Inkshed

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for the Study of Writing and Reading
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Inside *Inkshed*

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Inkshed provides a forum for its subscribers to explore relationships among research, theory, and practice in language acquisition and language use. Subscribers are invited to submit informative pieces such as notices, reports, and reviews of articles, journals, books, textbooks, conferences, and workshops, as well as polemical discussions of events, issues, problems, and questions of concern to teachers in Canada interested in writing and reading theory and practice.

Inkshed is published four times during the academic year. The following is a schedule of submission deadlines and approximate publication dates:

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Editorial Inkshedding

This *Inkshed* is the inaugural issue from the Centre for the Study and Teaching of Writing at McGill University. The responsibility for editing the newsletter was passed along to us at the Inkshed 8 conference in April. We were delighted to accept the job, but the rapidity of the decision caught us somewhat off guard. We had expected to throw our hat into the editorial ring at the conference, and when all others kept their hats on we were taken aback. Now that we have worked out some of the practical implications of being hatless (hapless?) editors, we feel we should report to the community.

For one thing, who are "we"? According to the minutes of the conference, published in *Inkshed* 9.4. (June 1991), we are "the McGill 'team' " (21). Participation of the full "team" would certainly prove difficult, since there are 27 teachers attached to the Centre right now. Some are full-time, others part-time, and a few are graduate students; all are overworked, most are underpaid. Adding editorial duties to already heavy workloads would be unjust. Moreover, editing-by-committee is no mean feat, and *someone* has to make sure the newsletters are stuffed in envelopes and put in the mail. As a result, we have settled on an arrangement that should allow participation from members of the Centre and still provide continuity from issue to issue.

For the first year, at least, the two of us will oversee the publication of *Inkshed*. Ann's role as convener of the committee looking into the structure of CASWAR means that she will frequently be writing or arranging for reports on the progress of that committee's work. Anthony will act as co-editor of each of the year's four issues, with Jane Brown, Carolyn Pittenger, and Pat Dias each serving as the other co-editor for one issue. Other members of the Centre have been encouraged to write for the newsletter, and some will almost certainly become involved in editing before long.

We do not intend to make changes in the form or substance of *Inkshed*. Our editorial policy remains consistent with Jim Reither's founding vision and Kay Stewart's contribution to that vision. We could not state it better than Jim did in *Inkshed* 5.6. (December 1986):

> My idea of *Inkshed* has been...that this newsletter ought to be a "parlor" in which people can carry on their conversations about writing and reading theory and practice. It is *not* a journal, privileging text over discourse, monologue over dialogue. It never should be. It's a place where people talk with other people, collaborating with one another in the search for meaning in their fields and their worlds. It's a place for exploration, not domination. (1)

We are especially eager to promote the possibilities for dialogue that the newsletter offers, and we encourage readers to respond to the ideas they read here. By "respond," we do not mean argue only, although controversies are welcome; we envision a whole range of reaction: query, commentary, reflection, elaboration, application. Ideally, every issue will contain at least one response to something in a previous issue. (To increase the pace of the "conversation," we are considering a return to six issues per year, beginning next year. To do this, however, we will need a sufficient number of submissions.)

In keeping with our desire for discourse, rather than text, we invite exploratory, informal submissions: thoughts-in-progress, questions, problems, attempts to make sense. Naturally, we also welcome polished short essays or commentaries, but we hope the newsletter will offer a threat-free forum for speculation and inquiry. This is the place to float a new idea, to request feedback, to speak spontaneously. One specific focus for this type of writing could be the theme for upcoming conferences. Inkshed 9 (Call for Proposals in this issue) will explore the issue of textbooks. We would like to include informal commentary on that theme in the newsletter as prologue to the conference. As in the past, *Inkshed* will

publish book reviews, reports on programmes and research (including theses), and announcements about books, conferences, and other events. We hope that reports from the committee investigating our community's structure, and responses to those reports, will be a regular feature leading up to next year's conference.

We also encourage unusual submissions. For example, we would like to publish Inkshedders' poetry or short fiction from time to time. And since the field of writing and reading has become multidisciplinary, insights from allied disciplines and suggestions for reading would be most helpful.

If readers are still uncertain about what the newsletter will look like, we offer this issue as a model. In it, Ann Beer presents a collaboratively written report on the structure committee's progress; Russ Hunt continues the Inkshed 9 discussion, begun in the previous issue, with a comment on textbooks; Graham Smart joins the dialogue begun by Wayne Lucey in *Inkshed* 9.2 (Nov. 1990), and continued by Laurence Steven in *Inkshed* 9.3 (Feb. 1991); Coralie Bryant and Don Ellis describe the use of inkshedding in a conference on the future of education in the Northwest Territories; Cathy Schryer offers a book review combined with personal reflection; Nancy Carlman reviews *Editing Canadian English*; and Kay Stewart and Chris Bullock call for proposals for Inkshed 9.

Our membership in the Inkshed community is extremely important to us. Through it, we have found a place to speak and listen, to join with others in a conversation about what matters to us. Perhaps most importantly, we have found good friends and valued colleagues. As a result, we take the responsibility for this newsletter very seriously. But our Inkshed experience has always been profoundly collaborative, and we need it to remain so. Please join the conversation and send us things to publish, especially if yours is a voice we have not heard before in these pages.

Subscriptions: New and Renewed

We would like to increase the number of subscribers. Enclosed with this issue is a subscription form and a brief description of the newsletter and CASWAR. Please photocopy the sheet as many times as you need and pass it along to prospective subscribers. You can also photocopy this issue and pass it along.

