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How Do People who Trained in Teaching, Medicine or Law become Fiction Writers? The Case for Task Specific Commonalities across Domains of Creativity

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Abstract

One of the central disputes in the literature on creativity is whether the skills or ability to be creative are general to all creative enterprises or domain specific (see, for example: Baer, 1998; 2010; 2012; 2015; Guilford, 1954; Kaufman, & Baer, 2005; Kaufman et al., 2010; Sawyer, 2012). What this body of research is attempting to discover is whether creativity is achieved using general factors, such as intelligence, motivation, divergent thinking, particular forms of memory processing etc. or achieved using factors specific to enterprises within a particular domain. This paper will argue creators have domain specific skills and capacities but that there is also significant overlap and transfer of these skills across creative domains. Creative writers, doctors, lawyers and teachers, for instance, have more in common than we think. What analysis of the creative system of fiction writing shows is that domain acquisition occurs across a range of settings and through formal and informal processes such as schooling, personal reading, explicit training, mentoring and self-directed learning. This paper explores how many writers acquire skills relevant to writing in parallel or seemingly unrelated domains despite research that suggests the transfer of skills and knowledge from one context to another is rare and difficult to achieve. Closer inspection of experiences in the writers' former (and concurrent) professions reveals correspondence with the domain of fiction writing through similarities in domain-specific tasks.

Introduction

One of the central disputes in the literature on creativity, particularly within the field of psychology, is whether the skills or ability to be creative are general to all creative enterprises or domain specific (see for example: Baer, 1998; 2010; 2012; 2015; Guilford, 1954; Kaufman, & Baer, 2005; Kaufman et al., 2010; Sawyer, 2012). This distinction is important because attempts to increase general 'creative' thinking or skills are ultimately doomed if creative skills or ability are not generalisable. On the other hand, if creative skills or abilities are generalisable then what characterises and distinguishes them from other cognitive and social capacities?

What this body of research is attempting to discover is whether creativity is achieved using general factors, such as intelligence, motivation, divergent thinking, particular forms of memory processing, etc. or achieved using factors specific to enterprises within a particular domain (Boccia et al., 2015; Hong & Milgram, 2010; Palmiero et al., 2010). This paper argues creators have domain specific skills and capacities but that there is instead significant overlap and transfer of these skills across creative domains. Creative writers, doctors, lawyers and teachers, for instance, have more in common than we think.

Analysis of sample segment of literature

Looking in-depth at one segment of the literature, psychometric tests for creativity, we can see that the question of domain specificity and generality is problematic. Psychometric or pen-and-paper tests for creativity rose to prominence in the 1950s, beginning with tests for divergent thinking after research showed standard IQ measures paid little attention to creativity and were unable to predict those individuals who would excel at 'leadership, innovation or technological inventiveness' (Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi & Gardner, 1994, p. 5). New measures were needed that, rather than testing for convergent thinking which sought out a single 'right' answer, were based on divergent thinking skills which tended to frame problems in new ways that lead to (multiple) novel solutions (Guilford, 1950). Creativity, from this approach, was viewed as a domain-general and measurable mental trait or characteristic, present in all humans, but at different levels of ability. In this way, tests could be applied to the general population, isolating domain-general creative abilities and traits by comparing those with high and low scores.

These divergent thinking tests were based on the assumption that those answers that diverge from common ones are more creative (Guildford, 1954; Torrance, 1962; 1968; 1970). Answers were rated using scores for fluency (number of relevant answers); flexibility (range of answers); originality (difference from average answers); and elaboration (answer detail). Although this system of testing is largely considered the first standard scale for measuring creativity, the usefulness of its measurements has been questioned. According to Weisberg (1993), a number of investigations concluded that domain-general divergent-thinking tests showed 'little or no predictive validity: children's test scores [were] of marginal help in predicting creative performance several years later' (1993, p. 61). Critics of the early psychometric approach also argued divergent thinking itself was an inadequate test for creativity; scoring based on fluency, frequency, originality and elaboration only highlighted task specific abilities (e.g. figural, verbal) rather than a general propensity for creativity (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999). Others argued that studies using pen-and-paper tests alone measure only the amount of creative ability an individual possesses and 'may unnecessarily restrict a fuller understanding of human creativity' and its underlying mechanisms (Mayer, 1999, p. 454). Alarmingly, Barron and Harrington's (1981) examination of hundreds of psychometric tests found test scores could easily be affected by slight differences in test conditions such as duration or whether participants are given verbal or written instructions.

