

Volume 41 Issue 4



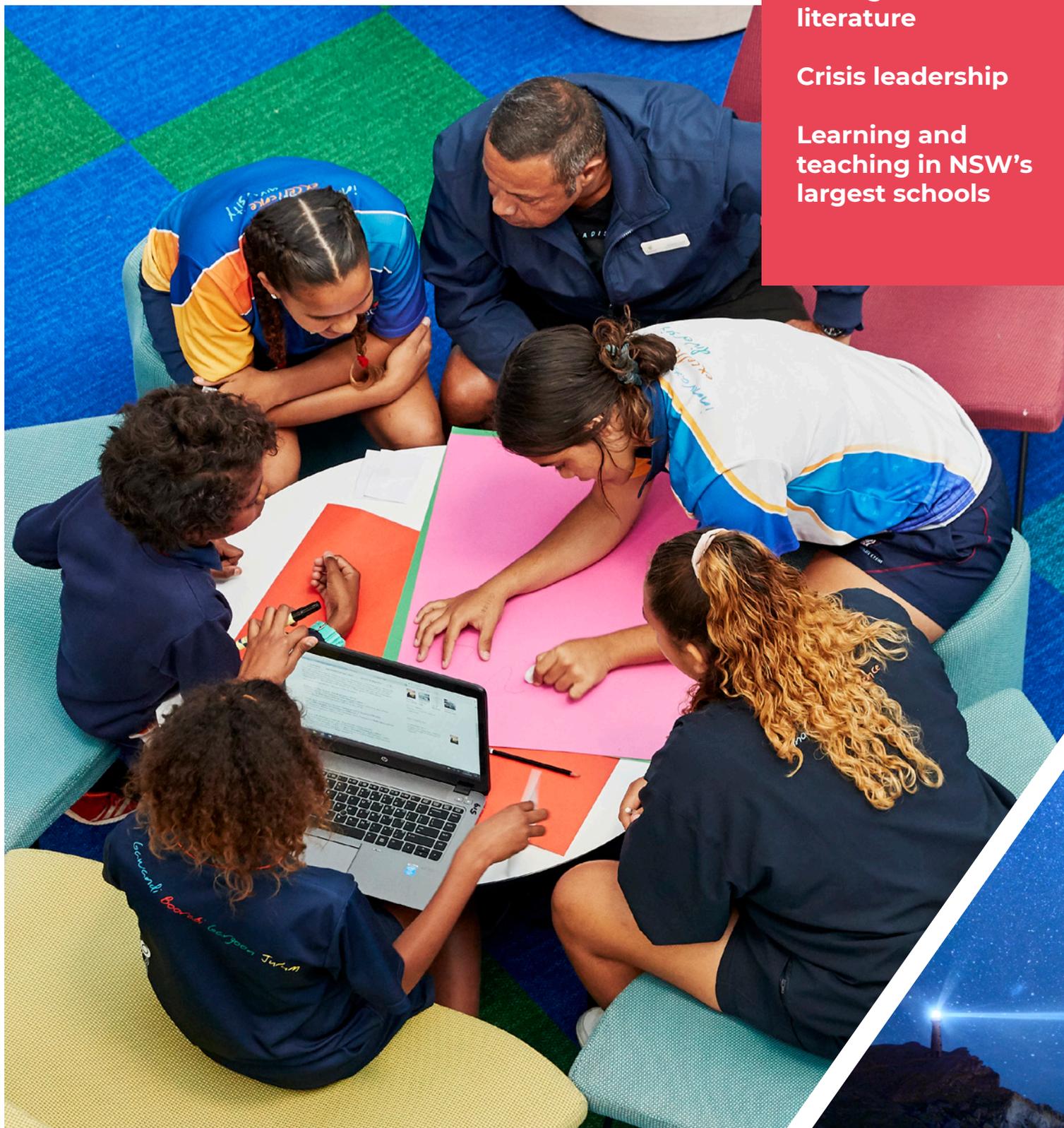
# Scan

The journal for educators

Teaching poetry  
with Australian  
Aboriginal  
literature

Crisis leadership

Learning and  
teaching in NSW's  
largest schools



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Scan is a leading refereed journal, published monthly between February and November. Scan aims to bring innovative change to the lives and learning of contemporary educators and students. Through Scan, teachers' practice is informed by critical engagement with peer reviewed research that drives improved school and student outcomes across NSW, Australia and the world. Scan aims to leave teachers inspired, equipped and empowered, and students prepared.

