

NON-UNIVERSITY CREATIVE WRITING EDUCATION IN WOLLONGONG AND NSW

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The focus of my research report was non-university creative writing education, specifically looking at creative writing education in primary and secondary schools as well as at community colleges and TAFEs in New South Wales (NSW).

To find out what sort of creative writing education exists in primary and secondary schools, I looked at the NSW K-12 English Syllabus as creative writing is not a separate subject and therefore does not have a syllabus. English is the only available subject in which children can learn creative writing.

However the syllabus focuses more on having children learn the technicality of writing rather than the creativity. For example, the syllabus states for Early Stage One (Kindergarten students) that;

“Students show an emerging awareness of the nature, purposes and conventions of written language. They know the letters of the alphabet and most of the sounds these letters represent. They produce texts of one or more sentences, using most upper-case and lower-case letters appropriately.” (Board of Studies, NSW, 1997, English K-6 Syllabus, p12)

Stage One students (years 1-2) learn different types of basic grammatical features such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, pronouns and adverbs, they are also learning to use compound and complex sentences, past and present tense and they are also learning to use these techniques in their writing.

Stage Two students (years 3-4) are introduced and learn to write different types of writing, which are not necessarily creative, but do allow creative freedom, in particular they learn how to write a;

- Exposition** (a detailed statement or explanation¹)
- Explanation** (a statement made to clarify something and make it understandable²)
- Information Report** (A report that provides information on a specific topic)
- Procedure** (A piece of writing that explains a sequence of events)
- Recount** (A piece of writing that retells or recalls an event or procedure)
- Discussion** (A piece of writing that is about or can lead to an argument)
- Narrative** (a story that has a sequence of events from beginning to middle and to the end)

When students reach Stage Three (years 5-6) there are able to write sophisticated pieces of writing for a variety of audiences and are able to edit their own work.

During a student's high school years, they are studying more complex texts and learning to critically analyse them in essay format. They are taught the basic essay format (introduction, three-five paragraphs with a different argument in each paragraph and a conclusion). They also begin to develop a preference of writing style.

Unfortunately creative writing is not an elective in years 9-10 like visual arts and photography are.

Stage 6 students (years 11-12) have the option of being able to study English Extension 1 and/or 2 subjects alongside their compulsory standard or advanced English subject. These extension subjects allow students to be able to research and compose major writing pieces from a specialised area of study. The subject also allows them creative freedom, probably more so than their standard or advanced English subject would.

"The Major Work is to be substantial. It may be imaginative, investigative, interpretive, analytical, or any combination of these. The chosen form and medium must be appropriate to the nature of the task, the student's interests and abilities and the resources available."

(Board of Studies, NSW, English Stage 6 Syllabus-Extension, p 85)

When students reach the end of their schooling education (Stage 6; years 11-12) they have a thorough understanding of literary conventions and texts;

"They (stage 6 students) engage in responding to and composing texts, and consider the diverse processes involved in this through their wide reading and through close analysis of texts. They develop knowledge and understanding of the ways that the linguistic, structural, contextual and thematic interrelationships among texts shape meaning. They develop and apply a knowledge and understanding of the role and function of literary conventions and devices."

(Board of Studies, NSW, 1999, English Years 7-10 Syllabus)

With the major work, students are required to extensively research the topic in which their major work is being created for, which introduces them to the creative writing process;

"To provide the basis for the Major Work, students undertake ongoing, systematic and rigorous investigation into their chosen area. This investigation process is documented in a journal that demonstrates the processes of inquiry, interprets, analyses and reflects on the knowledge and understanding gained, and explains the stages of the composition of the Major Work."

(Board of Studies, NSW, 1999, English Years 7-10 Syllabus)

After looking at the NSW K-12 English Syllabus, I have learnt that school children are taught different types of creative writing and the technicalities of writing so that they can function in the world when they reach adulthood and I have also learnt that the amount of opportunities for creative writing in primary and secondary schools is limited because the decision of whether creative writing is taught is at the discretion of an individual schools' principals and English teachers.

Community Colleges and TAFEs across the state offer several types of creative writing courses in several locations.