Despite these inherent problems, the use of psychometric tests was not limited to exploring domain-general divergent thinking as a measure of creativity. From the 1950s onwards, researchers built on basic tests to isolate those personality traits characteristic of creative people across a range of professions, aiming to identify both domain-general and domain-specific traits. Donald MacKinnon (1962; 1965; 1966) identified three main areas of personality study that relate to creativity: socialisation, richness or complexity of psychological development and psychological health and adjustment.

While these psychometric tests showed some difference between domain-specific traits in these professions or at least that tests for personality traits are often biased to the profession under study, an overall picture of the domain-general creative personality emerged that was both complex and occasionally contradictory. In general creative people were seen to be enthusiastic, driven, anti-social, intelligent, dominant, childlike, expressive, disciplined, disorganised, inquisitive, spontaneous, perceptive, intuitive, independent, sensitive, flexible, self-confident, critical, unconventional and showing symptoms of psychopathology (though are not necessarily mentally ill) (Arieti, 1976; Barron & Harrington, 1981; Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1967; MacKinnon, 1966; Roe, 1963). However, the identification of a core set of domain-general characteristics through the use of psychometric tests leaves some questions unanswered. Which of these personality traits"

> … specifically facilitate creative behaviour? Which are by-products of social achievement and recognition of almost any forms? Which are specifically by-products of creative achievement and recognition? Which are merely non-causally related correlates of creative achievement? (Barron & Harrington, 1981, p. 455).

The case for either domain specificity or generality, drawing on the literature on psychometric testing for creativity, remains unclear. However, the discussion highlights that there may be some evidence for domain-specific differences between the broad writing domain and other professions as well as within writing domains. Whether these differences are psychological, social or cultural, the case for domain-specificity in writing is worthy of further examination.

Incorporating psychological, social and cultural elements, the systems model of creativity developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1997; 2014; Paton & Fulton, 2016) offers a useful framework for exploring domain-specificity and generality. The systems model views creativity as resulting from complex interactions between an individual and a field of experts as well as a domain or body of knowledge about a particular culture. A writer, for example, draws upon a pre-existing body of knowledge about books and writing as well as the criteria of selection, or the preferences of the field, in order to produce a written work considered creative by a field of writing experts.

From this perspective, personal qualities such as divergent thinking or personality traits, which have been examined through the psychometric testing, are important but not the sole focus of a discussion of creativity or domain generality or specificity. Rather, 'an individual's background is equally significant and adds to the person's cultural and social capital, which then gives the individual a greater chance to succeed in their sphere of cultural production' (Fulton & Paton, 2016, p. 35). This model allows for complexity, not only in terms of how individuals gain skills but also how those skills might be used or valued within particular areas of creativity

Domain specificity and writing

Centred primarily in cognitive psychology, the research on domain specificity for writing has focused on the importance of content knowledge for non-fiction and academic writing with mixed results (Bart & Evans, 2003; Jolliffe & Brier, 1988; Kaufman, Gentile & Baer, 2005; McCutcheon, 1986). Bart and Evans (2003), for example, aimed to distinguish whether teaching general thinking skills or domain-specific knowledge would be more beneficial for increasing the writing proficiency of undergraduate and postgraduate educational psychology students. Writing samples of 70 students were evaluated, with the researchers finding no significant correlation between content knowledge and writing skill across the whole sample, inconclusive results from a targeted comparative sample of high and low knowledge subjects (n=20), and inconsistent results between samples from each expert rating the samples. Such results could not predict whether a general thinking or domain specific knowledge approach would lead to increased writing proficiency.

Several studies have attempted to compare non-fiction and fiction writers, trying to distinguish levels of specificity within the broader domain of writing. As discussed earlier, Ludwig's (1998) study on eminent individuals showed differences between writing professions, with poets displaying significantly higher incidence of mental disorders than general fiction writers, and both poets and general fiction writers displaying higher rates psychopathic traits than non-fiction writers. Similarly, Kaufman (2002; 2003) found eminent poets (but particularly female poets) were more likely than other professional groups to experience personal tragedy; indeed, journalists and other non-fiction writers tend to outlive poets by approximately six years.

Quinn (1980) examined cognitive processing across creative domains, arguing that although creative people in general appear to display more complex thinking styles, there are differences between and within domains. Creative writers, for instance, were more complex in their cognitive processing than journalists (specifically radio broadcasters, in order to assess differences between textual and audio-visual proficiencies). Kaufman (2002) also examined differences in thinking styles in different writing domains, with a study of creative writing and journalism students showing a preference for structured (executive) or logical and scientific (paradigmatic) thinking styles, while creative writers preferred more self-directed or 'creative' (legislative) or narrative-based thinking styles. Causality may again be an issue here, with Kaufman explaining that subjects of the study may be 'drawn toward a discipline based on their frame of thought' (2002, p. 217) while it is also possible that practice within the domain has led to a preference for a particular style.

