Transforming creative writing postgraduate and supervisor identities: Ways of becoming professional*Abstract*

In the twenty-first century, research higher degree students in Australia do more than simply research (DIISR 2011a:24, ACER 2011). They might teach or be employed as research assistants or administrators. These jobs prepare RHD (aka HDR) students for transition to the workforce; they inhabit, therefore, multiple identities. Supervisors in the twenty-first century also face the challenge of multiple identities. They act as employers as well as mentors to induct their cohort into a discipline's professional life. Mentorship, we argue, is not the same as supervision.

The mentorship role is especially important in emerging subject areas where the concept of research itself and appropriate methodologies are developing; both supervisor and student might be working as 'reflective practitioners' (Schön 1987), each helping the other to refine and theorise practice. This is particularly true of the flourishing but still relatively young discipline of Creative Writing (Brien 2004, Dibble & van Loon 2004, Woods 2007, Harper & Kroll 2008).

Some supervisors have always performed a variety of roles, but aspects of the postgraduate experience have been increasingly professionalised, affecting an academic's access to promotion and offering them another research area – the pedagogy of supervision. This paper explores the nature of these complex relationships focused on the Creative Writing doctoral experience and considers how they impact on the student overall.

Keywords: mentor; postgraduate, creative writing RHD, creative writing HDR, supervision

1 Introduction

In the twenty-first century, research higher degree students in Australia do more than simply research (DIISR 2011a: 24, ACER 2011). They might teach or be employed as research assistants or administrators. These jobs prepare students to make the transition to the workforce, even if those students entered graduate study without a clear idea of their post-completion goals. The sometimes rarefied atmosphere of the doctoral environment of the past, where students were either insulated from the challenge of 'what do I do when I complete?', or led to believe that a permanent academic position beckoned, has given way to an acknowledgment that a range of opportunities present themselves (DIISR 2011b: x, ACER2011: 4) [1]. In other words, the tasks RHD students might perform and, indeed, the challenge of which opportunities to take up, speaks to their multiple identities on the road to becoming professionals in their field. The active engagement of postgraduates in their discipline-specific as well as pedagogical education is one of the hallmarks of this change.

The other side of this question asks how closely supervisors are involved in these aspects of the postgraduate experience. How do they understand their role in creating opportunities and advising about performance? Are supervisors, in fact, required to perform multiple roles, or only if they conceive of themselves as mentors too? What is the difference between a supervisor and a mentor? Both might act as employers, for example, engaging students to teach in subjects they coordinate. Both might help, therefore, to induct their student cohort into a discipline's professional life, to 'socialise' (Hall & Burns 2009, Austin 2002) them so that they understand what being a professional signifies and which career options might suit them. Socialisation is defined by Anne Austin as having multiple aspects, which the postgraduate student undergoes all at once: 'socialisation to the role of graduate student, socialisation to the academic life and the profession, and socialisation to the specific discipline or field' (2002: 96). This paper will define supervisor and mentor specifically and see how one proliferates the identities a staff member might adopt and the benefits a student might gain from them. It is true that some supervisors have always performed a variety of roles without self-conscious reflection on their practice, but aspects of the postgraduate experience have been increasingly professionalised for all stakeholders. Postgraduates' access to opportunities such as grants, jobs and fellowships (while enrolled or after graduation) will be conditioned by their publications, conference presentations, teaching experience, and even supervisor or laboratory reputation. Correspondingly, in many cases, an academic's chances of promotion will be affected by their supervisory performance, demonstrated by completion numbers, teaching excellence awards, and postgraduate student success in terms of publications, grants and awards. For busy academics trying to juggle multiple career demands, self-reflexive supervision can also provide another research area: the pedagogy of supervision.

This paper explores, in particular, how the mentorship role is especially important in emerging subject areas where defining disciplinary boundaries, as well as the concept of research itself and appropriate methodologies, are developing; both supervisor and student might be working as 'reflective practitioners' (Schön 1987), each helping the other to refine and theorise practice. This is particularly true of the flourishing but still relatively young discipline of Creative Writing (Brien 2004, Woods 2007, Harper & Kroll 2008). In fact, supervision in the creative

arts has provoked robust debate in the past decade or so as it tries to formulate a workable student-supervisor dynamic (Perry 2000, Dibble & van Loon 2004, Baranay 2008, O'Mahony 2008) and understand the concept of 'best practice' for itself (see Williamson, Brien & Webb 2008, Brien & Williamson 2009). In its second half, this paper explores the nature of these complex relationships, focused on the Creative Writing doctoral experience, and considers how they impact on the student overall.

