TEXT SPECIAL ISSUES
Number 59 October 2020

ISSN: 1327-9556 | https://www.textjournal.com.au/

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To cite this article: Ellison, E & C Batty 2020 'Collaborating upwards: writing across hierarchical boundaries', in A Philp, E Jeffery & L McGowan (eds) *Creating communities: Collaboration in creative writing and research*, TEXT Special Issue Number 59, *TEXT: Journal of writing and writing courses* 24, 2 (October): http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue59/Ellison&Batty.pdf

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Collaborating upwards: writing across hierarchical boundaries

Abstract:

As a practice, collaborative writing between students and supervisors is hardly new and can be considered common in STEM disciplines. This has not always been the case in the creative arts, where there are different expectations around authorship and, as in other contexts, potentially deeper considerations of power and authority. In this article, we examine modes of collaborative writing practice in the creative arts, with a particular focus on writing across hierarchical boundaries in research training scenarios. Using screenwriting practice as a context for this discussion, and informed by our own reflective practice, we identify a number of collaborative writing 'modes' (which we have named 'take the lead', 'share the load', and 'learn the ropes') and offer possible strategies for those writing across hierarchical relationships and boundaries. This is important for understanding what might otherwise become an assumed, misunderstood or, worse, predatory practice that disempowers students and unfairly advantages supervisors. As part of our exploration, we draw on our experiences of running cohort-based, collaborative research opportunities in creative disciplines. Reflecting on our experiences in regard to our own collaborations allows us to examine how these structures have enabled students to find their own agency within these collaborative spaces.

Biographical notes:

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Keywords: Collaboration – creative writing – research training – academic writing

Introduction

Research training in Australia, especially within the creative arts and humanities, has a long history of encouraging and championing pastoral care. It is expected that the research student experience is a challenging one, and doctoral literature regularly notes the importance of self-care (Barry et al 2018; Kumar & Cavallaro 2017). For supervisors, pastoral care is something often inherent in our practice: we check in on how our students are feeling about their progress and the challenges they may be facing. This is particularly noted in the creative arts, in which research projects are often personal and implicitly linked to a student's own creative practice (Kroll 2009). Much has been written about the need for supporting students both academically and pastorally through the research journey (Anderson et al 2018; Brien et al 2019a; Batty et al 2019; Owens et al 2020; Shaw & Holbrook 2018); however, an emerging trend is the increased consideration of students publishing with their supervisors. Having clear reciprocal benefits, it is not without its challenges. How might we understand this practice – both its possibilities and its pitfalls?

As a practice, collaborative writing between students and supervisors is hardly new and can be considered common in STEM disciplines (Li 2019; Pinheiro et al 2014). This has not always been the case in the creative arts, where there are different expectations around authorship and, as in other contexts, potentially deeper considerations of power and authority (see Clowes & Shefer 2013). However, in response to the national Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) framework, which only recognises research outputs of supervisors and not students, universities are increasingly encouraging the production of quantifiable research outputs. Anecdotally, this has prompted an increase in supervisors and students writing collaboratively, generating research outputs that count for the university (in audits such as ERA) as well as the supervisor, and which arguably also assists in the career development of research students (typically early-career academics). While research training in Australia currently includes no specific requirement for collaborative writing or publication, many students in the creative arts are following other disciplines by looking to their supervisors or more experienced peers for 'collaborating upwards' opportunities. As such, it is timely to consider what makes for a strong collaborative experience that occurs between people across a range of hierarchical roles. Importantly, we note that collaborations can be incredibly positive and negative for a range of reasons that are not related to hierarchical boundaries – sometimes, it is just as difficult to work with a peer as a reporting manager. However, the inherent complexities of hierarchical boundaries – vertical relationships and reporting lines – bring their own challenges that we take particular note of here.

In this article, we examine modes of collaborative writing practice in the creative arts, with a particular focus on writing across hierarchical boundaries in research training scenarios. We use hierarchical here to refer primarily to formal academic boundaries, such as students working with research degree supervisors, or early career researchers working with reporting line managers. Significantly, there are a range of other considerations that may generate complexity in collaborations, such as class, gender, educational status, experience, and so on. While these barriers are undoubtedly at play in many – if not all – collaborations, in this article

we focus primarily on the specific challenges and opportunities that emerge when collaborating across hierarchical boundaries. We find it useful to consider screenwriting practice as a foundation from which to draw context and comparison for this collaborative practice. As we note below, the screenwriting industry is – like academia – filled with both practical and industrial challenges regarding collaboration. The hierarchies we note in academia are also prevalent in the screen industry, particularly that of television, in which a writers' room may include a head writer (showrunner) alongside a team of writers, writing assistants, and interns.