Further research on the cognitive processing within the domain of creative writing has been conducted, finding alternately that associative modes of cognitive processing (particularly those for generating metaphor) may be dominant or it may be possible to see increased activation of brain areas that deal with functions such as language processing or semantic integration (Barbot et al., 2012; Barbot & Tinio, 2015; Benedek et al., 2014; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hayes & Flower, 1986; Shah et al., 2013). Barbot and colleagues (2012) argue that it is the specific demands of the task or output that can affect which kind of processing is the more dominant. Poets, for instance, who write in more intense and short-form styles are likely to be more dominant in associative thinking and selective combination. Longer-form fiction writers, on the other hand, are more likely to favour perseverance and elaboration. For the researchers, different tasks require different resources from the creative individual and their thought processes.

Barbot and Tinio (2015) extend this idea, arguing that the neurological substrates underpinning these cognitive resources can be developed or strengthened during adolescence in particular through regular 'activation' of particular processes. However, the researchers also recognise the applicability of resources across tasks in different areas of creativity.

> Because writing poetry also 'activates' a set of domain-specific skills (e.g. vocabulary), this adolescent will likely show creative potential not only in outlets that require a similar combination of task-relevant skills (e.g. various subtypes of poetry such as haiku or slam), but also, to some extent, in outlets that involve similar domain-specific skills (e.g. creative fiction) (Barbot & Tinio, 2015, pp. 2-3).

This discussion of the need for skills and knowledge across multiple levels of the writing domain gives a neuro-scientific basis to Charlotte Doyle's (1998) earlier use of the terms 'fictionworld' and 'writingrealm' to distinguish the different types of task a creative fiction writer must engage with even within the one project.

Similarly but more generally, Baer and Kaufman (2005) argue there are a few factors (such as intelligence) that affect creativity across all domains, but there are many more domain or even micro-domain specific factors. In other words, some skills and knowledges may be generalised across creative domains but many others are specialised within a particular area. Lubart and Guignard (2004) specify further that creativity combines generalised abilities (such as intelligence or risk-taking), domain-specific abilities and *task*-specific abilities and that the importance of these may vary as level of expertise changes over time. This plurality of specific and general abilities corresponds to data on the acquisition of skills and knowledge by Australian fiction writers (Paton, 2009; 2011; 2012a; 2012b; 2013; 2016; Paton & Fulton, 2014).

Methods

Data on fiction writers, their process and the broader social and cultural contexts of publication, was collected over the course of three years utilising a broadly ethnographic approach that included in-depth interviews, participant observation, artefact analysis and examination of theoretical work in the area. Interviews were conducted with 40 Australian fiction writers (a geographically convenient sample), defined here as those producing novel-length works of prose describing invented or imaginary people or events. Aside from this, there were three further decisive factors for selecting in-depth interview participants: firstly, writers had to have published more than one fiction work, including at least one novel-length work, and have accrued a reasonable public profile associated with their writing; secondly, the total participant pool represented a wide variety of fiction genres; and thirdly, each writer needed to be accessible and agree to participate. With over 400 publications between them, the writers interviewed represent a broad cross section of fiction categories at both the national and international level.

A list of interview questions, served as a guide or prompt for the interview process. These questions are similar to those used by Csikszentmihalyi (1997) during his study of creative persons, but encompass eight broad themes on Australian fiction writers and their work: basic form and publication details, developing an interest, training, writing practices, ideas, professional support, peer support and personal history. However, given the organic and dynamic process of in-depth interviewing, adherence to this question list was flexible. In general, interviews were conducted by phone or email or face-to-face in the homes and offices of participants or venues accompanying writers' festivals. These interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour, though some were considerably longer. Three interviews were conducted in smaller blocks over a period of months because of the writers' time constraints and family commitments. Overall, these interview transcripts form a rich pool of data about Australian fiction writers and their work, that are then analysed through a systems lens (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Paton & Fulton, 2016). 1

The writing domain

For Csikszentmihalyi, 'any symbolic system that has a set of rules for representing thought and action is a domain' (1994, p. 153). This set of rules or conventions governs not only the use of the symbol system but it is against this framework that a work is judged to be a valuable and original contribution in that area. In order to be considered creative in the domain of fiction writing, for example, a person is judged on his or her finished product or novel, in the case of this study. Each individual novel is composed of a set of conventions governing elements such as language, alphabet, grammar, narrative and genre; those novels judged to be creative have been produced using a unique and valued combination of these elements. Despite the already large field of works in fiction writing, which includes every novel judged to be creative, there is still potential for more creative works to be added to the domain and drawn on by future writers. The domain functions as a means of preserving and transmitting a particular discipline's collected knowledge, works, rules and procedures to the next generation of users.

