Inkshed

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Co-Editors

James Brown, Mary-Louise Craven, Tom Greenwald, Jan Rehner,
Ron Sheese, John Spencer, Leslie Sanders and Gail Vanstone
from the Writing Programmes at York University

(including the Faculty of Arts' Centre for Academic Writing, The Computer-Assisted Writing Centre, and Atkinson College's Essay Tutoring Centre)

% Mary-Louise Craven
530 Scott Library
York University, 4700 Keele Street,
North York, Ontario M3J 1P3
email: inkshed@yorku.ca
Fax: 416-736-5464

Consulting Editors	
Phyllis Artiss Memorial University Coralie Bryant South Slave Divisional Board of Education, N.W.T. Susan Drain Mount Saint Vincent University Lester Faigley University of Texas Judy Segal University of British University Russell A. Hunt St. Thomas University	Neil Besner University of Winnipeg Wayne Lucey Assumption Catholic High School Burlington, ON Richard M. Coe Simon Fraser University James A. Reither St. Thomas University Graham Smart Bank of Canada

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.

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Canadian Caucus at CCCC in Washington

All those heading to Washington for the CCCC-don't forget to come to the Wilson Room of the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Washington, from 6:45 - 7:45 on Thursday March 23. What follows is a brief description of the Canadian Caucus sessions submitted by Anthony ParŽ:

1. CC at CCCC I'll report on result of a "paired" course, in which I taught a section of first-year comp to students all registered in a European history course. I hope to compare results of history students registered in both classes with results of students registered in history alone.

   Henry Hubert
   University College of the Cariboo

2. Twice now I have taught "Advanced Composition" in a language laboratory, using a system of networked computers linked to a central console, and individual electronic mail accounts. The experience has significant

differences in set-up and results from those reported of other computer writing classrooms, but is still worth doing.

Susan Drain
Mount Saint Vincent University

3. When the College's Art Education Division was threatened with closure last spring, we mounted a two-day letter writing campaign. Over 300 letters, as well as hundreds of postcards, were hand delivered by human chain from the College to the Legislature. The project connected the writing programme with the College as a whole, and successfully merged art and writing--together with a good bit of lunacy--with political action. I shall, of course, come with pictures. (The performance artist, dressed as Queen Elizabeth, who declaims the importance of the arts from the steps of the Legislature is splendid.)

Kenna Manos
Nova Scotia College of Art and Design

4. The teaching idea I would like to describe is, in fact, conservative(in the non- political sense of that word). It involves preserving the dialectic between spoken and written discourse. When a student who is contemplating a writing assignment comes into the Writing Lab, our conversation begins with connecting ourselves to the subject matter on the human level of memory and experience. Then I begin a more structured Socratic type of questioning to lead the student's mind towards a focused and logical approach to the subject. I usually take notes on the student's responses and give him/her these notes at the end of the conference. The same process can be used in small groups in the writing classroom. When students are at the prewriting stage, they can question one another in this same matter and take notes on responses(after some instruction on how to do it and why). Finally, having students read their finished essays aloud to the class with no ulterior motive--simply for enjoyment--can further maintain the balance between the oral and the written.

Roberta Lee
University of New Brunswick - St. John

5. Recent calls within the field of professional and organizational writing have argued for the need to include political and cultural critique within ethnographic and "on-site" research and pedagogy. This presentation responds to that call by arguing that the not-for- profit sector, as a dynamic mix of ideological and political action and everyday business practices, can offer teachers and researchers of "workplace writing" a rich and provocative ethnographic resource. By recognizing the unique and diverse organizational contexts not-for-profits work within, we can begin to develop important ways of integrating and addressing cultural and political issues within our composition scholarship.

Brenton Faber
University of Utah

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Inkshed Publications

As you know, membership in CASLL allows you to receive, each year, the Inkshed Newsletter and two volumes put out by Inkshed Publications. We've had quite a number of requests for information on how to order individualcopies of the monographs for friends, libraries, research associates, andothers interested in the series.

The following monographs are currently available:

WRITING INSTRUCTION IN CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES, by Roger Graves

CONTEXTUAL LITERACY: WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM, edited by Catherine Schryer and Laurence Steven

Individual copies of these books can be ordered from the Canadian Council of Teachers of English Language Arts (CCTELA) at the following address:

The Canadian Council of Teachers of English Language Arts (CCTELA)
c/o Ray Lavery and Marita Watson
340 Education Bldg.
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, MB
R3T 2N2

The cost for each volume is $16.95.

