Editing in the twenty-first century
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Increasing use of technology has led to a massive rise in the amount of writing people do for work, social and recreational purposes. The frequency and convenience with which ideas, opinions and other information are conveyed have also altered the way in which writing is viewed by many contributors. This has given rise to what the American professor of linguistics, Naomi Baron (2008, p. 198), calls the 'whatever' attitude.

It is therefore timely that the Australian Standards for Editing Practice have recently been updated by the Institute of Professional Editors (IPEd 2013) to acknowledge the changing landscapes of written communication and to assert the ongoing role of editors in this environment: '[n]ever have wordsmiths – the minders, or keepers, of language – been more needed'. The Foreword to the Standards notes that greater access to a range of media has resulted in instances of language usage sometimes being 'marred by the speed and ease in which they can be delivered, leading to miscommunication, a lack of clarity and a lack of elegance'. In seeking to support the professionalism of editing practice, the Standards aim to identify the skills, tasks and knowledge that editing can reasonably be expected to involve in the twenty-first century.

This paper focuses on school educational publishing in Australia and commences with an overview of this sector. It then examines a job advertisement for an editor with an Australian educational publisher. The discussion concludes by exploring how the depiction of that role reflects on the current and future scope of editing and the editing profession.

School educational publishing in Australia

Distinguished Australian editor Janet Mackenzie (2011, p. 4) notes that educational publishing is a major component of the Australian publishing industry, comprising around forty per cent of titles. A significant proportion of these titles are primary and secondary school textbooks. These tend to be time-consuming and expensive to develop and consequently are mainly produced by large companies with international backing, such as Pearson Education, Macmillan, Heinemann and McGraw-Hill. In recent years, the market has become dominated by a small number of companies. A report by the Australian Society of Authors (ASA 2008) describes how this lack of competition is having a negative impact on the negotiating power of some smaller companies and freelance contributors, especially those working in the education sector.

Educational writers Gregory Blaxell and Don Drummond (2006, p. 322) explain that school curricula are developed by Australian state and territory educational authorities who have largely left it to educational publishers to develop teaching materials in accordance with framework statements. The move to the national Australian Curriculum introduced by the Gillard federal government is likely to bring greater uniformity to the teaching resources used across the country, and lead to a decrease in the range of textbook titles in use (Mackenzie 2011, p. 4).

Supplementary teaching resources are another key component of the sector and many smaller companies specialise in this area. Since the 1960s many of these publications have included photocopiable blackline masters for in-class activities and these continue to be a mainstay of many teachers' resources. The creation of the Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) has supported the viability of this form of resource by overseeing how schools use reproducible materials and helping publishers and authors to gain revenue (Blaxell & Drummond 2006, p. 323).

Although school educational publications are still heavily print-based, there is increasing interest in developing electronic resources. This move recognises that technology is part of everyday life for many people in Australia, especially school students. Smart phones, tablet devices and laptops are major

avenues of social interaction and information seeking, as part of students' 'web lifestyle'.[1] Schools are seeking ways to meet students' expectations for technology, and to capitalise on the potential for electronic and online resources and game-style approaches to engage students in their school learning. Digital resources researcher Karin Geiselhart (2001, p. 204-205) describes this scenario as a 'convergence between education and entertainment', where, more than ever before, an 'increasing hunger for interactivity' requires teachers to find ways to 'make lessons fun'.

Educational publishers are exploring the opportunities available through technology and providing a wider range of curriculum support resources, including CD-roms, DVDs and interactive websites. They are also increasing their presence on social media websites such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter to engage with target audiences more directly. E-books have not yet become widespread in schools, although technology commentator Ray Crozier (2013) notes that trials are underway in some sectors. A 2012 survey of over 600 Australian school librarians by Softlink Australia, a supplier of information resources (including e-books) to schools, confirmed this trend. It found that, '[a] quarter of schools have purchased e-books in the past year… [and] [m]ore than 50% of teacher librarians believe they will "definitely" or "most probably" purchase more in the next 12 months' (2012, p 11). When infrastructure and licensing options are clarified, e-books may become an increasing area of resource development for educational publishers.