2 Multiple identities: Supervisor and mentor

Many research postgraduates and supervisors multitask in the contemporary university, often under financial and administrative constraints. This has been expressed anecdotally at conferences and meetings, and has given rise to research based on surveys and theoretical studies of supervision and mentorship (Webb & Brien 2008, Australian Postgraduate Writers Network (APWN), Scaffidi & Berman 2011, Austin 2002, Bell-Ellison & Dedrick 2008). One of the most comprehensive overviews of the North American postgraduate experience appears in *The Formation of Scholars: Rethinking Doctoral Education for the Twenty-first Century* (Walker et al 2008), which looks at the conventional and often arbitrary framework for producing doctorates in the past and the clarity (or lack thereof) with which individuals and departments have formulated their conceptions of supervision and mentorship [2]. It unpacks conceptions of mentorship, in particular, in its 'Apprenticeship Reconsidered' (2008: 89-119) chapter, which we will turn to later. Here it is worth remarking that this text suggests that a revitalised understanding of mentorship in the twenty-first century includes relationships 'with several mentors' (2008: 91), allowing multiple perspectives and expertise, rather than the exclusivity of one. Responding to Walker et al's proposed focus on stewardship, Hall and Burns advocate the need for a more critical approach to mentoring: 'Absent a clear theoretical framework, traditional mentoring relationships may limit the growth of the profession despite their intended generative functions' (2009: 50).

In the field of Creative Writing, Kroll speaks about the 'multitasking, interdisciplinary trainer' (Kroll 2009: 16) who 'ha[s] to be as informed and proactive as those guiding the careers of elite athletes' (2009: 1). Kalin et al focus on another nascent area, the arts-focused research methodology 'a/r/tography' (Kalin et al 2009: 356), which demands a flexible student-teacher dynamic: 'To approach a/r/tography as a graduate student is to concurrently search for non-traditional mentoring relationships and complex understandings' (356). Postgraduates and their supervisors can be at once groundbreaking theoreticians, teachers, researchers, research assistants, administrators or coordinators. Given these pressures in developing fields on both sides, what do students expect of supervision and mentoring and what do their supervisors believe a supervisor or mentor needs to provide? To complicate matters, some supervisors are also RHD candidates [3].

In Australia, in particular, university policy dictates how many supervisors each doctoral candidate will be assigned, but how those supervisors behave and how they interact with each other is subsumed under generic categories relating to responsibility for research training; the process by which supervisory behaviour is monitored can also be haphazard. Training in best practice supervision techniques might be available and required for new staff or embedded in regulations for a university Supervisors' Register [4], requiring only minimal updating of skills or knowledge of university policy. Discussion in training sessions of the 'hands off' and 'hands on' supervisory model (Sinclair 2004), for example, might set out sensible guidelines for supervision, but might also, in many ways, seem more feasible for those in the hard sciences, based in collaborative laboratory cultures as opposed to those in disciplines that are more text-based, like Creative Writing [5].

What is a supervisor and how might supervision differ from mentorship? Should we use those terms interchangeably or does that cloud our perception of what activities each might perform? How appropriate is the mentor-apprentice model in the twenty-first century? Let us begin with some definitions then [6]. *The Australian code for the responsible conduct of research 2007* blurs the distinction between supervision and mentoring when it advises: 'Institutions should promote effective mentoring and supervision of students and research trainees' (NHMRC 2007: 12). Are doctoral students not also research trainees and what does effective mentoring provide that supervision does not? The term 'mentor' originates in Homer's *Odyssey*; Mentor is the eponymous advisor to whom Odysseus entrusts his household when he leaves for Troy (Homer, Book 2, ll 225ff: 25). Mentorship involves, therefore, trust in the person as well as his or her superior wisdom and management competence. Skilled in personal interaction, the mentor advises and leads, providing professional and pastoral care of a kind (Lederman 2008).

Supervisor, however, can be a job description only, rather than a position charged with ethical and moral responsibilities, although those might be implied. The *Macquarie Dictionary* notes that supervisor can refer to 'a teacher who supervises the work of a student, esp. a research student or one studying for a higher degree' (Macquarie Library 1996). Supervisory expertise often appears in lists of academic appointment criteria (i.e. experience in supervising RHD students), and does not underline the personal connection that often characterises the student-mentor dynamic. When scholars and postgraduates discuss mentorship in nearly every source we have consulted, the emphasis seems to be on the depth and length of involvement, not only in the student's doctoral project but also in their career at their present university and beyond. 'Nature's guide for mentors' (Lee et al 2007) clarifies the distinction between supervisor and mentor by explaining that 'a distinctive feature of a great mentor as opposed to a great supervisor seemed to be a special focus on helping to build a mentee's career' (791). Another remark emphasises the personal dimension: 'He genuinely treats his ex-students and postdocs as part of an extended family' (791).

As well as skills and experience, mentors need to help 'socialise' postgraduates, to help them develop new identities as members of their discipline (Austin 2002: 96). As Walker et al (2008) state, 'doctoral education is a complex process of formation... [of] the scholar's professional identity in all its dimensions' (9). Hall and Burns (2009: 49), for example, explore how identity theory provides a workable way of approaching the mentor

relationship. They define the concept of 'identity capital', the idea that an academic's perceived identity value (the esteem held by others for that person) can be increased over time. Mentors model the many roles they perform as part of their 'layered identities' (57) as well as set up 'ongoing opportunities to reflect together [with students] on how they identify themselves and each other as researchers' (57). Further, they reflect on what constitutes identity capital for a particular profession. Randal Franz describes the development of a postgraduate's identity as a process of building character, and he draws an analogy with increasing physical fitness (Franz 1998: 65). Similar to building physical fitness, Franz explains, character cannot be acquired instantly, but must be developed through hard work, over time.