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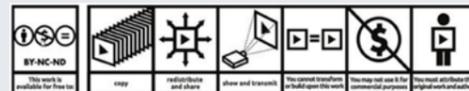
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# Marrung Ngarralyn (Awabakal and Worimi words meaning *good talker*) – poetry workshop



**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, Williamstown, 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, yalawan

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: Fennel 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](#).



Figure 6: Poetry work sample, Carrington Public School



Figure 7: Poetry work sample, Weston Public School (Image: 'Golden Eagle on Seedskaadee NWR' by Tom Koerner/USFWS at [USEFWS 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  
ZOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

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 Deweyan 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
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good ideas</li> <li>• Creative, likes rhythm</li> <li>• Likes to write with a friend</li> <li>• Writes about nature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can't think of anything to write about</li> <li>• Writer's block</li> <li>• Not a confident speller</li> </ul>

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

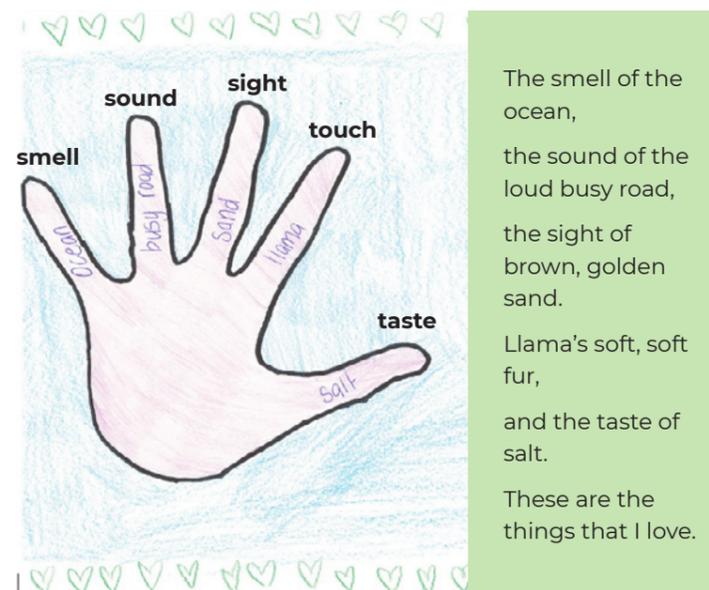


Figure 13: Senses poem, student work sample, Grahamstown Public School

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](mailto: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.

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**How to cite this article – Beveridge, L. (2022). Murrung 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.

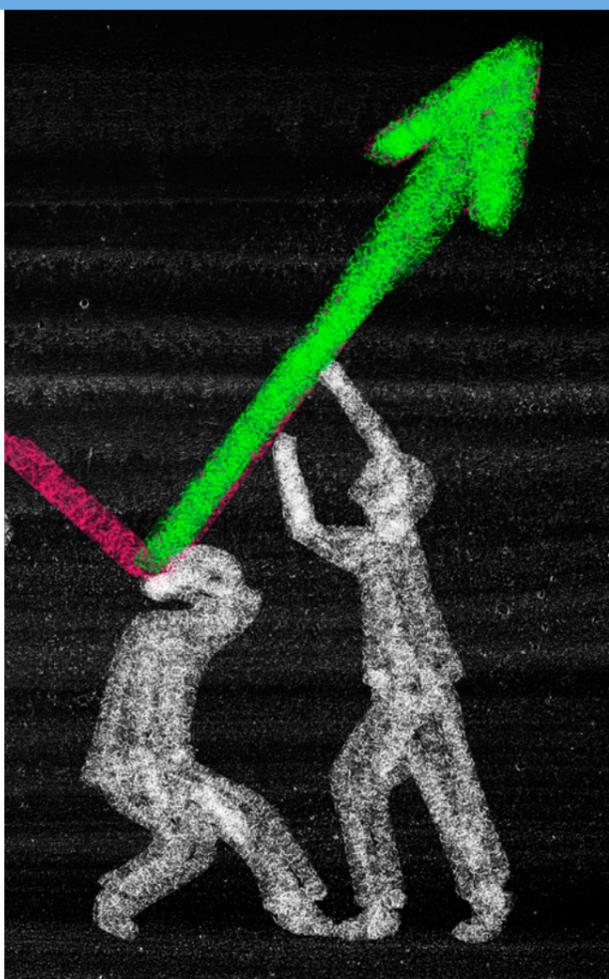
## June Wall remembers the life and legacy of Dr Ross J. Todd, a long time contributor and friend to Scan.

