Inkshed

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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

Memorial University Russell A. Hunt St. Thomas University Susan Drain Mount Saint Vincent University Lester Faigley University of Texas Judy Segal University of British University	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.

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

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Fees support the Inkshed Publishing Initiative and on-going organizational expenses.

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What's New...

1. Canadian Caucus at CCC - Thursday, March 28, 6:45 - 7:45

The agenda for the Canadian Caucus is still open: if you're going to be there, please email mlc@yorku.caÑor use regular mail address on page 2Ñwith suggestions for our discussion.

The official program has the Canadian Caucus ending at 7:45, but as habituŽs of CCCC know, the meeting only really gets going when we all go out for dinner. My request for a "social convenor"Ñsee Inkshed 14.1Ñwhose chief job is to decide on a watering hole and make sure we all get there, has fallen on deaf ears. Maybe this job needs more cachet? (How about we enshrine the position in the CASLL constitution?)

2. WAC/WIC and Writing to Learn in the Canadian Context at CCCC- Friday, March 29, 4:30 - 5:45

This session, organized by Cathy Schryer, Philippa Spoel, and Henry Hubert, and including other Canadian writing folk, should not to be missed.

3. We're on the Web

All the newsletters since September 1994 are now on our Web server. Go to

http://www.writer.yorku.ca and click on "resources."

I hope that this will serve as a useful archive, and as a way for "outsiders" to see our good work. I intend at the AGM to bring up the possibility of having other CASLL/Inkshed materialÑsuch as our constitution, and information about the publishing arm of Inkshed, for exampleÑon-line as well. Please give me some feedback on this, if you're not going to be at Inkshed 13.

4. Articles in this Issue

Here we have concrete proof of the influence of Inkshed conferences: in this issue, Mary Mar continues a discussion begun by Rhonda Schuller at Inkshed 12, and Glenn Deer charts the progress of his ideas starting from another panel at Inkshed 12. I hope that readers will be motivated to continue the conversation: Mary actively invites reactions to her piece, and Glenn's article might well elicit responses from Inkshedders in other provinces.

Also included are the last of the poems submitted by Renee NormanÑyou'll recall reading her poems in past issuesÑand hearing others at Inkshed 12. Any other Inkshedders have any poems sequestered away that you'd like us to read?

I'm delighted that we're hearing a new voice in this issue: thanks to Joanne Farrell for sending in her thoughts on journals. When I read her piece, I wanted to write a response about "electronic" journals. Will I get around to it? Given the normal turn of events in March, I doubt it. But I'm hopeful I can for the "April" issueÑI'll extend the deadline till May 10 to accommodate our March/April work pressures; the issue will be mailed May 15.

Mary-Louise Craven

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The Community and the Discourse of a Writing Centre

At Inkshed 12, Rhonda Schuller presented a schema of some of the different discourse communities represented in the conference presentations, characterizing whether each seemed to be a community and whether it had a discourse of its own. I was pleased that Rhonda included writing centres within her schema, but I've been thinking for some time about whether I agreed with her representation that writing centres are a community, but one without a discourse of their own.

As a person who works in a writing centre, I share much in common with others who work in this context. However, each writing centre operates very much within its own social and institutional context. So I write this article with the voice of a representative of writing centres as a context for writing instruction. But I don't purport to represent the definitive voice about writing centres in Canada. My experience working in the writing centre at Concordia University forms the basis of my thoughts.

First of all, there's no doubt that those of us who work in the Centre regard it as a community. Staffed by undergraduate and graduate peer tutors, the Centre is a place where we share a warm camaraderie that's difficult to describe to outsiders. It is still a source of amazement to me how quickly new tutors come to embrace the values of the writing centre community. I suppose our camaraderie stems from our shared enjoyment and shared frustrations in working with students, in attempting with them to demystify and understand the often arcane conventions of academic discourseÑand in being able to do so with people who come to us voluntarily and upon whom we must pass no judgment, make no evaluation. It's a place where learning happens because learners want it to happen, a place within but also outside of the "credentialing" function of the university. Student users feel it's their community too. It's a place where they come for support if they're frustrated or angry or troubled in their attempts to carry out the demands of their assignments, a place where they find interested readers and listeners willing to engage in a dialogue about their ideas, a place where they can ask questions and try out ideas and be assured that they will be taken seriously. The love of learning and enjoyment in working with others that inspires most of our work seems to create natural ties that result

in a strong sense of community.