Libraries may purchase the books either from CCTELA or from John Coutts Library Services. Your library probably subscribes to their catalogue. Libraries may get the books at a slightly discounted rate from Coutts. The address is:

John Coutts Library Services Ltd.
6900 Kinsmen Court
P.O. Box 1000
Niagara Falls, Ontario
L2E 7E7

Your library can also set up a standing order with John Coutts Library Services for all Inkshed Publications' books. This year's monographs will include a book on gender and academic writing and a book on the rhetoric of Kenneth Burke.

We hope that you have found these books useful in your own work. Please support the continued publication of these monographs by encouraging your library to purchase them.

If you would like any more information concerning Inkshed Publications, contact any member of the editorial committee listed below. Also, for anyone on the list who is not a CASLL member and who has not seen the books, I would be happy to forward a table of contents for each of them to you upon request.

Inkshed Publications Editors:
Stan Straw, Neil Besner, Pat Sadowy, Laura Atkinson, Sandy Baardman

340 Education Bldg.
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3T 2N2
Phone: 204-474-9034
FAX: 204-275-5962
baardmn@ccm.umanitoba.ca

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What Happens After You Say, "Please Go to the Writing Centre."

Jan Rehner, Centre for Academic Writing

Dear Inkshedders,

A few months ago, a colleague at York who teaches history and is very supportive of writing programmes confessed that he had no clear idea of what students actually do, or of what instructors actually do during one-to-one tutoring sessions. I wrote the following article in an effort to answer his questions--I hope you might find it interesting to read my response, perhaps to add to it, compare it to your own approach, or pass it on to your own colleagues who are curious about how some of us, some of the time, teach the writing process. . . . . .

First, let me try to anticipate a few basic questions you might have about how the Arts Centre for Academic Writing is structured. CAW is an autonomous teaching unit within the Faculty of Arts with its own tenure stream. Our mandate is to teach writing across the curriculum to students who enroll voluntarily. Faculty may recommend--even urge--that their students attend, but enrolment is not mandatory, nor does CAW report back to faculty on a student's progress in any formal way. Students improve their writing skills by working on papers assigned to them in their Arts courses. Although the Arts writing programme is varied, our main form of instruction is one-to-one. Finally, the CAW faculty is a mix of full and part-time instructors, the majority of whom have been with the Centre for at least ten years and most of whom also teach discipline-based courses in the Faculty. We do not use peer tutors, though each year we do have a professional development programme for about a dozen Teaching Assistants who are assigned to CAW from a range of academic departments.

Many of my colleagues outside the Arts Centre for Academic Writing sometimes confess that they have no clear image of what happens once their students enroll for one-to-one writing instruction. How, they ask, does one-to-one teaching differ from the individual conferences they often hold with students during office hours? Why, they wonder, do some students already enrolled at the Centre still hand in flawed assignments and how can course directors and writing instructors work together to help students articulate their ideas in clear and persuasive ways?

Perhaps context is the most significant difference between one-to-one tutoring sessions and the individual conferences which many faculty have with students in their discipline courses. While instructors and students in the latter instance share a frame of reference grounded in the content of a particular course, the context of the writing instructor is grounded in the writing process as it applies to all of the student's courses. For example, while students in my own Arts courses will often use office hours to ask me to clarify a particular assignment or read an initial thesis, their questions are invariably focused on how to express the content of the single course we share and on determining what I will be looking for when I evaluate their papers. In the Centre for Academic Writing, however, I am very seldom dealing with my own assignments and I am not likely to be grading the final essay produced. Thus students can be much freer in expressing their concerns about writing for a particular course (or instructor), about the differences between writing a history paper and an English paper, and about the individualized process they actually engage in

when they write.

The foregrounding of the writing process is also, I think, vital to the special context provided by one-to-one tutoring. Students who come to me in the Centre expect me to be an expert in writing; they do not expect me to necessarily be an expert in sociology or philosophy or geography. In other words, I can help the student learn strategies for generating ideas, for developing their ideas in analytical ways and for communicating their ideas clearly, but the student is essentially the "expert" in terms of content. This shift in status can be extremely empowering for students, but while it happens often and almost necessarily in one-to-one tutoring, it seldom happens during individual conferences with students in my own course. I teach the course; I grade their papers. No matter how earnestly I try to empower them, to convince them that I know the content of the course but not their interpretations of it, that structural reality is still there.

