Inkshed

Volume 14, Number 1, September 1995

Inside Inkshed

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

Fax: 416-736-5464

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

15 September, for 1 October 1 February, for 15 February
15 November, for 1 December 1 April, for 15 April
Post-Conference: June-July

This newsletter is supported financially by the various Writing Programmes at York University. To become a member of the Inkshed organization, make cheques for $27.50 (or $17.50 for students or under employed) payable to Inkshed at NSCAD c/o Kenna Manos, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 5163 Duke Street, Halifax, N.S. B3J 3J6. Fees support the Inkshed Publishing Initiative and on-going organizational expenses.

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What's New

1. Renewal Time

CASLL fees will now cover issues between September - August to reflect the academic year rather than the calendar year; thus, when you return the form at the back of this issue, you will have paid your fees for 1995-96. Later this academic year we're going to remove from the CASLL membership those miscreants who haven't coughed up their fees. (Thus beginning a new era of "fiscal responsibility and belt-tightening"...)

I posted a notice on the CASLL listserv for those folks who are signed up for the listserv (see number 2 below), but have not paid dues (they are either receiving the newsletter and the Inkshed Initiatives publications inadvertently, or not receiving these publications). I suggested that they might want to become full-fledged CASLLers by sending in their fees. (This bullying role is, I've come to see, de riguer for editors.)

2. How to Become a Member of the CASLL Listserv

If you've just recently got on the internet, you may want to become a member of the CASLL listserv. To subscribe to CASLL send a one-line message to this address:
listserv@unb.ca
(The message is in the body of the email, not the subject line of the message which should be blank.)

3. Resignation of one of Inkshed's Consulting Editors

Coralie Bryant has resigned from the editorial board of Inkshed noting that she no longer has the time for full-time participation in the organization; she did however renew her membership so that she could keep in touch with our activities. Thank you Coralie for your past involvement.

4. New Book Announcement

(The following announcement was sent from the publicist at Taylor & Francis. If other Inkshedders have a book announcement, send it to us for "free" publicity.)

Genre and the New Rhetoric
(from the Critical Perspectives on Literacy and Education Series)
edited by Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway

"Over the past ten years, the notion of genre has been dramatically redefined in rhetorical and linguistic theory. This rethinking has foregrounded the social, cultural, political and ideological realties that underlie the formal regularities observable in texts. It has thus enabled researchers to throw new light on the shaping power of language, the complex relationship between language and culture, and the interplay between the individual and the social.

This new text mixes ground-breaking articles in the field by Miller, Freadman, Freedman and others with new and recent pieces. Leading theorists reflect on the growing interest in genre studies across a wide range of disciplines including: literary theory, sociology and philosophy of science, critical discourse analysis, education and cultural studies. The chapters examine the powerful implications this reconception of genre has on both research and teaching, and present issues impacting on many domains of professional life."

Book available in Canada from:	Book available in US from:
Copp Clark Longman	Taylor & Francis
phone: 1-800-263-4374	phone: 1-800-821-8312
($39.00 Cdn.+ $3.00	($27.00 U.S. + $2.50
shipping + 7% GST)	shipping + Sales Tax for PA residents)

5. Call for CCC Conference Presentation

As per tradition, the editor of Inkshed is responsible for submitting a proposal for and chairing The Canadian Caucus at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. This year the conference will be in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; the Canadian Caucus is set to meet on Thursday, March 28, 1995, from 6:45-7:45 pm. Since Cathy Schryer's proposal for a panel of Canadian speakers was accepted by the CCCC organizers, we may not need formal papers, but might think of conducting "business" appropriate to the Canadian Caucus. If you have any business-related ideas, or would like to present a more formal paper at the session, send a brief (50 word) synopsis of your comments to:

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

The deadline for submission is February 1 so that we can publish a list of the CC presenters in the newsletter. Another part of the CC tradition is that we organize a social event after the caucus meeting, i.e., dinner. It is also traditional that we all stand around and say typically Canadian things, like, "Gosh, I don't know where to go, maybe Doug does, etc." To avoid a repetition of this exasperating ritual, we propose that we appoint someone (like maybe Doug Vipond) to be in charge of herding us to our social destination. If we can prevail on Doug V. (or Doug B.)Ñor anyone for that matterÑto organize us, we all have to promise to be unstinting in our praise for his/her choice!