Your own subscription may have lapsed. *Inkshed* subscriptions cover the academic year (September to April). If the numbers under your address on the mailing label end with 90 or 91 (e.g., 90-91), your subscription has ended; consider this a complimentary issue and renew your subscription with the enclosed form. If the numbers end with 92, you are safe until Spring, 1992. You will find a mailing label on the subscription form.

Thanks to Kay Stewart

Our experience publishing this issue has increased our already considerable respect for Kay Stewart. Participants at Inkshed 8 gave Kay the standing ovation she deserved for her job as *Inkshed* editor, but on behalf of all those not present, and with new insight into the great contribution she has made to our community, we would like to offer our deep thanks once again.

Ann Beer and Anthony Paré

Progress Report

Steering Committee for the reformulation of Inkshed/CASWAR (Canadian Association for the Study of Writing and Reading)

At the eighth Inkshed Conference, held near Montreal in April 1991, the membership decided that the time had come to consider the organization's structure and future. We feel this necessity not only because we are growing, but also because we are finding it increasingly difficult to deal with complexities of journal funding, conference organizing, and grant applications in the old pleasant, ad hoc ways. Moreover, we need to guard against an insider/outsider (or old-timer/newcomer) division that has repeatedly threatened to become a major problem. The challenge is: how do we keep all the features of Inkshed/CASWAR that have made it so welcoming and stimulating an organization for us, while moving towards a more established set of procedures and a larger membership?

Members present at Inkshed 8 nominated seven people to serve as a kind of "steering committee" – or more informally to explore ideas about the organization from their different perspectives and histories within it. The members are:

Susan Drain
Barbara Powell,
Jim Reither
Stan Straw
Wendy Strachan
Catherine Taylor
Ann Beer (co-ordinator)

Since April we have been engaged in a cross-Canada inkshedding (by fax, e-mail, post and telephone) to come up with some initial questions and position-statements. These are, of course, designed to involve all the rest of the membership (YOU!) in discussion, exploration, and further inkshedding, so that the committee begins to get a picture of what Inkshedders want to see changed/retained/adapted. Our goal is to develop ideas, with periodic progress reports like this one in each newsletter, leading up to the 1992 Inkshed Working Conference (Inkshed 9) in Banff, where the new policies will have to hammered out.

What follows is a summary, compiled by Ann but made up of seven points of view, of our discussion so far. Jim, Wendy, Catherine, Barbara, Stan, and Susan have participated in revision, as well as supplying most of the material for this report.

1.Name of the Organization

Although everyone seems to like Inkshed (the name of the Working Conference and what we do at it) CASWAR has come in for some serious criticisms. An acronym ending in WAR doesn't seem auspicious for the present or for the future. The easiest alternative, CASRAW, is equally unfortunate, and sounds (according to one committee member) like "something I would serve with sushi." Other suggestions have been made:

> **CALS:** Canadian Association for Literacy Studies – a name that emphasizes the complex nature of what we do. (This unfortunately is already in use, for the Carleton Centre for Applied Language Studies; perhaps CASL is an alternative: Canadian Association for the Study of Literacy.)
> **CARS:** Canadian Association for Rhetoric Studies – easy to remember, and useful in giving the historical connection, since rhetoric is an ancient as well as contemporary discipline.

NASLU: National Association for the Study of Literacy in Use (or words to that effect) – a name that deliberately avoids the colonial mentality by not using "Canadian," and that emphasizes literacy as an *activity*; and (a little more lightheartedly?)
CAWS: Canadian Association for Writing Studies

We need a name that identifies the organization clearly, highlights what really matters to us, is pleasant and easy to say, and doesn't seem too "offbeat" for official funding agencies (or too grand for us to live with). Not an easy task. Please submit further suggestions.

2.Principles and "vision" of the organization

The Inkshed group exists to provide systems of communication for all those interested in writing and reading theory and practice. It has developed in unique ways within its Canadian context and is now a national organization which will almost certainly increase both in size and in importance over the next decade. Does this mean that its special cooperative character will give way to a more typical hierarchical structure – or can we go on being collegial and participatory at every level? How can the organization serve the increasing numbers of people who are involved in the study of reading and writing? Can it retain the exploratory, democratic atmosphere so many of us have come to cherish, while fulfilling its responsibilities to direct its journal and newsletter, to organize its conference, and to manage its financial affairs?

The Inkshed Working Conference, which sets so much of the organization's tone and methods, is, as one committee member put it, arranged "to provide common experience as a ground for discussion; it is serious without being solemn; it attempts to be responsive and self-reflexive; moreover, it feels situated concretely, rather than abstractly, in its members." Preserving such features becomes a central concern as we try to define who we are and where we are going now.

- The organization has a unique Canadian "voice" and can provide a valuable perspective on issues of literacy of national and international importance.
- It is committed to a "bottom-up" rather than "top-down" approach to its own management, valuing non-hierarchical structures and inclusiveness.
- It is committed to radical exploration of the issues of literacy raised by its members, questioning the process by which academic orthodoxies are established and become resistant to change.
- It is concerned with community building, and with increasing communication between groups and disciplines.
- It values informality, sociability, self-reflexiveness, and an interactive approach to theory and practice.
- It is, as a matter of emphasis, dedicated to investigating social process as well as product, and is humanist and rhetorical rather than empiricist and deterministic.
- It values teaching and learning at every level.

