Flinders University

Jeri Kroll

Draining Creativity: The Teacher-Writer in the Vampire Academy

1 The Academic Twilight Zone

Imagine this scenario. Dim the lights. Come with me to another dimension, a dimension not of sight or of sound, but of mind.

It is cold, and growing colder. The lights are faint, and growing fainter. Then they blink out - pre-programmed in order to save on electricity costs. The badly painted corridor echoes with one set of footsteps. A lone figure scurries with a chipped coffee cup in her hands. She enters an office carpeted with papers and places the cup on a manila folder, whose title has already been smudged by previous cups of tea, coffee and instant soup. The title of the placemat folder, unopened for many months, has lost its 'S'. It now reads: 'IDEA'.

She stretches her arms, tries to ease the ache in her back, before settling in front of the computer. The cursor winks wickedly. Her face is as pale as the yoghurt she ate for dinner. The eyes are as hollow as inkwells no one uses any more. The hands - poised at the keyboard - shake like a simile she can't think of because she is so tired.

Who is it? A Romantic poet shivering in her garret? A dedicated doctoral student putting the finishing touches to her thesis? No, it is the teacher-writer, not about to finish her collection of poems or her novel, but a topic proposal, a DEST publications form, a set of comments on a student's story.

Around Australia, scores of teacher-writers probably endure similar nights, frustrated, enervated, drained of creativity by the quotidian chores of the academy, which they are sometimes happy, sometimes forced to perform. The volume of these tasks has begun to challenge psychic as well as physical wellbeing. How did this situation come about?

Let me clarify. At present teacher-writers in the Australian postmodern academy suffer from a profusion - or confusion - of roles. Part of this condition stems from the way in which their employers and colleagues value them and their creative work, which is, after all, prioritised in both internal and external (i.e. governmental) evaluation systems. At present, a published novel might attract free publicity for a university as well as new students, yet only a refereed article or book by the writer warrants research credits. We still do not know exactly how the new system in Australia - the research quality framework - will be implemented; it is supposed to take account of creative production.

This paper investigates the complex identity of teacher-writers by considering the nature of some of the jobs that they perform in the academy, which make them 'teachers,' 'supervisors' and 'mentors' as well as creative practitioners. These identities impact on a writer's ability to

produce because they require sustained and intense interaction with students. What happens to teacher-writers who can find no time to write? Does this state of affairs affect not only their stagnating CVs, but their functioning in the academy as well?

Some of the information in this paper comes from traditional sources such as articles and books. Given the nature of the subject, it is appropriate that some comes direct from the exhausted horse's mouth - teacher-writers in Australia, Canada, the UK and the US - whose individual experiences offer some insight into multi-tasking in the academy, a volatile educational and cultural space. I have been conducting a series of interviews about the way in which teacher-writers view themselves and some disturbing similarities as well as differences have emerged.

2 Defining Who We Are

> Australia: The only country in the world where the word "academic" is regularly used as a term of abuse.
>
> Pinkney (2003) *The Devil's Collection: A Cynic's Dictionary*

Most creative people in a university context do not define themselves first as academics, which is a term that is less respected in Australia than overseas. Only one out of eleven people I have interviewed so far called herself an academic in an initial response. No one used the hyphenated term 'teacher-writer' (the American Association of Writers and Writing Programs favoured denomination since 1967 - see their website: http://www.awp.org), but they did as a group choose 'teacher' and 'writer' separately to identify themselves. Hence I employ this compound term throughout the paper for convenience. These are some of the preferred descriptions:

Professor Graeme Harper - UK, University of Portsmouth (BA MLitt DCA PhD FRGS): 'a writer working in a university' (1); 'I teach on campus.'

Associate Professor Judith Kroll - US, University of Texas at Austin, James A. Michener Centre for Writers (BA, M Phil, PhD): 'I'm a writer and I also teach' (3).

Dr D'Arcy Randall - US, University of Texas (MA, PhD): It depends on the 'context.' 'I teach, I'm a poet or a writer' (3).

Dr Donna Lee Brien - Australia, University of New England (MA, PhD): 'I'm an academic, I teach writing, and I write self-help books' (2). At this point in time Brien adds the 'genre qualification' (2) because she wants to market those books.

