Why teach creative writing? Examining the challenges of its pedagogies.

Abstract

This article examines the deeper purposes behind the teaching of creative writing. To extend an analogy created by William Blake in his poem 'The Tyger', its furnaces are examined and 'its deadly terrors' clasped. As a starting point, it reinterprets the different views of teaching English, as drawn up in the United Kingdom's Cox Report (1989). It argues that these views can be used to nurture discussion among teachers about why they are teaching creative writing and can be helpful for planning lessons and reflecting upon practice. Significantly, it offers a personal, contemporary 'makeover' and amplification of these views. In brief, it suggests that many creative writing teachers:

- Facilitate their students' personal growth and healing.
- Encourage the exploration of unknown topics.
- Help their students sell their writing.
- Connect them with and to significant texts and well-established creative writing processes and practices.
- Foster critique about the world through their writing.
- Cultivate a spirit of profound learning.

It is the identity of the learner which is the most important one for a creative writing teacher: this pedagogue imparts to their students a spirit of learning, a zest for experimentation and a fiery passion for writing.

Key words: creative writing, teaching, The Cox Report, why teach creative writing, creative writing and healing, creative writing and activism, creative writing and cultural heritage, creative writing and the marketplace

Introduction

Why teach creative writing? In the last thirty years, there has been explosion of creative writing teaching for all ages across the world, particularly in further and higher education institutions (Cowan 2016) and yet very little research has directly addressed why the subject is taught (Gilbert 2017).

Generic methods of teaching creative writing have become orthodoxy in schools, universities and other educational establishments, but have been rarely questioned (Gilbert 2017, Cremin & Oliver 2017, Lambirth 2016, Childress & Gerber 2015). For example, why do so many creative writing classes follow the 'workshop model' (Childress & Gerber 2015) which 'at its worst…produces a profoundly hierarchical interaction' and 'serves to position the workshop author as inherently faulty' (Kearns 2009, 793). In such environments, students are often compelled to follow a 'set of rules for writing' (Bennett 2012, 70) where it is assumed, in contradiction to much current thinking about meaning-making, that 'the author controls the literary text' (71). Concomitantly, as Lambirth (2016) notes in schools there is often an inappropriate emphasis upon 'correct handwriting, spelling, punctuation and sentence structure' (218) and a marginalisation of 'the quality of the content and style of a piece of writing' (218). Why is this happening?

It's time for creative writing teachers to question what they are doing more rigorously and to reflect upon their 'premises' (Kreber 2004). Kreber writes: 'when engaged in premise reflection we question the presuppositions underlying our knowledge' (31). This is my challenge as a practising creative writer and teacher. The aim is to interrogate the fundamental premises of its pedagogy. The process of investigating its purposes is rather like being Blake's blacksmith in his poem 'The Tyger' (Blake 1979, 49). The intent is to lift the lid of the imagination's furnace and hammer out some creative answers; to gaze into its furnaces and 'grasp its deadly terrors'. Creative writing, unlike so many subjects, embraces the horrors and wonders of life: death, anger, injustice, burning desire and so forth. To explore why we are teaching it is, in part, to clasp 'deadly terrors'.

Perhaps this is why so little research has addressed the question. Indeed, I can find no explicit research into the topic. Cremin and Oliver (2017) implicitly explored it when they conducted the most thorough research review of creative writing teachers in recent years. They note: 'Few studies directly addressed the pedagogical consequences of teachers' personal practices or orientations towards writing' (286). This indicates there is little investigation into teachers' attitudes towards creative writing or why they might be teaching it. This said, noteworthy research suggests a wide variety of purposes. Lambirth has shown that creative writing is perceived by teacher and pupils in schools as improving literacy and other skills as well as nurturing creativity and promoting writing for pleasure (2016); Pennebaker and his team of researchers have, over a number of decades, demonstrated that creative writing can be taught as a form of therapy (2000); Smith and Wrigley reveal that teaching writing works well when teachers find communities of professional practice, nurturing spaces with other teachers to write creatively and reflect upon their writing before they teach it (2012). More of these purposes later.

The article outlines my methodological approach and then is structured in three main parts in order to answer the question in the title. The first part is a personal reflection where I discuss my experiences as creative writing student and unpick the fundamental purposes behind the teaching I received. It is anonymised not only for ethical and privacy reasons but also because my account is both subjective and indicative; it aims to shine a light on many students' experiences. In the second part, I seek to situate my learning within a wider framework and context, arguing that much of what I experienced could be perceived through the template laid out in an influential report in the United Kingdom into the teaching of English, the Cox Report (1989). In this section, I show how the Cox Report's views of English teaching could be updated and refined for teachers of creative writing. In the third section, I empirically test my ideas and illustrate how my reinterpretation of the Cox Report played out when I taught my Masters' creative writing students. Finally, in my conclusion, I sum up the different reasons why we might teach creative writing.

Methodological approach

Throughout the process of researching and writing this article, the tools of reflective practice (Bolton 2010: Moon 2004: 2006) have been employed. I stepped like Alice 'through the mirror' (Carroll 2013: Bolton Chapter 4) into my past life and my students' thoughts and reactions to my ideas. Bolton writes:

> Reflection and reflexivity make the ordinary seem extraordinary, 'as different as possible'. And it makes the extraordinary more comprehensible. Actions, interactions, professional episodes, memories from long ago, spirituality, thoughts, ideas and feelings all become 'all alive'. (Bolton: 69)

As Bolton advises, I have written reflectively 'to learn' so that I can make my lived experiences come 'alive'. This article began as a form of free writing – as advised by Bolton -- with me improvising about my thoughts on the Cox Report and then formulating learning activities, lesson plans and resources for my teaching session with my MA students. Using Bolton's guidelines (Chapter 6) to direct me, I followed the five stages she advises for reflective writing: free writing (stage 1), shaping my account into a story of my experiences as a student and teacher (stage 2), reading and responding to my draft (stage 3), discussing it with my peers (stage 4), further developing my writing by re-writing it for a different, more academic audience (stage 5).

This process of writing and discussion was a profound learning experience. It is necessary to point this out because it underlines a central aim of reflective writing, namely that writing itself is a tool for learning, and that perceiving writing as a form of learning -- as opposed to a purely performative act -- is central to becoming an effective teacher and involves writing creatively.

Part I: a personal reflection

The MA in Creative Writing

It was October 1990 and I was twenty-two years old, trembling with nerves as Professor X, my creative writing tutor, held up my handwritten manuscript. My work had been left to the last few minutes of the workshop to discuss. Earlier on, my anxiety had increased steadily as Professor X rhapsodised about another student's short story: he saw it very much in the tradition of John Updike's fiction (1980) -- in its use of social comedy, flashbacks, sensual writing and dialogue. All the other students in the workshop agreed, finding a great deal to praise, and not much to criticise, just little things here and there. The student-author in question purred, took rapid notes and finally thanked everyone.

The workshop followed the structure of the Iowa creative writing workshop – the model established at Iowa University in the United States in 1935 (Childress & Gerber 2015, 1: Bennett 2012, 72) – in that students' work is disseminated a week before the session, read by everyone, and then critiqued by the tutor and students in the workshop. The person whose work is being discussed is not allowed to speak until they've listened to all the comments, sometimes known as the 'gag rule' (Kearns 2009, 792).

Professor X had many identities: he was a famous novelist, a respected academic and a media pundit. The identity he adopted for much of the time in the workshops was that of the literary author: he was passionate about modern 'high quality' fiction and appeared to endorse work which he perceived was part of a cultural heritage he valued. This explained his praise for the Updike-type short story. When he progressed to talking about my work, he appeared to be dismissive, telling me that my story was 'teenage fiction'. My narrative was about an adolescent discovering gruesome pagan rituals in a remote Northumbrian village. It contained no flashbacks, the descriptions were quite basic, and the characters were little more than plot devices -- but there was, according to Professor X, a page-turning plot.

I had written the story in part because, before joining the course, I had attended a two-day workshop led by Robert McKee, a well-known Hollywood scriptwriter and script 'doctor' (someone who fixes faulty film scripts). The workshop was almost entirely a lecture in which McKee explained how to structure stories 'well'. McKee unapologetically taught us how to sell our writing, to become vendors of our work, giving advice on how to write a script or story that thrives in the marketplace. He drew upon his own experiences in Hollywood and a rich cultural heritage to do this – citing Aristotle, Hemingway and many classic Hollywood films. One of the 'secrets' he revealed was that writers can learn from the classics, particularly Aristotle's rules for writing plots, and win in a competitive market. Much of his advice was subsequently written down in his book *Story: Substance, structure, style and the principles of screenwriting* (1998).

I was electrified by his ideas and took many notes sitting at the back of a crowded room, full of aspiring writers like me. Then I went away and tried to write a story which could work both as a movie and a short story. I wanted to sell my work, I wanted to be a commercial success, but this approach made my work mechanical – as Professor X and many others noticed.