Like other domains, the symbolic set of rules and procedures of the fiction writing domain derive from the broader categories of writing systems and language. These rules and traditions have filtered into fiction writing and "been stored in the symbol system of the culture, in the customary practices, the language, the specific notation of the 'domain'" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, pp. 329-30). For Australian fiction writing (the specific domain of the writers interviewed), the broadest base element is the use of the English language. According to Chao (1968), language 'is a convention, a tradition, a social institution, that has grown through the common living of a large number of people who carry on that tradition' (p. 2). Rather than an inborn inheritance, language is learned from scratch through an early process of enculturation, often forming the first set of rules and conventions of a person's habitus.

For many Australian fiction writers, language habits and dispositions are formed around Australian English in particular. Chao (1968) argues that although a language such as English is resistant to change, it will only remain the same with continued agreement among its speakers.

> Separate them by social class, occupation, political division, geographical distance or by time in history, and you have dialects and languages (Chao, 1968, pp. 2-3).

While still sharing an understanding of Standard English, Australians have adapted and invented a lexicon of words and meanings unfamiliar to English speakers in other parts of the world. An Australian fiction writer's use of the word 'bush', colloquialisms such as 'breaky' or 'stubbies', or dialogue interjections such as 'oi', 'like' or 'y'know', for example, may not translate internationally. The conventions of each language or dialect, therefore, are constituted not only in a lexicon or vocabulary but also in the rules and procedures governing word usage.

The rules and procedures governing the proper use of words make up a language's grammar, the basics of which are often absorbed alongside the vocabulary as a child. A child will absorb the grammatical rule that words in the past tense generally need an '-ed', for example, before learning the exceptions to that rule. In the case of the verb 'to do', 'I do-ed it' or 'I did-ed it' will precede the grammatically correct use of 'I did it'. The grammar of a language can be broken into four parts: prosody, etymology, syntax and orthography, which govern aspects such as sound and pronunciation, parts of speech, the formation of sentences, spelling and punctuation, and the use of the alphabet as a notational symbol system (Cobbett, 2002). For fiction writers, understandably, the ability to manipulate language and its writing system is vital.

Like language itself, the domain of writing is more than just its alphabetic symbol system. The interrelated nature of language, grammar, written words and their use and meaning complicates even a simple definition of the term. Coulmas (2003) identifies a minimum of six different meanings that can be applied to 'writing':

> (1) A system of recording language by means of visible or tactile marks; (2) the activity of putting such a system to use; (3) the result of such activity, a text; (4) the particular form of such a result, a script style such as block letter writing; (5) artistic composition; (6) a professional occupation (2003, p. 1).

For Csikszentmihalyi (1996), the domain of writing is a useful one for the study of creativity. In all its various guises, writing is one of the most accessible and familiar forms of creative enterprise.

> Among the oldest symbol systems in the world are those organized around the content and rules of language. The first narrative stories telling of real or imagined events, the myths and campfire tales of our ancestors, extended dramatically the range of human experience through imagination. The rhyme and meter of poetry created patterns of order that must have seemed miraculous to people who had yet scarcely learned to improve on the precarious order of nature. And when the discovery of writing made it possible to preserve memory outside the fragile brain, the domain of the word became one of the most effective tools and greatest sources of pride for humankind. Perhaps only art, dance, and music are more ancient; the beginnings of technology and arithmetic probably contemporaneous (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 238).

As with other knowledge and symbol systems that make up the domain of writing, the conventions for telling stories, in the form of narrative and genre, existed long before its current users were born. People from all cultures and societies tell stories in one form or another. Oral histories, fables, fairy tales, epics, sagas, myths, legends, allegories, parables, nursery rhymes, speeches, poetry, lyrics, newspapers, magazines, books, short stories, letters, emails, blogs, scripts, plays, anecdotes, biographies, autobiographies, children's stories: all use words to convey meaning whether this is done in writing or spoken from one person to another. Writer Marion Halligan (2001) believes telling stories has long been a part of the human psyche and still makes up a big part of our everyday communication.

> Storytelling is one of the most natural of human activities. We all do it. We come home from work and tell our partner what happened in the office, what the boss said and what she did and then this happened and what a catastrophe but that's not the end of it, there'll be more to come tomorrow since this is the days of our lives (Halligan, 2001, p. 2).

