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## *Introduction*

**Lee McGowan, Alex Philp and Ella Jeffery**

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## University of the Sunshine Coast and Queensland University of Technology

Lee McGowan, Alex Philp and Ella Jeffery

### Introduction

An Early Career Researcher (ECR), a Higher Degree Research (HDR) candidate and an older researcher walk into a bar ... a cliché perhaps, but we are keenly aware that this is all too often how discussions of collaborative endeavours begin. We are confident it is how a number of the contributions in this Special Issue began – the creation of informal spaces, opportunities and networks to make it possible is the focus of at least one article.

The idea for a *TEXT* Special Issue centred on collaboration emerged when we, as three creative writing academics in different stages of our careers, began discussing not only how we collaborated, but *why* we did (or did not) do it. Our discussions ranged from the collaborative process as a means to build capacity, academic employability, and a research profile; to produce a sense of belonging in HDR communities; and to the deeply rewarding though at times challenging nuances of working with colleagues who are also friends. Collaborative endeavours raise questions of opportunity and innovation, and of power shifts and hierarchies, as well as of what we value as practitioners. The increasing pressure to publish placed on academics in all stages of their careers by both our institutions and the broader research environment demands further considerations. Questions raised in our early discussions are centred in this Special Issue. We ask: How does collaboration in our patch of the academy work? What are the possible benefits and challenges of collaborative practice? How do we build creative writing communities in the academy, and why should we?

The Romantic notion of the lone, isolated writer is one of the past. The rapid and dynamic integration of a diverse range of new media and technologies into our practice, the focus on trans- and interdisciplinary research in many academic institutions, and the increasing ways our discipline engages with wider communities, are just a few of the shifts that mean writers collaborate more than ever. This is not to say that collaborative practice has not been of significant interest to our discipline. Rather, the process and exploration of collaboration has been a keen interest in writing scholarship. Several Special Issues of *TEXT* include articles that examine collaborative frameworks and endeavours. We turn to Special Issue 40, ‘Making it new: Finding contemporary meanings for creativity’ (April 2017), for instance. In this issue, Jen Webb and Monica Carroll, in ‘A seethe of poets: Creativity and community’, explicitly challenge the myth of the lone genius by examining connection and community in contemporary poetry. In October 2017, Special Issue 44 ‘The exegesis now’ included an article by Nigel Krauth, Chris Bowman and Zoe Fraser. In ‘The exegesis and co-authorship: Collaboration between supervisors and research students’, Krauth, Bowman and Fraser discuss the benefits of research students co-writing and publishing with supervisors.

While these articles advance important discussions of collaboration, we believe that a dedicated Special Issue is a productive way to explore the charged complexities of collaboration, and the ways in which our disciplinary changes have shifted and reframed our collaborative academic and creative practice. These changes, and others, have opened new questions and spaces for exploration. To consider a recent change, the global impact of COVID-19 on how we work throws questions of collaboration – and of what we value about it – back to the centre of focus. While we conceived of and curated this Special Issue before the effects of the pandemic took place, as editors, the pandemic has encouraged us to return to the contributions of this issue with fresh interest, and with an eye on what we can and what we might have to make possible when working together.

We take a broad approach to collaboration in this Special Issue. This approach has encouraged a variety of perspectives for this first *TEXT* Special Issue focused solely on collaboration. Our contributors explore collaborative practice as it relates to creative practice and research, to undergraduate learning and teaching, and to Higher Degree Researcher (HDR) and Early Career Researcher (ECR) communities, among other themes. Susan Gasson, Christine Bruce and Clarence Maybee’s article focuses on the creation of collaborative capacity in ECR writers, defining concepts that can be incorporated within their Collaborative Research Culture Framework. Five stories, which occur in global and cross-disciplinary contexts, illustrate how elements of the Framework, including Collaborative Capacity, can help the collaborative research writer to successfully engage in collaborative opportunities and to overcome potential challenges. The contribution by Gasson, Bruce and Maybee is one of several articles in this issue concerned with ECR and HDR collaboration – revealing this to be a particular area of interest for creative writing academics.

