Writing and rewriting Australia: ECR collaboration in designing and delivering an Australian literary studies unit

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Abstract:

Collaboration plays an increasingly important role in the academy, and for early career researchers (ECRs) is seen as a particularly central practice for developing community, increasing productivity and building a research profile. Collaborative practices are most frequently adopted in the research space, but we contend that there is also significant value in collaboration between ECRs in unit design and development, teaching-based areas that are traditionally the domain of a single academic. In this paper, we discuss our collaborative approach to the design of an Australian literary studies unit named Writing Australia, in which the Unit Coordinator, a full-time lecturer and ECR, shared the space of unit design and development with the ECR contracted to deliver the unit's tutorials, a final-year PhD candidate. This approach enabled the unit's tutor to acquire crucial skills that are required for academics roles, but the collaborative approach also resulted in the development of a unit that was itself far more focused on collaborative, multi-vocal delivery that asked students to engage with Australian literature not as a static body of texts, but as varied, diverse, and ever-evolving discussion about what it means to be Australian, as well as the ways in which Australia as an ideological edifice is endlessly constructed and reconstructed in our national literature.

Biographical note:

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Introduction

This article explores the ways in which two early career researchers (ECRs) in an Australian metropolitan university collaborated on devising and delivering a literary studies unit, Writing Australia, which is designed to introduce students to the role that Australian writing has played and continues to play in creating, questioning and contesting Australian identities. In this paper, we discuss our approach to unit design in Writing Australia, and the ways in which we adopted collaborative methods to extend students' capacity to reflect, contest, discuss, and analyse Australian writing as well as the ways in which Australia as an ideological edifice is constructed, contested, and critiqued in our national literature. How do we teach Australian literature and, more specifically, how might we equip students with the capacity to read and reread the literature of this country with a close understanding of how literature contributes to the construction and deconstruction of national identity, mythologies, and imagery? As we sought to negotiate the development of the unit's content and delivery, our collaborative approach to unit design opened up new opportunities for constructing the study of Australian literature as a space of ongoing discussion and collaboration, where the idea of writing Australia is always being written and rewritten.

In 2018, Author 2, an ECR in his first year as a full-time lecturer in Communication, took over unit coordination of Writing Australia, a unit that introduces students to key texts, themes, and discourses in Australian literature. As the unit was relatively small, with roughly 100 enrolments, he contracted a single sessional academic to take on tutoring responsibilities in the unit: Author 1, then a PhD candidate and sessional academic in Creative Writing. When we first met to discuss this unit in the months preceding the semester, an initial conversation about the complications of teaching Australian literature led us to consider ways in which we might adopt a range of alternative pedagogical techniques to reconstruct the unit as one that invites students to explore in a concentrated and discussion-based manner the practices through which literature constructs and deconstructs Australian identity. We conceived of this project as Rewriting Australia, and resolved, after that conversation, to work together on designing the unit during the months before semester began.

Collaboration between ECRs on unit design and delivery is rare: in many cases unit design is the work of a single academic, and very frequently ECRs who are not yet finished their PhD candidature often find work as tutors, but are unable to develop the skills in unit design often required for full-time roles in academia (Onsman 2011: 486). Our collaborative practice in producing this unit was grounded in a shared goal of establishing a pedagogical space geared towards the discussion and contestation of ideas in Australian literary studies, and this approach had the additional benefit of enabling the tutor to gain vital skills through collaborating with the unit coordinator on unit design. We worked to develop students' capacity to read and speak about Australian identity construction and the development of the Australian literary imaginary, bringing individual skills and competencies from our related but distinct areas of research and practice to this collaborative endeavour. We sought through our development of course materials, selection of set texts, and design of collaborative lecture and tutorial activities to invite students to move past the 'resistance to hearing the history' (Rushbroooke & O'Dowd

2012: 105) in discussing Australian national identity formation, particularly in the context of discussions about texts that erase the impact of colonisation, frontier wars, and genocide that many educators encounter when teaching Australian literature (see, for example, Collins-Gearing & Smith 2016; Leane 2010).