Formalized constitutions have a way of turning organizations into conservative structures; once constituted, organizations, unlike people, often cease to be visionary and responsive to change, and instead become devoted to their own survival. Inkshed has been strong because tentative; at any moment it can act not to sustain itself. We need the tension of tentative structures to continue, developing a paradigm that emphasizes the "centredness" of different margins. One of our greatest strengths is the ability to approach questions and problems of marginalization in a systematic, reasoned, academic way, both

containing the anger that the marginalized often feel for the established centre, and allowing it powerful expression. Our constitution must, then, contain principles and structures which allow for self-criticism and the tension necessary for energy to be sustained.

3.Structures

In order to allow for fair representation, continuity, and reflective practice, we may wish to set up a permanent steering committee to enact and coordinate, but not form, the policies agreed on by members.

Our present thinking is as follows:

- create a committee of 5-7 members, starting with one (or two) one-year position(s), two (or three) two-year positions, and two (or three) three-year positions. This would create a continually self-renewing committee, with commitment and innovation in balance.
- include representation from the regions (Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, Prairies/West Coast).
- include representatives from the disciplines of English, education, and rhetoric, and from different groups, including teachers (elementary and secondary), the under-employed, and graduate students.
- make the committee representative of the organization in terms of gender and of ethnic diversity, as far as possible.
- allow no-one to serve longer than three years.
- authorize the committee to distribute information and request input in advance of the annual general meeting.
- grant the committee power to act for the membership after receiving approval to do so.
- appoint two members of the committee to coordinate financial responsibilities and records, banking and external auditing (note: we need to attend to these if we want large-scale SSHRC [Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council] support).
- set up three sub-committees whose chairperson also sits on the steering committee (Conference, Newsletter, Journal) and whose membership is also arranged to encourage new and marginal members.
- every year, re-evaluate the functioning of the organization at the AGM and in particular the tendency towards conservatism and orthodoxy which we want to resist.
- set up local networks whose members should have a constant "open line" to the steering committee and whose coordinators should be part of the steering committee. Encourage new ideas, criticisms, and other initiatives from all members at all times.
- resist the development of an inner circle or the appointing of a president; rotate responsibilities (as we do now for the conference) so that each region or group in turn conducts some of the central activities of the organization.

To a large extent, this will be possible only so long as the energetic participation of members continues, and if it seems idealistic to expect this in a more structured environment, then we need to think again. (As one committee member put it: "are we SURE we want to grow and become more formal?") Perhaps the nature of the discipline itself, and our common experience, are points in our favour – we value communication, risk-taking, and responsibility in our own classrooms and in our own writing. Without such qualities, the organization would not have existed as long as it has already.

4.Membership

In the spirit of equality which we want to maintain (or increase), a single membership category seems advisable. The dues should remain a modest amount (though perhaps slightly higher than at present), to support the newsletter and journal. Far more important than financial contributions are the contributions made by members in time and commitment – this should be encouraged in every way possible.

Institutions should be allowed to subscribe to publications, but of course cannot act as "members."

As part of the reorganization, we could seek clearer information from members: who *are* the Inkshedders in the organization now? How are they changing (in needs, tastes, work-styles, interests, experience)?

5.Conference

How can we expand the Inkshed Working Conference without losing its collegial spirit? The answer may lie in giving every participant not only the encouragement but the "obligation" to present material and to respond in a non-threatening environment. For example, we can organize the conference into small groups, focused on one of five or six closely related conference themes. Each group-member would circulate a short paper in advance, and/or give a 10 minute presentation. The groups would then come together at certain points during the conference to present a common statement in a larger forum.

There has been concern recently that certain "strong voices" (often of those in full-time academic positions) are presently too dominant, and that this has partly arisen because of the speaking arrangements made at some of the conferences held so far. A particular concern is to make the un- or under-employed and other marginal groups feel genuinely welcome, even at their very first conference. Informality and small-group settings seem most likely to make this happen, and also have the virtue of giving everyone at the conference some "familiar faces" from the very first meeting. The demand for advance commitment in the form of a brief paper or presentation would also help to ensure that all participants arrive at the conference with focus and energy.

At the same time, the conference can put greater emphasis on productive inkshedding and other kinds of process that lead directly to tangible results. Often wonderful and challenging ideas are simply lost in the flow of conversation. Without undervaluing that free, exploratory talk which we delight in, can we make our small-group sessions genuine sites of writing?

Obviously the danger of increased size is often loss of intensity, and in particular the sense of common experience that comes from all participants hearing the same discussions in each session.

Presently the Conference is tied to CCTE (Canadian Council of Teachers of English). However, we also need to consider whether this is always desirable. One interesting development, reported by an English department member, is that ACUTE (Association of Canadian University Teachers of English) is now acknowledging, even encouraging, an interest in writing theory. If we were to alternate bi-annually between CCTE and ACUTE (which meets at the Canadian Learned Societies) we would be in a powerful position to break down barriers and "teach" English department people who are just beginning to explore literacy in broader social contexts.