6. The CCCC Session organized by Cathy Schryer

Henry Hubert, Philippa Spoel and Cathy Schryer are presenting a roundtable presentation on WAC in the Canadian context. More details in the December newsletter.

(Please let us know if you're giving a paper at the CCCC's; we'll mention it in the December newsletter.)

7. Contents of this newsletter:

Important calls for Inkshed 13 and the Canadian Caucus at the CCC Conference; carry-overs from Inkshed 12Ña summary of the talk given by Horwood, Nolan, Pancer and Schuller; and two papers from Jim Bell and Karen Pancer. As well, a report from the research team of Robert Byrnes, Lena McCourtie, Brian Turner and Judith Kearns from The Centre for Academic Writing at the University of Winnipeg. (Articles by Hubert and Graves next issue!)
Mary-Louise Craven

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Call for Proposals
INKSHED 13: The Changing Faces Of Literacy

Thurs. May 2 - Sun. May 5, 1996
Gull Harbour Resort
Hecla Island, Manitoba

In our study of language and learning, the Inkshed community has consistently asked questions about what it means to be literate, what forces are at play in defining literacy, promoting literacy, and teaching literacy. The term has often been a focal point in our discussions of theoretical, pedagogical and programmatic issues involving language and language instruction, and through these conversations, our conceptions of literacy have become increasingly pluralized.

The organizers of Inkshed 13 invite pedagogical and/or theoretical proposals that speak to the theme of "The Changing Faces of Literacy." We welcome both singly-authored and collaborative presentations. Presentation styles may be traditional research presentations, position papers, panel discussions, or workshop sessions, as well as exploratory/alternative presentation styles, as proposed. Follow a general guideline of 10 to 15 minutes per person, with no session to exceed 60 minutes including inkshedding.

Proposals should account for the fact that this is a small, working conference in which the opportunity for participation by all, in the form of inkshedding, is expected to be an integral part of each presentation.

Conference participants might address topics such as:

¥ verbal and visual literacies, computer and other media-based literacies, text-based literacies, technical literacies;
¥ literacies shaped by varying discursive contexts, disciplinary contexts, workplace contexts;
¥ class and gender-related literacies, marginalized literacies, multicultural/cross-cultural literacies;
¥ literacy and meaning-making, the rhetoric of literacy;
¥ institutional issues, literacy programs, writing programs, literacy and institutional goals;
¥ literacy and society;

¥ literacy instruction, pedagogical issues;
¥ research strategies needed to study or support new and changing literacies.

Proposals should include the name, affiliation, address, phone number(s), and e-mail address (if applicable) of each presenter (designate a contact person when more than one person is involved); the title of the proposed presentation; a brief description or abstract (approx. 200 words); a brief description of the method of presentation; and a clear explanation of the contribution that the presentation will make to the conference theme.

Deadline: FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1, 1995
Send submissions to Sandy Baardman:
Room 340, Education Building phone: (204) 474-9034
University of Manitoba fax: (204) 275-5962
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2 e-mail: baardmn@ccm.umanitoba.ca

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Misconceptions about Writing Centres?

1. The "peer tutors" are peers.

I know of no writing centres in Canada where the tutors are peers in the sense originally intended by Kenneth Bruffee, in a common sense understanding of the term, or, probably, even in the view of students. "Peer" originally applied to tutors who were approximately the same age and academic level as the students they were tutoring (usually the peer tutors had recently completed the composition course that the students were taking). However, the tutors working at the University of Northern British Columbia last year were Masters students or students with one undergraduate degree working towards a second. Usually they worked with first- or second-year students. Most of the tutors at York are grad students or sessional instructors, and four are full-time, tenured faculty. At Concordia, tutors are undergrad or grad students; many have one Bachelors degree and are returning for another. Not surprisingly, most students do not see such tutors as peers. In research conducted at yet another Canadian writing centre, students were asked after their writing conferences with Masters-level tutors to identify any of eight roles the tutor may have played at any time during the conference: peer, interested reader, grammarian, and so forth. Only 3 or the 24 students identified "peer" as one of the roles, even though tutors had been trained to be student-centred. As Martin Behr said in his inkshed on this topic, "What I find problematic with the claim that 'peer tutoring' somehow eradicates the student/teacher hierarchy is that the students will still view the tutor as the expert-authority on writing." Students do not see tutors as possessing professorial authority, but neither do they generally view tutors as peers.