We are, by no means, the first academics to design a unit in an attempt to encourage and extend students' capacity for critical reading and interrogation of narratives that produce, support or question entrenched facets of national identity (see, for example Leane 2010; Johnson 2012; Clarke & Thomas 2015). However, one key – and unexpected – outcome of this model of collaboration between ECRs on unit design was that as we collaborated on designing the unit, we organically adopted a more collective approach to the unit's delivery, focusing more heavily on collaborative pedagogies. Instead of occupying space as the sole lecturer and tutor of the unit, we introduced a series of additional voices into the discussion through the incorporation of a range of guest lecturers, with a particular focus—unusual in a literary studies unit—on interactive discussions with writers themselves, and in particular with writers who added diverse perspectives to the conversation, including Indigenous writers and women writers. In this way, students were encouraged to view literary studies as collaborative, discussion-based, and open for contestation, while we as unit coordinator and tutor, both ECRs, developed our pedagogical practice.

ECR collaboration as professional development and pedagogical innovation

Collaboration is becoming increasingly widespread in both research and teaching within the academy. A push for greater productivity in research outputs has seen the rise of collective research practices among both established and emerging academics, and a change in student learning styles and expectations has had a substantial impact on the ways in which tertiary educators engage their students (Scager et al 2016: 1). Despite this commensurate increase across both spaces, research competency is most frequently the focus of professional development and training for ECRs within the academy, with far less consideration given to developing pedagogical capacities (Onsman 2011: 486). There is very little research on the benefits of collaboration between ECRs in teaching; where a great deal of scholarship has explored the ways in which collaboration for ECRs in research can 'contribute to members' sense of belonging to the academic community' and heighten their productivity as researchers (Guerin 2014: 128), as well as the central roles that supervisors often play in helping ECRs build their research profile (González-Ocampo & Castelló 2018: 389), we contend that a focus on teaching is vitally important for ECRs' professional development as well.

Full-time academic roles require teaching capacities, and while PhD candidates and ECRs comprise the bulk of teaching staff in most contemporary universities, it can be difficult to develop a range of skills – in assessment design, text selection, unit coordination, for example – that expand beyond tutorial-based practices (Wisdom 2006: 184). While designing and delivering Writing Australia, both of us, as ECRs at different points in our careers, benefited from the skills, perspectives, and expertise of the other, but through the process of

collaborating, we began to see the direct value of incorporating further collaborative opportunities into the unit and consider how we might bring this collaborative approach to our teaching of Australian literature.

Until the late 20th century, Australian literature was presented to students as a group of written texts whose writers commenced their production after the country was colonised in 1788 (Patterson 2012). Patterson notes that there has been 'an enduring social and pedagogical anxiety around the need to include Australian stories as part of the curriculum [which] dates back to the early years of school education in the fledgling colonies' (2012: 3). This has been the subject of great debate and discussion across all three tiers of the Australian education sector and continues to animate contemporary debate and policy around what constitutes Australian literature. Over the last several decades there have been growing calls for the acknowledgement of marginalised communities and voices in pedagogy and curricula in Australian literary studies. This is increasingly recognised as a crucial element of enabling students to develop a nuanced awareness of, and openness to, discussions about the nation's history of genocide, invasion, and exclusion across the political and cultural spectrum (Leane 2010).

Our collaborative approach to unit design adopted opportunities to present students with learning events that expanded or altered traditional lecture formats, in line with our intention to model an approach to Australian literature as a site of conversation, contestation, and interrogation. We established the lecture theatre as an 'active learning space … making it less likely that students would simply sit and passively listen' (Beicher 2014: 13) by presenting students with alternative ways of speaking about and responding to texts through a series of lectures, conversations, and presentations from emerging writers, the authors of two of the unit's set texts, and a range of other presenters. McCredden argues that 'if Literary Studies is to continue challenging power and authority, imagining alternative visions of society, not merely providing entertainment, it needs to continue to produce ideologically suspicious readings, surely' (2017: 6). Instead of teaching students to view the past and its texts as binary, static representations of a fundamentally 'bad' period in the national 'story', we instead invited them to explore the ways in which these legacies persist in contemporary texts, and how contemporary writers grapple with and speak back to the problems of the past as they persist in the present.