In each case the creative person appears in some incarnation, but writers in a university do much more than teach and try to pursue their own creative projects. They are also 'mentors' and 'supervisors' - identities that relate specifically to interaction with students. The word mentor - 'a wise and trusted counsellor' (*Macquarie*) - derives from the character Mentor, the person to whom Odysseus entrusted his household when he left for Troy. Note the adjectives wise and trusted, meaning the mentor possesses knowledge and can be trusted to guide often

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those younger or less experienced. These words possess positive associations, flattering the mentor, but they can also engender guilt, since the role implies a kind of de facto parenthood. The definition says less about a specific job than about the nature of the responsibility and relationship between mentor and mentee.

The term 'supervisor' is somewhat different. According to the *Macquarie*, he or she is basically '1. one who supervises; a superintendent'. The dictionary qualifies this by adding that the term has a specific university definition. A supervisor has a job and therefore job specifications that entail a range of tasks. These have increased due to bureaucratic pressure partly engendered by government audits of universities as well as by an institution's attempts to ensure the quality of honours and postgraduate programs.

3 Under Pressure: Overworked and Underwritten

Let us look more closely at the effect of these multiple identities and the attendant increasing pressures on teacher-writers. They can reduce time, energy and mental equilibrium; in a worst case scenario, anxiety, exhaustion and depression can result: the Vampire Academy drains its victims. In a large part, these interrelated pressures are endemic to the relatively new discipline of creative writing because of the way in which we teach subjects, the nature of the students who take them and the rapid growth of both undergraduate and postgraduate education. We offer a plethora of models in Australia: coursework Certificates and Diplomas as well as research higher degrees. The latter category in particular poses challenges, demanding that supervisors oversee a non-traditional type of thesis which combines creative product and exegesis in innovative ways.

Added to these factors are the other administrative tasks that all academics perform. 'Multi-tasking' is a current buzz word, but in an effort to juggle creative, critical and pedagogical demands many teachers become adept at what Richard Florida calls 'time deepening' (Florida 2002: 161), the attempt to squeeze each minute to the maximum to exploit every experience. The logic goes, 'if one cannot elongate time, perhaps one can deepen or intensify it, getting more from each bit' (161). Florida sees the increasing frenzy of creative people as ultimately futile, and unnecessary if government and society value creativity properly. In an effort to have it all, writers in academia tend to prioritise madly, especially when a mass of tasks descend like an asteroid in a Hollywood disaster movie. Prioritising works something like a nuclear bomb to blast apart that mass into less deadly bits that can be knocked off one by one. Fallout will still occur, and its debilitating effects can be subtle and long-term.

Let us begin at the beginning, however, with what writers first and foremost are supposed to do - write. What happens to someone who doesn't produce for two or three years in any meaningful or sustained way? Can they pick up their creative work again? If being a writer means producing texts, if being an author means significant creative output, what happens when that author ceases to create? A problem often unacknowledged by colleagues and administrative supervisors is that our creative products do not usually feed into our teaching as research might for traditional scholars. For example, a scholar might write a thesis or a book about Virginia Woolf, then teach a topic in twentieth-century modernism or an honours module on her novels, exploiting research already completed, or building on the original base. The scholar does not start from scratch.

If I am a novelist, popular or literary, however, I also have a parallel career to my academic one that has its own timetable over which I do not necessarily exercise much control. Publishers want a follow-up book when one has been successful because authors have a profile, a public dimension that needs maintaining. Writers have competition out there as well, others absorbing ideas from the maelstrom of contemporary culture. We've all either had the experience or have heard of others who have had the experience of being pipped at the post with a clever plot or a stylistic innovation. The truth is that someone else had the time and energy to bring their work to fruition first. Teacher-writers are used to putting their careers on hold. As D'Arcy Randall remarks, 'I miss having my avocation be my vocation' (2).

What about those writers whose genre is directly connected with a profession? Professor Lynne Van Luven, Director of the Professional Writing Program at the University of Victoria in Canada, found that after completing a PhD and being a professional journalist for ten years, she became so engrossed in learning how to teach that she feared she was 'going to lose the edge . . . be out of touch with the market' as well as with 'the struggle the students are having' (5). In particular, she says, 'in journalism you can get out of touch in half a year' (8). Pragmatically, we are all faced, she believes, with finding 'the balance between . . . [practising] what we are hired to know about and at the same time do what we're hired to do, which is teach' (5).