The piece, as I perceived at the time, did not interest the Professor much and when he invited the other students to comment, I felt like I was being shot in the head by each critique. I could only hear fragments as I tried to stop myself from crying into my notebook: 'this needs work', 'not satisfactory', 'stereotypical characters'.

Now, over thirty years later, I view Professor X very differently. He was always trying to help. What I did not understand was that he'd switched identities as a teacher. Most of the time, he tried to encourage his students to write literary fiction. He wanted to nurture, in a kind way, a genuine passion for the fiction he loved by suggesting that his tutees should read works by eminent European and American authors – mostly white males -- and use their reading to inform their own creative writing. There was a strong sense of a cultural heritage being 'passed on' in his classes. However, with me, encountering work he wasn't familiar with, he switched to 'vendor' mode because he saw its commercial potential. He suggested that I could shape my work into a saleable commodity by

working on it and then marketing it as 'teenage fiction'. This was a decade before 'Young Adult' fiction became a respected literary genre: it was mostly disregarded by literary authors like Professor X at that time. Nevertheless, successful authors like Robert Westall (1975) and Alan Garner (2017) did sell well, and he was aware of this.

At other times on the course, when students wrote what now is termed 'auto-fiction' and autobiography Professor X would shape shift again and urge them to write more expressively about their lives, 'Just let it all out,' he would say with a compassionate grin. He knew about the healing power of writing. He also could encourage an 'activist' mentality: much of his fiction was highly political in the way it satirised prejudice and hypocrisy. He enjoyed helping students make their writing politically astute and subtle.

The other tutor we had on the course was Ms Y, another renowned novelist, but not an academic or media pundit. Ms Y was different from Professor X in that she perceived writing primarily as a form of exploration. Her own fiction does this: you never know what subject Ms Y will take on in her next book. She has written fiction set in a wide spectrum of historical eras and geographical locations, adopting the narrative perspectives of children, teenagers, men, women, heterosexual and gay characters, refugees and royalty.

Her advice was the opposite of 'write what you know', and she would often exhort us to write what we *didn't* know about; research it and take the reader on a strange journey. Like Professor X she was passionate about reading but was not interested in being part of a definable cultural heritage. Instead, she believed you read to learn and grow as a writer. So, for example, when I submitted a rambling short story which was very autobiographical – about my teenage angst – she urged me to read Robert Penn Warren's *Blackberry Winter* (Ford 2008) as an example of how a writer wrote concisely about extreme emotions, urging me to pay close attention to how Penn Warren made the reader intuit the feelings of his protagonist rather than 'tell' us what they were. This was classic 'show don't tell' advice but framed with nuanced reference to relevant reading.

During that MA year, I found having my work workshopped a traumatising and often demoralising experience. I perceive now that the reasons for this were complex: I was generally a very anxious young man, desperately searching for validation by having my fiction praised. In this sense, I was not suited to the 'high-stakes' set-up of the creative writing workshop. I needed something which was more about healing and less about literary judgement.

 Like the academic Eric Bennett (2012), creative writing tutor Rosalie Kearns is highly critical of the structure of writing workshops. In her view strictures like requiring student authors to be silent when their work is discussed, the focus upon finding faults and the imposition of hidden aesthetic norms – such as 'show, don't tell' – mean that little is learnt. She writes:

> the focus on fault finding precludes a thorough and meaningful engagement with the author's work on its own terms. The author gains fewer new insights into her work than she could have, and the commentators merely reinforce their preexisting assumptions about what literature is supposed to look like. At the very least, learning is not taking place. At worst, authors become discouraged and blocked, or their work becomes derivative as they struggle to avoid producing something their peers may disapprove of (2009: 805)

This happened to me. I found myself, on more than one occasion, playing truant from classes; I did not want to have my work 'torn apart' as I felt it would be. By the end of the year, I gave up writing fiction and moved onto script writing because it was entirely about writing for a specific audience and market. I found it much easier to take criticism in this context because it felt as though the critique was not personal, but more about making work saleable. It was a much less intimate experience: personal stories were not shared in the way that they were in the creative writing workshop, where pieces were usually heavily tinged with life histories. The one piece I wrote which was praised in the creative writing workshop was the previously discussed fictionalised account of my adolescence. It was a painful piece to write and to share. I was shivering with fear as I listened to people's comments on it and cried in relief after the workshop because Ms Y had liked it. The 'furnace' of my being was in that piece, and I felt the molten metal of soul would be irreparably twisted out of shape if the other students were critical. Fortunately, the other members of the workshop, guided by Ms Y, were skilled blacksmiths and lightly tapped me into shape on their anvils!

Many creative writing teachers often come to know the furnaces of their students' imaginations very well: their innermost fears, desires, mistakes and transgressions. They learn things about them in the deepest sense of the word. Indeed, to be effective they need to value that learning.

Much research has been conducted into teachers as learners (Feiman-Nemser 2012: Warren 2013) but little into creative writing teachers as learners. Smith and Wrigley (2012) in their article *What has writing ever done for us? The power of teachers' writing groups* observe that one of the problems with the teaching of creative writing in schools – as opposed to universities -- is that many teachers are nervous about writing themselves: they are not familiar with the processes of creative writing because they may not have written in this form since they were young. Wrigley and Smith note:

> When individuals write what matters to them, the value of writing is foregrounded and may well reveal what lessons might best help them to improve. If they are to engage with individual writers, teachers need to be able to draw on understandings which are grounded in practice and in one's sense of self. Teachers make changes to practice because of the confidence derived from writing, being heard and of hearing that stories of others. They draw on the experience in their classrooms. (82)

Using the rich history and ideas of the National Writing Project (NWP) in America, which urged teachers to form their own creative writing groups, Smith and Wrigley set up a version of the NWP in the United Kingdom (NWP 2020). The primary aim was to encourage teachers to write expressively, and by reflecting upon their writing process, foster deeper learning about how it might be taught. The NWP has a very different purpose to that of the MA in Creative Writing I attended, where the relentless focus was on improving your own writing, rather than using writing to nourish a 'sense of self', 'confidence' and 'being heard and of hearing stories of others' (Smith & Wrigley 2012, 82). In an interview, Richard Sterling, Director of the NWP, USA 1994 – 2008, observed when talking about the rationale for teachers' writing groups:

> That's the heart of it, the personal engagement... So writing is very important but it's not about turning them into creative writers, fiction writers, drama writers; that's not the point. The point is that the process of writing is a way to organise your thinking and your learning and also excite you about what you know yourself. (Andrews 2008:37)

An important NWP strategy is for a workshop leader or 'animateur' as Smith and Wrigley term them (71) to 'nurture a community of learners' (Smith & Wrigley 2012, 72) about writing and much else.

The learning in all its richness and complexity is the primary point. Etienne Wenger's theorising about 'communities of practice' is directly relevant:

> Practice is a shared history of learning that requires some catching up for joining. It is not an object to be handed down from one generation to the next. Practice is an ongoing, social, interactional process, and the introduction of newcomers is merely a version of what practice already is. That members interact, do things together, negotiate new meanings, and learn from each other is already inherent in practice – that is how practice evolves. In other words, communities of practice reproduce their membership in the same way that they come about in the first place. They share their competence with new generations through a version of the same process by which they develop. (102)

The creative writing educator as the primary force in the community of practice sets the direction of travel with regards to the learning, or what Wenger calls the 'trajectory of learning' (Wenger 1999, 149). In more formalised workshops such as those you might find on Creative Writing degrees, the tutor has a great deal of power, both overt and covert, in defining the 'trajectory of learning'; they shape the curriculum, assess students' work and set the overall tone of the course. They are, by and large, established writers who have published prestigious books. Being taught by them means that students like me on my Masters' degree glimpsed their communities of literary practice through the workshop format – we saw how they thought, how they invented, how they edited – and we participated in 'literary life', attending readings, meeting agents, talking to publishers and editors outside the class as well. Their learning trajectory was directed at writing their next piece of writing; they were successful authors, and we learnt from hearing them talk about this as they critiqued our writing and explained how they worked. We were on the periphery of their literary community of practice. This is not to say that learning from their students was not immensely important to them – this may have been a primary reason for them teaching – but in the totality of their lives, it was their writing that came first.