We recognise, as Sambell, Brown, and Graham have established, 'the importance of university teachers focussing their attention on designing for their students really engaging learning opportunities, where the emphasis is on pedagogic experiences as much as the content being taught' (2017: 13). This was particularly central to unit design because of the varied student backgrounds that made up the Writing Australia cohort. A large portion of our cohort was drawn from the Faculty of Education, which, as Douglas et al note, is consistent with a great many Australian literary studies courses, and is a key feature that distinguishes the study of the national literature in Australia from similar units in America or the UK (2016: 255). Understanding our role as educators of future teachers was central to our unit design and our collaborative, discussion-based pedagogical approach. Douglas et al contend that 'though this

reality remains under-researched and under-acknowledged, teachers of literature in some institutions are cogs in the wheels linking primary, secondary and tertiary pedagogies for teaching English' (2016: 255). Teaching a national literature is by its nature a practice involving the interpretation and discussion of national identity. As Davies et al note, 'in Australia and around the world, the teaching of literature has been a mechanism for reinforcing or negotiating national identity and establishing or contesting national cultures' (2017: 21), and rather than make decisions about which version of this national identity we would present to students, we engaged them in a consideration of the ways in which these identities are constructed. Our generative conversations at the beginning of this collaboration ultimately directed our focus towards designing a unit that presented literature as a site of discussion and collaboration, where assumptions about Australia's past and present are challenged and contested.

Writing Australia

In this section, we closely examine two key areas of the unit: our text selection and learning activities. Text selection is always a central and complicated process when teaching national literature, involving both 'pragmatic and ideological decisions' (Davies 2008: 24). We designed the unit to exemplify and explicate the complications of national literature and nationalism more broadly by selecting texts that intersected in complex and challenging ways. Our decisions regarding set texts and assessment items divided the twelve-week semester into Writing Australia and Rewriting Australia, a shift intended to convey the disruptive and revisionist perspectives of both the texts and the discussions students would engage in during the second half of the semester. Here, we focus closely on Writing Australia, which involved four texts discussed from Weeks 1-4, and the ways in which we invited students to engage with these well-known texts from Australia's past. This approach was designed to contrast with the second half of the semester, in which a far larger portion of lecture content and delivery was situated with guest speakers and lecturers, presenting students with opportunities to speak to and personally engage with Australian writers and scholars.

As is typical of teaching Australian literature and identity at both the secondary and tertiary level, we began with common classroom examples of 19th century Australian literature. We chose Banjo Paterson's 1889 poem, 'Clancy of the Overflow', and Henry Lawson's 1892 short story, 'The Drover's Wife', to show students two different but equally intense investments in white Australian identity formation, specifically in the figure of the 'bushman'. From his stultifying office in metropolitan Sydney, the speaker of 'Clancy of the Overflow' imagines the freedom and simple pleasures that the 'sunlit plains' and 'endless stars' of outback Queensland afford the eponymous drover Clancy. The protagonist of 'The Drover's Wife' is a 'gaunt, sun-browned bushwoman' who must defend her four ragged children from the ravages of Australia's untamed outback while her husband is away droving. In facing and overcoming bushfires, snakes, and gallows-faced swagmen, the drover's wife embodies the strength of a national character supposed to have been forged in hardship. Additionally, we chose Barbara Baynton's 1896 short story, 'The Chosen Vessel', to show students a contemporaneous writer

exposing the cracks in these imaginary formations, specifically revealing the figure of the bushman as one that exists at the expense (and often direct exploitation) of women as Other. The protagonist of 'The Chosen Vessel' is a young woman who had once been a town girl, but who finds herself abandoned in the outback by her abusive drover husband, where she is raped and murdered by a passing swagman. By discussing the absence of women in 'Clancy of the Overflow', and their mistreatment in both 'The Drover's Wife' and 'The Chosen Vessel', we aimed to introduce the conterminous erasure and caricaturing of Indigenous Australians as Other in white Australian culture.