Supervision of research postgraduates brings its own challenges as discussed above, since so many projects now tend to cross disciplinary boundaries. We do not necessarily begin as experts in the area, or even the literary period, as conventional scholars might. In order to supervise competently we have to pay particular attention to bibliographies, to suggesting contacts in other departments or universities who might provide additional expertise, to the design and articulation of the thesis so that it will make sense to examiners.

Let me turn now to teacher-writers' relationships with students. The best and most enthusiastic students rejuvenate us; they keep us in the business; they teach us and sometimes become our friends. Given numbers and lack of institutional support, however, the group as a whole can drain our energy, not merely our creativity, leaving us pale and wan, like my imaginary character trapped alone at night in her office.

4 'Are You My Mother?'

The above phrase is also the title of a P. D. Eastman's children's book (1960) about a baby bird that falls from its nest. Its ego is still fragile, its identity unstable and so it travels around town asking cows, dogs, steam shovels and airplanes if they are its mother. When the baby chick is fortuitously dropped back into its nest and mother finally arrives, acknowledging baby, a joyful reunion takes place. To some extent, writing students want to be acknowledged as writers, and it is the teacher's approval, whether through marks, comments or time spent in conference, that validates their identities as creative people. This interpersonal dynamic seems to be in operation more with female than male teachers.

As anecdotal as well as published evidence suggests, it is harder for women than for men, because 'in the new mentoring and educational models, women are in effect asked to extend

the work of mothering from the domestic to the professional sphere' (George 1994: 227). Although they no longer overtly subscribe to the nineteenth-century's ideal of the Angel in the House, they more often than not model the ideal of 'the Angel in the Academy' (227). In a provocative 1994 article entitled '"How many of Us Can You Hold to Your Breast?": Mothering in the Academy,' Diana Hume George analyses developments in educational and psychoanalytic theory, citing writers and critics such as Tillie Olsen and Dorothy Dinnerstein to expose the positives and negatives of the feminist push to maternalise and, hence, humanise patriarchal structures in western society. In particular, she notes the dangers for academic women who teach creative writing, where the topic content and method might have psychotherapeutic dimensions and the paucity of senior women as mentors increases demands on their time. Ultimately, 'this other "reproduction of mothering" is the tendency among some women writers to let their protégés, their metaphorical children, do the work that they cannot do' (239). The needs of the mother are subverted by the needs of the children - or our clients, to use current terminology.

Those women who try to control the amount of energy going out by curtailing their investment in the academy - that is, by becoming part-time - often find this arrangement a trap. I have witnessed this with colleagues at more than one institution. Brien reinforces this state of affairs: '. . . women academics who I've seen going part-time, they're just getting paid for part-time, but there's no real freeing up from the thinking about work which is part of it' (7). When teachers care about their students, that care does not dissipate when they drive away from the university. And of course, there is the ubiquitousness of cyberspace, where email functions like an umbilical chord that can never be cut, guaranteeing that the anxious messages of students sent at midnight always have the potential to interrupt the mentor's creative absorption.

Creative writing teaching, by its very nature, demands a continuous and more personal engagement of both male and female staff that head the family workshop. Week by week they are usually reading, assessing and filtering responses to an amazing variety of material. This is more draining and potentially stressful than running a tutorial on a novel from the canon that a teacher has probably read several times, lectured on and perhaps written about. Even if we eschew the psychotherapeutic model of the workshop, try to keep everything as professional and impersonal as possible (see George about transference and 'personal poetics,' [George 1994: 231] and Wandor, about 'writing-as-therapy,' [Wandor 2004: 113]), a beginning writing class can test a teacher's verbal and interpersonal skills, since the egos of student writers are notoriously fragile. Honesty, tempered by tact, is even more necessary when dealing with postgraduates who invest at least two to four years on average in their thesis. They want a successful outcome, they want our professional expertise, but they might feel they need almost as much our loyalty, support and, as one of my postgraduates says in emails, 'compassion.'