It is much more difficult to foreground process when I am dealing with students in my own course, because they know that I know what might be missing in terms of content. So, if one of those students brings me a draft and I suggest that the thesis is not clear, the student is often in some doubt as to what that suggestion might mean. Is this a writing problem, or a content problem? Do I have problems with how the thesis is phrased or with the argument of the thesis? We all know, of course, how closely form and content overlap, but I find myself inevitably teaching content when I have conferences with the students in my course. In the Centre, the student and I still talk about what the student wants to write, but how to write it, or discover it, or organize it takes precedence more easily because I am not perceived by the student as having a dual and potentially confusing role. In other words, my responsibility, clearly seen I think by both participants, is to teach a range of writing, reading, and thinking strategies that will help the student not only with the assignment at hand but also with future assignments and assignments in other courses and disciplines.

In the Centre, I need to diagnose the particular process a student engages in when she writes, make that process, with its strengths and weaknesses, explicit to the student, and determine with her a set of writing priorities and strategies that will help her gain more control over or at least comfort with that process as it is applied to a range of academic disciplines over a period of time. It would be nice if the writing process were simple or if every student wrote the same way or if every discipline had the same methodology. Then I could be relatively assured that the advice I give to students writing assignments in my own discipline course could be generalized to all their other courses. Since none of this is so, one-to-one instruction tailors writing priorities and problem-solving strategies to individual student needs. This strikes me as a very different teaching task than giving the same general advice about, say, developing a thesis to large numbers of students. What works for one student may not work for another. There are just too many kinds of theses and too many styles for developing one. To help students write clearly and critically in the short time allowed between all their assignments in all their courses during an academic year, I have to know what strategies they are already using, what is working and what is not working in the writing process, what strategies may need to be learned or altered, which strategies can be transferred across disciplines, and whether the student understands differences in methodology across disciplines.

If I am doing my job and all of this exciting stuff is being communicated, how is it that students enrolled in the Centre might still be submitting flawed papers to their course instructors? Well, first, and most obviously, it takes time to master the complexities of the writing process. There are no quick fixes. Secondly, in our teaching at the Centre, my colleagues and I usually give priority to high level thinking tasks such as analysis and organization before discussing patterns of error at the sentence level. For this reason, grammar is usually not a central concern until an individual has satisfactorily completed the larger tasks of an assignment. It would be easy for us to edit such essays but then we would not be teaching students how to write independently nor would we be ensuring that the ownership of the paper remain with the student. Further, in setting writing priorities, it would be irresponsible of me to spend an hour on teaching subject/verb agreement if the larger problem experienced by the student was failure to understand the assignment task or an inability to develop an argument. The key point, here, is not to assume that a student's writing is not improving on the evidence of a single paper. It may well be that the essay you are asked to grade, however flawed, is still much better than the first draft seen by the writing instructor.

Finally, remember that students write to learn even though it sometimes seems they write only so we can measure learning. Students write economics papers to learn how to think like an economist, or philosophy papers to learn about

how philosophy works. Course directors and writing instructors are partners in this learning process, each with a particular expertise. Our intentions and our pedagogy should as clear as possible to each other and to the students. So, if you really want to know what happens after you send your students to the writing centre, feel free to drop by, meet some of the instructors, and perhaps arrange to observe a few tutoring sessions.

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This is the Poem

no poems
wrapped in my green
wool coat
reach across and
hug a greeting
expansive flourish hesitant
laugh:
merry christmas-no-
chanukah-no-that's over-
well-
happy holidays anyway
sea of seasonal activity emotion
suspended:
swept aside
behind
the crumbs behind
my garbage can
in the kitchen
awaiting attention
(I'll get to you
when I damn well please)
curiously flat
outside:
sea green coat removed
inside:
some important organ
missing

no poems
I listen over and over
each stilted greeting
sets me further apart
a flush of isolation
spreads through me
(hot water I sink into
every morning in the
bathtub)
eyes focused on a mouth
talking
lips smiling disoriented
heads floating above
the fireplace logs
burn intensity
I shiver as the warmth

radiates its glow
not belonging
odd woman out

no poems
just the dust debris
of the day
holiday revelry
end-of-year introspection
suspended animation
flat calm buried
second skin of discomfort
a part of the familiarity
apart from the warmth
an existential fur coat
l'etranger
wrapped in sensibilities
close
that which sets me apart
close
the poem
this voyage of
strangeness
lets the words out
my head aches
the effort of dreaming
this is the poem

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Making Beds of Poetry
(and Lying in the Words)

I'm just going upstairs to write poetry and make beds.