The acceleration of this development can be assisted by a mentor, who acts as a personal trainer, encouraging and pushing the postgraduate student (Kroll 2009). Each opportunity to learn and demonstrate a skill or behaviour valued by the institution represents a way to increase the postgraduate's identity capital, both within the current institution and the wider discipline in the future. A postgraduate might perceive fewer opportunities. Or there may appear to be too many opportunities (especially when there are two career paths, one creative and one academic), overwhelming for the postgraduate, who cannot take up every available offer, but who does not want to reject a potentially valuable one. A mentor can help the postgraduate identify, secure, and prioritise opportunities that maximise the postgraduate's identity capital.

The thesis supervisor is in an ideal position to become, therefore, a mentor. Whereas a supervisor assists the student to fulfil doctoral requirements, a mentor is someone who also actively helps the postgraduate to transform their professional identity (Hall & Burns 2009: 51), fast-tracking their professional growth. The mentor draws on experience and knowledge of the academic world to which the postgraduate is a relative newcomer. If mentors are also creative writers, their reputations can affect how the literary culture (including agents and publishers) receives postgraduate work. In addition, a mentor's identity capital can help to secure expert examiners whose own standing as artists might provide future networking opportunities for candidates after graduation.

Terri Givens, in 'The Importance of Mentors' (2009), stands back from her established position in the present to reveal how mentorship with several individuals helped to shape her career as a young black woman without an academic family background. 'Navigate' is a word she chooses to describe her mentors' impact: 'I have always appreciated the people who made time to help me navigate the often choppy seas of an academic career' (Givens 2009: 2). 'Navigate' suggests a shared effort between mentor and student, who work together on a journey to transform both the identity of the student and of the mentor. To achieve this, Walker et al (2008) emphasise planned interactions and communication about the relationship itself – what can be termed 'the rules of engagement' (103). Reflective practice is also strongly advocated as a way to ensure new professionals develop identities as innovative academics, rather than carbon copies of their mentors (Kalin et al 2009, Hall & Burns, 2009, Williamson et al 2008, Walker et al 2008). As Kalin et al explain, 'Recursive reflection and the questioning of assumptions promote adaptation or change in the construction of more complex understandings and connections' (2009: 356). Hall and Burns suggest that, when mentors actively reflect on their own development, it encourages the postgraduate to do the same (2009: 62). To summarise, the mentor's influence is far-reaching, affecting the student's professional, intellectual and psychological wellbeing.

3 Master and apprentice in creative higher degrees

A chapter in *The Formation of Scholars*, 'Apprenticeship Reconsidered' (89-119), provides a useful adjunct to our discussion, as it interrogates the concept of 'apprenticeship ...[as] the signature pedagogy of doctoral education' (Walker et al 2008: 89). This study acknowledges that Lee S Shulman created the word 'to describe "characteristic forms of teaching and learning ... that organize the fundamental ways in which future practitioners are educated for their new professions"' (Shulman 2005: 52 cited in Walker et al 2008: 117). In other words, Walker et al suggest:

signature pedagogies are windows into the cultures of their fields because they incorporate into the operational acts of teaching and learning assumptions about how to teach knowledge and skills (such as how to think like a lawyer) and implicit assumptions about professional values (2008: 117).

Certainly writer-academics as well as scientists try to instil in their students the habits of mind that encourage them to think like a professional. In the field of Creative Writing, these habits of mind might include how to embed objectivity into editing skills. They also might encompass being cognisant of ethical considerations, ranging from permission to use Indigenous material and respect for another's culture to the impact of a piece of writing on friends, relatives or the public.

Given that our focus here is on the Creative Writing doctoral experience, it makes sense to explore the master-apprentice relationship, since that dyad is often exploited when examining how mentors and their students relate and it has been a standard model for instruction in art forms, including painting and music. In addition, writing is often taught at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels in a workshop format – that is, with a craft-based pedagogy – by a practitioner or master, whose publications confirm their expertise. Dacey and Lennon (1998), developing Amabile, approach the notion of a master from the point of view of creativity theory: 'Amabile's theory of the three components of creativity suggests that any creative performance or production requires domain-relevant skills, creativity-relevant processes, and task motivation' (Dacey & Lennon 1998: 81).

The significant factor for this paper is the concept of 'domain-relevant skills,' because a creative mentor is someone who, by virtue of their expertise, testified to by their publications, possesses such skills and can pass them on: "'Domain-relevant skills" refer to what we commonly call talent or expertise' (Dacey & Lennon 1998:

81). What masters also might possess, however, and, similarly, experienced mentors who have a student's career as well as the individual doctoral research project in their charge, is a sense of 'historical embeddedness' (Dacey & Lennon 1998: 245); that is, an understanding of the traditions and key figures who have brought a particular art form to its current state. So masters in the fullest sense of the term not only can teach specific skills and provide best-practice models in their art form but also how to discriminate between products. They can transmit their sense of aesthetic values while also understanding how culturally-determined values can be.