Lynne Van Luven connected the quality of her supervision and teaching with her own work and extracurricular activities, neither of which are valued equally with traditional academic research. She, not her students, used the same emotive term that my student had. She says, 'the risks I take in my own journalism and my own sort of volunteer work . . . make me more compassionate as a teacher' (10). She has been voted more than once 'one of the most popular Profs' (16) in *Maclean's Magazine* university survey, yet she has come to the point where she admits that 'I have to make a decision about how I invest my time, and I can't do it all any more' (9). This refrain was repeated in more than one Association of Writers and Writing

Programs Conference session in Vancouver, 2005, where teachers noted the danger of becoming 'consumed by the students' work' (11). Job satisfaction can be superseded by frustration and eventually bitterness. I heard varying degrees of this in the interviews I conducted. Sometimes our peers are content to 'realign what [they] see as outputs for [their] creativity' (Brien 4) for the moment, but this seems conditioned by the age of the subjects and where they are in their academic careers. It all depends, I suggest, on how long that moment lasts. The fear of not having enough solitude 'to inhabit our own mental space' (Van Luven 8) seems always to be there to some degree.

Tillie Olsen has talked about 'wholly surrendered and dedicated lives, time for the work, totality of absorption' (241), yet contemporary academics have less and less of this fruitful isolation. Female teacher-writers have moved beyond the physical dilemma of not having a room of one's own (see Woolf 1928) in which to work; many have offices as well as home studies, but what are they doing in those work spaces? If, as Carolyn Heilbrun suggests, 'power is the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter' (Heilbrun 1988: 18), what happens if circumstances prevent writers from participating in or contributing to the creative discourse that matters to them? Are they in fact powerless by default? And are they collaborating in their powerlessness?

Gill James is a former foreign language teacher who made the decision to leave teaching and, in fact, heading a department, to do an MA in Writing for Children; she has published a number of young adults novels and is now completing a PhD. She talks about the author as a kind of medium who 'sits behind a computer and taps away all day, channelling in some ways' (9). Retiring from professional life made this possible. Van Luven does not refer to inspiration or spirituality, but the period needed for gestation, preparation and execution. She explains, 'one of the things that you're doing as a writer is process. But one of the things they're assessing you on . . . is whether there's a product. So there's this strange . . . disconnection. For us, our research is our writing . . . But there's a gestation period, sometimes, of three to five years' (8). Donna Lee Brien testifies to the investment necessary for a biography; three years is her rough time frame, but with study leave only every three to four years, at the best, how long would it take to produce a publishable work?

Even though the idea of doing any kind of sustained research or project during the semester evaporated with the financial cuts of the 1990s, for a while the summer long break and study leaves still promised some respite. Administrative chores and enrolment deadlines, summer short courses and new degrees have eaten away the summer break. Now even study leave is not sacrosanct. In the first instance, some pressure might be exerted to produce traditional research as well as creative product, simply because it attracts research credits. At my own university, where many of my colleagues now opt for either part or all of their time off teaching to be spent at home, rather than abroad, due to familial and financial constraints, or simply the nature of the project, they are then often required to fulfil some administrative duties, to appear for the occasional crucial meeting and certainly to continue some form of postgraduate supervision.

If we are meant to be not only mentors but role models, how can we fulfil both these roles if we are not granted, or claw back, the precious time and space required for gestation, contemplation and planning, let alone execution of creative work? Studies of creativity reveal that there is a 'four-step process' involved in original 'creative thinking . . . preparation, incubation, illumination and verification or revision' (Florida 33). In other words, this process

necessitates more than mere writing time to produce the product. Writers need literal and figurative space that is not always available in the academy. If this process stalls, how easily can it be reinstituted? How can we model independent, mature artists if we cannot be them ourselves? George challenges her peers: 'You want to show them how to be writers? Go then and write' (243). We might make a personal choice to follow this imperative, but most of us cannot follow through unaided.

5 Credentialism or Celebrity: What is the Teacher-Writer Worth?

Support for teacher-writers can take the form of DEST recognition of creative work, as well as local institutional programs such as teaching release, study leave and leave without pay. At my institution, however, I am the only person to have ever been granted teaching release to complete a novel, and I was told that it would not likely happen again. At many universities, given the decimation of staff numbers in the 1990s, even leave without pay for a semester might be an issue, because there might not be enough funds to replace the teacher-writer. Salaries have a habit of being absorbed back into the maw of the larger organisational unit.