Stories communicate, entertain and inform, drawing from a bank of human experience and knowledge and passing on this information to the next generations through shared understandings or cultural codes.

In a similar fashion, cultural codes or a reader's experience of cultural products are used to classify and structure a narrative according to genre. According to Ryall (1975), genres 'can be defined as patterns/forms /styles/structures which transcend individual art products, and which supervise both their construction by artist and their reading by audiences' (1975, p. 28). In terms of their reading by audiences, genre, from the French meaning 'kind' or 'sort', categorises or groups the infinite number of narratives according to a culturally

recognised set of criteria such as format, subject, values, setting or plot. Early systems of classifying narratives have included the division of drama according to design and the type of emotional value of the ending (Aristotle, 1987), Goethe and Schiller's division by subject matter (McKee, 1999) and Polti's (1977) thirty-six dramatic situations based on different emotions. Today, writing is grouped according to broad style (prose, poetry, drama), format (short stories, novellas, novels) and a fiction and non-fiction distinction. These and further genre classifications allow the reader to draw on cultural codes or familiarity with other works to build interest or expectation. In bookstores and libraries around Australia, although an individual book may contain multiple elements, fiction novels are classified and grouped according to a mix of setting, plot and audience genres such as crime/horror, fantasy/science fiction, children/young adult, blockbuster/ action thriller, romance/historical and literary/popular. Wellek and Warren (1956) argue the distinction between literary and popular or 'formulaic' genres is often arbitrary.

> The genre represents, so to speak, a sum of aesthetic devices at hand, available to the writer and already intelligible to the reader. The good writer partly conforms to the genre as it exists, and partly stretches it. By and large, great writers are rarely inventors of genres: Shakespeare and Racine, Molière and Jonson, Dickens and Dostoyevsky, enter into other men's labours (p. 235).

For the purposes of this research, 'genre' refers to the series of cultural codes or rules and conventions used by writers to construct new texts and by readers to recognise similar texts as well as the broad system of classification used to group similar works within the domain of fiction writing. These concepts of genre, together with the rules and procedures governing narrative, writing and language constitute the symbol system of the domain of fiction writing.

What analysis of the creative system of fiction writing shows is that acquisition of the skills necessary to write fiction (such as the manipulation of language, storytelling and knowledge of genre conventions) occurs across a range of settings and through formal and informal processes such as early family life, schooling, personal reading, explicit training, mentoring and self-directed learning (Paton, 2013; 2016; Paton & Fulton, 2014). At a fundamental level, knowledge of the general writing domain is essential in order to be creative within it. General knowledge of the domain is then the basis upon which further capacities are developed. All of the writers in this study received a solid grounding in English language and writing skills in their childhood and schooling. By internalising these symbol systems until they became seemingly 'natural' abilities, the writers were placed in a position to develop skills and knowledges beyond this, often divergent in their levels of domain specificity or generality (specific story content knowledge, for instance, compared to general language or writing skills). The following discussion explores how many writers acquire skills relevant to writing in parallel or seemingly unrelated domains.

Skills acquired in related and (seemingly) unrelated domains

Akin to Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) findings that the career trajectories of creative people led them to acquire skills and knowledge in often unpredictable or unexpected ways, many different paths were taken to the destination of creativity within the domain of Australian fiction writing. Some skills and knowledge that developed were related and some seemingly unrelated to the fiction writing domain. Two of the writers interviewed had engaged in a career in the Australian book publishing industry. One was a book editor (as well as a lecturer and mother) while writing the manuscript that went on to become her first published novel. The other was editing and publishing for 15 years before attempting her first novel.

Paton (2012a) outlines the role and importance of editors and publishers in the creative system of fiction writing as well as the skills and knowledge needed to perform those roles. Editors, for instance, require a deep understanding of language, storytelling and genre in their work with writers' manuscripts, shaping text at both surface and structural levels. For many editors, these skills are acquired in similar ways to writers through various combinations of socialisation and enculturation during childhood, formal and informal learning, personal reading, on-the-job training and mentoring. The primary differences here between a writer and an editor's use of these skills is in originating the work (although some editors may add original content whether ideas or text) and in acting as a gatekeeper or intermediary, evaluating and then shaping the texts according to the criteria of the field of fiction writing (Paton, 2012a). As members of the field, editors and publishers make judgments that affect which texts are considered creative and added to the existing domain of fiction writing. This role involves knowledge of this domain as well as knowledge of the publishing process and relationship management skills that would help guide a writer's journey through it.