Complexity has characterised the interrelationship between master and apprentice since human beings began to think about why they create as well as how. Sennett (after Hannah Arendt) speaks about us as *Homo faber* – man as maker – who asks 'why?' (Sennett 2008: 7). This drive for enhanced understanding of craft was embedded both legally and by tradition in medieval guild hierarchies: 'In craftsmanship there must be a superior who sets standards and who trains' and where 'inequalities of skill and experience become face-to-face issues' (Sennett 2008: 54). Significantly for a university context where creative arts are studied at the RHD level, Sennett also underlines that 'the good skills that established the master[s] authority were inseparable from his ethics' (2008: 61). A successful mentor will allow a straining against authority in order to see the apprentice develop as an independent artist and researcher, all the while maintaining his or her vision of acceptable aesthetic standards and ethical behaviour.

Kram's 1983 study of mentorship in a large public utility organisation analyses four stages common to all mentor relationships that reflect on Creative Writing as well. She terms these stages '*initiation, cultivation, separation and redefinition*' (Kram 1983: 614). Focusing on the separation stage, which hopefully coincides with PhD completion, demonstrates in particular the sensitive negotiations that need to occur in a creative mentoring relationship. At its successful conclusion, mentor and mentee have become peers, and a new relationship may be defined. A common outcome for an RHD student is that he or she overtakes their mentor in their specific field of knowledge to become an expert. For example, on completion, a Creative Writing postgraduate is likely to have become an expert in their genre of writing, research methodologies, and possibly other authors. Ideally, they will also achieve publication.

Andrew Melrose as mentor (master) and doctoral candidate Grace Rose Astor (apprentice), from Winchester University in the UK, offer a thoughtful analysis in the form of a dialogue around just such a positive mentoring interaction, which also became a creative collaboration. In '*Kyoto: A Collaborative Project between a Student (GRA) and her Supervisor (AM)*' (Astor & Melrose 2008), the authors describe how the initial discussions about a PhD project prepared not only the research focus but also mapped out a picture book as the creative project, the student being the illustrator and the supervisor the writer (41-42). Melrose explains that he 'teaches' about collaboration by modelling it. At one point, Astor talks about Melrose as the master and comments on 'the value of learning a trade from a craftsman and then applying it to a project in order to create something new, diverse and exciting' (Astor & Melrose 2008: 47). This dynamic between mentor and student also saw the balance shift so that, by its conclusion, each party felt, at least as far as the project was concerned, that they were creative peers.

In a field such as Creative Writing, defining knowledge as well as the requisite skills to acquire it are an ongoing challenge, given that the discipline is still debating the nature of creative research and the possible shapes a doctorate might take. The cliché, 'reading like a writer,' often explained to undergraduates (indeed sometimes the title of a university course), and based on an idea first formulated by Francine Prose (2006), needs to be extended to include 'thinking like a creative writing teacher and thinking like a creative researcher' (Kroll & Harper 2012: np). Actively engaged creative practitioners who teach are used to transferring craft-based skills to students, but the higher-order skills and a conceptual grasp of the nature of creative knowledge, necessary for doctoral study, are often not articulated, let alone transmitted to postgraduates. For writers themselves, as McGurl observes, 'the values of experience, creativity, and craft can be understood as the psychic and symbolic resources upon which a writer draws in the act of writing' (McGurl 2009: 23), but these are not easy to demonstrate, unlike the steps required to perform even a complex laboratory experiment.

Walker et al underline the necessity of providing multiple points of disciplinary view, as well as a range of knowledge bases, with more than one God-like master, by 'propos[ing] a shift of prepositions: from a system in which students are apprenticed *to* a faculty mentor, to one in which they apprentice *with* several mentors' (Walker et al 2008: 91), according to need. For the discipline of Creative Writing, this shift in emphasis works towards addressing criticisms of the North American system; in particular, it speaks to the criticism that a 'workshop mentality' or a university brand identifies graduates from writing programs (McGurl 2009, Gioia 1991) and has caused serious literature to lose popularity with the reading public.

In an Australian context, this shift towards engaging several mentors suggests how to provide the varied types of expertise necessary for innovative doctoral Creative Writing projects, often the choice of mature-age students who arrive with a rich work history, a background as a published writer, or both. For example, a Flinders University postgraduate student also worked for an anti-poverty team and her novel, set in a disadvantaged suburb, involved gambling. An associate supervisor in Social Work provided necessary expertise that enriched the novel as well as ensured that the exegesis demonstrated an appropriate scholarly framework. This type of non-traditional student exemplifies one of a growing cohort in all disciplines entering doctoral study from alternate pathways to Honours, with complex expectations of the degree and, hence, of supervision (see Kiley 2011, Marsh, Bright & Kiley 2010, Kiley 2010). In order to deepen our understanding of exactly how supervisors need to be successful mentors in new fields in the Australian context, we turn to more specific issues that condition a Creative Writing doctoral student's candidature.