2. Writing centres are primarily remedial.

Most writing centres see the range of studentsÑhonours students afraid of a lower GPA, average students who want better, and weak students desperate to pass. All kinds of students interested in becoming better writers. At UNBC we see the same percentage of students on academic probation as students not on academic probation. I consider this an accomplishment because, as a recent discussion on the WCENTER listserv revealed, many writing centres with voluntary attendance have difficulty attracting an equitable proportion of remedial students. As my former boss used to joke, "No student who visits us drops out." Why, in spite of the facts, does the myth of remediation continue? Aside from ignorance and vested interest, the image persists because some writing centres, such as the one at the University of Winnipeg, are remedial in focus, and legitimately so. Check with your writing centre to learn who it sees.

3. Writing centres work because of their friendly environment rather than their professional expertise.

This is a false dichotomy which students do not buy into. For example, at UNBC the most common comment students made about the writing centre was how professional the staff and tutors were, and the second most frequent statement was how friendly and caring people were. It is a question of relative influence. Jan Rehner maintains that writing centres work because of the combination of a) no role/power conflicts created by marking b) emotional support, and c) professionalism. Which factor is most important in writing centre success? If you have to grade papers, you can still

do a good job of teaching writing. If the writing centre is not the friendliest, coziest place on campus, students can still improve their writing there. But if you establish a supportive environment untainted by the necessity to grade, and yet know little about rhetoric and composition and teaching one-to-one, then students will learn little about writing.

Enough said now. I'll give the last word here to Sandy Baardman, who became hooked on writing as a tutor in the writing centre at the University of Winnipeg. "I think we need to re-think peerness as a central principle for why writing centres work." He suspects writing centres work because they know how to teach writing.

Jim Bell
Learning Skills Centre, UNBC

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Group Report from the Inkshed 12 Conference: "Beyond the Classroom: The Complexities of Context"

(Session included Joanne Horwood, Barry Nolan, Karen Pancer, and Rhonda Schuller)

Our discussions began with the notion of transferring writing skills from one context to another: from one composition class to another writing course; from the composition class to other courses in the college/university; and from the writing class to the work place. Our teaching environments provide a range of publiclyfunded postsecondary institutions, from the community college to a traditional university. Likewise, our students and courses constitute a wide spectrum for comparisons. But, throughout our discussions, we found ourselves focusing on the complexities of the contexts beyond our classrooms (our students, departments or programs, institutions, provincial governments and society). Much of our concern rested on how the contexts beyond our classes shaped the writings students did within those classes. These contexts also governed our perceptions and explanations of how and why we teach our students the skills we do and how we feel those skills ought to transfer to other contexts.

Rhonda teaches writing in a British Columbian university college whose students' needs are varied. She focuses on writing as an academic skill based on rhetorical principles, such as audience, text, context, purpose, subject, voice. Rhonda sees these principles as a heuristic applicable to writing students will do in further academic work as well as writing in workplaces. She emphasizes the role of writing as a media, as one way people can do things with words.

Joanne's upper level business writing course, offered in a traditional university setting, is popular with students who see it as offering practical, useful skills they will apply in the work place. To encourage a transfer of skills, the course is designed as a small technical writing company, with the instructor serving as manager, using the subjects, purposes, readers and voices of work situations students are familiar with or wish to enter.

Barry's classes are offered within a newlycreated Centre for Academic Writing, with a mandate to provide a first year writing course to a majority of this small undergrad university's students. The writing course is seen by the Dean of Arts and Science as a way into academic study, which includes Education, Business and Justice and Law Enforcement, as well as the traditional Arts and Science departments. The Centre has replaced an expressive and processascontent curriculum with a Writing in the Disciplines curriculum. Some sections of the writing course are linked with an introductory course in an Arts or Sciences department; other sections are designated writing in the natural sciences, social sciences, or humanities; still other sections are designated multidisciplinary with the instructor choosing the topic and readings from specific disciplines.

With the classroom focus on subject and purposes, the ways to do things with words can be used by students throughout their programs. The grading no longer rests on an artificially expressive product. Assessment now considers subject, arrangement of subject, purpose of the text, and style. These are traditionally rhetorical skills without the burden of the traditionally Romantic expressive text.