This experience as a member of the field of fiction writing not only developed W1's editorial skills with language, writing and storytelling but also gave her an insight into the criteria by which her future writing work would be judged and eased the transition into the writing life.

> I think it was a benefit because it meant that I was aware of the process and the fact
> that it could be slow or complicated and not take that too personally. I knew it was
> quite a nerve-wracking, fairly creepy, bureaucratic process in some ways waiting for
> responses to things and that can be very nerve-wracking for authors who don't have
> an understanding of how all that works. (W1).

While only two of the writers interviewed were directly engaged in the publishing industry and therefore gaining these first-hand insights into the field of fiction writing, other writers received experience and training also useful to their development as a writer in other writing domains such as journalism.

Although it may provide more relevant skills for the 'writingrealm' than the 'fictionworld' (Doyle 1998), the related domain of journalism has proved a rich training ground for many well-known writers internationally as well as in Australia. In his article 'Birth of a Novelist, Death of a Journalist', David Conley (1998) argues journalism and fiction writing not only share similar skills but also a history in that early literary Australia was also largely 'a journalist's Australia'.

> A symbiotic relationship developed between newspapers and novels in that
> Australia's early novelists could not write fiction without the prop of journalism in
> providing supplementary income. In addition, newspapers were, and remain, forums
> for critiquing, promoting and publishing literature. They also have served as a
> training ground for some of literature's greatest novelists, including Dickens, Twain,
> Zola and Hemingway (1998, p. 47).

In Australia, Frank Moorhouse, Robert Drewe, Kate Grenville, Nikki Gemmel, John

Birmingham and Geraldine Brooks are just some of the names that stand alongside Dickens and Hemingway in honing their researching, writing and editing skills in journalism before turning to fiction.

Fulton (2014; 2016; Fulton & McIntyre, 2013) outlines the skills and knowledge necessary for working successfully within the domain of journalism, which encompasses hard news, opinion, features, reviews and magazine articles. These include, as with the broad domain of writing, knowledge of language and a specific symbol system and the skills to manipulate them.

> Essentially, journalism is storytelling (Adam 1993, Bird & Dardenne 1997), and its
> basic elements – language, grammar and narrative – are as important to journalism
> as they are to any writing genre, but it must be recognized that journalism's form is
> also different (Fulton, 2016, p. 93).

Where the journalism differs from other writing domains is the knowledge of, and skill in, handling journalistic structures (such as the inverted pyramid), news values, a code of ethics and laws that govern what content may be reported and how it may be written and, for some journalism, a watch-dog ideology. Some journalists also work with 'beats' that require in-depth content knowledge of politics, health, law enforcement, the environment, economics, or culture. Similarly to writers, these skills and knowledges are generally acquired through combinations of formal and informal processes, although journalists are able to learn much more rapidly with new domain artefacts and on-the-job feedback from supervising editors or colleagues on a daily (and potentially hourly) basis. The journalist's relationship to the field is generally more explicit with often institutionalised or normalised interactions between them and other field members, seemingly the case even for freelance journalists working outside the bounds of media organisations (Coffee, 2016). This means journalists are often better placed than fiction writers to be exposed to the criteria editors and other field members such as chiefs of staff, media owners or even readers use to judge works of journalism, giving them a better understanding of how complex creative systems in general may function.

While Conley (1998) argues journalism's criteria for judgment, based on often strict conventions, have the potential to hinder a fiction writer, one young adult and children's writer interviewed said these conventions of news reporting and the close supervision of his editors led to his successful fiction writing style.

> I was a journalist for most of my twenties so my editors taught me a lot about writing, a lot. My style is always trying to be as simple and universal in terms of access as possible. So I will always try and choose a simpler way of saying something even if it means sometimes you lose a little bit of nuance. That makes me suitable for writing for kids and young adults whereas a more lyrical, perhaps a more reflective writer would dwell on a particular moment and eke out all the nuances of it rather than just barrel along. But that's a journalism thing. You don't have the luxury of your reader being willing to read ten pages about someone having a cup of tea, it just doesn't work in journalism (W2).

For one popular fiction writer, journalism experience (including a four year cadetship) taught her both to search out and get to the heart of a story. 'It was useful because it taught me to research, to get my facts right, to write simply and directly and to communicate immediately – or it was cut from the bottom by the subs' (W3). Consistent with the findings of Csikszentmihalyi (1988; 1997; 1999; 2014), Wolff (1993) and Giddens (1979), the conventions of journalistic writing and news organisations both constrained and enabled these writers in the development of their skills. Taking these notions further, however, the authors were able to master the skills and knowledges of the explicitly structured domain of journalism and apply these outside of that original context.

