Studying for the future: Training creative writing postgraduates for life after degrees

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Abstract
In the creative arts, we are teaching, and our students are learning, specialist subject areas at a time when only a small minority of creative artists can make a living from their creative work and the academy is offering fewer and fewer permanent tenure-track positions. In this environment, this paper considers an important question: What futures can, or should, higher degrees by research in the creative arts discipline of writing be readying our postgraduates for? Comparing the current situation in Australia with those in the USA and UK, we posit a range of professionally relevant approaches to the design of research postgraduate degrees, and consider how the work of both students and staff in research degrees can be both future-focused and time efficient.

Introduction

In December 2002, the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee issued a policy statement entitled *Universities and their Students: Principles for the Provision of Education by Australian Universities* (hereafter, AVCC Guidelines). The subsection, "Guidelines for Maintaining and Monitoring Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Degrees", mentions the research postgraduate candidate's future only once. This occurs as the last of a supervisor's ten responsibilities, which is that of "providing career advice and assistance as appropriate" (p.21). In the discipline of creative writing, however, we are working in an environment shared by many in the creative arts, where only a very small minority of professional practitioners can make a sustained living from their creative practice (Throsby and Hollister 2003) and the academy is offering fewer and fewer permanent, tenure-track positions (AVCC 2005). In such an environment, this paper considers what futures postgraduate research degrees in writing could, or should, be readying graduates from these programs for.

While taking into account a range of candidates including those who come to higher degree study as experienced researchers and writers (and who are often attracted to postgraduate study in writing) and those who progress at a relatively young age from undergraduate to postgraduate work, we will not consider professional doctorates or coursework programs such as Graduate Certificates, Diplomas and coursework Masters degrees. This is because we feel these qualifications tend to be taken as either bridging degrees for further study or as purely practical degrees to improve performance, expand professional expertise and/or allow candidates to upgrade current qualifications. We must also preface this discussion by acknowledging that there is a range of requirements for research creative writing higher degrees across Australia, which means that many universities have differing expectations of students. For example, weightings of the creative and critical/exegetical components of the thesis can vary substantially, and this obviously affects the kind of training students receive. It is not this paper's intention, however, to reflect on this area, which merits a detailed treatment of its own.

Our thinking on training creative writing postgraduates is grounded in our past academic, professional and work experience, current professional situations as supervisors, examiners and designers of degrees in writing, as well as in our concern for students in our discipline. It also takes into account the fact that firm and shrinking timelines are now an ever-present factor for all involved in postgraduate study. Although in the recent past research student enrolments largely determined funding, government support for such study currently relates

directly to completion rates, as does the performance-based formula that determines the allocation of research places to higher education institutions (AVCC 2003, p.16). In particular, candidates' scholarships and other sources of funding are now tied to specific time frames, while speedy completions enhance supervisors' prospects for promotion and other advancement. Without arguing the case for, or against, whether the allocations of time to complete these degrees are adequate (or even realistic) or if, given such timelines, already overloaded academic staff can offer sufficient supervision, current economic and other pressures dictate that research postgraduate candidates complete their work within the required period.

Contexts

According to figures in the latest *Australian Association of Writing Programs'* (AAWP) *Guide to Australian and New Zealand University Writing Programs* (AAWP 2005), some 19 universities in our region currently offer a PhD in Creative Writing or a PhD in English, Communication or other discipline that includes creative writing. In terms of research-based degrees, there are also 3 DCAs, 25 MAs of various nomenclatures, 5 MCAs and 2 MPhils with creative writing specialisation, as well as a number of other degrees such as MSocSc (Creative Writing) and Masters by Research (Creative Writing) (AAWP 2005). This number has grown each time the AAWP guide has been updated and anecdotal evidence suggests that not all available courses are listed in each update. This means that, every year, a relatively large, and increasing, number of candidates graduate with higher degrees by research in creative writing. As regular examiners of theses from a variety of programs, we can attest that they are generally of a high standard and are making substantial, even significant, contributions to new knowledge in, and outside, the discipline. But what do these students do with this knowledge, often so arduously gained, once their degrees are completed?