Karen's classes are offered at a large urban college of applied arts and technology. This institution provides training for students who a re attracted to handson learning situations and wish to learn practical job skills. Although it includes generic skills, this college's context is primarily based on vocational training. Consequently, Karen's writing

classes create situations that students will find relevant to the kinds of writing they will have to do on the job. This means Karen works closely with faculty from other programs when designing her courses in order to tailor topics and purposes for writing tasks to the students' future careers. Since Karen's students come to the college with such a wide range of writing abilities, from basic writing to postsecondary levels, her task is to develop her students' existing skills so they will mesh with the demands of the workplace. Although it is possible to build in opportunities for expressive and writingtoknow in her classroom, Karen considers her students' needs and stays as focuses on jobrelated writing tasks. Transferability of the writing skills from the relatively artificiality of the composition classroom to realemployment situations is the primary goal in this context. Students enroll to train for specific careers; their communications courses best serve these needs by taking into account the kinds of writing tasks graduates will meet in the future.

The contexts surrounding our classes are varied, and often complex. While on the one hand, we may despair at the perceived pressures on us from our society, the fundingclimate, our institutions, even our students, to provide "practical skills," we also regard these practical skills as enabling our students to not only perform the mundane, if necessary, but also to meet creative, practical purposes.

Submitted by Rhonda Schuller

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Writing Beyond the College Writing Classroom:
Occupation-Based Writing and Transfer of Writing Skills

In his article "Limited Literacies: English Instruction in Ontario's Community Colleges," Kim Fedderson describes the tension between two "crippling polarities" in their approaches to collegelevel writing instruction: the liberal humanist position favoured by college English teachers and the occupationbased approach favoured by college administrators. Fedderson is critical of the narrow traditionalist approach, but also sees occupationbased writing instruction as limiting the development of overall literacy in college students, marginalizing them within their vocational communities, and preparing them "for subordinate roles in society" (95). Fedderson's solution is "a curriculum that would acquaint students with writing across the disciplines and would not restrict them to parroting the writing found within a specific occupation" (98).

I agree that we need to build literacy, and that the best way to do so is to expand writing contexts. However, it's misguided to condemn occupationbased writing as the limiting factor. Rather, it's the cookiecutter approach (parroting models of complaint letters, for example) that creates problems. I would like to address the three issues Fedderson raises (college students' limited literacy, marginalization in vocational communities, and subordinate roles) and defend the legitimacy of occupationbased writing for this group of learners.

A college writing curriculum sets out to do the impossible: to be all things to all students. College students come from a broader spectrum of the postsecondary population than do university students. They come with a broader range of abilities (some are still learning how to write in sentences) and enroll in a broader range of programs (some academic, such as Humber's preuniversity General Arts and Science program, others more practical, such as heating and air conditioning). A college writing curriculum must focus on filling the gaps in all students' literacy skills, and must acknowledge that some students come to college because they have career goals in mind that do not include writing. Our students have chosen their occupation, so the college writing curriculum must address their current needs as writers at school, their possible resistance to writing, and their potential needs as writers on the job.

Too often, instructors in content courses and employers of new graduates complain that students are poor writers, even when these same students are taking or have successfully completed writing courses. One explanation for this limited literacy, this apparent gap in writing competency, lies in our assumption that teaching skills in isolation guarantees automatic transfer to other contexts. It does not. This point was brought home to me this past semester by my student Gina, whose work in my class was average: elementary sentence structure, but essays that were adequately organized to discuss a simple thesis statement. Despite her limited success with essays, however, Gina's selfassessment for her Introduction to Business course, where she was to summarize her performance on several measures (such as the

MyersBriggs Personality Inventory and a study skills survey), was abysmal. It had no thesis, no analysis of the data, poor organization within each section and across sections, and perhaps most surprising, incoherent sentences, full of surface errors that I wouldn't have expected her to make. Obviously, without more specific teaching on how to transfer her current composition skills to the new context, she was unsuccessful in managing both the process and the final product. Her errors in editing pointed to her overall confusion in trying to do many new things at once. Showing Gina a model selfassessment alone and asking her to follow it would encourage parroting, not analysis of her data. Showing how her selfassessment, although not an essay, still needs a thesis and topic sentences, and connections to be made between groups of ideas, and how a report format with headings could help with overall organization, would have facilitated transfer of her existing skills much more effectively.