The Australian Government's Digital Education Revolution program recognised that schools are integrating technology into their everyday teaching and learning practices. This program has funded hardware such as Interactive White Boards, notebooks and laptops, and curriculum support websites such as the Australian Broadcasting Commission's *Splash* and Education Services Australia's *Scootle*.

Editing in the school publications sector

For editors working in the school publications sector, the expansion into electronic resources brings greater opportunities, but also demands a broad range of skills and knowledge. The traditional strong command of written language, consistency and style underpins additional requirements including knowledge of on-screen editing. Information management lecturer Paul Mercieca (2001, p. 86) notes that working with online publications requires an awareness of content restructuring for different platforms (SGM or XML data protocols), web design and issues in usability, navigation, readability and access. This entails gaining an appreciation of target audiences for different publications, and identifying their particular interests and needs.

Many publishers, especially smaller companies, have relied on outsourcing for various stages of the process, including illustrations, permissions, editing, proofreading, indexing, cover design and printing (Mackenzie 2011, p. 7). Increasing specialisation in the technical skills required for electronic resources is likely to continue the prevalence of outsourcing, and some editorial roles may involve wider project management responsibilities in bringing publications to fruition. Editors may also find they need to develop a keener appreciation of issues relating to digital rights and licensing arrangements, as these may play an integral role in project viability (Mercieca 2001).

It is important to note that as new media increases the demand for text-based content, revenue streams are decreasing and there is greater pressure on publishers to cut costs and to maximise use of their titles. Unfortunately for freelance writers, it is becoming more common for publishers to provide a one-off flat fee for original content, insisting writers sign over any copyright, future CAL and lending rights payments, and in some cases, even their moral rights to be recognised as the author of their works (ASA 2008). Editors need to be mindful of this trend and of the implications contractual arrangements may have for freelancers.

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[1] Young (2007, p. 60) quotes Bill Gates from 1996 who used this term in predicting that the World Wide Web would become the first place people would turn to for information or entertainment.

The scope of editing within the changing landscape of school educational publishing can be illustrated more readily by considering an actual editorial role in this sector. For this purpose, the discussion explores a recent opportunity advertised by a Melbourne-based publisher.

In September 2012, the publisher advertised for an editor through EditorsVic, the professional association for editors in Victoria. The advertisement (see Appendix) was published on the EditorsVic website and was distributed to members of the organisation's email list.[2] Written in plain English in a friendly tone, the advertisement describes a small office team environment in an appealing location ('groovy [suburb] – close to public transport and great coffee'). This personal approach, together with descriptive words and phrases like *flexible, passionate, comfortable, exciting, self-motivated, willing to learn some new skills,* and *mentoring a 'baby-editor',* emphasise the human face of the role and the personal characteristics best suited to it. This language also suggests a long-term perception of the editorial role.

The advertisement states that the role requires knowledge of secondary school English or Humanities resources, previous work experience in educational publishing and 'proven editing skills' from at least three years of editing work. The role requires 'effective project management abilities', writing and web editing skills, style guidance with consistent application across web content, and previous experience in working with freelancers.

Editorial scope

A job advertisement in and of itself can only go so far in describing the nature of a role and the ideal candidate sought. The given example provides enough specific criteria for prospective candidates to measure their knowledge and experience against, and conveys a picture of the working environment and location. It also indicates that the role is varied and offers scope for the successful candidate to 'stretch' their existing skills and abilities. It conveys this aspect as a selling point of the role, offering the scope to learn and develop. It is possible that this is a new role so the advertisement allows leeway, noting that being 'flexible' is a desirable personal trait.