As many other postgraduates in the creative and performing arts, writing students complete their research degrees with direct expertise in areas in which there are few career opportunities. They might be highly specialised practice-based researchers, but they seek entry into an academy which not only provides a small number of entry-level permanent or tenure-track vacancies, but which increasingly is offering mainly contract and/or sessional positions (AVCC 2005). If these graduates look beyond academia, they find a world where few can survive on their creative work alone. Throsby and Hollister's 2003 economic study of professional artists, including writers, illustrates this fact, revealing very low incomes as the norm with half of all artists in the survey having a "creative" income (from arts practice) below $7,300 (the median) in the 2000-01 financial year (p.46). Contemporary artists' economic position poses worrying questions for those who train them, given that tertiary education usually means not only enhanced abilities but enhanced economic outcomes:

> It is clear artists' income from creative work in their chosen profession is far below that earned by similarly qualified practitioners in other professions. Even when other arts-related earnings and non-arts income is added in, the gross income of artists, from which they must finance their professional practice as well as the demands of everyday living, are substantially less than managerial, administrative, professional and para-professional earnings. Indeed their total incomes on average are little different from those of all occupational groups, including non-professional and blue-collar occupations (Throsby and Hollister 2003, p.46).

In particular, writers seem impoverished; the median earned income from creative work alone was only $4,800, while the median for total arts income was $11,700 (p.45). Throsby and Hollister note a fact, however, which might become highly significant when we turn to look at possible training schemes for creative writing postgraduates. Of all the art forms, "the highest average non-arts incomes were made by writers" (p.45). This suggests that the skills writers possess are transferable to a range of occupations.

Creative writing in the Australian tertiary sector today grows out of a two-tiered heritage, the Colleges of Advanced Education and Technology and the universities, which have now amalgamated. In this system, creative writing encompasses a range of genres, both literary and popular and, in several institutions, has embraced the new media and technologies (Kroll

2004, p.43). We have not opted, as in the USA model, to segregate the professional schools from scholarship. Nor have we for a long time, if ever, been plagued by the USA distinction between composition and creative writing that designates the first as practical and, therefore, vocational, and the second as artistic, and only vocationally useful for an artist. In Australia, we have been much more willing, especially with our embracing of a variety of theoretical positions in our discipline, to welcome all writing as forms of discourse directed at particular audiences. Postmodernism asked us to look at texts as cultural products with particular purposes and particular agendas. In this incarnation writing has to be useful; art does not exist for art's sake but, rather, for the sake of the writer, the audience, the culture. The wide acceptance of the term "creative industries" – so ubiquitous it seems barely credible it was only coined less than a decade ago in 1997 (CITF 1998) – confirms that the creative arts are not remote from the rest of society, but make a significant contribution to economies as well as lives. Richard Florida's analysis of the ways in which creative people contribute to a nation's economy and can reinvigorate locations where they choose to live crystallises these arguments: "Any country that doesn't keep building its creative strengths – with broad support for creative activities, and with policies that bring more citizens into the creative sector rather than under-employing them – will fall behind" (Florida 2004, p.xxvi).

Comparison with the USA system

The professions into which postgraduate students of writing might move upon completion of their degrees is an issue which has been of concern to writing program coordinators in the USA for some time. In 1997 the MLA Committee on Professional Employment drew attention to the "disparity between the expectations … that most graduate programs inculcate in their PhD candidates and the actual work most of those candidates will do" (p.23). Commenting also about the USA, Radavich (1999) found "no profession for which an MFA or PhD in creative writing provides direct training" (p.112). This discussion dates back to the 1967 formation of the AWP (Associated Writing Programs, recently renamed the Association of Writers and Writing Programs). From its inception, the AWP lobbied for the Master of Fine Arts (MFA) to be the ''terminal'' degree for graduates who wanted to be writers. Although the association does not admit this (or, at least, its various directors do not) this battle is in the process of being lost – at least for the majority of MFA graduates. The primary cause of this defeat is the advent of the PhD in creative writing in American universities. This topic came up both directly and indirectly in a variety of sessions at two recent annual AWP conventions (New Orleans, 2002, and Vancouver, Canada, 2005), which one of the writers of this paper attended. Staff reported that many university administrations wanted to employ PhDs if at all possible, even if (as in some instances) those with doctorates had fewer publications than candidates with MFAs. This preference was because the doctoral award is seen as increasing an institution's prestige and encouraging alumnae to donate funds to their alma maters.