So, yes, our Centre is unquestionably a learning context that could be characterized as a community in that we share a sense of commitment to a common purpose and to one another. But I also think that the nature of our context has enabled us to generate a distinctive discourse of our ownÑone that differs from any of the disciplinary discourses we spend so much of our time talking about in the Centre and one that differs from the discourse of classroom instruction.

A context of face-to-face interaction with no evaluation has within it the potential to significantly alter the discourse practices of instruction. The discourse can differ because the relations between people are different. Now it's quite true that writing centres don't have to take on a different form of discourse or a different pattern of relations with students. A writing centre can replicate the same type of discourse and the same power relations that exist in the classroom, even when freed in some ways from the constraints and the roles inherent in a learning environment based on evaluation. Yet it is possible to establish in the writing centre a different social context for learning, an alternative to traditional educational structures, one which results in a different form of discourse.

In our Centre, this discourse is oral, as most pedagogical discourse is. We do more talking about writing than actual writing in our work with students. The talk is different from most classroom instruction; however, because the agenda for most sessions is set by student users, we act as outside consultants in a way that a classroom instructor cannot. Students come to our writing centre because they value what they can gain there; they value our role in facilitating writing. However, many also recognize (or come to recognize) that they have more knowledge of the assignment, of the content, and even of the discourse requirements than the person they are consulting. Our talk then becomes a form of metadiscourse designed to help students understand their particular rhetorical situation, even though we might be quite unfamiliar with it ourselves. This results in a different pattern of interaction, a dialogue of genuine exchange that is very difficult to achieve in the classroom or advisory relationship of instructor to student. The relationship is not always entirely non-hierarchical, and certainly some students initially perceive themselves as novices coming to an expert, but that's the very perception we attempt to minimize through our discourse, trying to establish a more equal relationship than exists in most faculty-student interactions or even in most tutoring relationships that focus on content knowledge. Without denying our own authority as writers and readers, we seek through our interaction, through our discourse, to elicit students' sense of authority as writers. The voluntary nature of the interaction, the absence of evaluation, allows for this discourse of mutual exchange to take place.

Because students coming to our Centre are often strangers to us, because our time with them may be limited (perhaps a single session), because students may have their own expectations and misconceptions of what we do, and because of our goal of achieving an interaction of mutual exchange, we have developed certain practices in working with students, practices that are revealed in our discourse. We need to interact with each student in ways that build a rapport, we need to ask questions that elicit an understanding of the student's context, and we need to negotiate the exchange of knowledge and authority that will take place. Students often mention that they appreciate our friendliness and accessibility, but they also mention our "objectivity," by which they mean that we have no prior agenda of our own and are willing to engage in helping them deal with whatever their concerns are. These concerns are multidisciplinary so we need to be ready and willing to engage in discussion of ideas and patterns of thinking that are outside of our own disciplinary background. This combination of commitment to individual students and to student learning without having a stake in the outcome and commitment to negotiating some form of mutual exchange of expertise across disciplinary boundaries allows for a discourse that is relatively uncommon in the academy.

In fact, writing centres can achieve a distinctive discourse because we aren't bound by the factors that govern and constrain institutional learning: hierarchical relations, disciplinary boundaries, and high student-teacher ratios. As a result of the distinctiveness of our context, we can engage in discourse that is characterized by flexibility and openness to students and to their cross-disciplinary concerns. This discourse is effective in helping students learn because it enhances their sense of themselves as writers and knowers, because it creates a supportive and concrete rhetorical relationship in a setting where it's easy to have a sense of oneself as voicing ideas with a purpose to a reader, one where genuine communication takes precedence over concern for deadlines and marks and playing the academic game.