This type of learning is different from the learning promoted in the NWP groups, where the workshop leader (or animateur) has the primary purpose of nurturing learning through a reciprocal process of listening and enabling dialogue. NWP workshops can be very varied in format but they typically include the following elements drawn from the NWP website (2020a):

- starter exercises 'to loosen the writing muscles' which include short activities such as list 5 interesting words (NWP 2020b)

- interpreting exercises such as interpreting poems, stories, pictures, sounds, films and using them as prompts for writing (NWP 2020c)
- remembering exercises such as drawing maps of memorable rooms/places and then writing autobiographically about this place (NWP 2020d)
- adventuring exercises: visiting places, going on journeys, collaborating on shared stories (NWP 2020)

While this list is indicative, these are only suggestions; writing groups are free to discover what works best for them but given plenty of tried and tested suggestions from other writing groups. A spirit of inquiry and experimentation is encouraged not only in the strategies but also the pedagogy. Nearly all that workshops require that participants write expressively and personally, but how they do this varies: individual, paired and group work is encouraged at different times. It should be stressed that all the workshops are informed by a deeply reflective spirit (Bolton 2010) in that participants are regularly required to consider what is working (and not working) for them, to air their fears and anxieties, to think about upon their teaching experiences. Smith and Wrigley's research shows that members of these groups found writing had what could be termed a healing effect: 'Many participants report the wellbeing that comes with writing, even when alone' (81). What's important here is that the learning orientation of the groups helps them learn from each other and shape their own trajectories. Whether this was to heal, hone their craft, help them teach writing more effectively or to 'unsettle' each other, this was for the groups collectively to decide. I found this when I attended a number of NWP workshops; I revelled in the freedom to be a 'bad' writer, not to be forced to share my work, to see the positives in my own and other people's work, to nurture rather than critique. I discovered them to be a place where my writing could grow and I could, in part, heal elements of my wounded psyche. From my observations, the playful, reflective spirit of these workshops is often more effective in building participants' confidence and motivation than the more formal creative writing workshops typically conducted at universities, but since there is no systematic research comparing the two approaches it is difficult to say if this is the case more generally.

Part II: Theoretical perspectives

Reconceptualising and amplifying Cox's views

So why were Professor X and Ms Y, and writers like them teaching creative writing? Why do groups like the Teachers as Writers meet to write together?

To answer this question it is instructive to examine the United Kingdom's original National Curriculum for English, *English for Ages 5 to 16* (DES, 1989), or the Cox Report after the Chair of the Committee of Enquiry. Creative writing teachers share much in common with teachers of English. This report laid out five different views or models of the subject which 'were put forward, without evidence, as being of equal status and of equal value' (Goodwyn and Findlay 1999: 20). In giving credence to these differing perspectives the Report was controversial amongst English educationalists but was positioned by some commentators as a consensus approach to constructing a curriculum (see Marshall 2000). While acknowledging the imperfections surrounding Cox's five models, I seek to use them as a conceptual lens through which the teaching of creative writing can be perceived. The contention is that these five views are the 'fires' that heat the pedagogical furnace: hotly contested but specific reasons about why creative writing educators might be teaching.

To quote Cox directly, the models are as follows:

- A "personal growth" view focuses on the child: it emphasises the relationship between language and learning in the individual child, and the role of literature in developing children's imaginative and aesthetic lives. (1989 2:21)
- A "cross-curricular" view focuses on the school: it emphasises that all teachers (of English and of other subjects) have a responsibility to help children with the language demands of different subjects on the school curriculum: otherwise areas of the curriculum may be closed to them. In England, English is different from other school subjects, in that it is both a subject and a medium of instruction for other subjects. (1989: 2.22)
- An "adult needs" view focuses on communication outside the school: it emphasises the responsibility of English teachers to prepare children for the language demands of adult life, including the workplace, in a fast-changing world. Children need to learn to deal with the day-to-day demands of spoken language and of print; they also need to be able to write clearly, appropriately and effectively. (1989: 2.23)
- A "cultural heritage" view emphasises the responsibility of schools to lead children to an appreciation of those works of literature that have been widely regarded as amongst the finest in the language. (1989 2.23)

- A "cultural analysis" view emphasises the role of English in helping children towards a critical understanding of the world and cultural environment in which they live. Children should know about the processes by which meanings are conveyed, and about the ways in which print and other media carry values. (1989 2.25)

Clearly, these views are not exhaustive and definitely imperfect, but they nevertheless offer a useful starting point for a conversation about a creative writing teacher's premises (Kreber 2004). There is both clarity and confusion here. On the one hand, the views illuminate the compartmentalised reasons for teaching English but, on the other, they are problematic because they lack complexity, nuance and a significant research base. This said, some surveys show teachers are drawn to certain views such as 'personal growth' (Goodwyn & Findlay 1999). They are, in this sense, conceptual as opposed to 'evidence-based' premises. For me, they are a useful reflective tool which chime at times with my own lived experiences as a creative writing student and teacher (Bolton 2010).

For now, I would like to offer some interpretations of the five views for the teacher of creative writing. I am aware that Cox never intended for this to happen, but my rationale should become clear as I proceed.

Creative writing teachers who valued 'personal growth' might shape their lessons around helping students learn and 'grow' as people. They would possibly adopt many of Peter Elbow's tenets in *Writing without Teachers*: encouraging their students to write freely, organically, to 'let the words, thoughts, feelings, and perceptions try to find some of their own order, logic, coherence' (1998: 32).

Their classes could have a 'healing' element to them in that the focus would not necessarily to produce creative writing of 'high' literary quality but find ways of writing expressively as an outlet for difficult feelings. I would like to dub this type of teacher a 'healer'. I am aware this is a contentious sobriquet, not least because it appears to convey upon the teacher an identity of the therapist, of someone who is going to heal their students in some sort of way. Here, Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn's definition of healing is useful. He draws a sharp distinction between 'curing' (making someone physically better) and 'healing', which he explains in this way:

> While it may not be possible for us to cure ourselves or to find someone who can, it is possible for us to heal ourselves – to learn to live with and worth with the conditions that present themselves in the present

moment. Healing implies the possibility that we can relate differently to illness, disability, even death, as we learnt to see with eyes of wholeness. (2013: 200)

Throughout my decades of teaching creative writing and working with teachers, I have consistently noticed that some students hope to be healed by writing and sharing highly personal pieces. They seek a different relationship with their pain, whether physical or mental. The Teachers as Writers groups can offer this form of healing to many of its participants. The word 'healer' has an archetypal quality which makes it both resonant for many people and off-putting for others. It conveys something of the holiness and sacredness of creative writing, which a phrase like 'personal growth' does not.

A 'cross-curricular' form of teaching is very different from the healing model. The focus is on using language to explore different topics and diverse worlds. Wirtz (2006) advocates this approach when he says:

I wanted students to view writing as possibility to sift through different rhetorical possibilities until they found the forms they thought best fit their writing needs. (23)

The primary emphasis is exploration, 'to sift through different rhetorical possibilities'. The aim of the teaching is the linguistic journey, rather than a quest to find some sort of inner peace. This type of teacher could be dubbed an 'explorer', and/or this style of teaching 'exploring'. Ms Y was a perfect example of this approach: she taught in order to foster a spirit of exploration in her students.

A 'adult needs' teacher might prepare their students to promote and sell their writing in the 'real' world; showing them how to write commercially. This teaching style could be called 'vending' and the teacher a 'vendor'. All creative writing teachers in higher education probably become vendors at some point in a multiplicity of ways: they could be selling their strategies and approaches to prospective applicants, encouraging students to write for a specific market, nurturing entrepreneurialism. It's possibly a role many teachers shy away from, but it's important one in our current neo-liberal world (Brook 2012:1). The vending model could explain why such an instrumental approach to creative writing happens in many schools, where there is a drive in many countries to prepare students for an imagined workplace. As noted previously, Lambirth's research reveals a focus upon technical accuracy in their pupils' creative writing rather than the quality of the

content (Lambirth 2016, 218). Possibly, these teachers are seeking to make their pupils saleable commodities in a competitive job market. Or they could be perceived as being part of the commodification of the school itself within a performative system where individual outcomes have become subsumed into the wider narrative of schools, which are seeking to promote themselves as deliverers of great examination results (Keddie 2015).

A 'cultural heritage' teacher values writing of 'quality' and may well be an established author who has published 'literary' fiction. This type of instructor may well be more of a stereotype than a real person but is an important to consider, as the stereotype can shape much teaching. This is the idea of the creative writing teacher as the expert, who is the inheritor of a significant tradition. Cremin and Oliver (2017) perceive that this is the image many teachers, who are not confident about teaching creative writing, consider stifling:

> findings reveal teachers' narrow conceptions of what counts as writing or what makes a 'writer', often centred on print-based text, 'authorship' and narrative/expressive genres (in parallel perhaps with traditional hierarchies in reading which reify serious literary fiction) (291)

I've renamed this model the 'author' as the name suggests an eminent writer who is well versed in a particular cultural heritage, editing, and publishing 'serious literary fiction'. Professor X was very much in this mould. He taught to impart what he believed to be a profoundly significant literary heritage to his students.