4 The overall postgraduate experience – Australian context

In Australian universities, the research higher degree postgraduate experience does not necessarily follow directly on from undergraduate study. The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) report on student activity 'in the year prior to commencing research degree' notes 33.2% nationally enrolled in Honours, 1.8% in an undergraduate degree and 12.3% in some kind of postgraduate study' (ACER 2011: 3). The influx of mature-age and/or non-traditional students is another factor (see Kiley 2011 and 2010) affecting activity in the year before commencing study. Regardless of when students commence doctoral studies, however, they must make a transition from the coursework-heavy undergraduate degree, the moderately loaded coursework Honours or postgraduate coursework degree, where expectations and assessment are clearly defined, to a more independent environment. Honours or a coursework postgraduate degree with a substantial research component has been the standard entry point, therefore, although as cited above, the landscape is changing. In Honours, coursework forms part of the experience, but the student is usually also required to produce a short thesis, working with an academic who acts in a supervisory role. While the relationship between student and supervisor may develop through the sessions spent working together, the sessions are focused almost solely on the tasks required for timely completion of the Honours thesis. The main role of the supervisor is to help the student to navigate thesis requirements and acquire the skills necessary for its timely completion.

As a research postgraduate, the Australian student usually has no assessable coursework and no qualifying exams (as in North America), so the skills or outcomes of particular learning environments and activities can be implicit rather than explicit. Again, the RHD postgraduate must develop a professional and formalised relationship with an academic as Principal Supervisor, who is usually a faculty member with a supervisory track record (Williamson et al 2008: 2) although, as Williamson et al note, few supervisors have expertise specifically in postgraduate supervision of research higher degrees. It is worth noting that Walker et al (2008) explain that few graduate programs in North America provide formal training in mentoring pedagogy (99), and suggest that the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate points to a need for 'more systematic feedback and reflection that can turn pedagogical experience into expertise' (4). As with Honours supervision, the primary role of the RHD supervisor is to advise the student about how to complete the tasks required, in a timely manner, to produce a doctoral thesis of sufficient quality. For postgraduates aspiring to an academic career, however, completion of a doctoral thesis is no longer enough. A decrease in the number of tenured positions available and an increase in the number of PhDs awarded each year means a higher level of competition for North American faculty positions (Scaffidi & Berman 2011: 694, Austin 2002: 99). In a similar climate, Australian postgraduates must capitalise on the time between beginning and achieving a PhD, as this is the time when a university has committed to providing for their disciplinary and (to some extent) financial needs.

Austin suggests that 'the doctoral experience is the first stage of the academic career' (2002: 95) only. An aspiring postgraduate needs to gain skills and experience in a variety of areas to increase career options. The process of becoming a member in a new profession varies between disciplines, but this process becomes more complex when, in effect, the candidate needs to function as a professional in more than one area: as an academic and as a creative writer. For example, for a Creative Writing postgraduate, opportunities might include: tutoring and lecturing, working as a research assistant, presenting at conferences, publishing both critically and creatively, winning writing prizes, participating in writing associations, attending writer-in-residence programs or being sponsored for residencies, participating in a professional development program, editing a journal, working in another country through an exchange program scholarship, and the list goes on. There is no fixed career path.

A doctoral student has options for finding a mentor other than their primary supervisor; a mentor relationship might be formed with any one or more of the faculty members at the postgraduate's university. Walker et al advocate strongly for multiple mentors (2008). A mentor brings their own unique perspective to the relationship, based on their own background, in terms of the knowledge they have acquired and approaches they have learned, with much of this inherited from their own postgraduate experience (Hall & Burns 2009: 49). As Brien and Webb suggest, one mentor alone 'restricts the perspectives brought to bear on the work, and limits guidance directions and suggestions to just one person, the 'expert' supervisor' (2008: 2). Postgraduates need to be as aware as possible of the potential limitations of their mentor's perspective, seeking alternate viewpoints and additional mentors, as necessary, for their own development [7]. In fact, one of the benefits of multiple mentors in a creative candidature is that each mentor will bring her or his own creative identity capital to the relationship.

Postgraduates may be newcomers to a specific academic discipline, but often bring with them previous experiences in either directly relevant professional skills, or transferrable skill concepts, and they may have worked in a mentor relationship before. This, and the postgraduate's educational and social background, will shape the way the postgraduate relates to the mentor and develops in response to the new environment (Austin 2002: 102). Postgraduates need mentors who are prepared to tailor their approach to accommodate each student's specific background and needs (Kalin et al 2009). Kalin et al suggest that what distinguishes a mentor from a supervisor is a focus on generativity. Creative Writing postgraduates, in particular, need a supportive and creative space within which to develop their own ideas through interaction with their research; where the mentor fosters this environment, the postgraduate student is more likely to produce innovative results, encouraging more complex thinking, rather than merely replicating the status quo (Kalin et al 2009: 362). A number of critics have observed the kind of literary experiments now undertaken at university might not be possible given the economic rationalism of the current publishing environment and yet paradoxically supervisors function like editors, helping students to achieve professional results (Williamson, Brien & Webb 2008, Kroll & Webb 2012). This is one reason why established writers have returned to academia to produce their next project with its attendant intellectual, financial and physical resources (including scholarships) as well as creative freedom. Kate Grenville is a case in point, as she produced her award-winning novel, *The Secret River* (Grenville 2005) as part of her Doctor of Creative Arts at University of Technology, Sydney. The published version of her exegesis, *Searching for the Secret River* (Grenville 2006), clarifies why she undertook this project and how her research informed her practice.