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.

# Crisis leadership: Addressing technical and adaptive challenges



**Associate Professor Jennifer Charteris**  
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**Dr Adele Nye**  
Senior lecturer, University of New England

**Jennifer Charteris and Adele Nye synthesise current research to provide methods of crisis management for educational leaders.**

Leaders in education have been put to the test over the past few years with catastrophic bush fires, widespread flooding and the pandemic impacting communities and causing school closures. There have been suggestions that such events will occur more regularly.

Researchers from the University of New England are currently undertaking a study into how schools and communities rebuild after fire. Their research also involves a systematic review into leadership during crisis events. A crisis is a traumatic event that threatens the mental health and wellbeing of a school community and potentially influences student learning outcomes. Crises can include natural disaster, death, or a mass violence event.

This article addresses the sorts of crises that affect schools, the nature of leadership required to address adaptive challenges, and strategies for leaders to navigate times of crisis.

Listed below are five crisis types that leaders may encounter. This is a useful typology for identifying the nature of particular crises.

## Crisis typology

### Short-term crises

Events occur suddenly and conclude swiftly. For example:

- sudden staff resignation
- vandalism

### Cathartic crises

These crises build up to a peak or critical point and then are resolved swiftly. For example:

- union action where a dispute closes the school

### Long-term crises

As the term suggests, these crises are slow to develop and persist for a very long time – often without a clear-cut resolution. For example:

- unrest in the parent community
- disadvantage in the community
- issues around relational trust in the school community (parents/teachers)

### One-off crises

Unique and unexpected crises that are unlikely to recur. For example:

- emergency lockdown due to intruder on school grounds
- bereavement/s in the school community

### Infectious crises

These are crises that crop up and are quickly resolved. However, like a wicked problem, they raise further issues that need to be addressed, and they can develop into their own crises. For example:

- youth suicide with possible ongoing consequences
- tornado/flood/fire – destroy school buildings and property and impact the community
- Covid-19 outbreaks that result in school closures or staff shortages. (Smith & Riley, 2012)

## Technical and adaptive challenges

It can be helpful when crises occur to recognise which aspects of the crisis confronting the school may be considered 'technical' and which elements are 'adaptive' challenges. An understanding of the work that needs to be done can help with deciding which leadership strategies are most valuable and warranted.

By using technical approaches to problem-solving it is possible to diagnose and appraise what needs to be done by examining the parts of the problem. For example, after a catastrophic fire, leaders need to develop a set of sequential steps to ensure communication with community stakeholders is the remit of a particular person and that the approach is structured and comprehensive.

Technical challenges involve crises that can be clearly defined and a solution that is easily identifiable. Leaders can readily draw on their existing knowledge or access resources to provide a solution. As noted by Robert Cote (2022), technical challenges:

- are easily identified
- require minimal effort to resolve
- involve minimal change to the organisation
- have solutions that are readily accepted by the school community.

Adaptive challenges requiring a cultural shift also involve a need to identify relationships between the parts and the whole. For example, leaders need to look at how to sustain a commitment to the school's values and ensure mental health and well-being of staff and students when taking emergency action to close a school during a widespread illness such as the COVID-19 outbreak.

Adaptive challenges are not easy to identify and may be difficult to define. An inquiry mindset is required to address them. Leaders need to be open to learning what they don't already know and display a willingness to embrace new tools and practices. There may be an emphasis on changing beliefs and values.

Adaptive challenges:

- can be unpredictable and ambiguous
- require a change in beliefs, values, perceptions, behaviours and attitudes
- involve engagement with the different levels of the school ecosystem considering students, teachers, middle leaders, senior leaders and the school community
- require an awareness of how to lead change as there may be a need to engage the community and work through resistance
- involve experimentation with new strategies, technologies, and approaches (Cote, 2022).

Adaptive challenges can be seen to align more with long term and infectious crises detailed earlier in the article. It can be problematic for leaders to implement technical challenge solutions for adaptive challenges, as this underestimates the magnitude of the change involved and what is required to work with school communities through the crisis.