A teacher focused upon 'cultural analysis' may well be an activist, seeing creative writing as a way to make themselves and other people more politically and socially conscious. This dynamic teacher chimes neatly with the teaching Dymoke observed when a number of young spoken word artists had residencies in various inner London schools and used their contemporary, accessible poetry to activate teenagers' consciousnesses about the world they lived in (2017). Dymoke notes:

> Spoken Word artists, who often also call themselves poets, come from many walks of life and seldom conform to the traditional image of the solitary poet in their lonely garret. They might run workshops and compete in slam events. They may be politically active, involved in human rights or environmental campaigns. Beliefs about development of self-knowledge, transformative practice, and community empowerment underpin many artists' working practices. (217-218)

Her research shows that these educators seamlessly use canonical writers such as Shakespeare (235) with their own and contemporary texts, and that both aesthetic and cultural analysis are intertwined in their pedagogy. In the writing workshops they ran for in the schools where they taught, Dymoke observed: 'Emphasis was placed on developing precise word choices and learning to play with words in distinctive ways' (236). For these writers, writing itself is a form 'praxis', a 'vehicle for individual and collective transformation' (Yagelski 2012, 89). The activist may like Bernadine Evaristo argue for 'canons, if we have to have them' (2020) but their approach will always be questioning, and they will seek like Evaristo to promote a 'wider range of voices, cultures, perspectives' in their teaching than is currently the case in many classrooms.

Finally, but most significantly, a key view which is not explicitly stated in Cox is that of the teacher as learner. This view is explored in depth in the next section.

Figure 1 conveys the views' connections. The lightning at the centre of the diagram is suggestive of the fact that each view is a flame which helps forge its writing and pedagogy. The views are inter-connected and overlap significantly, with the most important view being that of the learner which subsumes everything else.
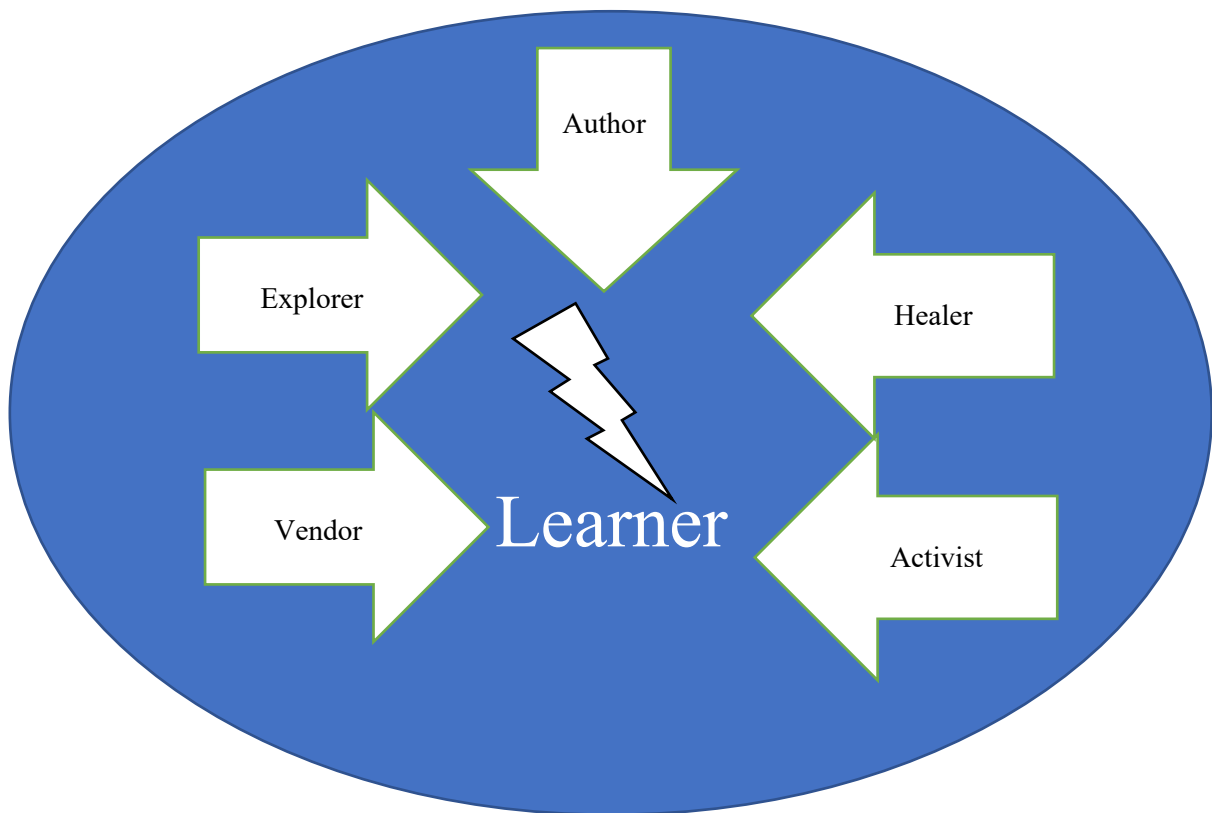

Figure 1 The Five Views in the Big Set of the Learner

Creative writing educators may use the views of all of these approaches in their teaching -- and much more besides. It should be strongly iterated that these views are controversial 'starting points' and are only a few of the flames in the furnace. Furthermore, none of these views are discrete: they are all part of the same furnace, which contains much else besides. For example, in any given class, I might find myself being a healer by asking my students to free write about a difficult emotional event with the purpose of getting them to become aware of challenging feelings. Then I could ask them to explore the linguistic tropes in what they have written. Next, I could invite them to rewrite their free writing after reading a significant poem in the 'canon' where a poet has shown awareness of some extreme emotion, and so become an author-teacher. Next, shape-shifting into a vendor, I could urge them to consider the needs of a particular literary market when re-drafting their work. Finally, I become an activist and invite them to rebel against the hegemony by cutting up their poem and re-arranging it a way which challenged literary norms.

Indeed, some creative writing teachers may regularly adopt all five identities in one class or none at all. The main point of listing them is to start a conversation which gets us looking into the furnace; listing them is, to extend the Blakean analogy, lifting the lid from a distance to glimpse the furnace.

Table 1 offers a taxonomy of the different views, which is offered as part of my developing argument rather than suggesting that it should replace Cox; it is offered as a personal and contentious starting point for a new discussion about the reasons why creative writing is taught.

It begins with the view of the learner, which is not in Cox. It is listed first because it is so important. The learner is central because all approaches to teaching creative writing involve processes of learning: acquiring new knowledge, investigating, discussing, collaborating, practising, producing, making mistakes, and reflecting (Pritchard 2009: Watkins 2003). Therefore, all other identities are subsumed within the big set of the learner. These roles are discrete for the purposes of Table 1, but as has been stated they are not separate at all (Figure 1).

View of creative writing and teacher identity	Teaching style	Values and typical students	Typical learning activities
The learner focuses upon learning in all its myriad forms	The teacher takes an open-ended approach, learning from their students about what they want/need to learn. The style is dialogic	Learning is the central value. It is viewed as a complex process acquired through practice, reflection and dialogue. Students attend classes to learn	Writing is a learning journey Mistakes are embraced as development Reflection is crucial
The healer focuses upon personal growth	The teacher aims to help students find a form of healing in their writing. The style is nurturing	Personal growth is the central value. Students attend classes for therapeutic and personal reasons	Free writing Diary writing/journaling Mindfulness exercises & creative visualisation
The explorer focuses upon exploring connections and worlds	The teacher uses creative writing as a tool to explore language and other forms of knowledge: history, geography, science etc. The style is investigative	Exploration is the central value. Students bring their life and/or professional experiences to classes for examination	Learning about the linguistic tropes of certain genres of writing Reflecting upon professional experiences in a creative way: writing poetry about your job or hobby etc
The vendor focuses upon adult needs	The teacher sees writing as a commercial enterprise and/ or a skill to develop one's market competitiveness. The style is entrepreneurial	Vending is the central value. Students attend to learn how to sell their work and/or improve their employability	Recipes for success; manuals for writing commercially Acronyms to help learn the relevant techniques
The Author focuses upon cultural 'significant' literary writing	The teacher will typically be a literary novelist or poet, passionate about some types of literature. The style is authoritative	Being 'literary' is a central value. Students attend to hone their literary skills; to learn to write 'beautifully'	Reading 'high quality' literature Discussion of the approaches taken. The writing of pastiche, parody, creative responses to literature
The Activist focuses upon cultural analysis	The teacher could be a politically motivated writer such as a spoken word educator. The style is active	Activism and social engagement are the central values. Students want to explore specific social issues	Reading of socially aware texts Writing about marginalised, oppressed, exploited people and beings

Table 1: the different views of teaching creative writing

Part III: Examining the furnace

I decided to test my reconceptualization of Cox's views in order to see whether they could be empirically confirmed in a small-scale study; to examine Blake's furnace if you like. To do this, I asked twelve creative writing educators, all studying for a Masters' degree in Creative Writing and Education, to work in small groups and consider my revising of Cox's views: healer, explorer, vendor, author and activist. I shared a draft of this article with the class and prefaced their group work by delivering a brief lecture in which I summarised my thinking and stressed the importance of valuing learning as opposed to performance in writing (Watkins 2010).