In line with our intention to ensure that students did not engage with lectures as passive spaces, we structured each 1.5 hour lecture to include one hour of content, followed by 30 minutes of group discussion, in which students actively responded to questions raised by the lecture. Students were asked to consider the ways in which these texts represented hostility and homeliness, and insiders and outsiders in the logic of the settler Australian landscape. For example, we asked them to discuss not only the ways in which men and patriarchal institutions fail Baynton's protagonist, but to consider that 'The Chosen Vessel' was the only story by Baynton to appear in *The Bulletin*, a publication that Norman Lindsay called 'Australia in concrete form' (1965: 5) and 'the only cultural centre this country possessed' (1965: 12). We then asked students to consider the decision by *The Bulletin*'s editor A.G. Stephens to retitle Baynton's story 'The Tramp' for publication, which Kay Schaffer notes 'shifted the reader's interest away from the woman's murder' and 'allowed the reader to question the woman's character' (1988: 155). Finally, we encouraged students to consider Schaffer's conclusion that 'The Chosen Vessel' represents 'the barbaric fate of being named woman within the Australian tradition' (1988: 169-70) and discuss whether such a fate still awaits women in this country's national narrative. Besides considering gender, group discussions required students to consider the entrenched raced and classed stereotypes adopted by white Australian authors: to consider, for example, the 'The Drover's Wife' and the 'stray blackfellow' who Lawson's protagonist employs to bring her some wood (1999: 58). What are the implications of the drover's wife's astonishment at the 'good heap of wood' he collects, and of her giving him an 'extra fig of tobacco' and praising him for 'not being lazy' (Lawson 1999: 58)?

Particularly, students reflect on the rude discovery that concludes the drover's wife's business with the 'native black': 'He was the last of his tribe and a King; but he had built that wood-heap hollow' (Lawson 1999: 58). Almost 130 years later, such stereotyping of Indigenous Australians – grounded, as Harrison notes, in 'a discourse based in suffering and deficiency' (2012: 6) – is familiar to students in examples such as the infamous Bill Leak cartoon showing a drunken Aboriginal father unable to remember the name of his son. Asked to consider whether they felt that these racist or sexist representations persist in contemporary Australia, students raised a great many specific instances grounded in their awareness of media coverage of race and gender relations. For example, they connected the female character in 'The Drover's Wife' to contemporary discussions about women in the workplace, and 'The Chosen Vessel' to feminist discourses around violence, consent, and alienation surrounding the burgeoning #MeToo movement.

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In tutorials, students are asked to read Joe Wolfe's 'clancy@theoverflow', a contemporary parody of Patterson's famous poem, to develop their literary analysis skills and their capacity to engage critically with contemporary notions of national identity. Students are thus introduced to ideas about creative response – a literary response in which an author might contest, interrogate, subvert, satirise or otherwise speak to another text. Students are then asked to work in groups on developing their own idea for a contemporary reworking of one of the three 19th century Australian texts. Do any key themes of these works continue to have resonance today? Does a contemporary readership recognise the key figures in each text? How might a revision of the original highlight things about our literary culture *now*, while also illuminating the assumptions and predilections of literary culture *then*? Questions such as these open canonical works of Australian writing to further discussion. Each group of students, crucially, worked together on devising a creative response to one of the texts, and produced an array of concepts: a short story told from the perspective of an imagined wife of Clancy, or from the perspective of the Indigenous man from 'The Drover's Wife', or a contemporary reimagining of the isolation and alienation of the female character in 'The Chosen Vessel' as a refugee in contemporary Australia.

We concluded the Writing Australia part of our unit with *Fly Away Peter*, which was chosen to introduce students to ideas about historical revisionism. We intended to use this text to demonstrate to students the ways in which an Australian author might engage with and attempt to challenge accepted notions about nationhood and to critique mythologies about its development, exemplified in this text by Malouf's nuanced treatment of the Anzac legend. Like our decisions regarding 19th century Australian literature, our decision to set *Fly Away Peter* was typical. As Clare Rhoden notes, *Fly Away Peter* 'has for some years been the sole representative of Australian perspectives of the Great War on Australian curricula' (2012: 4). While Rhoden is describing the Australian senior secondary curriculum, her statement holds true for approaches to Australian literary studies in tertiary education. Rhoden writes, 'In the highly regarded, canonical overseas texts, soldiers are sacrificed for negligible gains because the war's futility delivers nothing but ruination. Australian works, by contrast, tend to position the Great War as a foundational event in the nation's history (2012: 1). We chose *Fly Away Peter* to invite students to consider the ways in which notions of gender, race, class, and nationhood are inextricable, emphasising the marginalising of Others and creating a through line from the 19th to the 20th centuries.