6.Publications

a) Journal

The journal connected with Inkshed, now provisionally called *Canadian Literacies*, is currently awaiting the organization's long-term decisions on its exact goals, style, and editorial policies. It could become the "flag-ship" of the organization, and be used by outsiders, including SSHRC, to judge the organization as a whole. Ideally the editorial policy should be the result of the collective wishes of the membership, and should offer a friendly but scholarly environment for writing on literacy issues by or about Canadians. The journal can, of course, only be as good as the contributions it receives, and the organization may well need to do more to encourage and publicize it so that appropriate contributions will come forward. (We also need to consider its relationship with the recently founded *Textual Studies in Canada.)*

One major question, on which the committee is somewhat divided, is whether the journal should strongly support the MLA, rather than APA style and philosophy, or whether it can allow room for both. As one committee member said (apologizing for slight over-simplification), "we want a journal that explores ideas, not one that reports data; we want a journal that is driven by a rhetorician's epistemology, rather than one that is driven by an empiricist's epistemology; we want a journal that understands that knowledge is made, is a process, is socially constructed, rather than a journal that believes that knowledge exists, out there, and is discovered by objective procedures." Another member writes: "I agree that it should reflect a rhetorician's epistemology ... however, confining the journal to not accepting empiricist work, it seems to me, begins to approach what we are trying to avoid – a positivist stand that suggests that we have a set of correct answers. Therefore, I think it is appropriate that the journal should at times 'report data.' ... We need to reconceptualize 'data' in its (their) widest sense. I think that the dichotomization of the world into rhetorician vs. empiricist is not very productive. We cannot be inclusive if we (at the onset) make this kind of 'definition' of ourselves."

This is clearly an important issue which needs further discussion.

6.b) Newsletter

The newsletter is the one part of Inkshed/CASWAR that everyone feels is working well and should continue largely as it is. (All credit to former editors!) Whereas the journal is the more measured, scholarly part of the "conversations" among us, the result of research, reflection, and considered positions, the newsletter is the informal, "chatty" forum for all Inkshedders, old and new. It is especially important for those voices not typically represented in the journal – people whose positions, commitments, and lifestyles do not give them the privilege of time to prepare long scholarly papers. The "rather unpolished, improvised, responsive" tone of the newsletter is seen as its great strength. The newsletter confirms our identity, maintains connections across a large and difficult geographic mass, and opens up paths of change. The future of the organization, whatever it is, can only be enhanced by maintaining the newsletter as an exploratory and process-oriented publication.

As you can see this is only a very preliminary and general statement. Please bring your inkshedding energies to bear on the subject and send material to contribute to the discussion.

Ann Beer
(for the Committee)

R Texts Us?

More than a year ago, there was a forum in *English Journal* (October 1989) on the role of textbooks in secondary English. It was called "The Textbook Gap: A Teacher-Author-Publisher Dialogue," and included contributions by Hans Guth, Bob Boynton, and James Squire. I remembered it recently – at the Inkshed meeting in April, in fact, while we discussed the role of textbooks and texts – and I went back to find it. When I found it, I realized that I had drafted a response on the back of the photocopy given me by a friend who didn't know I subscribe to *EJ*, and who thought I might find it interesting. I did indeed. I had never actually sent the response (it wasn't quite finished), but since the Inkshed meeting, I've been working on it. Here it is. Maybe it can start us toward our next meeting, next spring in Banff.

As pleased as I was to read Hans Guth's and Bob Boynton's attacks on textbooks, and as fervently as I agree with their criticisms, I think they've missed the most important point. To argue, as they do, that textbooks are bad may be largely correct, but leaves it open to Jim Squire to exhort us to make them better. As he does. All we have to do, he says, is to pull up our socks as a profession, and write some good textbooks.

But it's not that simple. I'd contend that it's not that textbooks are bad, but that the textbook itself is bad. I've written in the margin of Hans Guth's contribution, "you say there are bad textbooks, but even good ones are bad." Like any texts, what makes textbooks what they are isn't their features, but their function, their social position, what they're used for. Textbooks are the texts which are used as sources or repositories of "The Truth" in situations where The Truth is institutionally pre-determined. (That's why making literary texts into textbooks – imagine The Norton *Satanic Verses* – so thoroughly debilitates them.) It is the institution of textbooks more than anything else ("textbooks are the focus of more than seventy-five percent of a student's time" [EJ Forum, 13]) which renders written text unquestionable in the eyes of most students, which puts it out of the reach of dialogic or instrumental response, and which urges us and our students to think of it – to think of all written (or at least printed) texts – as unauthored and unsituated, omnipotent, omniscient, and decontextualized. The Truth.

Pick up any textbook you know – pick the best one you know – and read any passage of extended discourse out of it aloud. Listen to the omniscient tone, the firm certainty, the lack of acknowledgment of obligation and response to colleagues and predecessors (if a student did it we'd call it plagiarism), the absence of provisionality, disagreement, uncertainty. Listen, that is, to the profoundly monologic rhetoric which regularly suffuses the discourse of even the best scholars, the most skillful writers, the most sensitive editors, when put in the rhetorical position of textbook author.

And then consider what happens even to the tentative or hesitant, exploratory or risky rhetoric of the books or articles that have illuminated and challenged and excited you, when you frame them as required reading and your students read them accordingly. It's no surprise (or shouldn't be) that the teachers in the AAP study reported in the Forum agreed that "texts do not teach children how to evaluate the quality of information they received from content, and that textbooks tend to teach children what to think, not how to think"(13). It is the institution of textbook which so efficiently precludes those things. A text written by Guth and published by Boynton would push them aside just as efficiently. The surface – what someone in that passage is calling "content" – might be different, but the message would be the same. I've been involved in producing textbooks that were going to be different, but, as it turned out, never were. And even if they had been, they wouldn't be, once they were framed in the classroom.

There is increasing evidence that we need to help students learn to treat written text as dialogue, as tentative, provocative, written in response to other texts and in anticipation of response; to help students see the literature of a field as a conversation and the author as one speaker among others. We will continue to find it very difficult to do that as long as we continue to consecrate one text as *the* text.