## Strategies for working through adaptive challenges

When infectious crises occur, people may experience cognitive overload and thus the technical approach is not suitable to address the complexity of problems arising. This can be challenging when information is fragmented or incomplete. There can be uncertainty, high anxiety and competing priorities in the community and among leaders, teachers and students. As Lyndon Rego and Rebecca Garau (2007) discovered during their research with leaders who experienced Cyclone Katrina. They note,

**Crisis has multiple phases; the leadership response needed will vary accordingly. In the short term, emphasis is on taking action, quick response... A key challenge is sustaining the effort through fatigue, blame, and lack of attention and resources. In the long term, priorities are less clear-cut and require people to connect through differences, wade through complexity, and find common ground to continue the work that must be done together (2007, p 42).**

## Twelve Cs for curbing crises

Here are twelve Cs distilled from literature on how leaders recalibrate and take decisive action during times of crisis (D'Auria, & De Smet, 2020; Mutch, 2020; Smith, & Riley, 2012; Wardman, 2020).

### 1. Contingency

Ensure there is a rigorously preconsidered contingency plan in place. Quickly refine the contingency plan to meet the current situation. There may be very little time to identify and consider the various options available. This resource will be useful in supporting key staff to know what action to take and by whom.

### 2. Character

It can be helpful to consider where you have experienced crises in the past and the personal

attributes you have used to get through them. Recognise when you need to find colleagues to complement your strengths and when you need to reach out for further support.

### 3. Clarification

Clarify the circumstances of the crisis, as the relevance, quality, and reliability the information can influence the planning and preparation of the response. Anticipate issues and assess risk. Decide on which things need to be foregrounded as important and when action will be taken.

### 4. Chain of command

Establish a 'war room' and determine who is to be delegated key responsibilities and empower these staff to make decisions. Be clear which things need to be escalated and when. Use any existing distributed leadership structures to support the dissemination of information and initiation of action. It may be necessary to empower key staff to direct some of the aspects of the school's crisis response. These key staff need to be provided with the authority to make and implement decisions without approval.

### 5. Core values

During periods of crises the values of the school and its leaders are apparent and visible to the community. Draw on the school's shared vision, core values and aspirations for an inclusive culture. These will serve the school well in during a crisis event. Ensure actions align with the school's core values and that this alignment is visible to the school community who need to see consistency through the crisis.

### 6. Communicate

Develop clear lines of communication. Teachers, students and the community need to be clear about what is happening. Establish a practice of engaging key staff to gauge how things are going. Provide coherent, concise and comprehensible instructions. Be aware of media pressure and protect the community where possible. Provide a single source of truth. To convey key information, consider proactive engagement with both traditional and digital media platforms. Set the tone and lead by example. Watch to ensure that there are no mixed messages. Where possible, support transparency so that verifiable information is provided in a timely manner.

### 7. Connect

Unify groups of people behind a single purpose. Describe the risks and explain their significance to provide context for people. Develop public connection and generate a narrative to articulate the strategy for how threats are to be addressed or mitigated. Detail the roles of the various stakeholders. Connect with the school community to determine and respond to the differentiated needs, preferences and concerns that people may have. Consider the lens that different individuals, groups and cultures bring to the table. Ensure language access for all groups in the community.

### 8. Concern

Demonstrate concern and empathy. Avoid being aloof and dismissive. Concern for the welfare of individuals and groups in the school community can foster powerful bonds and support in resolving the crisis.

### 9. Credibility

Be authentic and demonstrate competence and commitment in order to develop trust across the community. While there may be 'fake news' and misinformation, depending on the circumstances of the crisis, it is important to seek credible sources of information and be judicious about which experts to believe and promote. While seeking to support the community, it is important not to over protect them as they need an accurate account of all facets of the crisis.

### 10. Control

While there may be times for consultation under normal circumstances, during a crisis there is a need for leaders to be decisive. Factual information may be scarce and time may be of the essence. To prevent the escalation of damage or other forms of fallout, decisions must be made quickly. This helps to allay community fears, as there is a sense that 'all is under control'.

### 11. Calm

Deliberate calm is a key feature of successful leaders in times of crisis. Use the metacognitive strategy of detachment so you can think clearly about how to navigate the situation. Deliberate calm can be seen in leaders who possess humility but not powerlessness.