Thus, using screenwriting as a contextualising platform, and informed by our own reflective practice, we identify a number of collaborative writing 'modes' (which we have named 'take the lead', 'share the load', and 'learn the ropes') and offer possible strategies for those writing across hierarchical relationships and boundaries. This is important for understanding what might otherwise become an assumed, misunderstood or, worse, predatory practice that disempowers students and unfairly advantages supervisors. As part of our exploration, we as authors draw on our experiences of running cohort-based, collaborative research opportunities in creative disciplines. We have independently and collaboratively led formal and informal research training collectives for research students. Reflecting on these experiences, alongside our own writing collaborations, allows us to examine how these structures have enabled students to find their own agency within these collaborative spaces.

Scanning the landscape

Collaboration is, clearly, not a new idea for creatives or academics. Across the creative arts, collaboration is common, as are conversations around identifying and establishing authorship. In order to establish parameters within which to examine our own lived experiences, it is important to contextualise the use of two key terms of relevance: *authorship* and *collaboration*. These are two widely researched terms that have significance across broad disciplinary fields. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to provide a wide-reaching history or theorisation of these concepts. As such, this section will provide working definitions and context for the use of these terms in this article. Firstly, the practice of screenwriting is introduced as a useful context to understand these two concepts.

Screenwriting as collaboration

Script development, a sub-field of screenwriting that focuses on the structures, processes, and personnel that move a 'screen idea' (Macdonald 2013) to draft and eventually produced script, is currently seeing a rise in academic attention. With concerns around collaboration, authorship, agency, and hierarchies, it provides a useful lens through which to understand collaborative research writing. Of all forms of creative writing, screenwriting – and more specifically script development – is often a multi-authored process with hidden or invisible planning, writing, and editing practices. In particular, the television writers' room is a useful comparison point for this conversation, in which there are a range of writers of varying titles and experience levels – from showrunners to interns – working together for a single outcome. In an industrial setting, a script is a highly prescribed document and the development of that script occurs in a highly

institutionalised set of practices. This is not unlike the often formally prescribed format of a journal article within the highly pressurised environment of Masters or Doctoral candidature in a university with research key performance indicators. Similarly, like the university research environment, script development is often dominated by the competing discourses of business models and creative processes (Batty et al 2017), where the interests of investors, broadcasters, and audiences dictate, and sometimes stymie, the creative vision of the writer. Further, the input of script consultants, script editors, and producers and directors, to name just a few, mirrors the sometimes complex issues of authorship in collaborative academic writing (Kerrigan & Batty 2016).

As Stayci Taylor points out of script development:

> depending on the circumstances by which the screenwriter comes to the script (for example, independently; optioned or by commission), and the procedures that follow in bringing the script to the screen (that is to say, how the script might continue to change in the production process), it can be difficult to define where script development begins and ends. (2015: 5)

Further, as Ian Macdonald writes, ‘There are questions about how ideas are developed from initial pitch, and what shapes them. Who makes the decisions about what, at what stage and on what basis? Is authorship important within this process, or not?’ (2013: 81). Other observations around authorship suggest it might be an issue that runs through the various stages of script development. For example, writing of the collaborative nature of the television writers’ room, Felicia Henderson argues: ‘The human interactions in writers’ rooms are forms of collective authorship because the sociological dynamics there heavily influence the narrative that finds its way to the page, and eventually to the screen’ (cited in Caldwell 2009: 227). Bridget Conor also addresses the issue of ‘multiple ownership’, pointing out that for some time it has ‘worked to foreclose the possibilities for larger-scale collegiality or collective resistance for screenwriters. It is the root-cause of many a professional horror story, which again signals the normativity of bad work practices for writers past and present’ (2013: 10). On an issue very close to collaborative academic writing, in the context of the (mainly US) culture of rewrites and co-credits, authorship is simultaneously complicated, contested, and concealed (Banks 2015). As Batty et al propose, this all suggests that in many contexts, script development has less of a beginning and an end, and is ‘rather more a continuous loop in which particular creative inputs can gain or lose control over time’ (2017: 236).