Ella Jeffery and Mark Piccini, in their article ‘Writing and rewriting Australia: ECR Collaboration in designing and delivering an Australian literary studies unit’, contend there is significant value to be gained from collaborative unit design in literary studies – an area that is traditionally the domain of a single academic. Their article examines their collaborative approach to unit design as a process to augment the teaching skills required by full-time academics alongside development of a multi-vocal delivery that asks students to engage in more varied, diverse discussions about identity, ideology and literature. For ECRs and HDRs collaborative practice is often seen as central to the development of a research community, increasing productivity and building a research profile; Jeffery and Piccini remind us of the value of collaboration in specifically teaching practice.

While collaborative writing between students and supervisors is commonplace, even expected, in STEM disciplines, expectations around authorship are very different in the creative arts. In ‘Collaborating upwards: Writing across hierarchical boundaries’, Elizabeth Ellison and Craig Batty examine modes of collaborative writing practice. They focus on providing strategies for those working across hierarchical boundaries in HDR training and the importance of understanding how to avoid a misunderstood or even predatory practice that disempowers students and advantages supervisors. Using the context of screenwriting, Ellison and Batty

explore collaborations that enable students to find their own agency within collaborative spaces.

In another work, Batty underlines common perceptions of creative writing ‘as an isolated practice’, one ‘in which practitioners crave connection and people with whom to share their ideas, for moral support and critical feedback’ (2016: 69). Alex Philp, Ella Jeffery and Lee McGowan agree: collaboration is vital to developing new networks and communities. However, the development and maintenance of collaborative practice is often as complicated as it is productive. In their article, the authors assert that collaboration should be conceptualised, discussed in scholarship, and approached in ways that are as diverse, paradoxical, and fluid as collaborative endeavours are in practice. Their paper considers the complexities of collaboration on traditional research outputs for creative writing HDR students.

Student life for creative writing HDRs is already complex, fraught with its own tensions and challenges and the need to work towards both creative and traditional research publication. Melanie Saward and Sara El Sayed unpack the experience for women of colour, where student life is further complicated by the need for counterspaces in the academy. Their article examines how a peer-only, horizontalised HDR writing group facilitates the development of a sense of belonging that sits outside formal supervisory interaction. They discuss why HDR students of colour may seek support outside of predominantly white formal structures that characterise the academy in Australia, and how collaborative HDR writing groups could potentially create effective counterspaces for students of colour.

On the subject of creating spaces, Heather McGinn, Chloe Cannell, Pablo Muslera, Lachlan Blackwell and Amelia Walker argue that on-campus open mic events enrich university culture, which in turn enriches holistic learning and wellbeing. Their article presents four varied accounts of the development, issues and challenges involved in the success of Showpony: a monthly university creative performance and pop up bar night. Showpony events intervene in and cut through institutional spaces, which prompt different ways of being in and working through the space, fostering styles of learning and interaction that may not necessarily occur in lectures or tutorials. Staff and student perspectives provide insight for similar events at the intersection of formal and informal collaborative practices in creative writing within the academy.

Alex Philp, Emma Doolan and Rohan Wilson also explore the potential to create new spaces and networks for creative writing students in their article; however, they move the discussion to how this process might operate within the virtual space. Online publishing platforms have become a growing resource for emerging writers through which to share their work and engage in a critical dialogue with peers. The potential these platforms offer tertiary education, even with the increasing focus on online learning, remains largely untapped. In ‘The Writing Collective: A cross-university collaboration between undergraduate creative writing students’, Philp, Doolan and Wilson present the results of a pilot project which makes use of the digital platform, Wattpad, as a site for peer critique between undergraduate creative writing students. They explore the benefits and challenges of student engagement between universities across and within online spaces, and make suggestions for further research in this space.

Three articles explore interdisciplinarity and collaborative creative writing practices. They explore how writers marry divergent mediums and voices in their research practice and what this suggests about the wider discipline. Corinna Di Niro, Amelia Walker, Alice Nilsson, Rebekah Clarkson, Yuwei Gou, Elena Spasovska, Nadine Levy and Chloe Cannell present an assemblage. In the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept, a contingent formation of elements that could equally be separate, differently formed and/or combined with other things altogether, they aim to realise strategies to resist inequality in and beyond academia. Fragments written by the eight authors, from differing backgrounds and three tertiary institutions, facilitate sharing and comparing their experiences and working together on a collaborative creative writing research project. The incorporation of their 2019 performance of *Becoming-game*, at the JM Coetzee Centre's 'Scholarship is the New Conservative' Symposium, enriches the multiple themes in their paper, including games of power and privilege.