### 12. Chance for a reset.

If there has been past antagonism between staff in your school, the crisis experience may provide a chance

for a reset, as relationships are made anew. There is an opportunity for leaders to support teachers through the challenging time and (re)gain trust if it has been lacking in the past. After the initial crisis period, it may be opportune to consider the unexpected successes associated with working through the challenges presented by the period of crisis.

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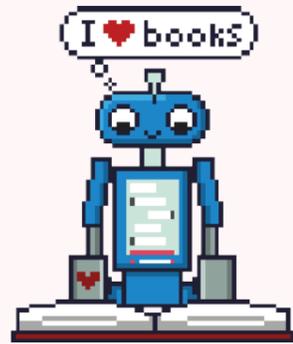
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**How to cite this article – Charteris, J. & Nye, A. (2022). Crisis leadership: Addressing technical and adaptive challenges. *Scan*, 41(4).**

# Huey the Bookbot - Resume 2022



**Huey** the bookbot.

I am an experienced Digital Library Assistant seeking a volunteer position in your library.

I work hand-in-hand with librarians like yourself to help children find books they'll love to read.

I connect to your library catalogue, ask students about their general reading ability, find out what they like, and then suggest books to read.

## Free Digital Library Assistant

### Skills

- Great with children
- Help a whole class in 15 mins
- Easy to use
- Personalised recommendations

### Qualifications

- Compatible with any device
- Created with students and librarians

### Availability

- 24hrs a day / 7 days a week
- Use on multiple devices
- Works anywhere in the world with internet access

### Have me in your library

[hueythebookbot.com/schools](http://hueythebookbot.com/schools)

## Try me!



### Work Experience:

#### Wriveted

May 2019

I started out as a prototype made out of LEGO and I was first showcased at the Children's Book Council of Australia Conference.

#### State Library of NSW

November 2019

This was my first role where I helped children to find books in the new Children's Library.

#### Wallsend and McCallums Hill Public Schools

March 2020

I was deployed in a pilot where I:

- Increased borrowing by 42%
- Frequent readers found books outside their regular author/series/genre
- Infrequent readers found books they liked for the first time

#### Over 100 schools Australia wide!

March 2022

I am being rolled out to over a hundred schools across Australia and would love to be connected to your school as well. To have me in your library go to:

[hueythebookbot.com/schools](http://hueythebookbot.com/schools)

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# What does it take to run a school the size of a town?

## And what's transferable to any school context?



Gary Johnson, Cherrybrook Technology High School

A wide spectrum of difference and diversity exists in schools across the state. As community hubs, schools embrace, cultivate and reflect the unique structure and culture of their particular locale.

This month's EduChat features intriguing insights from the principals of two of the largest government schools in NSW.

### Introducing Riverbank Public School and Cherrybrook Technology High School

Currently two of the state's biggest government schools are Riverbank Public School and Cherrybrook Technology High School, led by Jeanie Brown and Gary Johnson respectively.

Each school is responsible for the education of over 2,000 students. Between them, this is enabled

through a workforce of well over 300 dedicated and passionate teachers and leaders, plus administration and support staff.

Neither school operates from expansive grounds; the space afforded is cleverly utilised and possibly every nook and cranny is multipurpose. Both achieve outstanding results.

Jeanie and Gary agree that what facilitates the operations of a big school will work for any size school. Key to their outstanding results are some commonalities, including:

- a strong focus on relationships and wellbeing
- clear communication and lines of responsibility
- robust processes
- high expectations
- innovation and collaboration

Both principals kindly shared their experiences in interviews with the Scan editorial team.

## Riverbank Public School

Riverbank Public School is a dynamic primary school located in the north west of Sydney. Established in 2015 with an initial student population of 280 students, the school has rapidly grown to accommodate 2,060 students, including 3 Multi Categorical support classes. The school shares a site with The Ponds High School (which has just under 2,000 enrolments) and adopts an inclusive and student-centred approach, underpinned by a strong student wellbeing framework.



Learning spaces, Riverbank Public School



**Jeanie Brown**

Principal, Riverbank Public School

## How large and diverse is Riverbank Public School?

Together with The Ponds High School, there are around 4,000 students on our shared site, which makes for a vibrant learning community. The school's growth has been substantial; since opening the school in 2015, I have welcomed 300 new students and 24 new staff each year.

