1989; Rich, 1988, in Beveridge, 2021, p 5).

In this activity, students write a poem about their senses, with the aim of getting to know and understand each other a little better. See the model in Figure 13.

Mitch King can be contacted at dreambigger@gmail.com.

On reflection

Poetry workshops, such as the Murrung Ngarralyn poetry workshop, support the notion that 'poetry humanises, is a means of sharing inner thoughts and feelings, and helps us make sense of what is real in our life worlds' (Beveridge, 2021), and is important for our wellbeing during today's uncertain times.

Poetry workshops provide opportunities to build on and share students' love of poetry, and can facilitate collaboration between education teams, including the Aboriginal Education team and schools. Collaboration, such as the *Bindi* example, can lead to English units drawing on authentic Aboriginal texts and involving Aboriginal direction if possible. When teachers share their practice and students share their work across schools, reciprocal, ongoing relationships can be forged, potentially strengthening the quality of teaching in classrooms, ultimately, improving reading and writing outcomes for students.

The smell of the ocean,

the sound of the loud busy road,

the sight of brown, golden sand.

Llama's soft, soft fur,

and the taste of salt.

These are the things that I love.

Figure 13: Senses poem, student work sample, Grahamstown Public School

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How to cite this article – Beveridge, L. (2022). Marrung Ngarralyn (Awabakal and Worimi words meaning *good talker*) – poetry workshop. *Scan, 41*(4).

Remembering
Dr Ross J. Todd

Dr Ross J. Todd
Image supplied by Rutgers School of Communication and Information. Reproduced with Rutgers' kind permission.

June Wall
Professional Development Coordinator and former Library Coordinator, NSW Department of Education

June Wall remembers the life and legacy of Dr Ross J. Todd, a long time contributor and friend to Scan.

Dr Ross J. Todd – friend, school library champion and passionate advocate for student learning through an information literacy lens – passed away on 30 March 2022.

Ross was an inspiration to many, a global force in school libraries, and a lifelong learner and scholar. As an Associate Professor at Rutgers, his In memoriam has outlined his life and achievements. I would like to share my memories and his depth of support for NSW school libraries.

I met Ross in the early 1990s when he and Celeste McNicholas worked on a research project on information skills. Ross was a gentle revolutionary and, even then, the paper Evolution, not revolution: working to full school participation with information skills (PDF 273 KB) received notable attention. His quiet tenacity to keep moving ahead with a clear focus is a great quality for all teacher librarians to take on board. He has been a leader and collaborator in so many aspects of NSW school libraries, from media articles such as Teacher-librarians make a difference to his critical work with Lyn Hay on the School Libraries Futures project: School Libraries 21C (PDF 1.08 MB). Until only a few years ago, Ross was either a regular contributor or lead for the research component of Scan. NSW school libraries have lost a passionate visionary who always provoked thought and asked all of us to think differently while focusing on student learning. A re-invention of utilising evidenced based practice for student information fluency may be one way we can remember his passion and celebrate his life.

mental health issues or who are, for example, experiencing extraordinary difficulties with their families or communities. This group is led by the deputy principal, in conjunction with the head teacher welfare.

How do you ensure that every student is known, valued and cared for in a school this size?

Informally, the thing about having 2,000 students at the school is that nearly every student finds their own little niche. I've been at schools that are a quarter of the size, where there might be a few students who sometimes don't necessarily connect strongly with others. That doesn't really happen here, though. With so many peers, there are vast opportunities to find a like-mind. And that, in itself, provides a lot of support – organically, students develop their own personal network and friendship groups.

More formally, we also have extremely clearly defined welfare structures within the school. One of our 3 deputy principals has particular oversight for the work of the welfare and learning support teams. Those teams are also closely aligned with the stage head teachers and the year advisers. So, through those structures, and the regular meetings of these teams, we try to identify students that run the risk of falling through the gaps. That, for the most part, seems to identify students who are struggling with either their learning or other issues. Staff are also quick to identify potential problems and raise them with a year advisor or stage head teacher – which again feeds back to the welfare team.

In addition, we have a specific group set up to support complex case management for students with severe

We also have a tradition of excellent counselling support, which has become a remarkably strong part of the culture of the school. We frequently see students self-refer for support or speak up if they identify that their mates are doing it tough.

From both the student and staff side, we like to think that we have pretty good systems in place here to see that every student is valued and cared for.

What advice would you give to a principal who is starting on their journey?

That's an interesting question because the role has changed so dramatically in the time I've been a principal (23 years in total).

I'd say start with the basics: make sure the little things are right and then build from there – but keep your eye on the big picture. (Don't get bogged down in the minutia!) For example, ensure that you have:

- a quality learning environment: Provide the best possible learning and working environments for your students, teachers and administration staff.
- strong structures within the school that provide high expectations for both students and staff
- outstanding communication strategies – as the school grows, this becomes increasingly difficult. So, you need to have strategies in place for exceptionally good communication.
- crafted a good timetable, which is clear to students
  - a strong understanding of curriculum development, and that the curriculum meets the needs of your students
  - good wellbeing programs for staff and students.

Scan wishes to sincerely thank Jeanie and Gary for sharing their time, expertise and wisdom so generously, and for offering unique insights into how best practice in schools can be scaled.

How to cite this article – Brown, J. & Johnson, G. (2022). EduChat: What does it take to run a school the size of a town? And what's transferable to any school context? *Scan, 41*(4).

Classrooms and courts, Cherrybrook Technology High School

Writer biographies

Dr Lorraine (Lorri) Beveridge

Lorraine (Lorri) recently retired from the NSW Department of Education after 40 wonderfully fulfilling years as primary teacher, small school principal, school executive and curriculum advisor, across NSW. She is currently enjoying writing, freelance education consultancy in primary English, and sessional academic work teaching writing to undergraduate teachers. Her work is showcased on the website *We love English*.

Dr Jennifer Charteris

Associate Professor Jennifer Charteris is Head of Department Learners Learning and Teaching. She has been working in the University of New England School of Education since 2013. Jennifer conducts research associated with the politics of leader, teacher and student learning and crisis leadership. She researches in collaboration with educational leaders, teachers and students.

Dr Adele Nye

A senior lecturer at the University of New England, Adele Nye is the High Degree Research Coordinator in the School of Education. Her research interests include leadership and catastrophic events, reflective practice and the history discipline. Her most recent research undertakings have explored perceptions and experiences in the educational workplace.