In tutorials, we separated the class into groups of creative writing and education students and asked them to consider the responsibilities they have when they represent war or choose to set a particular representation of war in class. During this exercise, students reflect on the ways that writers and teachers indirectly collaborate to construct interpretations of historical events and national identities by privileging particular perspectives, be they celebratory or critical. In another exercise, we showed students the song 'I Was Only 19' by the Australian folk group Redgum, which, like Wolfe's 'clancy@theoverflow', is a creative response to the Anzac legend that speaks to the contrast between Australian perspectives of the Great War and the reality of the Vietnam War, with lines such as: 'And the Anzac legends didn't mention mud and blood and tears, and stories that my father told me never seemed quite real' (Schumann 1983). Asked

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to consider the Anzac legend in light of Australia's ongoing involvement in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, students again raised a great many specific instances grounded in their awareness of media coverage of the conflicts. For example, they connected our broader discussion of gender with the then widespread reports of sexual harassment in the Australian armed forces.

Rewriting Australia

In this section we consider the second half of our unit, which we designed to introduce the idea that Australian literature, Davies contends, is not 'a static body of homogenous texts, the purpose of which is to provide an historical perspective on certain cultural practices' (2008: 25), and is instead a space of contestation and challenge, where the literary past is never an inert or untouchable edifice. We turn to our reflections on our collaborative approach to this unit as ECRs, and how this approach generated the unit's presentation of Australian literature as a site of challenge, contestation, and revision. We see these two elements of the unit as fundamentally linked: had we not engaged in a collaborative approach to designing the unit, we would have been unlikely to approach the unit in this new way. Here, we explore these two forays into collaboration, drawn from our experiences with developing and delivering Writing Australia, to discuss in more detail the ways in which both the collaboration of ECRs in unit design, and the collaborative approach to delivering unit content through a series of guest speakers, lecturers, and authors, have value in the academy for both students and educators.

Who decides what Australian literature is? As educators, we grappled with the undeniable position of authority we assume when selecting texts. We designed the second half of the unit to revise not just the texts of the past, but the way in which literary discourse is presented and engaged with in the classroom, reworking pedagogical approaches to encourage students to generate more complex critical positions on Australian literature. We set the following texts: Melissa Lucashenko's *Mullumbimby*, *Comfort Food* by Ellen van Neerven, *Talking to My Country* by Stan Grant, and *The Yellow House* by Emily O'Grady, and designed a series of learning events to decentre our positions as singular sources of knowledge, and instead present content from a range of sources. We focused in particular on the space of the lecture hall as the locus for this shift, aiming to disrupt the delivery of information from a single lecturer throughout the semester, and instead sought to engage with a series of voices from both inside and outside the academy. The 2018 lecture schedule involved presentations from four additional presenters: Lesley Hawkes, Melissa Lucashenko, Graeme Akhurst, and Emily O'Grady. The adoption of a roster of guest lecturers is by no means a new or untested pedagogy, but we view this as a vital point of difference in our students' encounters with Australian literature: they were presented with perspectives from multiple sources, asked to consider a range of points of view, and invited to participate in literary discourse in a series of alternative formats that disrupted the traditional, 'historically authoritative role' of the lecturer (Beichner 2014: 12).

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One particularly successful example of this strategy was our implementation of a learning event in which students had the opportunity to speak to award-winning Australian author Melissa Lucashenko, whose novel *Mullumbimby,* was one of the unit's set texts. Lucashenko accepted our invitation to speak to students, and we adopted methods from Jeffery's background in creative writing to structure this: we chose an in-conversation event, modelled on similar events that are frequently used at writers' festivals, in order to model for students the conversational and interpersonal nature of contemporary literary discourse. Physical space itself, as Beichner (2014: 16) has established, is often central to 'active learning experiences'. Our students, Lucashenko, and ourselves were all seated in rolling chairs in a flat room – as opposed to a traditional, tiered lecture hall – students grouped around Lucashenko and conversed with her, facilitated, where necessary, by Piccini and Jeffery. Instead of situating meaning entirely within the text, we invited the writer herself to speak into the space surrounding the text, and, further, to speak to the students about the text.

This approach presents literature itself as a discussion, and Lucashenko commented on the ways in which she intended to critique, revise, and challenge notions about Australia's literary past. During our discussion, she reflected critically on her efforts to contest white Australian identity in *Mullumbimby* and described her redoubled efforts to challenge the stereotyping of Indigenous Australians in her latest novel, *Too Much Lip*, for which she won the 2019 Miles Franklin Literary Award. Lucashenko's experience of rewriting Australia became central to the way we spoke in class about the gradual and painstaking process by which national identities are formed and reformed. This event was one of several during the semester that required students to actively engage with and respond to a writer's work in an immediate and literal sense: by sitting in the lecture hall with Lucashenko and speaking about the ways in which her novel *Mullumbimby* and her broader body of work engages with and critiques notions of sovereignty and national identity, students had the opportunity to ask their own questions and direct the discussion according to their individual readings of the text.