Job and salary conditions of colleagues in Australia and overseas offer instructive comparisons. First of all, there is a definite hierarchy in creative writing. The range of degrees include MFAs, MAs, DCAs and PhDs. In the US, teacher-writers with MFAs are not generally expected to produce refereed research, but to publish in magazines and to produce books. A constant complaint at the two AWP Conferences I have attended, however, is that at many institutions MFAs are penalised in terms of salary and promotion. Even writers with Ph Ds are encouraged to do some conventional research, according to Van Luven and Kroll; this makes it easier for them to access sabbaticals and grants.

Let us consider our cohort in another way now, in terms of seniority of teaching and publishing experience. Here we have three categories. There are the beginners - those who enter the system willing to do almost anything to obtain a permanent job. Then come what I term the 'middle-ranked' people, those who have published books, and keep on producing, but whose names are not writ large on the night sky along with the luminaries in the third category. Those are the stars, the celebrities, whose names alone cast a golden light on a department, where they are often seldom seen.

The cult of celebrity arrived in the late twentieth century in the university, too. Both here and overseas famous authors are used to sell programs, even if most students are never taught by the greats. Shirley Lim talks about the 'social and cultural capital' (Lim 2003: 160) of the big name, so that 'at UC Irvine in 2002 for instance, the creative writing curriculum is described not in terms of course coverage or subject matter but in terms of reputation' (161). Look at any issue of *Poets and Writers Magazine*, the national organ for published writers in the US, which carries dozens of ads for full and low-residency MFAs. The roll call of illustrious faculty will dazzle prospective students, but in truth most of the people are no longer there; the operative principle seems to be: once on the list, forever on the list. In fact, the James A. Michener Centre for Writers (University of Texas) hires on average three visiting writers per year, some for only a semester, so the list grows yearly (Judith Kroll interview).

In the UK as well, writers are able to negotiate special arrangements whereby they do not have to function as other academics: . . . 'by the nature of their appointment' they 'can actively say, "Sorry, not interested in meetings. I'll come in, teach my poetry class, and I'll go home"' (Harper 2). Ironically, according to Harper, some feel that 'if they admit that writing can be taught, they place themselves within a context of being an academic rather than a writer. And that strange split still exists' (2). So they dip into the system, are paid well and regularly, and then opt out. Certainly there is a new breed of MA and PhD- trained writers who want to invigorate the system, but age doesn't seem to be a factor.

In Canada, according to Van Luven, the star system exists, although not to the same degree as in the US : ' . . . credentialism is now being exceeded in the universities . . . by celebrity' (10). This means that middle-ranked writers bear the burden of teaching and administrative work. The new challenge is how to survive: 'I have colleagues who are bartering to buy themselves out of teaching, so that they can finish the novel or they can start the next book . . . We hired them to be teachers because they were good writers, now they're spending time applying for grants so they'll never have to be in the classroom again' (10).

In Australia the same situation seems to be developing. Visiting Fellow or Writer-in-Residence positions can be used to attract prize-winning writers to departments where they have little to do with students, leaving middle-ranked writers with increased workloads given the popularity of the discipline. Lim's comment about US universities could apply to all three countries I have discussed: 'But the relationship between the recognition of talent as celebrated in the writers whom the university employs and tenures in its English departments and the work that these writers do in English doctoral programs is seldom clarified' (Lim 2003: 161). Ironically, those programs without budgets to attract star staff might become well-known for the success of their students, not their faculty.

The late twentieth century witnessed the rise of the cult of the celebrity author and this phenomenon shows no sign of slowing down in the twenty-first. Tours are reserved for those whom the publisher believes can attract audiences and generate big sales. Their names are their brands, whether literary or popular; their books make or break their reputations. In fact, good publicity, prizes, great reviews, a long enough publishing CV, and you have an author with enough credentials to warrant a position at a university as a Professor. And so the circle turns - or the merry-go-round whizzes off its axis. How can someone already in a university spend the requisite time and energy to produce that career-defining book or script, especially since 'publishers want their money back fast, so they want a very polished manuscript needing little work that can be published in the right time frame'? (Fisher 2005: 24).

6 Authors in the World: Don't Give Up Your Day Job

> . . . artists live in a world which is changing rapidly, where conditions of work are very different from only a decade ago, and where new technologies offer both exciting possibilities and potential threats to the pursuit of a professional artistic practice.