At my request, my students had brought in objects which were significant in their personal lives. They were then allocated a specific model: healer, explorer, vendor, author, activist. Next, they were asked to devise a series of plans which would include learning activities, objectives and assessments which this type of teacher might deploy using these objects (see Appendix). Observing them do this and listening to their feedback was illuminating.

One of the pairs that was given the activist role had brought in a toy reindeer as an object, and this became the focus for their ideas. They decided that they would teach older primary school children or younger secondary children about the ecological issues involved. In order to do this, they wrote their own story about the exploitation of a reindeer in captivity and devised a lesson plan where their pupils would respond with protest poems, stories and plays about the animal's plight.

Another group also had the activist role. In their lesson plan, they used a pair of hoop earrings to prompt teenagers to think about why certain items of dress are banned in school. They said they would encourage angry poems of rebellion, and help students perceive how empowered groups of people – often white middle class men – use the banning of dress, make-up and hair accessories to subjugate marginalised, disadvantaged peoples. The model of the activist was very motivating for these educators; it gave them a very clear trajectory of learning in planning work, and a profound sense of purpose. They found that once they had been given the activist view to interpret that devising

both their lesson ideas and stories was relatively easy. 'It's as though you immediately know what to teach once you're told to be an activist,' one of the participants said. 'You know you're going to make your pupils angry about some issue by writing your own story of exploitation, or by reading one.' In this sense, these teachers were aiming to create a productive, 'healing' anger.

The educators who were allocated the role of the author struggled: their object was a lunchbox, and they wondered how they could find literary exemplars to suit it. One educator suggested that the lunchbox was a chimney sweep's lunchbox, and they could ask their students to write in role as chimney sweeps, after they'd read some stories and poems about chimney sweeps. As the tutor, I felt more confident in dealing with this role, and suggested that the author-teacher might produce a series of lessons based on the idea of 'literary lunches': Christopher Reid's *The Song of Lunch* (2010) could be a nice text to read and watch: it's an engaging short film with Alan Rickman and Juliet Stevenson. Other texts which consider or involve food could be used, such as Proust's opening to *In Search of Lost Time* in which he describes how a madeleine cake brings back lost time (Proust 2005), Macbeth's banquet where he sees Banquo's ghost and so forth (Shakespeare 2005). The author would then deploy these texts as springboards to inspire students about the literary heritage they value and ask for creative responses in the form of diaries, stories, poems etc.

The educators who were vendor-teachers found it easy to generate numerous learning activities. They suggested that they would use Christopher Booker's *The Seven Basic Plots* (2005) and require their students to imitate specific best-selling genres with a view to helping them sell their work, either through self-publishing online platforms or to a mainstream publisher. One educator had completed a module very similar to this at university, where they had had to write 'commercial' genre fiction.

The explorers had earphones as their object, and they were quickly jotting down ideas. They devised a series of activities around the cross-curricular theme of music, requiring their imagined students to write in response to music and investigate the historical period of certain composers, such as Beethoven: the 250th anniversary of his birth has been widely publicised. One of the educators is an English teacher and realised that they often present themselves as an explorer: they regularly suggest

to their pupils that they were all going to explore certain issues and find out things for themselves. However, they felt in reality, little exploration or autonomous learning took place. They were, in effect, dressing up pre-packaged pieces of information as exploratory learning activities, 'selling' them covertly a set of ready-made recipes for exam success. 'I actually feel quite guilty now about being a vendor disguised as some super-cool, relaxed explorer!' they said.

The educators who were healers embraced the role most completely. They used their objects to imagine they were helping people with troubling emotional issues, including domestic abuse. They suggested activities such as meditation, free writing, listing problems, and personal journaling. They also believed it would be very important to create a safe space for their students by making it clear that they could express their emotions and articulate honestly what had happened to them: an awareness of such responsibilities is necessary. In many institutions, teachers are obliged to report their concerns about students to a designated professional such as a safeguarding officer. I was struck by my students' enthusiasm for the healing role: they really wanted to try and help their students deal with difficult feelings. This said, more work needs to be done on how healers might safely and ethically teach.

Student & Teacher responses

Students had different views on the session. When I asked the educators what role was most comfortable for them as teachers, the class was evenly divided between explorers, healers and activists, with some students pointing out that the role of healer and activist are sometimes very integrated. One student noted that whereas the healer focuses upon individual's coming to terms with their own emotions -- giving themselves 'self-care' -- the activist requires their classes to express difficult emotions like anger and grief in order to promote social change. No one wanted to adopt the role of the author, which made these teachers uneasy for multiple reasons: while most of them had published creative writing and had written work to be judged as high quality (an entry requirement of

the course), none of them had placed work in mainstream publications. They were also much more familiar with contemporary writing and had relatively little interest in the literary canon.

An experienced English teacher, who had been allocated the role of being an activist and created the 'reindeer' narrative with a partner said:

> It really made me think about how as writer-teachers we bring our own agenda to the table, and whilst it might be perhaps limiting to think of ourselves as solely a healer, or a vendor or explorer and so on, it actually allows us to reflect on our own writing and teaching practice. After the session I asked myself: am I solely a healer? How could I bring the activist or the author into my pedagogy, or even my own writing?

What's interesting here is that the session made this teacher reflect more deeply upon why they were teaching creative writing. While they saw the limitations of thinking about themselves solely in these roles, they perceived the value in using them as a tool for reflection on their professional identity (Williams & Power 2010). The session had a direct impact upon the English teacher's practice. They said:

> I'm going to use each model over the next couple of weeks, with a Year 10 class I teach. Perhaps this will be the basis for my project. We are working on Love and Relationships poems, and particularly focusing on voiceless women in 'Porphyria's Lover' and 'The Farmer's Bride'. I think it would be really useful for the students, and me, to explore the poems' women from each of the five perspectives we covered.
>
> It lends itself beautifully for the collaborative learning activities I have planned for the girls. I'm currently training to be a headteacher, in which I'm focusing on Metacognition and Self-Regulation and linking it to the new curriculum intent and Ofsted's deep dive ideology.

This teacher saw how they could be explicit about using the models with their teenage pupils, by asking them questions such as:

- What is does this poem make you feel? (healer-teacher)
- What worlds does it explore? What worlds does it make you want to explore?
- (explorer-teacher)
- Why is this poem part of our cultural heritage? (author-teacher)
- Who might this poem be popular with? Could it be turned into a commercially 610
- successful story? (vendor-teacher)
- Does it make you feel angry about any issue? (activist-teacher)

The study of the poems could then lead their pupils to write their own creative responses aimed at healing, exploring, celebrating cultural heritage, being commercially successful, or making people more politically conscious. This could progress to a discussion about what the purposes of writing are:

why write? The different views could be critiqued, questioned, amplified, dismissed or replaced with other views: this would be the meta-cognitive part of the lesson, where pupils could be given the chance to reflect upon their thoughts and feelings, and what they had learnt.

Another student, who had been allocated the identity of healer, wrote in their feedback:

> I knew before the class I want to teach creative writing as a healing process and to help people find their voices but having the five models made me see those intentions in a more focused way. It made me think of myself as a particular kind of teacher, and how I could approach my work through this lens. I found it easy to be a 'healer' teacher and to come up with creative writing prompts or discussions that fitted into this theme. My partner stopped our discussion early on to check in: who exactly was this workshop for? Perhaps because both of our alter-egos were women dealing with some kind of past upset, we found that we had in mind women who have been through a traumatic episode and needed a space where they could feel safe but also explore their emotions.

> The other model that really spoke to me was the activist and I was really drawn to the ideas that the two groups adopting this teaching model came up with. I was interested by the author, the explorer and the vendor too, but these personas felt a little cold somehow – preoccupied, respectively, with showing off their knowledge, doing research and being commercially successful. While I would want to bring in elements of these roles – such as showing students how to think of their writing in relation to others' works, making their writing richer and more realistic through research, and giving them the confidence to think about publishing or sharing their work – these are secondary identities that I would want to adopt temporarily.

Reflecting upon these comments, I can see that my own presentation of the identities of vendor and author was possibly at the root of the reason why the students found these personas off-putting. If I was more positive about them, then they might have embraced them more fully.