In 'Not "all writing is creative writing" and that's ok: Inter/disciplinary collaboration in writing and writing studies', Beck Wise and Ariella Van Luyn address questions of disciplinary identity and what academics mean when they talk about 'writing', which often results in writing programs being targeted at fiction and creative non-fiction writers. The authors collaborative efforts are positioned here as 'horizontal mentoring' and peer-to-peer learning across sub-disciplines – creative writing and technical communication – which has resulted in an argument for more inclusive notions of disciplinary identity and pedagogical practices that engage diverse student cohorts.

Chloe Cannell, Elena Spasovska, Yuwei Gou, Alice Nilsson, Rebekah Clarkson, Corinna Di Niro, Nadine Levy and Alice Walker report on methods used to analyse creative writings as data in a collective biography research project undertaken by eight academics. The authors bear broadly feminist and/or queer outlooks, and experience dissatisfaction with academia's neoliberal reality. As collective biographers they come together to 'imagine things otherwise'; their writings – the data – are analysed through processes of narrative inquiry, poetic inquiry and performance studies to generate and transform knowledges around the practice and processes of collective biography.

David Thomas Henry Wright's interest is in the writer's authority as it applies to text, code and other media in collaborative processes in electronic literature, and is one of two articles that discuss authority and power in collaborative electronic or digital narrative practice within this Special Issue. In 'Collaboration and Authority in Electronic Literature', Wright draws on cinematic auteur theory and generational approaches to digital literature and explores a range of examples, including the author's own works, to highlight issues in the creative collaborative production of digital literary works. In particular, Wright examines the influence of these processes on how these works are 'read'.

The final article of the issue is also concerned with collaborative creative processes; Freya Wright-Brough's 'Productive discomfort: Negotiating totality in collaborative digital narrative practice' examines the process of producing the digital narrative, *We See Each Other*. Writing from the perspective of a member of a collaborative writing team, Wright-Brough employs a largely Levinasian lens to examine the concept of *productive discomfort*, where working

towards ethical collaboration involves learning to work alongside totality. This approach provides new insights to how different power structures influence what and how stories are told and how they affect narratives produced by collaborative teams, as well as how practitioners can work towards more ethical collaboration.

Just as our differing career stages as co-editors brought varied perspectives to our initial discussions of collaboration and community within our discipline, so to do the range of approaches and topics examined by our contributors. Questions of how and why we work together will, we believe, hold interest in our discipline for a long time to come. That the majority of contributors chose to co-author their articles for this Special Issue surely speaks to the value collaboration has within at least some areas of our practice; we hope the articles included here keep the conversation (and debate) about collaboration at the forefront of our discipline. The articles here are about *how* we write; what informs our writing together; how both creative and scholarly writers form communities; and how we might write to, against, alongside, or from within wider communities.

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*Dr Lee McGowan is a Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of the Sunshine Coast. He recently published Football Fiction: A History (2020) and co-authored Never Say Die: The Hundred-Year Overnight Success of Australian Women's Football (2019). His other research interests include*

*digital narratives, practice as research and community engagement. Lee follows Glasgow Celtic and the Matildas.*

*Alex Philp is a PhD candidate at Queensland University of Technology. Her research examines sister relationships in fiction and the Gothic. Her short fiction has appeared in Overland, The Review of Australian Fiction, Westerly and on the Meanjin blog, and in 2017 she won the Rachel Funari Prize for Fiction.*

*Dr Ella Jeffery is a researcher in Queensland University of Technology's Creative Industries Faculty, where she lectures in creative writing in the School of Creative Practice. Her research focuses on postcolonial Australian anxieties about dwelling, housing insecurity and belonging, and her debut collection of poetry, Dead Bolt, won the 2019 Puncher & Wattmann Prize for a First Book of Poems.*