Our leadership team comprises 3 deputy principals and 9 assistant principals, who oversee different year groups within the school. Our largest cohort is currently Year 4, with around 380 students – large enough to be a school by themselves!

A large proportion of our students (89%) have a language background other than English. Our school's motto, 'Learning to live, living to learn', reinforces a broad and enriching curriculum – one which focuses on both developing academic skills and nurturing social and emotional wellbeing in a culturally diverse community.

Our facilities include flexible co-teaching classrooms for students in Stages 2 and 3. The design of the Stage 3 learning space is particularly unique. Catering for groups of 90 students, these hubs include presentation spaces, science labs, withdrawal spaces, a mix of traditional and flexible spaces, and areas for creative and performing arts – all designed to support students' transition to high school.

## What are the benefits of leading, learning and teaching in a large school?

With 150 staff, the talent, experience and expertise among my staff is truly exceptional. Together, we run more than 50 co-curricular groups, including creative and performing arts, STEAM and sport. As a result, there's a wealth of opportunities to develop the whole child and create learning opportunities for all.

The reciprocal learning among staff is also significant, and builds capacity for future leaders. We co-teach



Classrooms and outdoor facilities, Riverbank Public School

and work together, asking questions, listening, cooperating, coaching, showing vulnerability, and providing professional space. This kind of collaborative innovation strengthens and improves teachers' concepts of problem definition, idea generation, idea selection, implementation and diffusion. We are constantly exchanging knowledge and learning from each other, resulting in mutual development.

In our experience, a combination of instructional, distributed, and transformational leadership has also kept students at the centre of all decisions.

## What are the challenges?

While there are potential logistical challenges associated with managing a large and rapidly growing school community, nothing is insurmountable with a strong culture of flexibility, adaptability and accountability.

We find the following strategies particularly useful:

- **Data informed practices:** Teachers know their students and use this data to inform their teaching and learning. Programs operate in 5-week cycles. We also use data to track attendance and wellbeing, ensuring that teachers and school leaders know the needs of each student and the next steps for differentiated learning.
- **Communication:** Our systems and processes prioritise communication and parent engagement and convey high expectations.
- **Leadership:** Every teacher is considered a leader and we consistently build this leadership capacity in staff. (For example,

all school leaders have been trained as mentors by Growth Coaching International and in turn mentor the teachers within their teams.)

- **Student-centred learning:** We focus on school-wide, collective responsibility for student learning, with students at the centre. Success is regularly shared with parents, with students participating in parent and teacher conferences and open mornings where students discuss their learning goals, reflect on their achievements and showcase their learning.
- **A commitment to ongoing improvement:** Our teachers and school leaders have a shared responsibility for learning improvement. Meaningful conversations are continuous throughout our High Impact Professional Learning cycle and rich data informs our teaching practice and builds teachers' data capability.
- **A whole school approach to literacy and numeracy achievement** (accompanied by evidence-based teaching strategies to improve student outcomes). This is, once again, underpinned by quality data. For example, the school leadership team has recently unpacked our Check-in assessments data and triangulated this with school-based data to seek areas for improvement. Alongside this, families are supported as partners in their children's literacy and numeracy development.

**Our largest cohort is currently Year 4, with around 380 students – large enough to be a school by themselves!**

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

I think it's crucial to develop connections and nurture authentic relationships, built on trust. For example, I am visible to students in the mornings and afternoons, and work to ensure that staff, students and the broader community know that my systems and processes are fair. Our Circle Time philosophy also supports the development of healthy relationships and provides a pedagogy for incorporating the principles of safety, positivity, inclusion, respect and equality.

Restorative practices form the relational basis for quality teaching and learning at the school. Due to its explicit nature, our Restorative Practice Framework offers a common language and process capable of fostering healthy relationships. Our approach encourages individual responsibility and helps to develop empathy. Mistakes can be viewed as an opportunity for insight, learning and development in both the academic and social domains.

In addition, we are careful to embed the intellectual, creative, social-emotional and physical domains in our learning and relationships. As a result, opportunities consistently arise to recognise and cultivate the diverse gifts and potential of every student.