Considering the developments in school educational publishing noted earlier, it would appear that the editor role with this publisher offers considerable scope to use strong language-based skills while exploring new opportunities and gathering new skills, as summarised in the following points.

First, the successful candidate for this role is expected to make a 'vital contribution' to a new online project and will be involved in developing 'electronic content', including web-based resources which may include e-books and apps. Working in this area, especially in a small office, an editor may also become involved in issues relating to digital rights management and licensing options.

Second, in being 'responsible for managing content for an English literacy website', the editor will require strong structural editing and evaluation skills, together with a capacity for conceptual thinking and an appreciation for design and layout. Also, it is likely that some components could be linked to the Australian Curriculum and this task would require knowledge of indexing methods and metadata strategies (Browne & Jermey 2007).

Third, there is potential to forge connections between new electronic resources and existing print-based materials via the new website and social media channels. As Young (2007) notes:

> 'new technologies are not a threat, but an opportunity. …The internet does not replace any media form (be it audio, video or text). But it can act as a mechanism for distribution and promotion, a venue for entertainment, a space for conversation. The internet does not do what books do, it is where the book can be reinvigorated' (p. 165).

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[2] At the time of writing it was unclear whether EditorsVic was the only advertising avenue, so no comment can be offered on the breadth of the campaign.

Finally, because online spaces are global spaces they offer the potential to move beyond Australian audiences. With English as a world language there is considerable scope for mainstream learning resources, and new markets can be developed by translating resources into other languages. Editors have a key role in maintaining the quality and clarity of content through the translation process and identifying and targeting the learning needs of new audiences.

Conclusion

Through the window of the school educational publishing sector in Australia, this discussion has shown that advances in technology have created wider opportunities for editors than ever before. These new avenues are likely to require a broader skill base coupled with a capacity and willingness to work with new formats in pursuit of diverse audiences. The sample advertisement highlights the types of knowledge and experience that may be expected of an editor of educational materials in the twenty-first century. It affirms that scope exists for editors to participate in and to embrace the opportunities of new media.

Furthermore, as education editor for *The Age* Jewel Topsfield (2012) highlights, there is increasing political pressure to improve Australian students' results in international testing. This concern is creating considerable momentum to identify and develop new avenues for teaching and learning, especially in the fundamental skills of literacy. Editors have an opportunity to address the 'whatever' attitude towards language use through helping to publish quality written and interactive resources that engage students and enhance their learning experiences and outcomes.

As a final comment, the human face underpinning the sample job advertisement also affirms that within changing work environments, publication formats and staffing arrangements, good communication and interpersonal skills remain key virtues of successful editors.

Appendix

[Company name]: Editor

- Work with a small and fun team
- Office located in groovy Fairfield - close to public transport and great coffee
- An opportunity to contribute to an exciting literacy project
- A full-time, ongoing role

[Company name] is seeking an experienced editor familiar with English or Humanities content designed for use in secondary schools.

Working in their [suburb] (Vic) office, you will be a vital contributor to an exciting online project. They are looking for someone with proven editing skills and effective project-management abilities. Ideally you will be comfortable with technology or willing to learn some new skills. The successful applicant will be responsible for managing content for an English literacy website.

About [Company name]

[Company name] is a wholly owned and operated Australian company. [List of associated companies]

The ideal candidate:

- A flexible and passionate individual who would like a varied role that stretches their skills and abilities
- Three or more years of editing experience
- Previous experience working for an educational publisher
- An interest in working on content for secondary schools
- Self-motivated and happy to work in a small in-house team
- Some experience briefing and working with freelancers
- An interest in the creation of electronic teaching resources.

What you will be doing:

- Preparing a style guide that will be applied to all web content
- Editing web content according to style
- Writing some content
- Uploading web content
- Contributing your ideas and experience to the development of the whole website concept
- Mentoring a 'baby-editor'

Remuneration is commensurate with experience.

Contact:

[Company details]

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[company name] websites were also consulted.