Outside of journalism, other writing careers have provided on-the-job training and transferable skills and knowledge for writers in this study. One fantasy writer began her working life in public relations (PR). The PR domain incorporates a variety of activities such as strategic and operational management, research and the interpretation and sharing of that information, event planning, and the technical aspects of production. It is also a domain that requires traditional writing skills and knowledge for print-based tasks such as crafting press releases, organisational collateral such as newsletters or annual reports, or advertising copy as well as non-print writing tasks such as speech writing or scripting for audio-visual advertising or promotional material (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 2013; Wakefield & Perkins Cottone, 1987). Writing activities here, however, have a very different purpose than those of fiction or other non-fiction forms such as journalism. For Dozier, Grunig and Grunig (2013), PR has two primary forms of communication: asymmetrical, with the intention to manipulate or persuade the reader or viewer, and symmetrical, which emphasises building long-term relationships based on negotiation and compromise with clear benefits for both sides. Both forms require clear knowledge of the organisation, relationship management and strategy as well as skills in persuasive writing (Newsom & Haynes, 2007), which can involve manipulating style and content to craft an argument or an appeal to emotion or values, or clarify and simplify a message.

These PR skills were useful for W4 when she started a travel magazine with her husband, beginning in the sales area, where she drew on skills in marketing, relationship management and persuasive communication to encourage companies to advertise with the magazine. She later began contributing written work in the form of articles and editorials, contributing to the domain of journalism discussed previously.

> I realise now as I look back over my working life that I have always been writing. It never occurred to me until recently that all of my jobs have required word crunching and even when I was selling advertising space for our magazine, I was actually using creatively produced proposals that I'd written to lure prospective buyers. It worked really well for me and our magazine won a major business award for its small business achievements. So although I hadn't attempted a fiction novel before, the writing skills I have to presume were well honed, although I never stop learning (W4).

Here, the direct link to the writing domain, through written tasks and the development of language skills, helped facilitate W4's transition to fiction writing

In more visual or aural media, three writers found writing for radio, stage and screen developed or informed their writing ability and style. 'I think I received a very good free training in how to tell stories... What's interesting to me is I've had feedback quite consistently from people saying the way I write is visual, that people see pictures' (W5). Writing in these areas requires not only skill with language and its symbol system but also knowledge of industry conventions for formatting and timing and technical directions as well as an understanding of the performers and the medium through which it will be performed (DeZutter, 2016; Kerrigan, 2016; McIntyre, 2012; Sawyer, 2012). While these domains each require specific skills and knowledges (writing for the eye, the ear and for performance), it is still possible to categorise each under the broader banner of a writing domain. Transfer of skills and knowledge between domains that share a thematic or meta domain does not seem like such a great leap. This is consistent with research that shows transfer of cognitive abilities (such as critical thinking and divergent thinking) is most likely to occur when contexts are similar than when contexts are dissimilar (Willingham, 2002; 2007).

Not all of the careers undertaken by the writers in this study, however, seemed to be directly related to writing. Five of the writers interviewed, for instance, began their careers as primary and high school teachers. Creativity in the domain of education is complex with creativity potentially a product, in producing students who are capable of creative work, and a process, whereby teachers provide a creative learning environment and assessment (Reid & Petocz, 2004). Elements of the domain of education include curricula developed at local, state and national levels and teacher standards as well as subject specific content and general principles of learning. Language and writing skills are required for conveying content as well as written assessment and reporting. Teachers within specific disciplines such as English, contemporary languages or media, need a deeper level of understanding of language and rules and conventions as well as the ability to analyse texts. Interestingly, for this research, literacy is now a 'general capability' within the new national curriculum with Australian teachers required to incorporate and highlight elements of literacy in all subjects.

> In the Australian Curriculum, students become literate as they develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions to interpret and use language confidently for learning and communicating in and out of school and for participating effectively in society (ACARA, 2013).

To this end, all teachers must now undertake literacy learning as part of their formal training, giving them skills and knowledge of language and writing for different purposes and in different contexts across oral, print, visual and digital media.

For the writers interviewed who had worked as teachers, it was largely a dissatisfaction with working within and with the domain of education that led them to writing fiction. Dissatisfaction with the texts on offer, for example, led one writer to attempt writing his own books for children and young adults. For another, writing extended from producing creative English assignments for his students. He was later employed in writing and publishing assignments and courses for a state-based distance education department.

> Because I was also teaching what I wrote, I had to write two styles of things for distance education. You write the assignment but you also have to write the instructional material that tells students what to do. I learnt to be very precise in that instructional stuff because I had to teach it myself and then I also had to balance it with creative ideas to give them starting points for their own creative ideas, but the instructional material had to be a very different sort of writing (W8).