Let us turn now to the nature of the USA postgraduate system and the types of degrees it produces. Hierarchical in nature, the system is based on the assumption that those who complete a PhD in English literature aim to be university teachers, and that the PhD is their professional qualification. (This is relevant to consider as many USA degrees in creative writing grew out of, and in, English literature departments.) That said, the coursework, qualifying exams and full-length dissertation required by the English literature PhD, do make this a comprehensive teaching as well as research degree. Moreover, most of these programs offer and, in fact, require that their masters and doctoral candidates train in the teaching of composition – a trend that began in the late 1970s. The situation for creative writing in the USA, however, is significantly different. One of the symptoms of the split between traditional English studies and creative writing – and what is increasingly posited as a division between the scholar and the writer in particular – is that the first is believed to conduct research, while the second practises a studio art. Hence, scholars can be trained as researchers and teachers, but writers, if they publish and/or if they have their MFAs or PhDs, are (supposedly) already trained. These individuals can practise their art, therefore, they can teach it. That is at the heart of the debates about training. Such writers learn to teach by "osmosis" (Leahy 2005, p.xii); they have taken workshops, ergo they can teach them. A survey in 2001 on the USA PhD in creative writing noted:

> At only *4 of these 25* institutions [awarding the PhD in creative writing] is there any *required* training course or program in the teaching of creative writing, whereas at *23 of the 25* there is a required course at the doctoral level … in the teaching of composition/freshman writing/rhetoric (Ritter, p.218).

So, if these students are not being trained to teach their discipline area, what, then, are these USA doctoral programs in creative writing preparing their postgraduates for? It is true that the majority will teach composition as well as literature if they remain in the academy, but these students' main specialisation is creative writing. The number of positions in creative writing has, it is true, outstripped the number of jobs in English at university level (Ritter 2001, Perloff 2006), but these statistics need analysing. Although there are more jobs in creative writing, apparently nearly 50% of these "were for 'distinguished' or full professors" (Ritter, p.211) with substantial publications, "or otherwise mid-to-late-career writers and teachers" (Ritter, p.211). The rest were for entry-level jobs where applicants with a MFA would be competing with those with (the seemingly preferred) PhD.

Some USA universities offering higher degrees in creative writing admit openly that these degrees will not prepare students for employment in any meaningful way. Lim notes that a number of institutions tell their students they are not preparing them for a job (p.164). For example, Cornell University (2002) warns: "The M.F.A. degree, in itself, has little value in obtaining a teaching position in a college writing program. In intense competition for such positions, a substantial body of published work is of greatest value" (Lim, p.164). In 1999, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reported that the University of Arizona was then sending a letter with its MFA application materials that, according to that university's program head, informed applicants "before they come into the program, 'Don't expect to get a job with this degree'" (Montell 1999). The *Princeton Review*, an online course finder tool approved by the National Association of College Admission Counselling, states the situation quite clearly: " … there's something you need to note about an M.F.A. in Creative Writing – or any other M.F.A. discipline, for that matter. An M.F.A. is not necessarily a job-preparation degree like a lot of other graduate programs. Rather, an M.F.A. is largely an artistic endeavor" (2006). In fact, Lim found that "[m]ost M.F.A. graduates 'return to the types of jobs they held before … if they had employment experience … A sizable number go on to complete other degrees'" (p.164).

How useful and how realistic, then, is the assertion by the executive director of the AWP, D. W. Fenza, that "the goal of graduate study in creative writing is to become, first and foremost, an accomplished writer who makes significant contributions to contemporary literature" (Fenza, p.6)? According to David Myers, USA statistics "peg the professional success rate for graduates in creative writing (based on the success rate for publication) at about one percent (as compared with 90 percent for graduates in medical school" (1996, p.157). Publications or not, most graduates look for work in their field. In the late 1990s, tenure-track jobs in creative writing in the USA rose sharply, but the annual numbers of positions listed with the AWP and MLA in 1997 and 1998 were still under 100 at a time when thousands of students were enrolled in MFA degrees and a large pool of graduates were vying for jobs (Montell 1999). In fact, as Sherwin and Perry state, speaking about the situation in a broader context: "Most graduates with advanced degrees in English literature, composition, and creative writing will not find full-time tenure-track jobs in academe" (1999). Continuing on to note the numbers of potential job seekers in creative writing (based on those enrolled in higher degrees according to an AWP 1997 survey) and the numbers of "tenure-track creative writing positions" (in 1998), it is clear that the outcomes for most will not be permanent employment: "Out of 138 member institutions, 368 MA, 543 MFA, and 37 PhD candidates were awarded degrees in creative writing, with 19,813 students enrolled in undergraduate programs and 3,075 students enrolled in graduate programs" (Sherwin and Perry 1999).