We can wean ourselves from that practice. There's no intrinsic reason – it's not even very efficient – that all students have to read the same text. We could send students to libraries or classroom bookshelves to find what they need in a range of books and articles; we could begin to engage them in the discourse of professions rather than issuing them uniform predigested gobbets of information. We can use the good textbooks out there as library resources, sending students to a range of them, to use them the way they're best used, as one presentation among many of a compendium of basic, socially negotiated agreements about what's true and what we can work with, written from a particular point of view. We could begin by having children read their own books instead of uniform basals – or even uniform editions of Maurice Sendak or Chris van Allsburg. We could continue, later, by helping them find books they (and maybe even we) want to recommend to their peers. But we'll find such initiatives facing an even more important obstacle then pedagogical conservatism: they'll be facing the entrenched financial and political power of the textbook publishers.

Russell A. Hunt
St. Thomas University
Fredericton

A Song of Innocence and Experience?

A Response to Laurence Steven

In the February 1991 issue of *Inkshed*, Laurence Steven, in critiquing an earlier piece by Wayne Lucey, presents us with a Manichaean vision of the rhetorical universe. On the one hand, we have the dark, satanic mills of industry, business, and government – where genres such as the report, the case study, and the proposal are occupational hazards lying in wait to enchain writers in monologic "discourses of passivity and subordination." In this dismal world, writing instructors such as myself employ genres as narrow, static devices for indoctrinating writers into states of being devoid of intelligence or imagination – all of this, somehow, under the banner of cost-effectiveness.

In contrast, we have the Elysian fields of literary studies, where George Walley, Laurence Steven, and other cohorts (following in the tradition of Matthew Arnold and F.R. Leavis) lead students, hand in hand, in the innocent pursuit of truth, beauty, and personal transformation. In this world of dialogic discourse, with Bakhtin whispering promises of heteroglossia and polyphony from around every corner, students experience "exploratory, heuristic encounters of language" that lead to self-realization.

To be frank, I find this dichotomy stereotypical. Ironically, Laurence's commentary on Wayne Lucey's piece has the patronizing, monologic tenor of judgement and sermon; there's precious little that suggests an invitation to dialogue. More specifically, I think the dichotomy raises questions, first about the role of the English teacher as truth-bearer and agent of transformation and, second, about the reality of workplace genres.

What exactly is the nature of the psychological/spiritual transformation that Laurence engenders in his students? Is it an ongoing therapeutic experience, such as that orchestrated by analysts using Freudian, Jungian, Adlerian or Rogerian methods? Or is it, rather, an epiphany – a sudden spiritual awakening? And what is Laurence's role as agent of transformation? As he leads people through the "realizing process of language and imagination," is he acting as therapist or shaman, prophet or priest? Finally, what preparatory therapeutic or spiritual training is necessary for this role? I would assume that such training must go beyond acquiring a Ph.D. in English literature. My own experience studying and teaching in English departments tells me that on the whole – in terms of integrity, self-awareness, and treatment of colleagues – English faculty are very much like people I've worked with elsewhere, neither noticeably better nor worse.

In talking about "the common genres" of the workplace, Laurence describes types of discourse that have the air of one-dimensional cardboard cut-outs, figments of a textbook writer's imagination. If he were to look closely at real genres in workplace settings, he would see something very different. He would see discourse communities inventing the specific genres they need for enabling effective writing and reading. He would see genres that are, in effect, broad knowledge-building strategies – heuristics for enhancing collaboration among community members. In fact, some of the key contributions to genre theory are being made by researchers looking at the textual and contextual dimensions of workplace genres. Here I'm referring to people such as Charles Bazerman, Lucille McCarthy, Carolyn Miller, Jack Selzer, Greg Myers, Karlyn Campbell, Kathleen Jamieson, Greg Myers, John Swales, Stephen Doheny-Farina, and Dorothy Winsor; and closer to home, Cathy Schryer, Jane Ledwell-Brown, Anthony Paré, and Judy Segal.

I wrote the passage above in a pique of temper after first reading Laurence's piece. And as I read it over months later, I recognize that it's certainly no more an invitation to dialogue than was his commentary. But I feel little inclined to revise it. Sometimes a feisty monologue is just easier and, in the short run at least, more satisfying.

Upon reflection, however, I want to underscore the fact that our Inkshed community includes, among others, people working in the field of literary studies and people whose research focuses on writing in workplace settings. Our dialogue – our friendship, conversation, and collaboration – has allowed us to learn from one another. Any proposed moral dichotomy between writing in the academic world and writing in the workplace, apart from being fundamentally false, threatens to undermine this dialogue.

A final note to Laurence Steven: If you'd like to transform our discourse into true dialogue in future issues of *Inkshed*, I'd be delighted to join you.

Graham Smart
Bank of Canada

Inkshed Comes to the North

We thought readers might be interested in our attempt to simulate the Inkshed conference pattern of written and shared response at a recent education conference in the Northwest Territories. "Learning in the North – the Next 20 Years" was a privately-sponsored invitational forum intended to draw together all elements of the teaching and learning community in the South Slave Region: politicians, parents, teachers, students, young, old, in the system and out of it. We hoped to lift participants out of their day-to-day conceptual framework by having Ruben Nelson, a well-known Canadian futurist, as one key-note speaker, and at the same time to keep things practical by hearing from the Deputy Minister of Education and a representative panel from the group. The forty participants were engaged individually and collaboratively in listening, discussing, and writing.