A number of students pointed out that the roles are, to a certain extent, merely 'elements' to integrate into their teaching and that in reality, these identities are blended much of the time. Another student wrote:

> On the different views of creative writing pedagogy (Healer, Vendor, Explorer, Author and Activist), I think there is room to consider the teacher who is motivated by learning itself. The Learner, to me, sits across these roles. My best teacher in secondary school was my English teacher, who himself was a Learner. He taught me when I was sixteen, and was eccentric, mercurial and so vividly curious and interested in the world. His very presence was therapeutic and inspiring, and he also had full command of the classroom. His classroom had a reflective undercurrent that provided space for the imagination. I know that I am happiest when learning - either exploring something new or revisiting something in a different way. So, a major motivation in taking an MA at my stage of life was to immerse myself in learning, and my desire is to collaborate with students at the frontier of the human imagination. I think this is why I am drawn to the roles of Explorer-Healer-Activist. I also think there is room for the Vendor, because a story should pull us in and make us want to know more, and helps us to think about our reader, who is, after all, the person we need to care about most.

What becomes clear here is that learning is central to all the views and that a learning orientation as Chris Watkins terms it (2003: 2010) nurtures the creative spirit. The views appear to provide a clear trajectory for learning (Wenger 1999), but there is a worry that they also constrict it as well, particularly when they are interpreted as the only way to teach.

Fascinatingly, all of the students felt that one of the useful things about using the views was how they could promote discussion in the creative writing classroom/workshop about why they were learning about it. To this extent, it could be used to make learners' voices more visible. Lambirth in his article *Exploring children's discourses of writing* (2016) researched what children thought about learning creative writing in United Kingdom primary schools, where there has been a sharp focus upon teaching to the test. He writes:

> The teachers believed that they were being encouraged to present a formula for writing which was most likely to enable the children to succeed in formal assessments. By asking questions and listening to how children perceived writing in the writing project, the teachers were able to confront the dominant writing discourses. They explored the ideological perceptions of the children and this affected and galvanised their determination to change it. They worked together to look for the means to demonstrate how writing can be made meaningful to them; for example, they offered more choice and opportunities for children's writing independence. They introduced oral storytelling to emphasise composition of narratives away from the written word and enriched their use of drama to stimulate writing. (230)

Lambirth's research could be built upon by presenting teachers and children like this with the different types of creative writing teacher, which could be utilised as part of a wider project to listen to what they think about *why* they are learning creative writing. The views could be used with experienced professionals to help them consider the deep purposes behind their pedagogy. One very experienced creative writing lecturer who read drafts of this article told me:

> I've found it interesting to reflect on my practice as a lecturer in creative writing (at both undergraduate and post-graduate level) using these models of teaching. While I wouldn't say I make explicit choices in my teaching as to whether I'm going to be a "healer" or an "explorer" with any given student or class in any specific situation, when I think back on pedagogic and editorial encounters I can see the ways in which I am, in fact, utilising some of these ideas. Speaking to a student who's writing about her own life and its connection to indigenous cultures, I realise I have been thinking in healer/activist/explorer mode; talking to another student about a historical novel and its journey to publication, I might say I was working as an explorer/author/vendor. The lines are not cut-and-dried; always too I hope I am a learner in teaching creative writing. But these modes offer an interesting framework for thinking about the ways we can teach creative writing.

Here, the lecturer is using them primarily as a reflective tool to analyse how they are teaching their students. Above all, there is here a realisation that they are 'a learner in teaching creative writing' and

that this learning is not a tepid but a fiery thing, which can defy description like Blake's Tyger. This is very different to Gert Biesta's conception of 'learnification' whereby all the discourse about education is reduced to learning and which has had the net effect of marginalising the 'purposes of education' (2015, 230). At the heart of this is to require teachers to learn about their pedagogy by questioning their fundamental purposes.

Conclusion

So, to return to the first question, why teach creative writing? What happens when you peer into its furnace?

This article contends there are some flames which clearly ignite the pedagogies of many teachers: there is a desire to use writing to help students grow as people, heal emotional hurt; a thirst to explore different worlds, linguistic tropes, rhetorical stances; a craving to draw upon a rich culturally meaningful heritage which can be used to inspire and guide; a hard-headed focus upon writing for a specific marketplace; and a drive to use writing to change the world for the better.

These views could be used to help shape course planning and teacher education. They could be deployed in the classroom at various times to reflect upon the learning taking place: the views offer a way of thinking about why people write and teach writing. For the views to work though, creative writing teachers would have to grapple with them in an open-ended fashion, and not see them as narrow prescriptions about how to teach. They could afford creative writing teachers a chance to reflect upon their own identities and thus develop their own personalised pedagogies. Using the views as a reflective tool could help teachers of creative writing to see themselves as learners, and that learning is the fuel that powers the furnace.

Above all, it is the invitation to interrogate the reasons why we might be teaching creative writing which is central. The lack of significant research in this area is troubling because it suggests that there has been too much specialisation and not enough 'big picture' thinking. This vacuum has been filled by policy makers and has meant that reductive models have inveigled their way into classrooms. At

this time of political, social and environmental crisis, there has never been a more important moment for teachers to be blacksmiths of the imagination. They must learn to work with the furnaces of their own and their students' creativity and hammer out new solutions.

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Appendix

Understanding the 5 Views in Action: objectives and objects

A good way to understand how these views might play out in practice is to see how 5 objects could be used to teach creative writing using the 5 different views.

The objects I will use for this exercise are:

- My teddy bear Georgie
- A wolf mask
- Some silver, chocolate coins
- A finger puppet of a princess
- A drumstick chewy lollypop

Figure 2 My Objects

I have chosen some objects to illustrate these approaches because I am drawing upon the Multiple

Intelligences (MI) theory espoused by Howard Gardner (1993): this is the idea that we learn in

multiple ways because we have different forms of intelligences.

We learn by:

- moving and touching (kinaesthetic intelligence),
- seeing (visual intelligence),
- using verbal language (linguistic intelligence),
- using numbers (numerical intelligence)
- thinking through things ourselves (intra-personal intelligence)
- talking with other people (inter-personal intelligence)
- making & listening to sounds & music (musical intelligence)
- inter-acting with the natural world (naturalistic intelligence)

Objects are very useful to deploy in creative writing classes because they immediately make a subject

'real': sensory, visual, and tactile (Pahl et al. 2010). All of Gardner's intelligences can be engaged

when teaching with them. There has been strong criticism of Gardner's MI theory over the years

(Waterhouse, 2006), which must be acknowledged: first some argue, it is not a theory at all, but a

collection of other people's ideas which is lacking in 'empirical evidence'; second, others contend that

it leads to rigid, blinkered thinking amongst teachers and learners, with some people believing that they can only learn using a particular style (Watkins, 2003, p. 19). The first critique certainly makes a valid point and one that's difficult to argue with, however, for the purposes of this article, MI remains the best 'umbrella' label to understand the pedagogical approaches takes: this is something that the article will show. The second critique also is a fair one; however, this article aims to perceive MI in an open-minded, critical spirit, and does not subscribe to the view that some learners have very distinct learning styles, rather it sees learners as needing to deploy all styles at different points. In this spirit, I have provided some of my own crude drawings which have helped me evoke the values, approaches and concepts which lie behind each of the identities discussed.

In terms of the objects, different teachers would use them in very different ways -- as we will see. However, the ideas are suggestions only. A productive form of teacher-education might be to critique my thoughts and see if they could adapted and/or improved for specific contexts you and your students have encountered.

At the end of the discussion of the five identities, a number of learning objectives – the skills/content students will learn -- and assessments – their learning outcomes -- have been suggested (Basset et al. 2016, pp. 92-104) in order to exemplify how these particular types of teacher might plan their lessons.

The Healer: Creative writing as personal growth

Figure 3 The Healer

The picture above is a visual representation of some of the key points about a Healer creative writing teacher. It aims to show how the Healer thinks holistically, with their own creative writing forming a central part of their lives. Because of this holistic view, homework or independent study would be very important for the Healer to plan for in their teaching.

The Healer would firstly set an important form of independent study before their class begins and ask their students to bring in a number of objects that have been emotionally important in their lives: objects which are associated with significant people, events or settings. The purpose of students using the objects would be to nurture creative writing in response to these emotional objects. This could be carried out in many different ways, but the tone of the class would be important to get right: the Healer would need to create an emotionally safe space where people feel free to express their feelings. So, for example, my teddy bear brings back poignant memories for me as a child, and I would want to feel comfortable enough with the class to share some of these memories. The Healer would always attempt to model and share their own personal stories so that they set this appropriate tone. The spirit of the class would be reciprocal, emancipatory, hopeful and critical (hooks 2003: Stanger 2018). There would be no experts, no huge demands to produce publishable pieces, but rather to find a form of healing by discussing the objects, writing about them and sharing thoughts and feelings about the

healing that might have taken place. Students could be invited to arrive at their own activities, ones that help them heal themselves.