While the postgraduate gains value from a mentorship that helps them to form a unique academic identity, locate and balance development opportunities, and also achieve the doctoral qualification they set out to earn, the mentor

often enters the relationship with their own agenda. The mentor-student relationship can provide value to the mentor as well as the student, offering them a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction in the contribution of their wisdom and creativity through mentoring, and this experience can be re-energising for the mid-to-late-career professional (Walker et al 2008: 102, Kram 1983). Recognising the relationship for its potential benefits to both mentor and postgraduate can help correct the power imbalance and encourage a more healthy working relationship (Walker et al 2008: 103) that might include co-publication, especially in disciplines such as the Humanities where this has previously not been the norm.

A third party in the relationship is the institution, guided by government imperatives, which puts another level of pressure upon both mentor and student. In Australian universities, the current focus is on timely RHD completion and attracting RHD enrolments (Williamson et al 2008: 1). Good mentoring not only benefits the postgraduate and mentor; the success of this relationship can help fulfil the priorities of the university. Scaffidi and Berman, in a 2011 study of postdoctoral supervisor relationships at the University of Western Australia, found that researchers with a positive relationship with their supervisor perceived their own research progress to be as expected or better than expected (695). Furthermore, post-docs who discussed an overall career plan with their supervisors early on were more likely to achieve publications and create collaborative opportunities for themselves. Baldwin and James (2000) note that attracting undergraduate students to universities is a matter of satisfying their perception of the prestige of the university. Positive relationships, more active research profiles, and increased opportunities for skills development, are likely to make a university more attractive to motivated RHD candidates as well. Creative doctorates that become books bring with them increased publicity at the time of release but they also form the building blocks of a writer's career, and by extension reflect over time on the university writing program's prestige.

Currently, around fifty percent of doctoral students in North America do not complete their RHD studies or become disillusioned with their new profession along the way (Walker et al 2008: 2). Improving the career outlook and sense of professional collegiality for postgraduates through mentor-guided professional development and socialisation might improve these odds. Additionally, creating what Walker et al term 'a culture of intellectual community' could improve a university's research higher degree successes in North America (2008: 10). Australian statistics tell a somewhat different story, although certainly the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate strategies for revitalising graduate programs would enhance a postgraduate experience in Australasia as well. The 2009 Report, *Supply, Demand and Characteristics of the Higher Degree by Research in Australia*, asserts that 'within the doctorate by research qualification, there has been substantial growth in completion numbers from Australian universities in the past decade in both domestic and international student cohorts' (Edwards et al 2009: x) [8].

Australian completion numbers compare positively with OECD countries in general: 'Data from the OECD show relatively high levels of completions per 100,000 persons in the population and notably larger growth over the past decade when compared with other nations such as the United States and Canada' (2009: x). The report suggests that some of this increase is due to attraction and retention of international postgraduates, many of whom intend to settle in Australia: 'It is estimated that of the annual new supply of doctorate qualifications in Australia, migration accounts for approximately 10 per cent. The estimates show that 78 per cent of this supply comes through domestic student completions and the remaining 12 per cent is from international student completers who remain in Australia following graduation' (x). Research clarifying what percentage of this domestic and international cohort undertake a creative writing, creative arts or non-traditional degree would need to be done to evaluate whether completion rates are affected by the structure of this type of doctorate and its supervision.

5 The doctorate in Creative Writing: A case study

The literature on mentor relationships raises useful points that contextualise the experience of becoming a doctoral candidate in Creative Writing for one author of this paper. First of all, she came to Creative Writing postgraduate studies via a previous career in Information Technology, which began around fifteen years ago. So she has experience in establishing a new career and rapidly building a successful professional identity; that experience also helped her to understand the need to develop not only technical skills relevant to a new industry, but also a new set of professional habits and behaviour.

During her undergraduate studies, and continuing to the present day, she has held the role of a director of a small software development company. She understands that, in moving from an established career to becoming a doctoral student in a different field, her identity capital has transferred from high to low, to draw on the concepts identified by Hall and Burns (2008: 56). This understanding is a constant reminder that she has entered into a new industry, and this heightened awareness helps her to identify the differences and similarities between the two professions. Basic professional conduct and many relevant administration and communication skills are already part of her repertoire, which gives her the confidence to focus more on acquiring skills specific to an academic career. Additionally, she has previously worked with business mentors, and has herself acted in the role of a mentor; she has, therefore, some understanding, albeit anecdotal and limited, of what a mentor relationship might involve.

Her postgraduate experience is one of working closely with her primary thesis supervisor, who acts as a mentor. They meet regularly, every two to three weeks, and discuss her doctoral thesis, but also which opportunities she might pursue to enhance her career opportunities once she completes. From discussions around these topics, she also gains an understanding of the wider discipline, and her mentor's comments, based on the mentor's experience and research into the pedagogy of the discipline, provide an insight into this new industry she believes she would be unable to gain through her own efforts.