The delivery of content was designed to be collaborative and multi-vocal, and we feel it is also significant to discuss the ways in which this approach to the unit emerged from a similarly collaborative endeavour between two ECRs. Piccini as unit coordinator and Jeffery as tutor worked together to design, structure, and deliver the unit. This was a crucial element of this unit's development: it is rare, in our experience, for unit coordinators to extend opportunities for tutors to contribute to unit design, especially across different, albeit related, study areas within a university. Situated in two separate schools and discipline areas within our institution, our collaborative approach enabled Jeffery, then a PhD candidate and sessional academic, the chance to develop her pedagogical acumen with the support of a more experienced academic. Piccini, himself an ECR in his first years as a full-time member of staff, discussed options with Jeffery, which developed over time into a more substantial collaborative approach.

During the lead-up to the semester in which the unit would be delivered, we met frequently to share ideas about possible directions we might take in our approach to introducing each text to students. Our conversational and discussion-based collaborative approach enabled us to develop not only the teaching activities in tutorials but the set texts and lecture schedule for the

Writing/Rewriting model outlined above. This was a creative collaborative process, in which we were both involved in 'questioning, building on intuition, trying out ideas, connecting previously unconnected resources' as they work towards their goal (Jackson & Sinclair 2006: 118). We found these discussions to be rich, generative experiences that allowed us to pool our varied teaching strategies and techniques and to exchange discipline-specific knowledge. We worked closely on designing first a unit outline and lecture schedule, then individual tutorial plans, that would encourage students to engage in collaborative discussions.

This approach was of great value to both academics: Jeffery was able to see the ways in which unit design could be captured in lesson planning, and gained vital experience in the development of holistic unit content. Piccini was able to access immediate feedback on his ideas for unit design and development, and was able to discuss and negotiate unit content. Working together, we found our emphasis on conversation, critique, and discussion in Australian literature emerged from our own conversations and collaborations on the unit: as we discussed our ideas about Australian literature and how it could or should be taught, as well as our reflections on how we had been taught and had approached teaching it in the past, we found that this discussion was enriching, generative, and engaging. Adopting frameworks based on pedagogical modelling and discussion-based learning, we worked together to find ways to engage students in the kinds of enlivening, multi-layered conversations that we encountered ourselves.

Reflections and conclusions

We now turn to a reflection on our collaborative approach to unit design, and the ways in which this influenced the development of an approach to teaching Australian literature based in discussion, contestation, and a plurality of voices. As we have noted, a range of collaborative relationships shaped the unit design and delivery. First, our collaboration as unit coordinator and tutor was, in our experience, less conventional than many other approaches to unit design. The model of two ECRs working collaboratively to develop their skillsets and pedagogical practices is a valuable one that we feel is central to fostering the sense of belonging and community in the academy that is often upheld as a vital outcome of research collaboration for new academics (Guerin 2014). This is a model that provides a valuable opportunity for ECRs to share knowledge and develop skills that are crucial for full-time academic roles. We also feel that this model would be very effective if adopted by any full-time academic involved in teaching: while the ECR collaboration we engage in has been enriching for us both, there are undoubtedly benefits for mentorship in teaching and unit design for ECRs from more established academics.

One key measure of the efficacy of the unit's design is the cohort's response to the unit. The first indicator that our approach had been successful was positive student responses to the unit in mid- and end-of-semester surveys. Overall student satisfaction with the unit was 4.0 out of 5.0 in the mid-semester survey, and 4.1 in the end-of-semester survey. While these scores demonstrate that students responded well to our approach to the unit, it is important to note that

