I write as an author of more than fifteen educational books in the field of English as a second language and literacy skills. Most of titles have been published by Pascal Press, but I have also written for Cambridge University Press both locally and internationally. My books are used in primary and secondary schools, adult English language institutions and coaching colleges.

The royalties and copyright payments from these books provide my income. As with most authors, I was not paid for my work at the time of writing. I created these works and own the copyright for them, and naturally I expect that the considerable time and effort that has gone into their creation will be rewarded with payment. My books are very widely used and photocopied in schools and adult education institutions across the country and overseas. It is heartening to think that teachers find them so useful in their classrooms, but unfortunately I cannot live on this warm feeling alone.

Over the past years, I have noticed that at times the money received via royalties for some books has gone down, but that often this has been compensated for with Copyright Agency Limited payments. This has made the hard work continue to be worthwhile.

The statutory licence arrangements in this country work so very well and CAL does an excellent job in administering payments to authors and publishers. They have just instituted a new system of direct payment which will make the system even more efficient. They do what I could not as an individual author. I am in no position to handle copyright licensing arrangements myself. I will have no way of knowing if individuals or institutions are breaching my copyright and no way of prosecuting such practices. And even with the help of my publishers, the process would appear to be very messy and difficult indeed.

Having worked in educational institutions myself as a teacher and project manager, I remember well the days when we were asked to record every copy we made from a textbook. I also remember how inaccurately this was done – and how often it was not done at all. In one place I worked the stated policy until I changed it, was to only buy one of each textbook and then to photocopy as needed with no recording of copies made. We all know that if teachers and institutions are left to judge if their use of copyright material is ‘fair use’, they will generally do so – especially if faced with the alternative of writing to get permissions from publishers and authors and paying up when asked to do so.

Schools and teachers who use copyright materials need to understand that if the system changes, they will have fewer good textbooks to use because authors and publishers will be less inclined to produce them. It is also very likely that those that are published will be considerably more expensive to purchase in order to compensate for the new arrangements. (Books sold now with free photocopying worksheets sell for about five times the price of other textbooks.)

I am currently in the process of developing two separate series for Pascal Press for which I will get a royalty share and a consequent share in any payments that come via CAL. So far I have spent the equivalent of six months full-time work on this process with no payment at all upfront. If the change being mooted had been in place before I signed up for that process, it would have become a major factor in determining my decision to become involved. The royalties alone would likely not have been adequate to cover the amount of work entailed. If they are brought in, I will almost definitely not write any more. This would end over 25 years of contributing as an author to the important educational field of language and literacy.

The statutory licence system ensures authors like me are fairly remunerated for our work so that we can continue to provide high-quality resources suited to the particular needs of Australian teachers and students. The changes being proposed will threaten this and thus diminish the educational opportunities of all.

Yours sincerely,

Kristine Brown