Hierarchies in script development are arguably less defined than in screen production, and the term ‘development hell’ often arises from problems where the writer simply does not have the power to say no (Conor 2014). This can occur commonly in collaborative academic writing, especially where real or perceived hierarchies already exist – student, lead supervisor, associate supervisor, research assistant, and so on. If script development can be understood as a social process, where complex and dynamic interrelations between roles exist, which then interact with creative or industrial contexts and goals (Batty et al 2018), then we argue that collaborative

academic writing can be understood similarly. Like a script, the writing of a journal article can be performative of individual tastes, existing knowledge and experience, actual or perceived labour, power struggles and competing agendas, and having an overall vision versus the practicalities of getting the article into an acceptable form and style. As such, screenwriting gives us a useful lens to consider collaborative academic writing in a research and research training context.

Authorship and collaboration

Authorship as a concept has a long theoretical history, and one that has intersected with academic writing and the creative writing discipline in a variety of ways. Collaboration also remains a topic of interest within the academy. Ede and Lunsford (2001: 358) argued for a greater focus on collaboration in English studies nearly twenty years ago, asking: ‘What might it mean, for instance, to acknowledge the inherently collaborative nature of dissertations and the impossibility of making a truly original contribution to knowledge?’. Literary or English studies, often considered a natural accompaniment to creative writing teaching and research (for better or worse), is a discipline steeped in individualised academic practice. As Ede and Lunsford (2001: 361) suggest, humanities scholars were starting to embrace collaborative co-working practices in response to both internal and external pressures – internal university pressures around productivity and ownership, but also the desire to carry out important, necessary research. Comparatively, creative arts disciplines, although newer to the traditional academy model, have a long history of collaborative practice. Many forms of creative practice hinge on the combined efforts of multiple artists and arts workers as noted above: the production of a film or a theatre performance rely, at their most basic level, on varying numbers of ‘front of screen/stage’ and ‘behind screen/stage’ workers. Questions of authorship order and ethically representing collaborations – or who ‘owns’ and has contributed to the work – can be complex, and this is certainly the case in academia as well.

It is possible to consider that authorship, in the context of collaboration, is best considered as a question of *ownership*. Who ‘owns’ the idea and who has contributed to the work? Who is willing to relinquish ownership, and how and when might this happen? Discussions of authorship within a creative writing context can be both practical (for example, the examination of an author’s writing technique) and industrial (for example, Stuart Glover’s 2012 discussion of the construction of identity for writers). For doctoral students, authorship can be quite simple and be momentarily considered when signing a declaration of authorship upon submission of a thesis. It is outside of the student’s thesis where authorship can become more complex when collaborations emerge outside of the supervisor-student relationship. When these relationships are well-entrenched, it can be challenging to discuss authorship when the student remains beholden to the supervisor for administrative oversight, pastoral care, and research support.

As Ede and Lunsford (2001: 363) identified, collaboration brings with it many challenges: personal dynamics, practical logistics, and management, and ‘the material conditions that enable most academic work exclude or discourage collaboration’. Academic structures promote individual achievement through promotion rounds and awarding individual research

leave. Such existing protocols arguably disadvantage collaborative practices: 'What do subtle but entrenched conventions (such as the use of *et al*) do to erase the work of those who already engage in collaborative practices?' (Ede & Lunsford 2001: 363). Some of the performance metrics for Australian universities are typically collaborative, it has to be noted: national research income that frequently prioritises teams over individuals, or the timely completion of research students who require a minimum of two supervisors, for example. In this way, collaboration is something that needs to be considered on both an individual and institutional level.