Perhaps some of the writers from some of these programs will be able to make Fenza's "significant contribution", but this does not address the plight of the majority of students who will not. In fact, further on in his defence of our discipline, Fenza does assert that it is "myopic not to see that study in the arts is applicable to many types of employment outside academe! – like those of a professional writer, editor, literary agent, public affairs officer, grant writer"

(Fenza, p.7). With this qualification, the AWP has begun to list jobs outside of the university on its website, acknowledging that its members have skills that can be utilised in the economy at large; these options include "arts administration, editing, publishing, and grant writing in nonprofit and corporate sectors" (Sherwin and Perry 1999).

The UK system

Developments in Britain mirror more closely the Australian model. Professor Graeme Harper's experience is instructive here, since he completed the first DCA at the University of Technology, Sydney (1993), then went on to obtain an MLitt and a PhD in creative writing in the UK (East Anglia). He sees that the development of our discipline has begun to alter the "split" between those who define themselves as writers or as academics, and the corresponding split in their teaching styles and orientations. Harper explains that in the 1970s and early 1980s, the UK MA programs produced some famous graduates, "people such as Kazuo Ishiguro and Ian McEwan" (Harper 2005, p.2) who "dipped into an [academic] environment and stepped back out again" (p.3). These individual success stories are not realistic models for the majority of postgraduates, however, since they are that rarity – writers who make a (good) living from their craft.

In both the UK and Australia, how we supervise our postgraduates and they futures they might be prepared for as a result of their degrees has to be connected to what those degrees comprise and what students learn in them. This is especially so in the case of PhD candidates who do not, at present, take mandated coursework as part of the degree in either the UK or Australia. Harper asserts about the higher degree that, "if you're entering an academic environment, then there's got to be some proof of your progression in the field of knowledge that you're in" (4). What is that proof? It has to be contained in the thesis and in our conception of research. A critical question, he suggests, must be asked about every candidate's project:

> what is the additional component that confirms the fact that your knowledge curve has increased? And the knowledge curve aspect seems to me to relate back to the critical response to your own work and the work of others that confirms you have learnt a higher degree level of understanding of the subject (p.4).

This knowledge moves out from the centre of the thesis – the project – we submit, in more than one direction. A writer's knowledge of the craft is proven by practising that art, as in the MFA, but the completion of the exegetical component (in whatever form) in the MA or PhD allows candidates to prove their knowledge to their peers, and their grasp of contemporary and past contexts as well. These types of knowledge, in terms of mastery of a discipline, can prepare candidates to be teachers of the discipline. We are not talking here about pedagogy, but about what Myers calls *Wissenschaft*. He distinguishes undergraduate from graduate programs by saying that one provides a "*Bildung*, the development of students' appreciation of literature, as opposed to a *Wissenschaft*, a research methodology for producing new knowledge" (p.160). But it does not solve the problem, for postgraduate students, of the lack of teaching positions once they have that knowledge. Which brings us what might be possible in the Australian system.

A possible Australian model

In Australia, it is inevitable that our position about what futures our students are being prepared for and what we can do for them will inevitably be conditioned, in the first instance, by the nature of our degrees, which are different from the USA and UK models. In other words, how we conceive of research in creative writing, that we do conceive of such work as research, and that we continue to develop, interrogate and refine the idea of practice-based-research (Brien 2006), gives our students a different intellectual grounding than that gained overseas (and particularly from that gained in the USA). This grounding provides a different focus to how they are trained as writers and scholars.

It seems that the demographic of the Australian student population is also quite different from,

at least, that in the USA. In Australia, we attract a considerable proportion of mature-age students who are either already writers returning to higher degree work, or who are switching careers. This has been reported anecdotally by many members of the Australian Association of Writing Programs and by mature-age students themselves at conferences and in articles. In addition, statistics testify to the fact that "professional practising artists … tend to be older than members of the labour force or the general population. The mean age of professional artists, about 46 years, is greater than that of the average worker, less than 40 years" (Throsby and Hollister, p.20). More to our point, writers are even older (Throsby and Hollister, p.21). It is certainly true that the boom in creative arts education has, in general, attracted not only school leavers (Throsby and Hollister, p.31) but also writers who have previously focused on family or other careers.