She worked with the same supervisor during her Honours year, and after that experience, the student felt that she could work productively with her again. A fellow postgraduate once told her that she is pleased that she has become friends with her own supervisor, but for this particular postgraduate, the focus of mentoring is in establishing a professional relationship that will accelerate her development as a new academic. The relationship is based on what Walker et al term 'a stance of mutual respect [...] respect for ideas' (2008: 102). Her mentor expects hard work and high standards, of both herself and her students, and these characteristics fit well with the student's personality. As well as being a creative practitioner, her mentor works at the forefront of Creative Writing research, and is active in progressing her own academic career. These all represent areas of expertise that can help to form the student's own skills as researcher and writer, building a unique academic and creative identity. Further, the mentor's well-established record of success, in the same discipline but in areas not too closely aligned with the student's interests, means she is unlikely to be threatened by her postgraduates' successes, and will therefore be more active in seeking out beneficial opportunities. In looking back over the various mentors she has worked with over her career, Givens in particular comments on the question of conflict of interest, observing that she has 'had to learn the difference between people who had my best interests in mind, and those who had their own personal agendas' (2009).

6 Conclusion: the challenge of new disciplines

Francine Rochford analyses the idea of the university historically and some of the reasons for the crisis of confidence (Rochford 2006: 157) that currently besets administrators and academics. Her analysis suggests that 'there are multiple conceptions and different notions of the acceptable characteristics of a university, and attempts to reify the idea of the university are motivated by broader political agenda' (Rochford 2006: 154). If this conception about the lack of a consistent understanding of 'university' is valid, then those working in newer disciplines that are not weighed down by centuries of tradition and disciplinary practice might, in fact, welcome this instability and confront the challenge of asking what the object as well as value of a university education, in particular a doctorate in their own area, can be.

This debate began in creative arts disciplines before Dennis Strand's groundbreaking report, *Research in the Creative Arts* (Strand 1998), which considered the research status of every performing and creative art form except creative writing. In the past twenty years, one of the issues confronting academic-artists who wanted to define research and to design rigorous higher degrees was a lack of cooperation, what Paul Carter calls 'the "balkanisation" of creative arts...', an unwillingness for the arts to '[enter] into dialogue with one another' (Carter 2004: 177). Judging by the criteria for RHD study and examination, all art forms seem to agree that

Practice ... can be viewed as a mode of investigation, and a mode informed by individual and cultural circumstance. Also, as an act of acquisition and exchange, it is informed by critical understanding of a specific kind related to creative achievement, but not always to notions of "the market" (Harper & Kroll 2008: 6).

The challenge of not only finding a supervisor and mentor with an appropriate critical and creative background, but examiners with similar qualifications, has become more pressing in the past decade, since the discipline has increased postgraduate numbers steadily since 1993 (Krauth 2011, Boyd 2009, et al). Faculty as well as students realise that they are in many cases creating not only new work but also new structures [9]. For those in a relatively new field, the way in which Clegg approaches the precariousness of academic identities by focusing on individuals is instructive. She argues that 'academic' is a 'multiple and shifting term [that] exists alongside other aspects of how people understand their personhood and ways of being in the world' (Clegg 2008: 329). Creative writers in academia, students as well as staff members, have at a minimum two major ways of being in the world: academic and writer. To complicate this doubling is the instability of our understanding of even established departments (such as English):

Departments, and even sub-units, develop particular ways of "thinking and practising" in their subject domains [quoting Entwistle 2003]. Discipline itself is variable as different sorts of knowledge come increasingly to dominate in some professional fields (Clegg 2008: 332).

As we have already argued, Creative Writing has been engaged in arguing for its own epistemology. Establishing a disciplinary identity, therefore, maintaining a writing career and teaching and administering, demonstrate the multiple roles that writer-academics as well as postgraduates who teach must adopt. In fact, doctoral programs in writing have been key in helping supervisors and their students to map out disciplinary boundaries, define creative research, clarify their own theoretical positions, interrogate the nature of the degree and its examination standards, and seek out best practice at all levels of teaching (Kroll 2009).

This active engagement in the development of a dynamic discipline by both supervisor and student offers opportunities to shape degrees and research profiles in a way that has not been usual in already established areas. The challenge of needing to design and execute a hybrid or bipartite thesis that must fulfil doctoral standards produces a graduate with an advanced level of creative and critical skills [10]. This experience, therefore, gives students a background that prepares them for work in a range of fields besides authorship, including arts administration, editing, public relations, publishing and teaching. In a discipline where even the definition of research is fluid (unlike a field like biology, for example), the opportunities that mentors provide are almost as critical in developing viable career paths as the research itself. Understanding how vital the student-mentorship relationship can be in a nascent field and understanding in which ways mentors can guide doctoral candidates will not only improve completion rates but also train the next generation of informed, responsive academics.

Notes

NB. A short version of this paper was presented at the 2012 Quality in Postgraduate Research Conference held at the Stamford Grand Hotel, Glenelg, April 17-19. An abstract of the paper appears in the conference proceedings.