Both formal and informal guidelines exist around authorship in academia. Formally, the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2018) calls for authors to have made a 'significant intellectual or scholarly contribution to research and its output' [1]. On its face, this should be clear and decisive in determining who should be included as an author on research outputs. Informally, however, there are a range of complexities that emerge in authorship discussions. This may include authors who have had little engagement with the work also being listed: the most obvious examples being research supervisors who are listed on all of their students' work (whether by mutual agreement or coercion), or the head of a research team who is listed on all outputs generated by the team, regardless of input. Science disciplines are well-known for having increasingly high numbers of authors contributing to individual papers (Santos et al 2015) and in an environment where outputs are incredibly necessary for career growth, authorship order can be used as a negotiating tool. Butler and Spoelstra (2015), writing for *The Conversation*, noted the 'dark arts' of academic journals and highlighted that these platforms are susceptible to what they consider to be widely accepted but unethical instances of poor scholarly behaviour. Their concerns are justified, and they argue these techniques or 'tricks of the trade' are 'a threat to standards of scholarship'. As authors, we too have experienced instances of authorship disappointment, in which name orders may be changed at the final hour before submission, or where we felt unable to argue our case as a junior member of a team. This potential for unethical, poor behaviour is therefore a valid concern. And yet, many of these techniques that Butler and Spoelstra identify as 'game-playing' remain widely shared as good strategic practice for emerging academics – admittedly, espoused by senior academics. Considering the impetus for increased collaboration, it is integral to acknowledge ethical aspects that must be taken into account prior to beginning a new working relationship, while acknowledging that the onus often appears to fall on those lower in the hierarchy to broach these conversations.

In the creative writing discipline, authorship numbers per article is often much lower than in the sciences; however, increasingly research training in the creative arts is adopting techniques from the sciences regarding publishing with research students, and is also seeing an increase in collaborative research teams. Importantly, however, peer-to-peer collaboration can be an incredible support mechanism for research students and not just an avenue for unethical authorship behaviour. As Kroll and Brien (2006: 10) suggest, drawing from their offerings, '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'. For Kroll and Brien, the links the students made

between themselves as a collaborative entity became the structure for a group that worked towards its own deadlines and 'learn[ed] advanced manuscript assessment and editing skills' (2006: 10). Similarly, Batty (2016) discovered the importance of peer-to-peer learning for his group of creative writing research students, where reciprocal empowerment meant that the group became much more than the sum of its parts. These experiences highlight the important distinction between collaboration in the sense of co-authoring or collaborating on a research project; and a more generalised, collaborative learning model.

Collaborative, peer-to-peer learning can be incredibly rewarding for students. Batty (2016) identified that creative writing as a practice can often be considered solitary; however, practitioners are frequently eager to share their ideas and progress with like-minded peers. This is not unusual for academic writing broadly, as can be seen in the extensive work by Cally Guerin and Claire Aitchison on writing groups (see, for example, Aitchison & Guerin 2014; Guerin et al 2013; Aitchison 2009). For screenwriting practitioners in industry, writers encounter critical feedback at many stages throughout the process, and therefore collaboration is inherently significant. One of Batty's peer group participants identified this: 'While there are some areas where my research is similar to others, what I have found most useful is the insight that I have gained into other people's processes' (2016: 70). We, the authors of this article, have also collaborated on the development and execution of a discipline-specific research training model at a regional university. It primarily relies on multiple in-person intensives that bring geographically and disciplinary disparate students together. Although formal reporting is yet to be concluded, it is clear that the students benefit greatly from the connections made with their fellow peers both in terms of comradeship and in gaining insights into others' research processes. In terms of navigating the often-described tumultuous research journey, how does collaboration assist with agency and ownership?

Reflections on collaborating

Clearly the practice of collaboration is something appealing and engaging for academics, as can be evidenced in the significant academic output on the subject. In a context where research publications are highly valued, and anecdotal wisdom regarding research grant success prioritises previously established teams, academic collaboration is at once a necessary requirement and a challenge to often individualised structures of creative arts academics. This can be even more pronounced at regional universities, in which academics and research students are often part of small disciplines or organisational divisions.

Academics have, especially within the creative writing discipline, reflected on and engaged with collaboration concepts in their publishing. To pick just a few examples, it is possible to see the variety in the ways collaboration has been articulated. What is common across these examples is, unsurprisingly, a strong focus on the lived experience of the collaborators. While some authors spend more time establishing a theoretical framework for their discussion than others, all provide context of their own collaboration and the outcomes of the experience. To begin, Donna Lee Brien and Tess Brady, writing in this journal in 2003, identified a comprehensive set of collaboration forms and two overriding issues ('movement between

forms' and 'issues of friendship and equality'), and then reflected on their own collaborative writing experience. In 2011, Graeme Harper shared a report on *Unmade!*, an international video conference event that linked writing students and experts across geographical barriers using virtual webcasts. Harper provides context for the history of the event, but dedicates much of the report to the reflections of his five collaborators. Written in their own voices, they share vignettes of their experiences. Interestingly, in this example, although each collaborator is named with their vignette, the article is solely authored by Harper. A more recent example is Rachel Robertson and Helena Kadmos (2020), who co-wrote a journal article that reflected on their experience of writing a collaborative grief memoir. As this collaboration was a work of life writing, the journal article was richly infused with experiential reflection, detailing the process not only of the collaboration itself but also the personal stories of grief that inspired the memoir.