I suspect that this manner of discourse we engage in at our writing centre is as important as, probably even more important than, our formal knowledge about writing and how to help students improve as writers. Certainly part of the

challenge, the excitement, of working in a writing centre for me is that I never can become fully expert. I know I often can't expect to know more than the students I work withÑand those are the sessions I most look forward to. It's a context where the potential for learning is great, where I only have to be open to listen, where students teach me about the role that differences in culture, linguistic background, and academic orientation play in learning to write and where I get a chance to explore the many different discourse patterns that make up the academy. And it's a place where I frequently have the opportunity to influence, even transform, students' sense of themselves, to help them relate to the academic context in a different way, as authorities in their own right, as knowers who are open to the voices of other authorities within the discourse community of their discipline. It's a place where I myself have undergone transformation. It's a powerful learning environment, a powerful context for learning.

And, in closing, I'd contend that it's powerful because of our sense of community and also because of the type of discourse we engage in with students, a discourse that arises out of our roles within the distinctive institutional context that is a writing centre. So thanks, Rhonda, for stimulating me to think through this issue. What do others who work in writing centres think? Do we have a discourse of our own?

Mary Mar
Concordia University

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Dangerous Relief

my aunt Goldie tells me to wash my face daily
take care of your skin
the mother at my daughter's lessons
says she only had time to work on one bedroom
my mother rinses the dishes in hot water
before she stacks them in the dishwasher
my youngest daughter's face crumples
under the blankets when I push her away
the dog follows me from room to room
until I finally take him for a walk

a cousin won't come out of her room to visit
Heidi is or TV (and we are 21)
the nurse washes the blood
off my legs when I wake
a doctor tells me the story of a colleague
who placed a urine sample
in his fridge at a party
my sister measures out a remedy from her kit
five tiny balls of strychnine roll on a spoon
fingers drum on a steering wheel
a rhythm of restlessness I want to quash
my knees are folded in front of me
on a childhood vacation
I admire my smooth flesh ready for adventure

Renee Norman

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The Rhetoric of Educational Reform

The Importance of Being Relevant

In January 1996 Sandra Dueck and I participated in a roundtable discussion at Douglas College, New Westminster on the growing tensions between applied and liberal humanist approaches to education. Drawing on our research interests that had already been sharpened through our collaboration with Henry Hubert and Margaret Procter for our "Perceptions of Literacy" presentation at Inkshed 12, we attempted to chart some of the recent developments in the rhetoric of educational reform in the B.C. context. I have attempted here to provide an overview of some of the problematic issues in an educational, political, and economic landscape that is dramatically changing even as I write. Here in B.C. a provincial election looms on the horizon, a new premier has just taken office amidst a storm of controversy, and it is not certain who will be the ministers overseeing secondary and post-secondary education one year from now. While our colleagues in other provinces, especially Ontario, are having to deal with direct crippling cuts to education and social programs, we in B.C. are struggling to respond and adapt to a rhetoric of educational reform that is demanding relevance.

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The British Columbia Teacher's Federation recently launched an advertising campaign to counter the bad press education has been receiving. Unfortunately the ads had not yet even risen off the ground when the campaign was deflatingly construed on the front page of the Vancouver Sun as an expensive and self-interested rhetoric, an attempt to protect their territory from the hands of reformers and alternative school governance: "Teachers out to polish image" states a headline, followed by the accusatory lead, "A $1.6 million ad campaign by the provincial federation is expected to target charter schools" (Balcom, 21 February 1996). The Sun article also states that "the public will need some convincing [that the school system is working well]" since the B. C. ministry of education found in a 1993 report that 42 per cent of the respondents to a survey "said taxpayers are getting poor value or very poor value for their education dollar."