We have to ask if these candidates' needs are different from the recent graduate who enters a PhD program with the aim of full-time employment after completion. The returnee, the academic recidivist, might be someone who just cannot keep their minds out of the brains trust, wanting to steal a little more knowledge after twenty or more years outside academia. Or are they, at least in part, also motivated by the idea of full-time employment as a result of their degree? To answer these questions fully we need dedicated research on postgraduate student goals and expectations, and graduate destinations, and such work would make a worthwhile future research project. Until we have that information, we need to think about a related question that we can ask in this context. Should we structure our degrees according to what our students think they want out of their course of study – or should we be preparing our students for a wide range of options that they might not even contemplate until after graduation?

We believe that staff in the discipline of creative writing (as in other creative arts disciplines) in Australia must consider whether our aim should be to produce higher degree graduates who are accomplished artists (in our case, writers), professionals with a profession, or both of these. Moreover, if producing employable professionals is to be an outcome of such degrees for our students (which is our point of view), then which professions should these be? What part will "research" in the discipline, as we understand it, play in this process? The stastistics cited above suggest that it is unlikely a majority of our graduates will be able to live from their art (Myers 1996, p.157, Throsby and Hollister 2003). We believe, therefore, that research degree institutions should assist students to enhance other future employment opportunities.

Teacher and other training

Ritter states that USA creative writing higher degree programs should "account for their identity by building markers of professional difference in their candidatures" (p.208) and teaching expertise is one of the indicators she lists. Many of our research postgraduate students already teach and most of these will, or will want to, teach in their specialty, creative writing. We are not training them formally to do so, however, except in the most general way.

Many Australian institutions currently offer generic university-wide workshops and short courses that sessional and other staff can access on a voluntary basis. This training commonly addresses such subjects as small and large group teaching, assessment and marking, and flexible delivery. At Flinders University, for example, the Staff Development Unit offers an expanding range of such topics, as does the Teaching and Learning Unit at the University of New England. At Queensland University of Technology, sessional staff (including tutoring postgraduate students) were paid to attend such sessions as late as 2004, when the institution (in a working group with the University of Queensland) recognised that "resources need to be allocated (and be specifically identified for this purpose) to ensure that sessional teaching staff are appropriately managed, supported and trained" (TEDI 2004).

While undoubtedly a useful place to start for all beginning academic teachers, none of the (generic) courses with which we are familiar offer any discipline-specific training in teaching creative writing. Those undertaking the Graduate Certificate in Higher Education can (usually) tailor their study and project areas to creative writing, but such units and modules are usually

not developed or taught by those with any particular disciplinary speciality (such as creative writing) unless by chance. The responsibility for any training in teaching creative writing, therefore, usually falls to the unit coordinator with whom any particular sessional staff member is working. This training is often offered as an intensive mentoring process with class preparation assistance, regular meetings, assessment moderation and even instructional handbooks produced to support tutors and guest lecturers in team-taught units. Caught up in day-to-day administrative matters and detailed discussion of topic content and student needs, coordinators usually have little additional time, however, to give any broader attention to such areas as the pedagogy of creative writing or the philosophy underlying this pedagogy.

Apart from the experience itself and those (sometimes) unreliable formal student evaluations, the postgraduate student undertaking teacher-training-on-the-job has little to take with them – physically or philosophically – from their teaching. The professional evidence increasingly called for in job applications, such as the teaching portfolio, are not developed by such mentoring or practice, and these postgraduate tutors and guest lecturers, while often performing exemplarily in the units they have taught, gain little wider understanding of pedagogy and other issues in higher education, such as the teaching/research nexus and the importance of engaging in reflective scholarship of teaching research and publication. Moreover, most postgraduates who undertake sessional teaching as casual academics will eventually either opt out of this system, finding a permanent academic position or moving out of the academy altogether. It is true that all do not waste their experience, however. The most flexible and hardy gain positions in related fields including primary and secondary education, teaching in the community arts sector or in industry training schemes. Despite having gained a number of transferable skills at university, many of these graduates will still have to learn how to teach in these contexts while they are working in these jobs.