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the validity of student surveys is increasingly being disputed. For example, Peter Murphy notes that such surveys 'do not measure whether or what students have learnt' (2015: 139), while a recent study of student evaluations of teaching 'revealed statistically significant bias effects attributable to both gender and culture' (Fan et al 2019). As we acknowledge the limits of student surveys, it is also important to reflect on the ways in which students engaged with the unit through tutorial discussion and in the lecture theatre. In tutorials and lectures, we observed students demonstrating heightened engagement with the subject matter as the unit progressed: they became increasingly confident in offering their ideas and opinions during class discussion, and they gained a clearer sense of the ways in which they might interrogate or critique the unit's set texts, while also examining the mythologies and ideologies inscribed in those texts. This was more difficult in lectures than in tutorials, where discussion is a more familiar format for lessons. In lectures, particularly during the second half of semester, students were introduced to new guest lecturers in varying formats almost every week. This took several weeks for them to gain confidence in, but by the end of semester many students felt comfortable enough to ask questions of the guest speakers and participate in discussion without prompts from either of the teaching staff. This suggests that introducing guest speakers and alternative lecture formats earlier in the semester would be a valuable addition to the delivery of the first half of the unit content.

Our schedule of guest lecturers was vital to the unit's strategy of presenting Australian literature as pluralistic and varied. In this way, we modelled a literary discourse that is wide ranging and constantly changing, and we stepped back, in our roles as unit coordinator, lecturer, and tutor, from the traditionally central positions those roles occupy. While the unit's strong satisfaction results attest to our success in increasing student engagement with this format, we feel there are further improvements to make in some key areas of our course's first four weeks, in which students are introduced to what we term 'Writing Australia'. We consider the question of how we might further disrupt the notion of the writing of Australia taking place in the 19th century, which we feel would best be achieved by introducing guest lectures at the beginning of the semester by writers or historians who can disrupt the dominance of white voices, particularly white male voices. We also note that our attempts to present the unit as a site of varying ideas, voices, and knowledges was one that worked well in the lecture theatre, but which we feel may need further refinement in the tutorial room, where we remained, as the teaching staff, at the centre as facilitators of discussion.

Collaborative practices have been increasingly adopted across a range of research and teaching spaces in the academy over the last decade (Papatsiba 2013). However, there remain complications for ECRs who hope to develop skills in unit design while working as sessional academics. Often ECRs face many barriers to broadening their skills, and the vast majority form the bulk of the workforce in terms of unit delivery, but are significantly less involved in design. Despite the success of our collaboration, we recognise that the process does raise concerns around inequity in tertiary education workloads and the unpaid labour of sessional and contract staff. A significant imbalance of power is inherent in many tertiary institutions, as Richardson et al's case study of casual academics in Australian universities has established; sessional and contract-based staff, such as tutors, are frequently expected to complete unpaid

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work in the units they teach and have substantially reduced access to the kinds of paid professional development opportunities available to full-time academics (2020). We recognise that the collaborative process we describe is, in this sense, imperfect: the tutor's involvement required her to take on additional hours and she was not paid for the work of assisting with unit design.

However, that the collaboration took place between two ECRs was one way in which this inequality was substantially reduced. Having only recently moved from sessional work into a full-time academic role, the unit coordinator was aware of the potential for this collaboration to involve unpaid labour and was careful to scaffold a process that was characterised by entirely open communication with a caveat that the tutor was able to opt out of the arrangement at any time without explanation. Time was set aside each week to work through new ideas together, so that the tutor was never asked to take on tasks that were covered under the coordinator's workload agreement and complete them in her own time. While both collaborators were well aware that this was not an ideal situation, we contend that these kinds of individual agreements and collaborations remain one of the few vital opportunities for ECRs to gain the skills required for full-time academic work. We note that in a collaboration such as this, the situation is heavily reliant on the unit coordinator maintaining an awareness of the tutor's time commitment and being careful to see the process as discussion- and education-based, rather than a division of tasks across two equal workers.

While this collaborative approach evolved organically from conversations between two colleagues, we feel there are significant benefits to this model of unit development that are meaningful and valuable for both established academics and ECRs. We saw students gain confidence in expressing their ideas and participating in collaborative exchanges with their peers, and we as ECR educators also developed our confidence in our unit design skills. This confidence has, in our opinion, been one of the most valuable outcomes of our collaborations. We designed the unit using collaborative pedagogies to present Australian literature as a space of conversation, contestation, and change. The unit's broad range of guest lecturers and the selection of set texts with a series of co-responsive thematic and stylistic elements modelled for students their own interaction with a fluctuating, diverse literary discourse in this country. As we collaborated on developing this unit, we both gained crucial new knowledge as early career researchers and teachers.

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