Nathaniel Teich writes that transfer of writing skill is maximized when students write for a variety of situations, for defined purposes, with structured tasks and goals, and for audiences beyond the classroom (207). In other words, structure must be built in, and writing contexts must be as varied as possible. A composition class sets the groundwork, introducing techniques for invention and organization, revision and editing. It is the venue for teaching students how to move from discussing issues presented in readings, to exploring those issues further through different forms of writing. But groundwork is not enough for most college writers. What composition instructors also need to do to maximize transfer is build opportunities for students to write for contexts other than the composition class. And then, beyond the writing classroom, they need to actively lobby for an expansion of writing instruction across the curriculum and within the disciplines. I'm deliberately separating WAC and WID because I want to demonstrate that the terms are not interchangeable, but complementary.

In their article in the October 1994 issue of Colleqe Composition and Communication, Judy Kirscht, Rhonda Levine, and John Rieff point to the false dichotomy between writing to learn and writing to learn the discourse conventions in a discipline. College students need to learn to do both: "write to learn" for their content courses (WAC), and learn the "discourse conventions" for their discipline (WID). College students often write for some general content courses , such as the introductory Humanities class at Humber. However, they need specific instruction in how to use their developing composition skills in their "writing to learn" assignments. Inconsistent or conflicting messages about how to approach an assignment can block, not facilitate transfer. In addition to establishing overall institutional commitment to improving writing in composition and content courses alike, WAC programs build in opportunities for consistency and transfer. As for Writing in the Disciplines, it's important to remember that a college student's discipline is the occupation he or she has chosen. Since college students are training for occupations, it makes sense that their occupational courses be included as possible starting points for both content and format in the composition classroom.

In the college composition classroom, essay topics can and should be drawn from content courses. Business students, for example, can move from reading a Globe and Mail opinion piece on ethics or the discussion of business ethics in their business text book, to writing an essay on related topics, such as whether businesses should contribute to charity, or whether deception or false advertising can ever be justified. In this case, students would be writing to learn, especially if research was an added requirement. Then, since a dominant genre in business is the report, it would be appropriate for the students to recast their essays into a report format for their business professor, which would entail writing in their discipline. And since "reallife" business reports present information upon which decisions are based, the composition teacher can demonstrate how in doing such writing, students are in a small way participating in the decisionmaking, knowledgeshaping process relevant to their field of study. Such an assignment teaches students how to write to learn, revise according to audience, and try different genres to satisfy the demands of both their academic courses and future occupations. Such an assignment helps students synthesize information pertinent to other courses, composition skills, and occupational demands in a way that is not possible when each segment is taught in isolation. This is an example of occupationbased writing instruction at its most effective.

We could blame impoverished curricula for limiting literacy, as Fedderson does. But who creates the impoverished curricula? What limits literacy is our own reluctance to make changes to our comfortable and familiar teaching methods, and our mistaken assumption that all students can automatically transfer writing skills. To ensure transfer, college composition instructors need to understand both the academic and occupational contexts their students will be faced with, and then expand writing contexts and structure class lessons to teach students how to transfer. This means we need to work more closely with contentcourse instructors, predict what occupationrelated writing tasks our students will encounter, and let students write for those contexts in addition to their academic courses. In doing so, WAC/WID

programs can be tailormade to enhance literacy by expanding writing contexts, not restricting them.

Before I conclude, I want to address Fedderson's charge that an occupationbased writing curriculum marginalizes college graduates in their vocational communities, away from "the rest of us" (i.e., those of us who do try to shape knowledge). We need to remember that most students come to colleges of applied arts and technology for occupational training, and employers expect graduates to have attained demonstrable levels of skill in their chosen field. But colleges accept strong students and weak students, strong writers and weak writers, and not even everyone among the strong has the potential to become a mover and shaker. Weak student writers are not likely to shape (or even want to shape) knowledge in their field; successfully teaching this group to construct routine business letters and memos may be all we can realistically hope to accomplish. For some students, success at this limited level is enough to boost their confidence and help them see themselves as "professionals" in their field. And if their membership is limited to a single vocational community, that is partly because of the vocational choices they themselves have made, based on their own abilities and interests.