How, then, can we best support our postgraduate students who are faced with such a precarious situation upon completion? First of all, we could offer our postgraduates short, weekend or semester-long courses geared to the reality of sessional work and employment outside academia. Such a course, focusing on teaching in the community, for example, might include how to run writing workshops in schools, how to prepare relevant grant applications (such as for the Artists in the Schools program); and how to conduct an oral history project. In addition, a course could grapple with the special contexts and challenges of adult education. We could further enrich a candidate's degree experience, and aid in the transition to life outside the academy, by discussing the artist's freelance lifestyle, which largely involves making a living out of "bits and pieces" of work. Freelancing in this sense does not only mean writing for a variety of publications, but in working for a variety of organisations, usually on short-term contracts. At present, many writers piece an income together from grants, community arts projects, freelancing for newspapers, magazines, journals, corporations and other bodies such as manuscript assessment agencies, as well as casual school visits and the like. This eclectic employment lifestyle is summarised by Hazel Edwards, who has made a living for more than a quarter of a century out of her writing and books that train others to write. She asserts that "writing is a small business, the writer is the business" (quoted in Kroll 1998). As in any business venture, those who prepare the most thoroughly have the best chance of success.

At Flinders University, such a vocational dimension has been incorporated into the creative writing honours program since 1998. Students are asked to interview writers or industry professionals in first semester, and then to undertake short-term work or volunteer placements in the second. This practice has been formalised and expanded for the Honours Bachelor of Creative Arts/Creative Writing students in 2006 with a mandatory industry placement topic of 120 hours. Previous short-term internships have already yielded significant results. For example, a third-year BCA student who completed a placement at Omnibus Books, one of Australia's premier children's publishers, was offered a full-time job as soon as classes were over. Even if these stints in industry do not yield financial rewards, they can instill students with confidence and can provide them with enthusiastic recommendations for future employers.

Professional practice and placements in research degrees

Research program planning at the University of New England (UNE) by one of the writers of this article has gone further to propose that completion of a professional practice module be a requirement for all postgraduate research students in writing. This module can comprise an industry or other internship, work elsewhere in the institution and/or research in a professional area. Two elements are important here: that the learning/work in this module enhances candidates' employment prospects upon graduation while also providing research and/or other material for their theses. A side benefit of such a dual approach is that this focuses the effort candidates are already expending on thinking (and often worrying) about their futures into their postgraduate working schedules and outputs. The benefits for undergraduate students of completing internships or otherwise gaining professional knowledge are persuasively argued (Tovey 2001), but such knowledge and experience is often of considerably more relevance to postgraduate students. In particular, interships at this level offer a variety of benefits: resume-improving experience; help in identifying transferable skills; and organisational/institutional knowledge that can only be accessed in the workplace. It is obvious that any student writer aspiring to publish gains from a working knowledge of the publishing industry, but all interns can make valuable industry-based contacts at this timely point in their careers, and increase their employment prospects before they complete their degrees.

In such a system, supervisors and their higher education institution's career advisors would assist candidates to identify the professional areas for which they are most suited and qualified. A student who wanted to work in publishing, for instance, could complete a study of some aspect of the industry involving an internship (perhaps regarding the possible market for, or genre of, their creative work) the results of which might then become incorporated into his/her thesis, or at least produce a publication. Others who planned to set up a small business as a literary consultant, manuscript assessor, editor, indexer or agent would benefit from taking units in Business and/or Law areas and mining information from these experiences for their theses. Assisting with convening seminars, conferences, colloquia other events would provide candidates with hands-on experience (which could be supported with other study) in professional areas such as arts administration, events management, professional writing, and marketing and publicity, in the process also providing an increased range and number of venues for postgraduate students to present their work in public. Of course, this professional practice placement requirement could be utilised by the postgraduate to add a suitable qualification in higher education or other teaching to their portfolio of achievements gained during their candidature, although as noted above, a discipline-specific nationally accredited award may need to be created for this to be of greatest benefit.