When I searched for creative writing courses on the TAFE NSW database I found 10 creative writing courses and 13 courses that are not in creative writing, but are related to it, such as *Communicating in the Media*. There were creative writing courses that existed but they are not available at the moment. They included;

- Introduction to Fiction Writing
- Introduction to Scriptwriting
- Singing and Song writing
- News Media

The majority of creative writing courses that were available were only available to study at the Western Sydney TAFE, these courses include;

- Writing for Publication, Category: Romance
- Writing for Publication, Writing for Children
- Writing for Publication, Short Stories

All of these courses run for one year. Writing for Publication, Category: Romance costs \$585; the other two courses cost \$480. These courses provide budding writers with a TAFE Statement of Attainment.

The creative writing-related courses that are on offer include;

- Communicating in the Media
- Communication and Media
- Media

Communicating in the Media is taught at the North and Western Sydney TAFEs. This course runs for one year with an annual fee of \$450. This course provides budding writers with a TAFE Statement of Attainment.

Communication and Media is taught at the Blacktown, North Sydney, Western Sydney, Nowra, Petersham, Tumut and Wollongong TAFEs. This course runs for three years with an annual fee of \$1274. This course runs for three years and provides budding writers with a Diploma.

Media is taught at the Dubbo, Eora, Miller, North Sydney, Petersham, Sutherland and Kingscliff TAFEs. This course runs for one year and has an annual fee of \$704. This course provides budding writers with a Certificate III.

These courses are mostly in Sydney and other cities, so budding writers in rural areas are disadvantaged as the commute would be long and the courses are expensive.

The courses that NSW Community Colleges offer are similar to the courses that NSW TAFEs offer and are not as expensive as the TAFE courses, prices range from \$76 to \$495 for a certain amount of hours and sessions. The average price is around \$120-\$180 and the courses are usually run over sessions, over a few days or weeks and each session runs for about two to four hours.

The courses range from creative writing to calligraphy to memoir writing and editing.

Most of the creative writing courses available seem to be available at community colleges in Sydney but there are courses available at Woy Woy, Kincumber, Tuggerah and even my hometown of Wagga Wagga, where the memoir writing class is available.

The Workers Educational Association (WEA) also provides creative writing courses to budding writers. The WEA has campuses across Australia, Wollongong included. At the Wollongong WEA, there are currently four creative writing courses available;

-American Writers' Series (This course examines the relationship between the writers Fitzgerald and Hemingway during their early years in Paris, how these early experiences with people and places influenced their personal development and a writing style that produced some of some of the most interesting characters in early 20th century literature.³)

-Introduction to Playwriting

-Introduction to Writing Short Fiction (which is taught by UOW's own Colin Dray)

-Writing New Worlds: Science Fiction and Fantasy Writing

The American Writer's Series course is three sessions of two hour lessons which cost \$79, the Introduction to Playwriting course is four sessions of two hour lessons which cost \$109 and both of these courses are taught by Anthony Trapnell.

The Introduction to Short Fiction course is four sessions of two hours lessons which cost \$77.

The Writing New Worlds course is four sessions of one-and-a-half hour lessons which cost \$77 and is taught by Laura Goodin.

In conclusion, there are plenty of non-university creative writing education opportunities in NSW, however there could certainly be more. I would personally like to see creative writing taken seriously in primary and secondary schools; in particular, I would like to see creative writing become an elective in years 9-10, just like the visual arts and photography have.

I personally believe that schools, school principals, English teachers, community colleges and TAFEs do try to accommodate to budding writers and do try to create different types of education and opportunities, but they are limited by the education system.

I hope that more non-university creative writing education opportunities present themselves in the future and the reason why I chose to research this topic in particular is because I would like to teach creative writing one day at primary and secondary schools as well as at community colleges.

Footnotes and Bibliography:

Footnotes:

1. Definition for exposition was taken from <http://www.dictionary.reference.com>.
2. Definition for explanation was taken from <http://www.dictionary.reference.com>.
3. Explanation for American Writers' Series course was taken from the WEA website; <http://enrol.weaillawarra.com/modules/details?ModuleID=2401>.

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