We particularly hoped that the responses written after plenary or small group sessions would result in a rich sharing of opinion and a body of work we could then publish in some form. The purpose of the "inkshedding" was to help participants reflect, explore, and articulate their thinking on issues raised. We hoped that the ensuing exchange of these pieces of writing would stimulate and enrich the conversation taking place.

To facilitate this process, we taped the first day's responses to the wall, but the amount of attention these had was disappointing. The second day we used an idea from an early Inkshed conference and brought two PC's to the room where responses were keyed in as soon as editors were finished with them. These were distributed as results of "Inkshed #2," etc. Participants seemed to read and build on these with considerably more enthusiasm.

The event occurred over two days: it should have been longer. Unlike Inkshed, this was not a group necessarily committed to writing as a way of sharing or exploring ideas. We had some self-conscious, nervous writers among us and it took a day to get many loosened up. In fact, while some submitted no writing at all, some of the most effective writing came from participants who sent in post-conference submissions. Not surprisingly, the most ardent writing came from high school students. What most interested us, though, was the increasing seriousness with which the participants regarded the activity of inkshedding. By the end of the conference, inkshedding time was less disrupted by conversation or trips out of the room, with more people engaged in the act of writing. We speculate that a third day would have produced even greater commitment to this process and richer written response.

Perhaps the greatest difference the approach made at the forum was that writers had to form their own views and speak to them, which gave a potentially unfocussed event surprising power. Consensus on needed direction for education in the north was more easily achieved. And afterwards, we had the basis of a text we've now provided to participants, the Minister, school boards, and libraries, which we hope will help to keep the conversation going.

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The Man from Gandalf:

A Review and Reflection

Recently at a banquet at my son's techno-camp, I listened to one of Canada's corporate elite explain an important (unbeknownst to him I'm sure) rhetorical and perhaps ethical principle, a principle that helped me clarify my own reaction to Christine Barabas' *Technical Writing in a Corporate Culture: A Study of the Nature of Information* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1990). Barabas' detailed and methodical empirical study will probably be an important influence on research into scientific and technical writing. But I found it infuriating at times, and it wasn't until I listened to the man from Gandalf that I began to understand the nature of my response.

The man from Gandalf told us the story of his company's corporate merger with another company. Gandalf, as many in Canadian universities know, refers to those seemingly magical blue boxes that connect our computer terminals to mainframes. For over a decade Gandalf has been in the business of creating local area networks. The company prided itself on its personal contacts with its customers. Rather than develop extensive new technology, the company concentrated on what it did best – it assisted its customers by catering to their local area network needs. In rhetorical terms, Gandalf knew its audience. Yet during the last few years, Gandalf's profits have been shrinking. Its customers no longer found local area networks sufficient – they wanted systems that connected local networks to larger global networks.

Gandalf's solution has been to create the technology capable of linking local and large scale networks and to merge with a company that already controls one such network. The man from Gandalf's story was interesting, but what was even more interesting was the change in corporate policy that accompanied the merger. Gandalf no longer sees itself as simply responding to its customers' needs because, in this ever-changing world of information transfer, companies like Gandalf have to lead rather than follow their customers. In other words, customers or audiences aren't always right and don't always know what they need, at least according to the man from Gandalf. This raises a serious rhetorical and ethical question: when does educating customers about new technology become persuading them to buy into technology that they don't need?

The Gandalf parable brings me to my reaction to Christine Barabas' study of the nature of information in progress reports in a Research and Development organization. This study begins by locating itself among the studies examining "real-world" writing (i.e., writing outside of academia). Its review of literature is extensive – it discusses and basically ridicules many of the current, academic views of writing and the assumptions about good writing underlying such views. On a more positive note, it focuses on emerging views of writing as a social activity, i.e., writing exists in a dialectical relation to organizations as it both influences and is influenced by an organization's culture.

Specifically, the study examines what types of information researchers (writers) intend to include in their progress reports; the types of information actually contained in such reports; and the type of information that readers expect. One of the main assumptions is that an effective report can be determined by the extent to which there is a "match between the writer's *intentions*, the *text*, and the intended readers' *expectations* " (xxxvii, Barabas' emphasis). Barabas includes a variety of methods – surveys, discourse-based interviews, text analysis, and context-based experimental studies. She claims to focus on the interrelationships of writers, texts, and readers; the content of written texts rather than their structural or stylistic features; and the dynamics of communication in a real-world rather than an academic setting.

The study itself consisted of three parts. Phase 1 involved a survey and interviews that examined the general nature of progress reports as perceived by readers and writers (identified by their supervisors [readers] as either good or poor writers) in the R & D community she investigated. This data resulted in a classification scheme used to analyze the different types of information in progress reports. In Phase 2, using a classification system based on the binary opposition between unprocessed versus processed information, Barabas classified information according to the five following categories: What I did, How I did it, What I got, What it means, What it is good for. Phase 3 consisted of 2 experimental tasks designed to triangulate or cross check her findings. In essence she asked her subjects to identify important versus unimportant information and to identify information as data, results, or conclusions (a hierarchy is assumed here).

Her results are interesting. Better writers appear to understand their readers' expectations more accurately than weaker writers. They are more confident; they have a different writing process – spend more time thinking about the consequences of their research and more time planning and revising; they work deductively rather than inductively; they are more aware of how their readers will use the reports. Better writers are also more in accord with their readers *re* the nature of data, results, and conclusions – although discrepancies exist here between what counts as data and results and what constitutes results and conclusions. Progress reports in this organization are not simply accounts of work done but accounts containing "processed information" – results and conclusions needed to see the bigger picture.