> Throsby and Hollister (2003: 79)

Let us look outside the academy again for a moment and ask, 'Given this environment, would teacher-writers be better off quitting in order to pursue their art, especially if they have already established some kind of career?' Is 'writer' a viable career option in Australasia, the UK or the US? As Throsby and Hollister suggest, artists now function in a vibrant but unsettling context. The cult of the artist promises incredible financial rewards to the lucky few, those whose agents can auction their works to the highest bidder. Publishing firms, however, are not the constant entities they were fifty years ago. Multinationals scrap and devour each other frequently or mate with other entertainment corporations, producing bloated offspring that threaten local arts. Paul Carter remarks of this milieu: 'In a culture dominated by the lust to neutralise the unpredictable difference of what is local, creative and true to its material circumstance, and to serve it up in the homogeneous format of information for consumers, [artists] find that their social and cultural function dangerously dematerialises' (Carter 2004: xi). Those whose writing is not 'mainstream' in a global sense, or who do not produce genre fiction, for example, will have a hard time.

Richard Florida has put forward an alternate view in *The Rise of the Creative Class*, postulating a creative place (or local environment) as more significant than anything else in ensuring a successful economy (xxix). He is more concerned, however, with fostering creativity as a cornerstone of twenty-first century society than in looking closely at how a minority of his Creative Class - artists - can survive solely as artists. His statistics are encouraging, since 'nearly a third of the workforce' (xiv) in the US belongs to his Creative Class: 'people in science and engineering, architecture and design, education, arts, music and entertainment' (8). He finds this composition replicated 'across the advanced European countries' (xiv). Florida notes that the most successful U. S. cities economically have high numbers of all kinds of creative people, and his analysis is then used as a springboard to suggest policies to move society forward. The situation looks very different for writers, however, when their actual economic position is examined. Statistics can help to answer the question of '. . . how . . . the role of artists is evolving in response to changes in the political, social, economic and cultural environments in which they work' (Throsby and Hollister 11).

In fact, how many people actually identify themselves as writers without mentioning their income-producing profession first? As we have seen, those working in universities tend to mention initially that they teach. Standing up and being counted says something about the possibility of forging a career as well as how society values writers. The Australian Census only surveys people during one particular week, and if an author were not writing that week, but making a living in another way, he or she would not tick 'writer' as the principal occupation. Certain kinds of writers, of course, might be able to make a living: those who produce genre fiction (romance, fantasy, etc.); journalists employed by a newspaper or with a wide range of freelance contacts; those who write for the new media, for example - not to mention the stars in any category who have national or international reputations. The majority of writers, however, who pursue fiction, poetry or drama, who experiment in new technologies, who might create a range of material, in fact, for a variety of audiences, will find that some of their outlets offer remuneration and many do not (or not enough). For all of the hype about the advanced nation's knowledge economies, about how people are needed as 'content providers for the information superhighway' (Throsby and Hollister 11), the situation does not seem promising for those who want to dedicate themselves to writing alone.

A recent study of Australia's principal artistic occupations produced Throsby and Hollister's Australia Council Report, *Don't Give Up Your Day Job: An Economic Study of Professional*

Artists in Australia, which not only picks up from earlier reports, but canvasses overseas research as well. In the publishing arena in particular, which is 'inherently conservative' (Fisher 6), the safety of a proven bestseller, for example, appeals far more to publishers' representatives, marketing executives and corporation accountants than a risk-taking novel by a first-time author. Statistics from another recent report, *Current Publishing Practice* by the Australian Society of Authors' Executive Director, Dr Jeremy Fisher, tell the story, and these have been replicated in other countries. In 2003-04 in Australia, 'sales were dominated by over 900,000 copies of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* and 1,777,000 copies of four Dan Brown books - after these titles in their categories, the next best-selling book sold 65,000 copies . . . ' (Fisher 3). Although the UK and the US have healthier niche markets and small publishing firms survive, 'in each market the largest market share is held by a relatively few major players' (Fisher 9).

The figures for any but the big guns look grim: 'Evidence from earlier surveys of artists, both in Australia and in other countries, suggests two major factors - financial problems and time constraints' (Throsby and Hollister 35-36) as impeding artistic production, and one can see how. The median creative income for Australian writers in 2000-01 was a pitiful $4800, while the total arts income was only $11,700. The mean earned creative income was $11,400 (45). Let us consider the implications of these statistics, some positive, some negative. Asking for creativity to be a cornerstone of a progressive economy, as Florida does, is positive if policy-makers follow through with all of his suggestions, including funding the arts in, and for, themselves. On the other hand, if 'the concept of creativity - a central and indisputable element in artistic practice - has been coopted as the driving force in the new economy' (Throsby and Hollister 11), purely for economic benefit, there is the potential to distort that practice and hence to lose insights that might be ultimately transferable back to the economy.