The struggle of the B.C. Teachers Federation to convey their view of the state of the schools to a sceptical media and an anxious public is just one of the innumerable sites where education is being called to account by armies of reformers across North America. The voices of reform are diverse, and include government education officials, organized labour lobbyists, corporation leaders, business think-tanks, futurologists, parent associations, school administrators, and innovation-minded teachers. The reach and power of these voices of reform are not, however, equal: In B.C., the provincial government, which sets educational policy and goals, and which controls funding, has the greatest power to define the terms of the educational debate. Those terms clearly demonstrate how the B.C. government is seeking educational solutions to a mass of economic and social problems. Reforms often involve the conflicting goals of cutting budgets to eliminate debt yet also aiming to stimulate employment and economic growth through enhanced training programs. Teachers and students increasingly carry the burden of needing to solve the most pressing social problems. According to the government, and to specific business and labour groups, education has all of the answers, if only it could be reformed to be more relevant.

'Relevance' is a key term in the rhetoric of educational reform, a word that appeals to common self-interest and to practicality. The British Columbia Ministry of Education's Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education Plan (September 1994) uses the term three times on the introductory page. Who would want an education that was irrelevant? Everyone wants to study in ways that are important, personally beneficial, and reaffirmed by society as valuable.

A hostile challenge to the relevance of an education program cannot effectively be answered with a defense of the intrinsic worth of knowledge: the Reform-minded audience is running out patience, and they control the purse strings. This audience of Reformers demands relevance and in some instances they want teachers to provide proof that their courses are relevant, or that their students have benefitted in empirically measurable ways.

If you have been following some of the language and rhetoric discussion groups on the Internet, you have likely come across a colleague's request for advice concerning the relevance problem. A recent discussion string on H-RHETOR was concerned with defending the relevance of classical rhetoric and a liberal arts education. One university apparently had made 'relevance' one of the key tests for retention of courses, and an American governor had criticized the lack of relevance in liberal arts colleges. James Raymond, former editor of College English, replied by defending the

nonutilitarian value or "uselessness" of the "free arts." Such a position of aesthetic essentialism is common enough amongst us, and we who have known the privileges and pleasures of working in the humanities know the intrinsic rewards of our calling, but intrinsic rewards don't carry much weight with an inquisitorial audience of Reformers: "See," says the Reformer, while sharpening the axe, "I told you they were useless, and now they admit it."

Our colleague Will Garrett-Petts, in Kamloops at the University College of the Cariboo, recently posted a note on the CASLL list concerning a cross-disciplinary challenge to English courses. An economist on Cariboo's B. A. restructuring committee could not "see any difference between those students with and those without instruction in English" and requested "studies that show the effectiveness of English literature and composition instruction" (CASLL/Inkshed, 25 Jan 1996). One of the helpful respondents to Cariboo's challenging situation was Professor Calvin Kalman, a physicist at Concordia University, who wrote that "To understand science, you need to deal with concepts. Yet how do you read a book and understand the conceptual underpinnings? If nothing else, we should be training students to take unseen pieces of scientific texts and analyze them critically. . . . What I taught my students in my courses in classical electromagnetic theory is how to write to learn. This is the true subject as well of our English Composition courses, which are not courses in grammar but courses in rhetoric, in how to analyze material critically. As such they should be compulsory for science students"(CASLL/Inkshed, 30 January 1996).

From Practice to Future Work

The relevance question, however, has recently become more than just a challenge to the assessment of the academic outcomes of teaching. Our defense of what we do would be a bit easier if we just needed to prove that teaching enhances the communicative and cognitive abilities of our students. Now educators from kindergarten to graduate school, from liberal arts universities to technological institutes, are having to account more directly than ever before how we help prepare students for the working conditions of the future.