The implications of her study are fairly clear: organizations need to establish their expectations (mentors, models, guidelines, etc.). Technical writing teachers need to set up courses which emphasize "contextual flexibility." Students "need to know...how to read and analyze an organization's culture and community – and how to accurately judge what constitutes "good" writing within that organizational setting" (282).

There are many things about this study that I like. It tries to be "organic" in Barabas' terms. She tries to incorporate her subjects' own terms, their own world view into the analysis (Phase 2); she cross checks constantly by comparing one set of data against another set of data. It is a convincingly in-depth study. She also grounds her methods and analysis in specific examples. She illustrates, for example, what she means by "data" or "results." In fact, I learned a lot from Barabas.

But after spending almost a week ploughing through this study, I found myself annoyed. The man from Gandalf helped me sort through some of my reactions.

Barabas castigates most of the current research in composition and rhetoric and technical writing. In a chapter on "Academic Views of Writing: Product, Process, and Context," as might be expected, she opts for a "context" approach. I have no quarrel with her position, but the way she cuts out her ground is disturbing. She lambastes virtually all research – often in dismissive terms. Researchers have studied student writing because of its "sheer ease" (46). Neither the product view of writing, process views, nor the cognitive views have produced any valid research. Academic writing is not real-world writing. Even those who attempt to provide real-world or "contextual" assignments are damned since such assignments are games of "rhetorical make-believe" (51). Damned if you do and damned if you don't.

This analysis is disturbing because, in denying the validity of all such research, she cuts herself off from much of what might explain some of her findings. For example, some of her findings actually substantiate Flower and Hayes' research that better writers are aware of large scale rhetorical concerns (audience and purpose) and consequently possess better planning and revision strategies.

Also, she is guilty of alienating her audience, something which she herself acknowledges is a characteristic of weak writers and something the man from Gandalf wouldn't do. In her introduction she includes a series of memos produced by a neophyte engineer and his supervisor. The supervisor de-

mands revisions because the original memo seems unaware of its political consequences within the organization. Much of the literature review seems to me to be guilty of this same lack of awareness. Why should I believe a researcher who castigates her own roots and seems unaware of the enormous difficulties endured by those who attempt to teach technical and scientific writing?

Other paradoxes perplexed me. For example, in her conclusion Barabas asks us to rethink the concept of "information." She suggests, in fact, that the concept exists on a continuum between unprocessed and processed information. "Unprocessed information is the result," she suggests, "mainly of describing and narrating, of simply selecting and recording that which exists." On the other hand, "Processed information is the result of analyzing, deducing...evaluating that which exists, and speculating about that which can, may, should, or should not exist." Consequently, she suggests, "the first, unprocessed information, serves primarily as documentation of experience, as history. The second, processed information, has the predictive and creative power to alter theory, direct the course of experience, and pave new paths for future research – to create history" (275). It seems to me that when one documents either historical or scientific events one is also creating history. She is pointing to a central difference in the two types of information (data versus conclusion), but it is not until we look at her own central conclusion that another and more sensible explanation emerges.

Barabas' central finding is that better writers are more capable of matching their intentions with their texts and with the expectations of their readers. These writers know their contexts well, they share a great deal of tacit knowledge with their readers and they know that in this corporate culture their readers do not want data (records of events) so much as results and conclusions – interpretations of events, implications of research programs, reasons to continue (or discontinue) programs – in other words, already constructed arguments that supervisors can use with their own managers. Results and conclusions are, in fact, inherently more rhetorical, more persuasive than data. They reflect careful thought about readers and their purposes.

However, this returns me to my central dilemma in reading Barabas' study. In her introduction, she refers to one of the greatest failures in technical communication – especially progress report writing – in this century: the Challenger tragedy. Several engineers (writers) wrote clear, articulate progress reports warning management (readers) of the inevitability of a disaster. Were their progress reports failures because they failed to match with their readers' expectations? Barabas' model does not assist technical and scientific writers in addressing the problem of poor readers or inadequate genres. Is the status quo always right? How do writers change readers' expectations?

The man from Gandalf knows that his customers are not always right; he knows that he can persuade them to move towards new technology if he frames his arguments in terms that represent their possible future needs. He aims to go beyond their expectations. This brings us back to the man from Gandalf's ethical problem: when does educating customers about new technology become persuading them to buy into technology that they don't need? But, at least, he recognizes that we live in a world where writers/researchers must assume some responsibility for changing readers' expectations, for possibly informing readers of unexpected bad news. Barabas' study examines the status quo from a fundamentally positivistic perspective despite its claim to study the dialectical interaction between writers and their contexts.

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Review of *Editing Canadian English*

Prepared for the Freelance Editors' Association of Canada (FEAC) by Lydia Burton, Catherine Cragg, Barbara Czarnecki, Sonia Kuryliw Paine, Susan Pedwell, Iris Hosse Phillips, Katharine Vanderlinden.
Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1987, 205 pages, $16.95

Editing Canadian English is a combination style guide and handbook, but it is not comprehensive: it gives examples and suggestions for solving typical Canadian editorial problems and suggests that readers use either British or American references for others. The book is described by its preparers as a "reference work that rarely dictates but instead aims to help its readers make sensible editorial choices."

Although the book is not new, it adds important information to what we know about the editing conventions Canadians prefer. I also think it is unlikely that many post-secondary teachers are familiar with it because it does not fit into the category of an academic handbook. It is based partly on responses to a questionnaire sent to members of the FEAC and the International Association of Business Communicators (most respondents had more than five years' experience writing and editing in Canada) and partly on research like Robert Ireland's survey of Canadian spelling and on publications, including those of the Canadian Standards Association (for SI symbols).