Students are not the only beneficiaries of such a program. Workplaces benefit from the accumulated skills, maturity, advanced education level and cutting-edge knowledge of postgraduate interns. Workplaces also gain knowledge of, and the opportunity to network with, university staff and students in programs in their professional areas. Supervisors make (or maintain) industry contacts and gain up-to-the-minute knowledge of a range of professional contexts, while also increasing their access to possible future guest lecturers, research partners and consultancy options. The hosting higher education institution benefits by meeting strategic goals in the areas of professional/industry linkages and the enhancement of "job-readiness" (Maiden and Kerr 2006) in their graduates. Dual recruitment pathways can also be formed, whereby the intern may progress to more lasting work arrangements with a particular workplace (as in the Flinders example discussed above), and where individuals from the workplace may also be attracted to study at the intern's university because of their personal contact with the intern*.*

Solving the problem of time

While many of us know, anecdotally, that busy people are often the most productive, the suggestion that a wide variety of activities is associated with higher levels of accomplishment

is also supported by well-known studies that show involvement in a broad range of projects, activities and hobbies relates directly to scientists attaining more significant outputs in their scientific work (Finkelstein, Scott and Franke 1981, Root-Bernstein, Bernstein and Garnier 1995). Given that many higher degree students already experience considerable stress and anxiety trying to complete their theses in the available time (Elphinstone and Schweitzer 1998) and "workload issues" are high on every supervisors' list, however, it is valid to ask how a research program can realistically include any of the above program additions, no matter how worthwhile for all those involved.

One possibility, and the central rationale underlying the UNE program outlined above, is that everything required of candidates during their candidature relates to their final thesis and/or any employment that they are either already undertaking or planning to undertake. In this case, any work required of a student, rather then being "extra" to the required thesis, should directly assist in the timely completion of that thesis while also enhancing each graduand's portfolio of professional skills, achievements and knowledge. How the professional experience, learning and research from such experiences are incorporated into theses (and whether into creative works or dissertations, or both) will be determined by the students, supervisors and the other individuals involved in the professional placements, such as workplace employers and university careers advisors.

A more holistic although, no doubt, more radical answer to the problem of time for both candidates and supervisors is to significantly reconceptualise the relationship between the two. Such rethinking can establish a more collaborative "community of practice" environment (sometimes characterised as an apprenticeship model) where both supervisors and candidates have the potential to gain equally from the experience. In particular, supervisors will receive "payback" for any additional time spent with postgraduate students as we will outline below. The community of practice model is described in Lave and Wenger's theory of legitimate peripheral participation situated learning (1991) and is one being employed currently with a small group of three new (in 2006) PhD students who are involved in testing such a program at UNE. Of course, candidates' submitted works must be original and their own, but the learning process to achieve that end is, in this situation, based on what Lave and Wenger call "coparticipation" (1991, p.13). In exploring the relationship between learning and the social situation in which it occurs, Lave and Wenger promote an approach in which the learner becomes part of a community of practice through his/her participation in actual practice with an expert. This differs from a mentorship model in that it can be directly translated into such disciplinary practice outcomes as co-written and/or presented conference papers and other public presentations, co-authored articles and books, and team teaching, for example. Co-authoring opportunities – which in economic terms could be seen as exchanging creative and professional input for DEST points – will naturally arise from this situation, but please note that we do mean co-authoring (with co-credit) and not exploitation on anyone's part.

The AVCC Guidelines offer some direction about shared responsibility:

> Research training at a university involves the active participation of both staff and students. The responsibility to ensure that it is conducted in the most efficient and effective manner is shared by all parties: the university, its academic units and staff, and the students, all have obligations to each other (2002, p.19).

Coparticipant colearning can, however, move well past this sense of shared obligation to that of real cooperation and, thus, can provide a potentially useful model for reconfiguring the sometimes-problematic relationship between writing student and teacher at the research postgraduate level. Dibble and van Loon (2004) characterise this complex and, at times, awkward relationship as a "three-legged race", acknowledging that "[w]here it is most exhilarating is when they become equal partners with different learning and production goals" (n.p.). Nightingale (2005) has even suggested that the term "advising" be utilised in preference to "supervising" as the latter term implies an unequal power relationship, but equality between partners is not a necessary part of productive collaborative work (Brien and Brady 2003) and is the basis for the apprenticeship system. A recent study suggests,

moreover, that the most successful postgraduate supervisory relationships are those in which the obvious power differentials are openly acknowledged (Neumann 2003, p.139). We would add "but valued equally" (Winer and Ray 1994, p.25), as in the case studies discussed by Lave and Wenger.