Activities they might use could be:

- Meditating upon the objects and visualising them in context. This meditation might lead to them writing a description of a particular place which was the objects natural residence.
- Using blindfolds to get students feeling their objects, smelling them, even tasting them (if appropriate), and then free writing in response.
- Sequencing the objects in different orders: chronologically, in order of importance, in terms of the objects that bring the fondest and/or worst memories.

Having done some individual work on the objects, the Healer might then invite small groups or pairs to combine their objects to create an entirely new person, new settings, and then write a poem or story together. The purpose would be for the class to share feelings, events, emotions, and enjoy the exercise as cathartic: enabling participants to release and explore the challenges in their lives (Rainer, 2004).

Key objectives and assessments

In terms of planning a scheme of work for a series of classes (let's imagine 10 weeks of classes lasting two and half hours), the Healer could profitably sketch out some key learning objectives (Bassett et al. p. 99) which would be informed by their view of creative writing, which could include:

1. To help students learn how personal objects can be used to nurture cathartic writing
2. To develop students' ability to write about their own emotions using a variety of strategies
3. To help students learn how to use meditation to inform their writing
4. To develop students' ability to write expressive diaries

These objectives would then be scrutinised to develop specific learning activities which help develop these skills and knowledge. So, for example, the first objective in this list could be translated into a series of learning activities. Most simply, students could 'free write' in response to their objects, that is simply write without self-censoring. Again, the Healer would almost certain allow learners to write privately and not require students to show what they have written to other people because this would make people feel less inhibited. But the Healer might want to try other activities for the first objective such as getting people to visualise and meditate upon the object; to feel its textures and smells etc.

while wearing a blindfold or shutting their eyes; to draw and annotate the object; to write as they were the object by personifying it and so on. All these exercises might produce some fascinating writing, but the focus wouldn't be their literary quality, but how much the process and product aided some form of healing.

It's often very helpful to consider assessments when planning lessons (Capel et al. p. 409-452), and so to consider this briefly now, I would suggest that the Healer would ask for these forms of assessment:

- A personal self-assessment and reflection on a private portfolio of cathartic writing which could include personal diary entries, dialogues with the self and problems, visual responses to life quandaries, free writing, written responses to dancing, meditating, living etc.
- An autobiography to be shared with trusted friends etc.

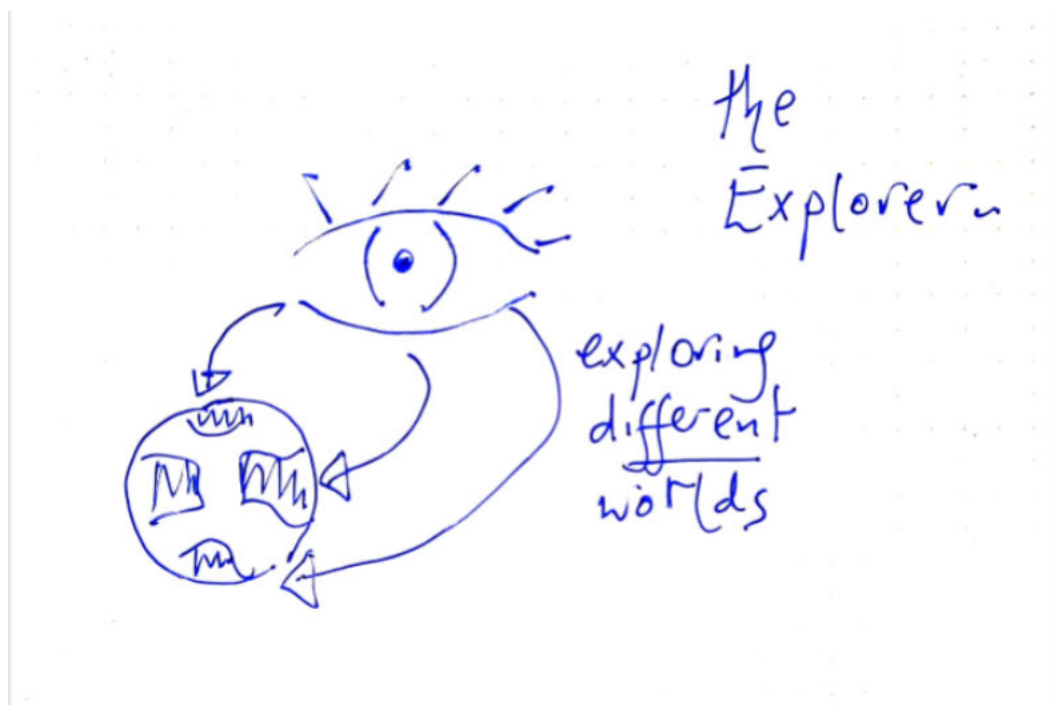### The Explorer: Creative writing as cross-curricular

Figure 4 the Explorer

The Explorer would use the objects in different ways. Like the Healer, the Explorer would invite students to bring in objects which represent the different places they have travelled to either literally or metaphorically. The idea of metaphorical travel is more difficult to explain, but becomes clear when modelled. So, if we look at my objects, we can see they all could be construed as 'historical objects', and let's imagine that for the purposes of this class the Explorer has asked us to bring in objects which represent a particular historical period that the Explorer wants the class interested to write about.

So, if I were to model my objects as an Explorer-Tutor, I might say:

- my teddy bear, is the toy of a Victorian child,
- the wolf represents the animal that his father, a Victorian explorer, is tracking down in the wilds of the Arctic,
- the money represents the resources that the father has spent going on his mission,
- the lolly-pop represents the food that everyone eats,
- and the princess represents the abandoned mother of the child, who had dreamt she would be a princess but is now stuck in a hovel in Victorian London waiting for her husband to come back from his expedition.

Thus, I have created through my objects a historical world, a scenario, characters, settings, all of which would prompt me to do further historical research into: the language of Victorian explorers with an interest in wolves, the discourses about Victorian food, Victorian childhood and toys, and Victorian poverty. The Explorer might bring in certain texts to read with the class such as Jack London's *White Fang*, Arthur Morrison's *Child of the Jago*, and more recent Victorian historical fiction by the likes of Peter Ackroyd to help students understand how to write in this way. While this approach may share real similarities with the Vendor's classes, the overriding purpose of the class would not be to write commercial genre fiction, but to use creative writing as a way of exploring another world by grappling with the language and structures of relevant texts.

Key objectives and assessments

The key learning objectives for such a class would be:

1. To learn how objects can be used to stimulate historical stories.
2. To learn how to research certain historical eras and texts as a creative writer.
3. To develop your ability to apply your research when writing historical fiction.
4. To learn about the language, structure, form and genres of relevant historical texts
5. To develop your ability to write historical fiction, using certain linguistic structures at a word, sentence, paragraph and whole-text level.

Typical assessments for such a class might be:

- A portfolio of poems, short stories or novel extracts set in a specific historical era.
- A commentary which discusses your historical research and how you used your research to inform your writing; analysis of the linguistic structures you used.

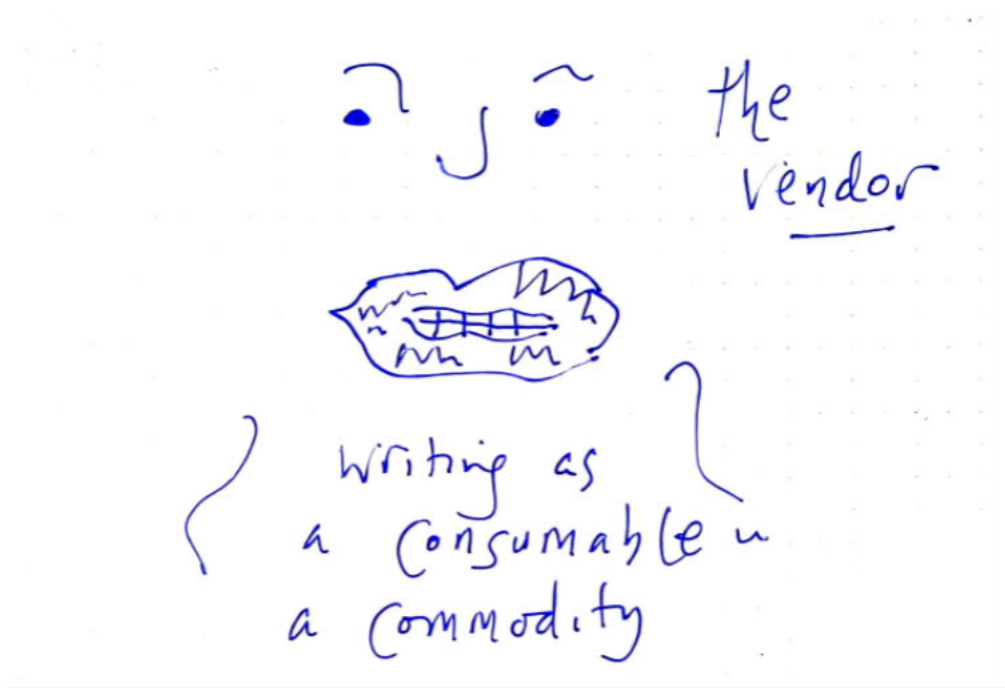## The Vendor: Creative writing and adult needs