[1] The *National Research Student Survey*, organised by ACER (Australian Council for Educational Research) in 2011, funded by DEEWR, 'was conducted across 38 universities in Australia in June 2010' (ACER 2011: 1). The most relevant section of this report here is entitled 'Career intentions and motivations.' To the question, 'Pathway student would **ideally** like to follow immediately after graduation,' 66.9% of respondents nationally indicated 'Academic position (include postdoc)' (4). To the question focused on 'Research work outside a university,' 15.7% of students nationally indicated that they would like to follow this course. There is an appreciable swing, however, when students are asked what 'Pathway student is **realistically** expecting to follow immediately after graduation' (4). The category 'Academic Position' has a reduced response rate to 51.8% nationally and the 'Research work outside a university' drops to 12.4%. Other options include 'Further formal study' (2.9% goes up to 4.2%); 'Non-research professional work' (moves from 13.1% to 27.4%); and 'Other' (moves from 1.4% to 4.2%). If investigators had more reliable and comprehensive information about the time to completion of the respondents it would help to contextualise these findings. In other words, do postgraduates change their responses from first year to last of candidature? It is worth emphasising that the national response rate for this survey was 25.5% of the national target population (ACER 2011: 2), roughly one-quarter.

See the TEQSA Threshold Standards 2011, at (<http://www.comlaw.gov.au/Details/F2012L00003/Download>) and the AQF Handbook (http://www.aqf.edu.au/Portals/0/Documents/Handbook/AustQuals%20FrmwrkFirstEditionJuly2011_FINAL.pdf). The AQF Handbook does not mention the qualifications of RHD supervisors specifically; it only requires that the primary supervisors of students are actively carrying out research in an appropriate discipline area. In the TEQSA Threshold Standards 2011, Section 4.2 of *Teaching and learning are of high quality*, the policy states:

[staff members] are appropriately qualified in the relevant discipline for their level of teaching (qualified to at least one Qualifications Standards level higher than the course of study being taught or with equivalent professional experience).

Equivalent professional experience for RHD supervisors at Masters and/or Doctoral level can be interpreted as meaning that the staff member normally holds an MA and/or PhD, is research active in the appropriate area as well as being experienced (having seen a student through to completion). One could argue that in the case of a doctoral supervisor with a PhD (who cannot hold a degree higher than the one supervised), experience as a supervisor is considered 'equivalent professional experience.' return to text

[2] Its introduction (Shulman 2009: 2) notes particular challenges to all parties involved in the postgraduate experience, including globalisation, more diverse student bodies (inter-generational mix, minorities and women), the rise of interdisciplinarity and 'new technologies ... altering and accelerating the way knowledge is shared and developed' (Shulman 2009: 2). return to text

[3] For the purposes of this paper, we are focusing on Principal (Primary) Supervisors. Most continuing academic job advertisements in the Humanities, including Creative Writing, now contain the essential criterion of a doctorate, because universities need qualified supervisors (this is based on our reading of job ads over the past year). Thirty-four out of thirty-nine higher education institutions in Australia now have a Supervisors' Register (policy available on university websites), holding information about who is qualified to be a Principal Supervisor and facilitating quality assurance. Furthermore, the new Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) Threshold Standards also speak about who is qualified to teach and/or supervise at various educational levels. It is worth pointing out here that a staff member also trying to complete a doctorate might not be allowed to be a Principal Supervisor at their own institution and might not have the time or energy to be a mentor to another RHD candidate as well. return to text

[4] At present there appear to be at least 34 universities that maintain a Supervisors' Register in Australia, which lists those who have fulfilled certain minimum requirements in order to supervise at Principal or Associate level. return to text

[5] Of course, certain practice-based creative arts, situated in studios or theatres, at first glance might seem to have more in common with collaborative research cultures. This paper, however, focuses on Creative Writing. return to text

[6] This portion of the discussion is based on Kroll's 2009 paper, 'The Supervisor as Practice-led Coach and Trainer: Getting Creative Writing Doctoral Candidates Across the Finish Line', in *Works Cited*. return to text

[7] At Flinders University, alternative viewpoints have been formalised in a Creative Mentorship program for RHD candidates. A published writer in the appropriate genre is engaged on a paying basis for a short period to offer feedback and support to the student once they have an acceptable draft of their complete thesis. return to text

[8] Edwards et al qualify this statement by explaining that the Masters by Research degree is increasingly less popular. Its future has been discussed at the Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies' annual conferences as well in the commonwealth's *Defining Quality for Research Training in Australia: A consultation paper* (2011). Edwards et al state: 'However, the masters by research completion numbers for domestic students have declined and among international students, have remained stable. These figures suggest that while overall supply is on the increase, the masters component of the HDR population is waning' (2009: x). return to text

[9] Since its inception, *TEXT* has published numerous articles about the complex nature of creative degrees. return to text

[10] Again, *TEXT* as well as *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* contain numerous examples of RHD candidates and supervisors discussing the hybrid thesis, as does the *TEXT Special Issue* entitled *Illuminating the Exegesis* (Fletcher & Mann 2004). return to text

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