I don't know how to
make beds
out of fabric springboard stuffing
or write poetry
out of gossamer webbed lace

The sheets are wrinkled
in the stanzas
blood-.stained with lots of fearfulness
I don't want to change them
but I can't seem to pull them up over
images of uselessness

I don't mind picking up the nightclothes
and tossing them into the dirty laundry
but
it's hard to display them
between the rhythm of the words
everyone is always annoyed

when I return
the special toys and tempo
to the wrong person

Does everyone smooth the bedcovers
like this
wondering where the lines came from
staring
at the quilt
on the page
pleased with restored order
which lasts and stays static
for about two minutes

Am I just fooling myself
into believing that I
need to make the beds of words
or could

I think I should have washed the sheets
and written letters home

Renee Norman

(Renee Norman is a graduate student in the English Department at U.B.C.; she teaches part-time in the Vancouver school district. Her poetry has been published in *Inkshed, Contemporary Verse 2, Prairie Journal, Common Ground and English Quarterly.*)

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Collaboration On CASLL-L

When I undertook to summarize and edit for this hard-copy medium one part of the flow of conversation which appeared on the CASLL listserve in November and December of 1994, I thought the task would be a pretty straightforward one. That I was entirely mistaken began to dawn on me early in the process when I contacted Russ Hunt to see if he could send me some of his "archive."Ê In the end, I didn't get his record of the postings, but what I did get from Russ was some good advice on the project: "don't try it--it's a lot harderÊthan it seems." Unfortunately I wasn't paying attention and the result is as follows.

First, the apologies. I never did manage to collect the whole corpus of texts--so in addition to the inevitability that this reconstruction is based on arbitrary and idiosyncratic notions of what was significant--(ie. mine), it's also based on an incomplete record. If this isn't bad enough, many of the postings were forwarded to me by a colleague at York and in the process, lost their original electronic headers. As a result in many cases, I'm guessing about the order of the texts; in some I am also guessing about author. In this, I console myself with the now widely accepted notion that the author is dead.

The background to much of the conversation was provided by an earlier posting from Rick Coe in which he had explored the utility of practice drills in hockey and swimming for our understanding of learning in general; however, I'll treat Patrick Dias's posting as the beginning of the conversation about collaborative learning. In a part of his posting which was later excerpted and elaborated by a number of others, Patrick said:

I believe most collaborative work fails because the task itself does no require collaborative input; in other words, it CAN be done by one or at most two individuals. I think it is a wise group that allows or even insists that one or two of the more capable people in the group take on the job and allow the others to get on with other things with occasional cursory glances at progress.

Russ Hunt commented on Patrick's posting, concluding by saying that collaborative classroom projects are valuable and stressing the proviso that the collaboration must be "authentic." Authenticity subsequently became a keynote of the conversation.

The conversations took a major turn with a posting from Marcy Baumann. InÊthe first part of her posting, she summarized a number of threads that had been developing to that point:

So far, we've said that in order to have a chance at succeeding, [a] collaboration has to involve a task that all participants recognize as one they couldn't do alone; [b] the task has to be perceived by them as authentically important; [c] the participants have to feel that everyone's contribution is important and necessary, whether or not the work is equally divided; and [d] the collaboration has to be subsidiary rather than focal -- it has to be the means to an end rather than an end in itself.

However, it was the second part, in which she expressed reservations about the pedagogical utility this kind of taxonomy which turned out to be most generative:

I also think that because the conditions which foster successful collaboration are so dynamic and unstable, we really need to get good at reading the situation -- at picking up on the cues that tell us how things are going, and learning to make adjustments as necessary -- if we want to facilitate collaborations. And there, I'm stumped. I don't know how people learn to do that, nor can I imagine teaching it to anyone . . .

It suggested to Anthony Paré ideas related to "situated learning":

Jean Lave writes that "Developing an identity as a member of a community and becoming knowledgeably skillful are part of the same process, with the former motivating, shaping, and giving meaning to the latter, which it subsumes" (p.65; "Situated learning in communities of practice," in Perspectives On Socially Shared Cognition, edited by L. Resnick, J.M. Levine, and S.D. Teasley, APA, 1991). I don't think we can "teach" brainstorming as an isolated cognitive skill that students can carry about from place to place and apply, as if it were a tool. All the cognitive psychologists are scurrying to revise their theories and models to account for this.