There are also many examples of supervisors and research students collaborating. Consider, for instance, Brian Dibble and Julienne van Loon (2004). Then an experienced supervisor, Dibble collaborated with an emerging supervisor, van Loon, who was also completing her own doctorate. The article investigates the nature of the creative writing doctorate and also its process of production at a time when the creative writing discipline was still emergent in many ways. The authors acknowledge the interdependent relationship between both creative and critical components of the project, the supervisory team, and higher education 'industry'. They suggest, 'the Higher Degree Research process is a whole where the parts depend upon one another for their function and meaning: each determines and is determined by the others and their relationships' (Dibble & van Loon 2004). Regarding the student-supervisor relationship in particular, they are keen to emphasise the notion of mentoring, as opposed to 'managing' candidature. They offer a definition of mentoring as a process in which 'a person – with knowledge not readily available elsewhere, even knowledge unique to the mentor – is willing and able to establish a special bond with a student intent upon acquiring that knowledge'. Mentoring and collaborating as student-supervisor is an intrinsic part of a research degree, and as has been written extensively elsewhere, a relationship that may require careful negotiation. Of particular relevance to this article, Dibble and van Loon (2004) note this about the shifting nature of the student-supervisor relationship, particularly in regard to knowledge production and ownership:

> The supervisor and the student alike must be prepared for an unusual amount of give and take that involves trust (and even risk) perhaps unique to education in the arts. Where the relationship is much at risk is when it becomes clear – as is inevitable given a research project's new contribution to knowledge – that the student knows more than the supervisor or needs to take the project into territory new to the supervisor or to both of them. Where it is most exhilarating is when they become equal partners with different learning and production goals, something that can require the supervisor to subordinate his/her ego and interests to the student's.

For research students and early career academics, perhaps even especially for creative writers who often find themselves as both author and subject of their own work, negotiating an upwards collaboration – with a supervisor, or line manager, for example – is crucial. It may represent the difference between completing a doctoral degree, or the likelihood of repeated work opportunities. It may be the difference between a supportive mentor and a poor reference letter. As such, understanding strategies for collaborating across hierarchical boundaries is critical.

'Collaborating up': models of working together

In our experience, and informed by the research reviewed above, postgraduate students and early career researchers are often not formally provided guidelines or strategies for academic collaborations. It is often likely that students or early career researchers collaborate with each other, what we consider to be *within* hierarchical boundaries. This can emerge from casual interactions that generate an idea – a type of 'corridor conversation' – or it can be more formalised, like through a mediated peer group experience. These collaborations are, of course, important for students and researchers for whom volume is often a key starting strategy for research and non-traditional research outputs. Although peer collaborations can also provide difficulties, collaborating up – *beyond* hierarchical boundaries – can be more challenging to navigate. Importantly, there is an inherent power imbalance for many students and researchers when aiming for collaborations that are 'upwards' in nature. In this article, we consider boundaries in a broad sense: an upwards collaboration may be a research student and their supervisor; a student with an early career researcher; an early career researcher with a more established researcher, and so on.

As practitioners and educators, the use of reflective practice in allowing for a consideration of our own experiences is well-established. As Du Preez (2008) suggests, understanding and articulating the narrative of our own, specific experiences with collaboration allows us to draw learnings from them, and these can be considered within a broader institutional context (Boud 2009). As such, informed by our reflections on our own processes and experiences, and from the literature regarding experiences of collaboration, it is possible to identify three key models of 'collaborating up'. We propose these are useful models to foster and devise collaboration; and also, where things might be going wrong (eg a sense of disempowerment), ways to understand and improve a situation.