Lastly, we value student voice. Students are supported to actively contribute ideas and viewpoints, and share their concerns to shape their learning. Establishing student ownership in the day-to-day operations of the school is important – be it roles and responsibilities within the classroom, jobs out in the playground, or generally having a say in ways to improve the school. To this end, we operate a 'student parliament'. This parliament is run by Year 6 leaders who take on the roles of prime minister, premier, and various ministers of sport, environment, events, transport, education, arts and technology. There is also a treasurer, speaker, serjeant-at-arms and a leader of the opposition. During parliament, all students in Years 3-6 have the opportunity to address the parliament

and move a motion, outlining new initiatives for the school to undertake. The students then vote on the motion. If passed, the item is brought to the attention of the relevant minister, who takes action under the guidance of the principal and school staff. In recent years, due to the significant increase in student enrolments, our school parliament has split into two sessions: Stage 2 (State Parliament) and Stage 3 (Federal Parliament). These sessions provide a forum for all students to have a voice regarding how the school operates.

What lessons could principals and teachers in smaller schools take from your experience?

My priority from day one has been to develop accountability and shared responsibility for improvement. This is now strongly embedded in our daily practice and organisational culture, and serves us well as a large, complex school. Effective communication is also critical, as well as active leadership which builds trust and values collaboration. Ongoing improvement, for every student and teacher, comes with hard work and an openness for challenging conversations.

In many ways, our successes have simply come from finding ways to scale best practice. In particular, our teachers and school leaders know their students' learning and wellbeing needs. They also foster healthy relationships through their interactions and the school's robust wellbeing framework.



Jeanie Brown and school captains, Riverbank Public School



Administration building, Cherrybrook Technology High School

## Cherrybrook Technology High school

Cherrybrook Technology High School is a high performing comprehensive high school in Sydney's north west. Established in 1992 as a purpose-built technology high school, it was originally expected to enrol approximately 800 students but has grown to accommodate around 2,000 students and 180 staff. Over its 30 year history, the school has steadily gained a reputation as one of the most innovative and successful comprehensive high schools in NSW.



### ..... Gary Johnson

Principal, Cherrybrook Technology High School  
.....

## How large and diverse is Cherrybrook Technology High School?

Geographically, we're actually on a relatively small site, since local population growth has exceeded initial projections. But in terms of enrolments, our school is now bigger than a very significant number of country towns. With over 2,000 people on site each day, we're larger than the entire population of Nyngan, for example.

Almost 70% of our students come from language backgrounds other than English, with 89 languages

represented across our school. The multicultural nature of the school community is one of our great strengths.

## What are the benefits of a large school?

There are many benefits! We get great economies of scale, in so many ways, particularly in terms of ongoing, in-house professional learning. For example, there are about 22 teachers in our English key learning area, including some highly experienced staff. Within a large, experienced team of this kind, there are terrific opportunities for developing the skillset of younger teachers and sharing a culture of quality learning. Supported by so many outstanding teachers, including those with HSC marking experience as senior markers and supervisors, beginning teachers experience this rich, incidental professional learning. It's the type of experience you can't buy – and our teachers get that, on the ground, every day. And this is reflected in our students' outstanding results.

## What are the challenges?

I think one of the issues for staff who may be seeking promotion is that they become highly skilled at doing things deeply, but they may not necessarily experience the same breadth which you get at a smaller school. Staff have fairly specific roles, which is necessary to ensure that lines of responsibility are clear in a large, complex setting. As a result, they benefit from developing that depth of expertise, but may not necessarily cover the same broad territory that you might experience elsewhere.

... our school is now bigger than a very significant number of country towns.

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.

## Writer biographies



### Jeanie Brown

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Jeanie Brown joined the NSW Department of Education in 1995 and began her teaching career in Sydney's Inner West. A strong advocate of inclusive education for all, Jeanie earned her Master of Special Education in 1998. Her first principalship was at Brooklyn Public School, a beautiful, small school on the Hawkesbury River. Jeanie now enters her 11th year as principal at Riverbank Public School.



### Gary Johnson

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Gary Johnson is the principal of Cherrybrook Technology High School. Prior to this appointment in 2003, Gary was principal of Jamison High School and deputy principal at Asquith Boys High School. He was an HSC marker and HSC marking supervisor from 1992 to 1999, and served on the Curriculum Committee of the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) Board from 2017 to 2020. From 2010 to 2016, Gary sat on the former Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards NSW as a nominee of the Minister representing secondary principals. From 2000 to the present, he has sat on the NESA Board. Gary is a life member of the NSW Secondary Principals' Council.

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