His work being read and used by teachers and children across the state gave him not only the ability to write for different audiences but also a precision of language important when asked to write and illustrate picture books and historical fiction for children. Although he had not intentionally set out to train for writing fiction, this writer, like many of the writers interviewed, accumulated knowledge of his audience and writing and language skills that made the transition from his previous career to the domain of fiction writing a smooth one.

This transition was also eased for two of the writers interviewed who trained and worked in law. The domain of law includes knowledge of laws (tortes, codes, legislation, and others), how to apply them and how they have been applied previously as well as the legal system generally. It also requires skills in the ethical and practical application of abstract theories, problem solving, research, oration, relationship management and counselling of clients. In terms of writing, those working within the domain of law need in-depth knowledge of legal structures, content and formatting alongside the ability to convey information clearly and persuasively for crafting arguments or legally binding contracts (Hanley Kosse & ButleRitchie, 2013; Sullivan, Colby, Welch Wegner, Bond & Schulman, 2007). For both writers with a legal background, their training and practice not only informed their writing skills but their legal specialties became central themes in their work, integrating elements of the law as plot points, setting or character. Although a successful crime writer, W6 still regularly volunteered with Legal Aid in order to continue her exposure to the law, law enforcement, the court system and those accused of crimes.

Similarly, another writer's experience in medicine also allowed him to interact with people he wouldn't have otherwise met and learn how they told their own stories.

> I would take histories from them and listen to their stories in their voice, listen to the details they picked out, listened to the way they tell their stories. It gives you an idea about voices that aren't your own (W7).

As with the domain of law, the domain of medicine involves the knowledge and application of highly specific content, with serious implications for clinical practice if the individual has not attained a sufficient level of content knowledge and practical skill for administering treatment. Doctors are also expected to be skilled in science, communication and relationship management (including 'bedside manner'), and diagnostics and

problem solving (Benner, 1982; Walker & Colledge, 2013). W7 discusses the ways in which some of these skills have transferred into the domain of fiction writing.

> [Practicing medicine] teaches you diagnostic problem solving skills and I find that useful. So if I'm looking at a story and something's not going quite right with it I can kind of take a history and do an examination and get some kind of idea of what's going on. I think learning some kind of problem solving skills has been helpful (W7).

Here, it is possible to see that although the domains of education, law and medicine cannot be subsumed under the banner of a broad writing domain, as with journalism, a transfer of skills and knowledge across these domains has still occurred. While Willingham (2002; 2007) suggests that this kind of transfer between dissimilar contexts is not likely, he does not argue that it is impossible.

Conclusion

An explanation for this (seemingly unlikely) transfer of skills and knowledge across dissimilar domains may be found in extending those theories that recognise a combination of specificity and generality in creativity (Baer & Kaufman, 2005; Doyle, 1998; Lubart & Guignard, 2004). Lubart and Guignard's addition of task-specific skills and knowledge was originally intended to indicate a deeper level of specialisation or specificity but may, nonetheless, provide a mechanism by which transfer between dissimilar domains occurs. That is, tasks may be specific to multiple domains simultaneously. Education, law and medicine, for instance, all have writing-related tasks that are fundamental to practice in those areas: reporting on events and people, providing accurate documentation, crafting persuasive texts, and so on. While the purpose of those tasks may prove dissimilar, the tasks themselves have enough similarity with those in the writing domain to explain how transfer of some skills and knowledge is possible.

Although the assessment of the specificity or generality of mind/brain processes is still under study, what the diversity in career trajectories shown here tells us is that not all of the skills and knowledge required to write fiction are specific to that domain. Transfer of skills and knowledge from one context to another can be both rare and difficult to achieve. Studies have shown, for instance, that training in divergent thinking (a skill purportedly applicable in all creative domains) is most successful on content covered in the training exercises (Baer, 1996; 2011). Transfer of skills and knowledge is most likely to occur when contexts are similar – as with journalism – than when contexts are dissimilar – as with medicine, law, teaching (Willingham, 2002; 2007). However, as can be seen in this paper, transfer between dissimilar domains *is* possible. Closer inspection of those latter cases of medicine, law and teaching reveals correspondence with the domain of fiction writing through similarities in domain-specific tasks. Crafting character profiles and backstories, picking out the telling detail, engaging an audience, are just as important to doctors, lawyers and teachers as they are to fiction writers.

Notes

1 Interviewees have been de-identified for the purposes of this paper, with names replaced with an alphanumeric code.

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