'Take the lead'

In this model, the student or early career researcher (ECR) is in control of the project. This may include championing the idea, understanding and managing the process from research to write-up, and drawing on the other authors primarily for support, high-level concepts, and perhaps some editorial input. The student or ECR is probably the driver of the research focus and question, but may need structural support from those around them. In most instances, it would be expected that the student is the lead author in this model. An example of this in practice comes from our own experience of co-editing *The Doctoral Experience: student stories from*

the creative arts and humanities (Brien et al 2019a), in which we worked with research students through a writing process that was supportive but driven by them and resulted in students publishing sole-authored chapters (for further discussion, see Brien et al 2019b).

This approach can be very positive for the leader: they may feel increased confidence in their expertise and ability to lead; they may feel ownership over the research; and they have a lead-author publication output. In a television writers' room, the student in this instance acts like a showrunner: they are in control of the full vision and final result, and take lead responsibility for the outcome. But this scenario is not without its challenges. A showrunner usually requires evidence of past success in order for a network to trust they can deliver results. For students, who may be less experienced in collaborative academic writing, it can be challenging to ask for support from colleagues, especially those higher in the hierarchy. Sometimes it is not always clear what assistance is needed ('you don't know what you don't know'); and the majority of the work may fall on the student/ECR's shoulders, which can feel inequitable (even if they are aiming for a lead-authored output).

'Share the load'

In this model, the student or ECR is part of a genuinely collaborative, working team. All parties share responsibility for the project, the process, and the write-up, and all contribute specifically to particular parts along the way. This might, as a practical example, include all authors being allocated portions or sections of the writing (see, for example, Robertson and Kadmos's 2020 article about their collective experience, which includes an endnote allocating specific sections to each author). This type of project may emerge from one or many of the collaborators: for example, an article in which the authors find a commonality amongst their differing niche areas of experience. For students and ECRs, this type of collaboration may rely on a research supervisor's recommendation or a colleague's introduction to join the project.

This model can include 'case study' material that is apportioned to each author, with the more senior researcher taking responsibility for scholarly framing (including overall literature review) and pulling the complete article together. This was the case with Sempert et al's 2017 *New Writing* article, 'Methodologically Speaking: innovative approaches to knowledge and text in creative writing research', a collaboration between Batty and four research students. The research students were listed first, alphabetically, in recognition of their work being most important to the article.

As with 'Take the lead', there are both positives and negatives to a 'Share the load' approach. Firstly, collaborations that are more 'naturally' collaborative often run into practical challenges around who carries responsibility, such as reporting deadlines for research projects or authorship order for articles. This model may feel more like a US-style sitcom writers' room, in which everyone pitches in and stays late to ensure the season is completed. And yet, even in highly charged environments like this – in fact, perhaps even because of it – small cracks may appear in the working relationships of the writers, especially where episode credit is up for grabs. The more junior members of these teams may often feel they are not in a position to

push strongly for their own authority, or may feel there is an uneven balance of workload. In this case, the morality and ethics of the lead researcher or supervisor can determine practices. That said, collaborations like this can be incredibly rewarding, as all members are invested in the outcomes and impact of the work and strongly driven to contribute. This type of collaboration can also be a good way to bring disciplines together, as it acknowledges that the very nature of the collaboration is what makes the work important and – in terms of authorship – equal across disciplines.

'Learn the ropes'

In this final model, the student or ECR is a cog in the wheel of a larger project. Not driven by them, the student may take the form of a research assistant, or be formally attached to a supervisor's program of work as a research student. This experience can involve generating literature reviews, performing early data analysis, collating resources, and cleaning up reference lists: all components that are eligible for the NHMRC's definition of authorship. This was Ellison's experience as a Research Assistant and then Named Investigator on two grants with more senior academics (Hamilton et al 2014a and Hamilton et al 2014b). It is rare that a student or ECR will have significant control over the project and its outcomes, and may not even have disciplinary interest in the content. Ideally, however, this will result in inclusion on research publications, often as final author (specific to creative arts) or buried in the middle of a large number of collaborators (potentially in alphabetical order).