Therefore, the book's suggestions are descriptive, rather than prescriptive, of Canadian practice. Chapters cover spelling, compound words and hyphens, capitalization, abbreviations and symbols, punctuation, French in an English context, Canadianization, avoiding bias, measurement, documentation, and editors and the law – not comprehensively but specifically with reference to Canadian usage.

The last chapter is a glossary of Canadian terms – for example, extra-billing, Green Paper, Inuit, Learned Societies, Metis – and lists of governors general (the book recommends that the title not be capitalized unless it's followed by the person's name), provincial courts, native nations and bands, and daily newspaper names.

An appendix describes the process of collecting and collating the responses to the questionnaire, a fascinating exploration of the vagaries and inconsistencies of Canadian conventions. As Margaret Wente, editor of *Report on Business Magazine* wrote, the book is:

> an intelligent, thoughtful, and indispensable guide. It's about time we had a reference that addresses Canadian idiosyncrasies; this book does so with great good sense.

The necessary index is comprehensive and useful.

I noticed as I wrote this review that I made decisions about spelling, punctuation, and grammar based on the Canadian preferences detailed in this book, for example, which "practice" to use, whether or not to use the acronym "FEAC," whether to put the comma inside or outside the quotation marks, and how to use "that" and "which." The compilers' description of this last distinction is the briefest and clearest I've seen: use "that" with restrictive clauses and "which" with non-restrictive clauses (examples of both types of clauses are given); certainly Fowler's comprehensive explanation allows more variation, but it confuses rather than clarifies.

The book will be particularly helpful for instructors who are convinced that certain prescriptions in their American-published handbooks are not "right" for their Canadian contexts. "Contexts" is the privotal word here, since the guide makes clear that writers must keep their contexts in mind (as well as their audiences and purposes) when making editing decisions such as the following:

- using a "u" in "favourite"?
- capitalizing the first word after a colon? (Always, or only if what follows the colon is a sentence?)
- using closed or open punctuation?
- hyphenating two words, writing them together as one, or leaving them separated by a space?
- using a comma before "and" in a series?
- using single or double quotation marks?
- including the accent in Montreal?
- capitalizing "West Coast"?

The guide gives reasons for choosing among correct alternatives in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, such as those above, depending on the contexts of the writing.

I recommend this book as a useful addition to the writing instructor's shelf, next to favourite style guides, handbooks, and dictionaries.

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"...literacy is a function of culture, social experience, and sanction. Literacy education begins in the ideas of the socially and economically dominant class and it takes the forms of socially acceptable subjects, stylistically permissible forms, ranges of difference or deviation, baselines of gratification. Becoming literate signifies in large part the ability to conform or, at least, to appear conformist. The teaching of literacy, in turn, is a regulation of access" (19).

"...literacy is a system of oppression that works against entire societies as well as against certain groups within given populations and against individual people. The third world is oppressed by the system of literacy of the first world; ghetto blacks are oppressed by the American system of literacy education; and a second-grade girl is oppressed by a teacher who fails to understand the craziness of the spelling of vocabulary words. Literacy oppresses, and it is less important whether or not the oppression is systematic and intentional, though often it is both, than that it works against freedom. Thus, the questions of literacy are questions of oppression; they are matters of enforcement, maintenance, acquiescence, internalization, revolution. Which is to say that when societies dissolve the forms of oppression against their own citizens and against other societies, then they will dissolve the questions of literacy also" (64).

J. Elspeth Stuckey. *The Violence of Literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann, 1991.

Call for Proposals: Inkshed 9

Textual Practices: Problems and Possibilities

Banff, Alberta, May 3-6, 1992

At Inkshed 9 we will focus on questions concerning the status texts should have in our courses, given (1) current arguments about canon-formation and about the nature of form and meaning; and (2) the structures within which texts are composed, published, and distributed.

This focus arises out of Nan Johnson's talk at Inkshed 8 on "The Rhetoric Anthology and Its Use in Writing Courses" (for a summary and responses, see *Inkshed* 9.4, June 1991). Nan posed two questions for research:

- "With what we are coming to know about the socially-constructed nature of meaning, the conventional nature of form, and the problems of an imposed canon, can we continue to use texts like these?"

- "Can we use anthologies of any kind without somehow implying that stable rhetorical standards must be met if writing is to be "good" or "effective" OR that certain ideas are better stuff for writing and thinking than other ideas? In other words, can we require an anthology without imposing a privileged canon of some variety on our students?"

Proposals might also address questions such as these:

- Can the way that we use texts in the classroom compensate for, alleviate, or overcome any difficulties inherent in the texts themselves?
- Are certain kinds of texts more appropriate for our classes than others?
- To what extent are reading/writing texts (such as handbooks, rhetorics, and anthologies) shaped by the demands of the publishing industry?
- What other constraints (such as cost, availability, copyright) shape our textual practices?
- What light does experience as a producer of texts throw on this issue?
- What is the history of this issue? Why has the current pattern of textbook use developed?
- Are there cultural differences in text use in classrooms? What are they? Is the Canadian situation special in any way?
- What are the alternatives to courses with teacher-chosen texts?

Guidelines: This is a small, informal working conference – a maximum of 55 people meeting together in a series of sessions to explore their areas of agreement and disagreement about reading and writing. We therefore encourage 10-minute position papers and research reports, panel discussions,