I should mention one of the other options - or source of income - for a practising professional: grants. Would this ensure that writers could function without teaching, for instance? Certain highly successful authors attribute their success to the respite that Australia Council grants have offered. In fact, Kate Grenville explains: 'The inexorable mathematics of Australia's population means it's almost impossible for writers - even established ones - to earn a living from our books. Literature Board support means being able to go on writing, rather than becoming a full-time teacher of writing' (Stevens 2004: 16). Novelist and poet Luke Davies talks about 'breathing space' (Stevens 17) as well as the networking that can advance a career. These advantages come from being able to focus on writing as the primary profession. But what are the chances for the majority of writers of accessing this assistance?

Stevens' *A Short History of the Literature Board* makes it clear that an objective in the 1990s was to tighten up requirements to reduce the number of applications, and so increase the number of positive outcomes (Stevens 13). Statistics reveal that between 1986 and 2000 the number of applications did indeed reduce, and hence the percentage (between 11 and 18 per cent) of success rose (Stevens 14). The most grants awarded in one year (individual writers' programs) reached 100; the least was fifty-three (14). In other words, the odds improved for a very small number of writers. Given this incredibly competitive environment, most writers (especially those with families) would be rash to give up a day job to rely on grants and royalties unless they had already secured a substantial international contract or could produce material for the more lucrative TV or film markets.

The truth is that in order to survive, most writers have to take other jobs; they teach in universities; work in community arts, advertising or arts administration; freelance for newspapers, magazines and corporations. In many reports, including the one by Throsby and Hollister, those who do teach regularly are not surveyed since writing is not their principal source of income. Teachers in particular, however, have difficulty maintaining focus on their creative life because of their other intellectual, pedagogical and ethical responsibilities. As Throsby and Hollister suggest, 'The fundamental processes of creativity, the pursuit of an artistic vision and the passionate commitment to art that characterises the true artist - these things remain at the heart of what it is to be a practising art professional. For many artists the real challenge is to keep hold of these core values in such a rapidly changing world' (12).

7 Conclusion: Back to School?

I would like to be able to conclude this discussion with a series of recommendations that will reduce stress, increase job satisfaction and guarantee creative respite. Unfortunately, I began with questions and that is what I can offer again, so that we, in the academy, can debate possible answers:

1. How many roles is it reasonable to expect a writer to perform in the academy?
2. Is it reasonable to expect that at the end of a career, writers' students should become their greatest legacy?
3. What credentials does the academy require?
4. How can writers maintain, update or develop credentials if the academy does not reward them for producing creative work?

Certainly how we define research in the discipline of creative writing will help us to generate useful answers to some questions.

In order to be the best academics, the best teachers and, most importantly, the best writers, we desperately need time and space; a respite, in effect, to become students again, so that we can read, think, make mistakes, move forward. How to acquire that time is the issue. I will leave you with some comments by Hélène Cixous that suggest what is needed for writers to produce their most meaningful work, even though they are distracted by families, jobs and the 'enormous concert of noise-and-rumour' (Cixous 1993: 6) in the world. In a metaphor about how serious writing gets done, she says that writers need time and courage not only to immerse themselves in the unconscious, but to practice going under and transcribing what they have found.

> As a result, we do nothing and don't advance, we stop out of laziness, hurry from impatience. Between the two, the work of descending isn't accomplished. Paradise is down below. . . . Giving oneself to writing means being in a position to do this work of digging, of unburying, and this entails a long period of apprenticeship, since it obviously means going to school; writing is the right school. (Cixous 1993: 6-7)

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Jeri Kroll is Professor and Program Coordinator of Creative Writing at Flinders University, Adelaide. She is the author of over twenty books for young people and adults, as well as essays, poems and articles published in Australia, the UK, the US, Korea and Japan, her most recent in 2004 being The Mother Workshops *(poems) and* Mickey's Little Book of Letters *(novel).* Creative Writing Studies: Practice, Research and Pedagogy *(Multilingual Matters forthcoming 2007) is her newest publication with co-author Graeme Harper. www.jerikroll.com*