There are obvious concerns with this type of model: the potential for exploitation of casual academic labour; the possible exclusion from publications or other outputs; and the lack of control over the project and its direction. This may resonate with the experience of a writers' room assistant, for instance, who is present in the room during the development and writing process, takes notes, learns on the job, and may eventually be rewarded with a chance to contribute an episode or other credited role. However, this model can form a prime training ground for academic skills that may not emerge in other avenues, and could thus be a welcome invitation for the student or ECR. As mentioned above, Ellison benefited from extensive experience as a research assistant on projects that ultimately provided both scholarly direction and significantly increased research management skills. Unfortunately, for some students or ECRs, this can result in being underpaid for tedious 'grunt work' that provides no guarantees of career growth or sustained employment.

Conclusion: strategies for success

Collaboration and authorship are concepts with long and complex histories across many diverging disciplines. Within the creative arts, and more specifically the creative writing discipline, authorship can be incredibly solitary, especially in a postgraduate research student or academic context. And yet, industrial models like that of screenwriting provide clear examples of the need for writers to be able to collaborate successfully. This is also the case in academia, where many performance metrics are linked to measures that require collaboration for career advancement. Importantly, collaboration can also be enjoyable and a key training

ground for skills that will only strengthen a writer's skillset. Many research students and ECRs in this discipline are very practiced at working on their own – their creative practice often demands it. As such, it is often the case that when studying and/or employed in academic positions, this transition into collaborative working relationships – particularly when considering academic publications – can be challenging. These challenges can be particularly difficult when the collaboration sees the crossing of hierarchical boundaries.

For research students or ECRs, collaboration can be an excellent opportunity to grow inter/disciplinary networks within and across institutions. Co-authoring articles, particularly in the creative arts, can often be achieved by committing time rather than research funds and therefore is not out of reach for students or staff with little access to university funding. And yet, the experience of collaborating 'upwards', we suggest, often falls into three common modes. While these modes can often generate significant benefits, they bring their own complexities and challenges for those lower in the hierarchy. While individuals will, of course, have their own strategies, we provide a few considerations that have emerged from our experiences of collaborating upwards.

Firstly, establish *clear deadlines and commitment from each collaborator*. This should happen early in the collaboration's lifecycle but can be updated as necessary. Similarly, make *agreements regarding authorship order* early. In our experience, establishing expectations of authorship order can be crucial – especially when collaborating upwards with colleagues with more established track records. This agreement should not change unless all authors are in agreement, and where there is a clear justification for it to happen (eg someone else takes on data analysis). It is also crucial to *avoid being a 'hostage taker'*, a term used by Maria Gardner and Hugh Kearns in their support services for research students and academics (iThinkwell 2020). This refers to a situation in which one of the collaborators is not delivering their commitment – this may be because they insist, for instance, that they need to be the final eyes on the document or they may have not done their part. Either way, in practical terms, it means they are holding the document 'hostage' and progress cannot be made. Finally, all of these strategies are strengthened in concert with the last suggestion: encourage *transparency in communication* at all times. While some collaborators are reluctant to burden colleagues with too much communication (consider, for instance, the pain of lengthy 'reply all' email trails), having a record of communication can be really important in ensuring everyone is maintaining their contributions to the project.

Above all, while working and writing collaboratively has many career benefits for all involved, human experiences and emotions are brought to bear on these practices. While evident in all collaborations, all collaborators must be aware of how power assumptions and dynamics affect people, *especially* when working across hierarchical boundaries. Academia and doctoral education is notorious for its wellbeing issues (Pretorius 2019), particularly in times of increased pressure to produce research, and these can be exacerbated by a lack of care and attention in collaborative practices; worse, they can lead to predatory and unethical behaviour. It is easy for experienced researchers and supervisors to forget what it was like to be at the beginning of a career, not knowing the protocols, formulas, and 'tricks of the trade' for writing

up research. For students and ECRs, these are all things to be learnt – and they are daunting. Added pressure through an unsuccessful or uncomfortable attempt to 'collaborate up' can be stressful, upsetting and – particularly when working with established colleagues – deeply disappointing. Creative writing is a very generous and supportive discipline, so while we hope collaboration will typically be very positive, it is perhaps useful for each of us to pause and reflect on what writing across hierarchical boundaries might look like for us.

Notes

1. The code (2018: 1) acknowledges that conventions may vary across disciplines, but it would expect that a 'significant intellectual or scholarly contribution' would need to include at least two of the following: project or output concept/design; acquisition of data requiring judgement, planning, design, input; contribution of knowledge; analysis or interpretation of data; significant drafting and revising so as to contribute to its interpretation.

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