Supervisors obviously have much to offer candidates at a time when these students are attempting to join various scholarly and/or professional communities as entry-level members. Postgraduate writing supervisors, for example, no doubt have personal and/or professional relationships with some or all of the following members of what could be called "the writing industry": publishers, printers, editors, agents, manuscript assessors, journalists and other members of the media, translators, indexers, multimedia producers and bookshop owners, as well as individuals in a range of positions in arts administration from local writing centres to state and national funding bodies. Supervisors are usually experienced undergraduate instructors, conference participants and job applicants, as well as writers of peer-reviewed, professional and mass circulation articles, funding applications and creative work. In addition, supervisors are often seasoned performers with experience at festivals, schools and community venues. They deal with the media. They serve on peer review boards, government bodies and other expert groups. The list could go on. All in all, supervisors possess an array of skills and contacts that make them a rich resource of experience and expert knowledge for postgraduate students of writing. The point being made here is to find a way for already overburdened supervisors to share some of this experience and knowledge with their students in a time-efficient and mutually beneficial way.

It is worth emphasising here that writing students often unrealistically expect their supervisors to be therapists, personal writing mentors, close editors and/or agents for their work. Although Lepore and Smyth (2002) show how writing can be therapeutic in the hands of the psychologist, such curative skills are highly specialised and lie outside those which can reasonably be expected of the writing supervisor. Similarly, although Krauth and Baranay have identified some students as strongly motivated to apply to work with a famed writer primarily because they are seeking the "focused experience" provided by mentorships outside the academy (2002), most supervisors are unwilling (or unable) to engage in such an intensive and time consuming process over the period of a postgraduate degree candidature.

While the above professional practice module could transfer some of the responsibility for this desired input to figures outside the supervisor/student relationship, we also posit that regular, candidature-long research paper, creative work and thesis workshops (with groups of students and supervisors present) could supply a range of the feedback and support mechanisms that often fall to single supervisors alone. Flinders University's English and Cultural Studies Department has developed this practice over the past three years. In fact, MA and PhD writing students have had the opportunity in 2005 and 2006 to participate in four video-linked seminars with staff and students from the University of Portsmouth's creative writing program. This has expanded their critical and creative frame of reference and also forged continuing links between individual students with similar research interests. Such regular group peer workshops can set a progressive series of production deadlines for students and provide varied feedback to help improve the creative and critical components of theses. Participants can also learn advanced manuscript assessment and editing skills that will be useful to them individually as well as in professional or industry contexts.

While these workshops establish and encourage the maintenance of, invaluable peer support for students, what of the (promised) benefit to supervisors? In effect, such workshops allow supervisors to offer time-efficient group supervision while, at the same time, providing the opportunity to assess each candidate's progress in the context of the larger postgraduate cohort. Most importantly, supervisors supply their expert knowledge to a range of candidates at the same time – how often have we heard ourselves saying the same thing to candidate after candidate? – rather than in the traditional (and extremely time consuming) one-on-one mode. By communicating with each other regularly at these events, supervisors can readily share supervision duties, as well as best-practice strategies. If such workshops were also to require all participants to regularly table information about publishing opportunities, calls for

conference papers and news about competitions, festivals, residencies and possible industry linkages, they could provide a means for everyone to remain efficiently informed about developments in their discipline and industry. It is all too easy, nowadays, for both staff and students to miss important information embedded in a mass of emails.

Conclusion

Incorporating such possibilities formally into research degree programs proactively takes responsibility for assisting with the timely completion of the final thesis while helping prepare candidates for their futures. Most importantly, such rethinking of degree content and structure does not contribute to a "dumbing down" of research higher degrees in writing. Rather, by recognising that practice-based research has links to, and relevance for, a myriad of pursuits outside the narrow confines of academia, we are positioning creative writing graduates to take part fully in the intellectual, creative, cultural and economic life of our nation.

In Australia, we are not as blinkered as some in the USA who promote their programs as the only way to develop talent that will make a lasting contribution to culture. We realise that even those of our students who do succeed artistically might not make a living out of their books. Knowing that most will not find a permanent niche within a university nor make a living as a writer, why not help them make contacts outside the academy while they are still inside? While we do want our postgraduate students to be the best writers that they can, and know that at least some might find fame and fortune, we want all of them to have satisfying careers. We believe we owe them at least that much. But we owe ourselves, as supervisors, too. Mezirow suggests that transformation is one of the foundational dimensions of adult learning, whereby more mature learners reflectively transform their "beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and emotional reactions" (1991, p.223). While such transformation is usually discussed in terms of student achievement, we suggest that the postgraduate experience can be transformational, beneficial and profitable for everyone involved in the process – including the time-poor, experience-rich postgraduate supervisor.

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