Finally, I must respond to Fedderson's argument that the college literacy curriculum ensures students will play subordinate roles in society. Surely the problem here is our society's view of these graduates, not the students themselves. It seems to me that other societies and countries respect craftspeople and apprentices for their specialized skill. We, in contrast, constantly privilege the mind (intellect) over hands (skill). But when it's 20 next winter and my furnace is on the blink, I'll want to call the person who can fix it properly and quickly, a heating and air conditioning graduate, not someone (like me) who can only theorize about what might be wrong. We need to acknowledge and honour the abilities and interests of all our young people, not just the ones who've chosen to follow in our footsteps.

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Karen Pancer
Humber College, Toronto

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Report on Research in Progress

Possibly the most difficult question faced by those who try to teach a disciplinary perspective on university writing is the question of how we, as "outsiders," can teach students to recognize and intelligently emulate specific disciplinary rhetorics. Recent work in rhetorical theory, especially in the Rhetoric of Inquiry, has certainly given us some leverage on the question. Through their analyses of academic writing in a variety of disciplines, scholars such as Charles Bazerman, Alan Gross, Karin Knorr-Cetina, Donald McCloskey, and Greg Myers have hugely improved our understanding of how disciplinary rhetorics take shape, of how they differ in matters of style and convention, and of how their norms of argumentation sometimes resemble one another more than we might expect. The problem for writing teachers is that the rhetoric of inquiry has concentrated almost exclusively on professional scholarship; it has analyzed representative selections of academic writing and tracked the kinds of negotiations that go on between academics and the journals for which they write, but rarely has it considered the writing of studentsÑour academic protŽgŽs in the making of knowledge. As a result of this neglect, as a recent review of three studies in the rhetoric of science pointed out (Lay, 1995), it's hard to know how to translate even the best rhetoric of inquiry work into terms that are pedagogically useful.

Four of us at The University of Winnipeg have begun a two-year project that enters the space between Rhetoric of

Inquiry research and the more pedagogically focused research in Writing in the Disciplines. We want to offer Inkshed readers an overview of the project, as well as some general observations about our work so far, and would be pleased to receive your comments and suggestions. In brief, the project involves analyzing graded student papers from a variety of disciplines, with the goal of determining, first, whether professors transmit rhetorical norms to their students through the process of evaluating and commenting on written assignments, and, second, to what extent any norms that are transmitted are discipline-specific. The motive is to make criteria that underpin the evaluation of university writing explicit. As Connors and Lunsford point out, "The judgments expressed in writing by teachers often seem to come out of some privately held set of ideals about what good writing should look like," when in fact they derive from "norms that students may [or may not] have been taught but were [nonetheless] expected to know" (218, our emphasis). If we can identify even some of these norms, the project will prove as useful to faculty as it will to students.

Preliminary interest suggests that colleagues share our sense of the project's potential. Twenty-two faculty members have committed themselves to our projectÑa considerable proportion of the faculty at the University of Winnipeg, especially striking when we are, after all, asking participants to submit their grading practices to rigorous analysis by colleagues. It seems likely that we can attain our goal of collecting graded papers from several faculty members in at least two departments in each of the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. One might expect that gathering a representative sample of student papers would prove more difficult in a small university like ours than it might elsewhere. Other factors, though, have made the University of Winnipeg a particularly hospitable site for this project. It is small enough that colleagues from different disciplines meet, not only in colloquia and workshops designed to bring faculty members together, but informally and frequently. We have plenty of opportunities to acquaint ourselves with insider knowledge, even with what Stephen North calls the "lore" of other disciplines. Writing in the disciplines has an institutional presence here, too: departments designate a certain number of their courses "writing-intensive," and the newly autonomous Centre for Academic Writing will now offer courses which strengthen our ties with several departments and expand discipline-specific approaches to the teaching of writing. We expect our research findings to inform the further development of this revised curriculum.