And having started with "brainstorming" here, he turned back to Rick Coe's metaphors later in the posting:

And if we do teach students to collaborate on school tasks, are they learning how to collaborate? (That is, are they learning how to do that social thing in other settings?) And is Rick's analogy to hockey and swimming accurate? Can we break down into parts the complex social activity of collaboration, the way the individual skills of hockey or swimming can be broken down? If we can, would teaching those parts in isolation allow students to re-integrate them into Polanyi's "skillful act"? What are the analogues to skating and swimming drills in the area of language development? . . . In my end-of-weekness, I wonder what the rhetorical/collaborative parallel would be: having students say over and over again to empty chairs, "you've made a good point there and I think we can use it in the introduction to our group paper"?

Henry Hubert picked up another facet of the hockey practice metaphor--the idea of completing "drills:"

Rick, for me you're onto something, and as you continue your posts, you elaborate what that is: the horror we have of "drills" in teaching writing. And your focus on interest and authenticity makes the difference, whether applied to collaboration or to other learning. Through much of the last century there has been so much drill (probably because hard work was good for the soul, idle hands turning to devil's work, and so on) that the last decade has reacted against drills.However, if I were Rick, worried about Bure getting around me, or about missing the net with my shot from the point, I'm going to practice skating backwards and lining up pucks at the blueline to practice slapshots. And Anthony

may even practice hammering if he hits the wrong nail too often!

Gary Raspberry contributed to this exchange a distinction between the mandated nature of classroom practice and the desire which, in other more natural situations, leads to practice and drill:

It seems to me, a word that has been left out of the conversation to date (although it has been hinted at or perhaps called by other names) is DESIRE. I wonder who in their right mind would spend hours shooting pucks at an empty net without first watching an older brother or sister or (insert favourite high-priced star/role model here) breeze over the blue line andfire a puck into the top right hand corner. I think there has to be a "higher purpose" (besides the top right hand corner) to shoot for (for the individual and for the collaborating group).

This opposition between "mandated" and internally desired collaboration branched in a couple of directions. One was taken by Susan MacDonald who responded to a question about the "mandated" nature of the collaborations at both the last and the upcoming Inkshed conference:

I'm not aware that the organizers of the next Inkshed have "man-dated" collaboration. I thought they set guidelines for attending this particular Inkshed, guidelines one can choose to ignore by not participating/attending. . . Unless the organizers do have positions of authority where they can command and attendance is mandatory? Doug? Russ? Jim? When you organized Inksheds last year did you have such positions of authority? Is so, I humbly beg your forgiveness for my rather cavalier attitude towards your postures of power. (Although, I did detect a touch of arrogance about Doug Vipond, sort of a "Hey, you, I'm the guy in charge" attitude. Did anyone else notice this?)

This led to an hilarious exchange which is too long to repeat and which neither excerpt nor summary can do justice.

This branch of the conversation started to move toward resolution, with a remark by Roger Graves:

Just a side note: not all collaborations outside the classroom are freely chosen by those involved. Often we get dragooned into things, sometimes there are subtle but effective ways of being told that participation in this or that other project is expected, and so on. So if the argument (or part of it) has do do with equating what goes on in the classroom with what goes on in workplace settings outside the classroom (for example), then we need to acknowledge that compulsory collaboration is a feature of both kinds of environments. There's really a range from invitation to compulsion, isn't there?

Graham Smart picked up this "side note" and commented:

I think Roger is right about this. For example, in the workplace people are frequently expected to carry out collaborative tasks in groupsÊthey haven't chosen to work in. As they are in in courtroom juries, advocacy groups, etc. I also think Roger's notion of a range, or continuum, could be usefully applied to some of the other notions that have come up in the discussion/debate on collaboration, such as the "authenticity" of tasks and the degree of portability of skills learned in one particular context to other contexts.

To Rick Coe, who introduced the hockey metaphor to which so many of the voices returned, the final word:

This notion of authenticity is spinning (to use Kburke's word) or careening intriguingly. Despite the original phrase ("authentic task"), we seem to be coming round to the idea that authenticity is not a property of tasks. . . .In any given situation, it seems that some newcomers become "knowledgeably skillful" more quickly than others. Some people even seem particularly quick and good at becoming "knowledgeably skillful" in whole categories of situations. Whatever ability (metaskill--ugh) these people have, is it learnable? If so, can that learning (learnability) be facilitated? If so, is teaching possible? . . .Am I helping them [students] situate? (Can situation become a verb, can one be helped with it?) The fifth time you live in a foreign culture, do you situate yourself more quickly or better? Can you tell me how you do it, or do I have to repeat your entire journey?

Readers of Inkshed/members of CASLL will not be surprised that Rick's final word here begins with those of Kenneth Burke.

James Brown,
York University