Figure 5 The Vendor

Let's imagine that the Vendor is also teaching historical fiction and is modelling the objects using exactly the same set-up. While they might have similar learning activities, the tenor and spirit of the classes would be very different. For example, the Vendor might stipulate quite precisely what objects people should bring in to the class such as:

- A heroine (my princess puppet)
- A romantic villain (symbolised by the wolf mask)
- An object which conveys a moment of sweetness/romance (the lollipop)
- An object which conveys the villain's evil, secret intentions (the money)
- An object which embodies the heroine's best friend, the real male hero (the teddy bear)

If historical fiction was the theme of the course, Vendor would direct students to best-selling historical Victorian fiction, and historical romance in particular. Together the class would investigate the market, and either discover or be instructed about the various 'recipes' for a Victorian romance novel. Certain publishers such as Mills and Boon (2019) actually provide templates for writing genre fiction which could be explored. The Vendor might show how the objects could provide an easy-to-use method of generating different plots. In the list above, I have tentatively suggested how the 5 objects could utilised in this fashion.

The Vendor would invite their students to draw diagrams to illustrate their plots with suitable turning points, moments of romance, climaxes threaded through the plot. The approach would be architectural in that students would be encouraged to design their books using certain formula, and plot out their writing careers. The different approaches to publishing would be explored with a view to making money; looking at the opportunities afforded by prizes, grants, online publishing, and mainstream publishers.

Key objectives and assessments

- To learn how to write commercial historical fiction.
- To learn the various formulas and structures used by romantic historical novelists.
- To read widely in this genre and learn how to meet the needs of this market.
- To learn how to promote yourself as a writer both online and in person.

Assessments might include:

A portfolio of work, including maps, diagrams and organisers of your story's plot, characters, setting, themes; sample chapters; letters to relevant agents and publishers; an online blog with some work placed there.
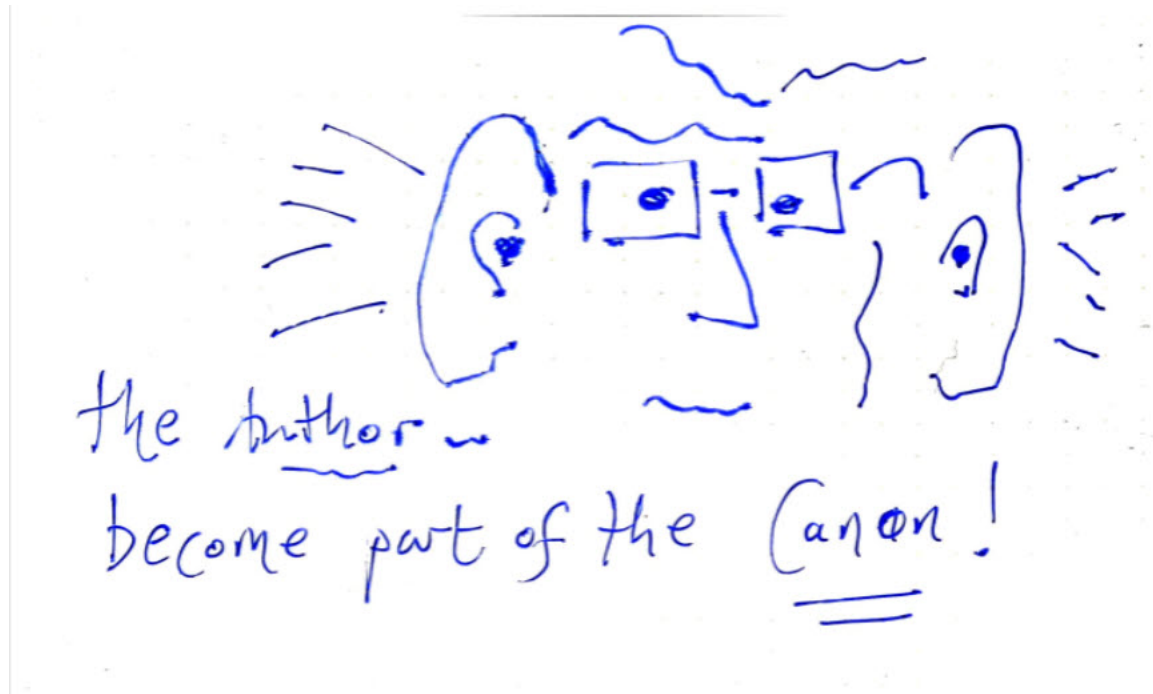
Figure 6 The Author

The Author, like all of the above teachers, could use objects in many ways. Let's pick one approach though, which could illustrate how they might work. The Author might ask his students to read certain literary texts, ones that they deem as having literary significance, and bring in objects which symbolise those texts for them. The Author would probably need to model this for their students. So, for example, the Expert might say:

- The teddy bear symbolises a favourite text of mine, *Brideshead Revisited*, where the main character Sebastian Flyte famously carries a teddy bear about with him while a student at Oxford.
- The wolf is representative of a great short story by Angela Carter, 'A Company of Wolves'.
- The lollipop represents the beginning of Proust's 'In Search of Lost Time', because like Proust's madeleine cake, it makes the Author recall his lost childhood.
- The princess puppet represents Jane Austen's *Emma*, one of the first deluded heroines of fiction.
- The money represents Thomas Hardy's fiction where the lack of money and status plays such a central role in novels such as *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *Jude the Obscure* and *Far From the Madding Crowd*.

The Author might then share extracts from the above texts which illustrate these points, and invite students to either imitate the style of these writers, or write their own responses based on the themes raised. These pieces would then be workshopped with the Author usually having the final say on the writing, particularly with regards to the assessment of the pieces.

In a certain sense the use of objects is possibly a little forced here because his type of teacher may be opposed to using objects, wanting the focus solely to be on the literary impact of the writing. Nevertheless, the objects exercise here usefully illustrates the tenor and spirit of the Author's approach: the focus is upon what the Author conceives to be 'great literature'. Now this could be very different from the texts I've suggested but the direction of travel is very clear here: a literary paradigm is held up as exemplary, and students are expected in various imaginative ways to 'go along with it'. I think students who have studied creative writing at university will be very familiar with this view.

Key objectives

- For students to hone their literary craft.
- For students to develop their knowledge of culturally significant literary texts.
- For students to produce literary works of publishable quality.

Assessments would typically include a portfolio of literary work, which will be judged upon its literary 'quality', and a commentary exploring why and how this work came to be written.

Figure 7 the Activist

The Activist would use these objects in different ways. They might ask students to bring in a series of objects that represent the injustices and inequalities they have either experienced or perceived in their lives. Like the Healer, they would want students to take some care to bring in objects that are personally meaningful to them. If I were to model how to do this exercise, I might use my objects in this way:

- The teddy bear represents the injustices of childhood, where children's voices are ignored, marginalised, told to indulge in imaginary games rather than having a genuine say in things.
- The wolf could represent rapacious capitalist patriarchy which only sees the value in people and things if they can make a profit.
- The princess could represent the oppression of women, condemned to stereotypical roles.
- The lollipop could represent the meagre, addictive, sugary diet which so many in late, neo-liberal capitalism have bought into for various reasons out of their control.
- The money could represent the economic and political inequality in the world.

During the sessions, the Activist might use poems, fiction, autobiographies which illustrate these themes, using for example, William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* to discuss the theme

of childhood, maybe Eimer MacBride's *A Child is a Half-Formed Thing* to talk about sexism, patriarchy and the oppression of women, and Joelle Taylor's spoken word poetry to explore the ways in which people from marginalised backgrounds are brainwashed, exploited and abused. The Activist's literary choices would be eclectic and much of them would be contemporary. Frequently, the Activist teacher shares their own writing, not as an exemplar of great work, but in order to stimulate discussion. They might use certain educational research such as Sue Dymoke's *Poetry Matters* (2015) and *Poetry is not a Special Club* (2017) as reading material: in these books, Dymoke and other researchers show how poetry can be taught democratically in school settings if it is carried oout an 'activist' fashion, getting students to see that poetry can speak about the problems of today's world.

Key objectives

- To help students learn about the relevance and power of poetry, fiction and life-writing.
- To help students write in an engaged way about the problems of the contemporary world.
- To develop students' political and social awareness.

Typical assessments might include:

A portfolio which includes videoed readings of poems, stories and scripts in community settings; creative writing which responds to issues which students feel passionate about; online creative work which engages with relevant communities of practice; commentaries on the political implications of their creative writing.

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