The project's value will not be limited to this institution. Research on teachers' response to student writing has generally focused on the composition or the literature classroom, especially with respect to drafting and revision. It has examined such issues as the problem of contradictory messages sent by, or the generality of, teachers' comments; the preponderance of negative commentary; the conflict between justifying a grade and offering thoughtful response which encourages a student's development; or the difficulty of acknowledging one's moral, social, or political attitudes without imposing them on students. Our research seeks to extend such work by examining how the tacit rhetorical standards of a particular discipline work themselves into teachers' grading of student papers, an examination which may contribute to a more complete picture of how academic discourse communities construct knowledge.
The first set of papers we analysed were brief research proposals from an upper-level Sociology course; students were asked to select a topic, account for its selection, assess its relevance, and design a project which would investigate their research question. Our goal was to discover as much as was possible, at this early stage in the project, about the assessment criteria of one representative of that discipline; to see into the mind of the professor, whoÑas insiderÑcould determine the extent to which students were becoming or had become novice Sociology rhetors. The assignment description acted as a starting point (a somewhat problematic starting point, as it turned out), but it was the written texts themselvesÑby which we mean not only the students' papers but also the professor's evaluative comments and gradesÑwhich would reveal the professor's implicit and explicit assessment criteria.

Because these were our first texts, we approached them in a spirit of experimentation, hoping that testing a variety of strategies would keep us open-minded and flexible. We wished to stay as attuned to our colleague's assessment procedures as to our own, and attentive to what both similarities and differences were telling us. First, we read a representative sample of student papers, applying a three-part schema in order to distinguish among rhetorical (in general, style and argumentation), compositional (mainly arrangement, on all levels), and mechanical features in each paper, and estimating the relative importance the professor placed on each of these broad areas. As we assessed each text, we identified the degree of consensus among us, explored the nature and sources of discrepancies, and tried to determine whether we were developing an understanding of the standards applied by the sociology professor. Our second approach was to analyse texts which were completely devoid of grades and comments while trying to intuit these two variables. The third approach was to use comments alone to estimate grades.

As we summarized our findings, we realised that even these papers from our first professor exposed some of our disciplinary biases. Despite our efforts to remain open-minded, we had read with certain expectationsÑpreconceptions that were only revealed as such when we were confronted by actual responses to student writing.

One surprise was that the sociology professor privileged students' own perspectives, encouraging them to identify the role of personal experience in topic selection and to place their personal knowledge in the broader context of the research field. As the assignment description stated, each student was to indicate not only why his or her research question was important to sociology but also "why it interests you." The professor's comments and grades were consistent with this emphasis. This is not to say that a higher grade was given to students merely because they wrote in the first-person singular and related personal experiences; the perfunctory use of one or two stories about the delights and dysfunctions of one's family were not enough to redeem a paper that was rhetorically weak (for example, vague in defining its research focus, or "unsystematic" in describing procedure). But what we did see was that the students receiving the highest grades were those who best articulated the connection between their personal lives and their perspective on a research question. The professor, far from uniformly treating the use of "I" as an academic misdemeanour, as we had thought a sociologist might, considered it perfectly acceptableÑeven, in the right hands, an asset.

This pedagogical stance on the place of personal experience in student writing was somewhat unexpected. Not that the idea of a connection between personal experience and academic research was new; as members of a discipline that was early on and deeply influenced by Polanyi, we had been made aware long before studying the rhetoric of inquiry that the ostensibly impersonal voice, not just in the social sciences but in the natural sciences too, is in fact rooted in personal and social perspectives. Moreover, our team had seen the connection between the personal and the professional emphasized over and over again in our readings of rhetoric of inquiry literature. As McCloskey says, even academics who are ostensibly objective "tell stories of their own scholarly lives" (50). The reason for our surprise, then, may have been our limitations as outsidersÑa kind of disciplinary ethnocentricity which had us thinking that the rhetorical self-consciousness of our team and of our discipline was rare. The rhetoric of inquiry literature often bolstered this attitude. Says McCloskey, "Since historians and economists are trained to be ignorant of their rhetoric they do not notice themselves making a story of their own lives . . . . Other scientists, believing themselves to be nonhistorical, share the ineptness" (5). Our sociology professor's approach begs for reassessment of this attitude. Even if many academics do wear rhetorical blinders when writing from their disciplinary perspective, they may be able to see their disciplinary practices more clearly when designing assignments for their protŽgŽs.

We were also surprised to discover how much less compositional features mattered to the professor than they do to us. She responded less often and less explicitly than we would have done, in other words, to such features as the arrangement of material, the use of proleptic devices, and the effectiveness of the paragraph as a unit of discourse. This is not to say that such features played no role in determining gradesÑindeed, papers at the top end of the scale were strong in all three areas of our schema, while the weaknesses of those at the bottom showed a similar consistencyÑbut we could not account for the range of grades assigned to papers between these two poles by applying compositional criteria. Strengths and weaknesses in this area, moreover, received few marginal comments and were rarely referred to in the summary assessment accompanying the final grade.

The experience of Mallonee and Breihan with writing across the curriculum workshops may be instructive here. They hypothesize that faculty concentrate on those errorsÑoften mechanicalÑwhich their vocabulary enables them to perceive and describe; "Most were hampered by inadequate terms with which to conceptualize other problems in writing." (216) While our sociology professor was not unduly preoccupied with mechanical errors, the development of "a broad and comprehensive language of criticism and advice" (220) might nevertheless prepare her and other faculty members, as Mallonee and Breihan argue, to respond effectively to a range of non-substantive features such as organization and coherence. Such a process might additionally help them to convert general directives into more precise cues, to suggest strategies which would bring students' writing more clearly into line with disciplinary norms.

On the other hand, rather than lacking a terminology for commenting on certain aspects of students' papers, the professor may simply have believed that compositional matters are not particularly important. Her assignment description suggested that this is a possibility; not only did it explicitly emphasize rhetorical matters, but it also implicitly de-emphasized compositional matters, insofar as it was loosely constructed. To us outsiders, at least, her

written instructions seemed lengthy, ambiguous in at least two places, and generally lacking in focus. Moreover, we were able (we think) to trace weaknesses in several student essays back to these flaws. Is it possible that the professor, both in her own prose and in her expectations, was tacitly defining a genre of student writing that differs significantly from professional norms? Was she defining a style commonly accepted in sociology, even among academics? Or were her cues more idiosyncratic?Ñwas it her personal style of writing that inadvertently gave students permission to neglect compositional features and focus instead on their arguments?

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that most students seemed to have understood the assignment fairly accurately. Given the students' success in the assignment even though the professor did not make her rhetorical norms explicit, it may be that students and professor already shared a tacit knowledge of acceptable protocols for the assignment. Perhaps students had been so acculturated in other sociology courses that they didnÕt need direct instructions so much as suggestions, even key words and phrases, to set them working effectively. If this is the case, we may be looking at the power of discourse community to orient students to disciplinary expectations, and to compensate for fuzzy directions on any particular assignment.

We have been wary of rushing to judgment about sociologists' grading procedures and explicit mentoring of students. This set of papers was the first collected, and came from a single department, whereas the project, a comparative analysis, will draw on material from a variety of departments in order to distinguish discipline-specific rhetorical norms and evaluative practices. Suspending judgment, then, was prudentialÑa decision that would not only help us avoid the dangers of premature conclusions but also, if we were sufficiently self-reflexive, develop our awareness of the project's potential, raise questions which hadn't yet occurred to us, and refine our procedures so that they would become adaptable and comprehensive enough to deal effectively with the range of material likely to be submitted. Experimenting with several strategies in approaching the first set of papers was a step towards these goals. We discovered, for instance, that detaching grades from texts and marginal comments raised a number of questions about the relationship between them: how much attention should be paid to the grade assigned each student paper? to what extent should we limit our focus to the professor's marginal and summary comments? how might we articulate the interaction of these factors as a means of addressing our central research questions? In a related area, we came to term the absence of comments on certain passages within a text "the rhetoric of silence," acknowledging that the absence of an explicit response from the professor might be read in a variety of ways: as an unrealised possibility for encouragement, correction, or suggestion, or as implicit approval of the material and its presentation.

Other questions emerged as we began to anticipate the analysis of several sets of papers from a single department: Would we be correct in assuming that similarities in the comments and grades of two or three professors represented disciplinary similarities rather than extradisciplinary similarities? Is it possible that our sociology professor's emphasis on personal experience, for example, reflects her gender, her feminist perspective, her age, or even her professional rank? Though we cannot hope to identify all of the variables which shape an instructor's expectations, priorities, and style of commentary, we can avoid hasty generalisations about disciplinary norms by acknowledging that such factors do play a role in responses to student texts.

Follow-up interviews with participants in the project may help us to answer some of these questions. What's more, we know many of the participants personally, and are aware of how their extradisciplinary interests might influence their disciplinary perspectives. ThisÑone of the many advantages of working in a small institution like oursÑshould help us resist disciplinary stereotypes that would be all-too-convenient for the project.

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Robert Byrnes
Judith Kearns
Lena McCourtie
Brian Turner
(University of Winnipeg)

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