Paul Gallagher, former chief executive officer of Dawson College in Montreal, Vancouver Community College, and Capilano College, in "What a challenge to the old ways of teaching and training" (Vancouver Sun 10 February 1996:A19) represents the job-futures position when he writes that "The top priority now should be training and education for economic independence for virtually everybody, even at the expense of delayed opportunity for more general education for some. It is hard to pay much attention to intellectual or cultural pursuits, or exercise citizenship responsibilities, when you cannot put bread on your table."

This call for an education that is relevant to the student's future working life is complemented by an article by Marian Meagher and Stuart Noble, Co-chairs of the B.C. Labour Force Development Board, on "The graduation gap between what employers get and need" (Vancouver Sun 16 February 1996: A19). They write, "Our analysis points out that current levels of university graduations will be sufficient to meet requirements in the future. We do have a concern, however, about an imbalance in the mix of these degreesÑtoo many general arts degrees and too few applied degrees, such as computing science and engineering"

Meagher and Noble were part of the B.C. board that, in November, released the report Training for What?, a document that has drawn Reformist support and liberal humanist criticism. In it the board highlights the "relevance gap" that is marked by the "over supply of academic program graduates" versus the "under-supply of those in career, vocational and applied programs," and the board seeks to redress the imbalance by changing the "content of all education and training programs [to] fit more directly with the needs of the workplace." The board also states that there are "entrenched societal attitudes about what levels and kinds of education and training will lead to high paid, secure jobs [and these attitudes] need to be re-focused on where the real opportunities are going to occur." They see "a successful future for British Columbia that includes a highly skilled, diverse and agile workforce" (from the Training for What? Release Backgrounder, issued by the British Columbia Labour Force Development Board , 14 November 1995).

Now, I realize that many of us already teach writing, reading, and critical thinking in contexts that emphasize the applied, the technical, and the future-oriented. Some of us might even welcome the unseating of Humanities and English lit/comp courses from positions of curricular prominence, for we might think this will let us get on with the practical nuts-and-bolts of focusing on composing as learning, teaching practical rhetoric, technical writing, and

business communications, or promoting composition theory as an overarching meta-discipline that will enhance writing-across-the-curriculum programs. I fear, however, that, at least in the B.C. public schools, the policy makers and their favourite interest groups have teamed up in order to impose curricular goals that cannot be met in a fairly accessible, single-tiered school system. More disturbing, as well, are the plans to bring in such curricular reforms as practical math courses or business communications English courses without consulting the teachers who would supposedly be delivering these courses. Such courses and policies will have effects that will problematically radiate throughout public education.

Concerning the proposed new "practical" math curriculum, Garry Philips, the president of the B.C. Association of Mathematics Teachers, says, "My approach would be that we really need to have the curriculum as broad as possible because we don't know what jobs are going to be out there in 10 or 15 years. I don't think we should be teaching kids plumbing math, for example. We may not even have plumbers in the future" (Vancouver Sun 26 October 1995:B8). And Sylvia Jones, president of the B.C. Teachers of English Language Arts, says about the ministry of education's proposed Technical and Professional Communications 12, a course the ministry wants to be granted equal status to English 12 in 1997: "It's not that we don't want our courses to be relevant. Our problem is that technical and professional communications isn't even founded on any theory of language. As it stands now, it's just formula writing"(Vancouver Sun 25 October 1995: A1).

While many of us would object to the lack of an informed rhetorical perspective in the last statement by Jones, what is disturbing here is the manner that educational reform is proceeding through a top-down imposition rather than through consultation. The result is that the new practical curricula will have to be delivered by teachers who either don't believe in the academic integrity of what they are teaching, don't believe in its real practicality, or don't have the necessary training to deliver the new courses. Teachers will need practical training themselves in order to become more practical in their own teaching, but will government, in this age of dwindling resources, commit the funds for the professional development of teachers? How can government hope to improve the practical learning outcomes of students if they don't fund further teacher-training?

One unsatisfactory solution to this is offered by the B.C. Labour Development Board: provide more lenient instructional credentials to skilled technicians and trades people already in the field and allow secondary students to earn work-study credits by apprenticing with the employers. In theory this is a good idea, but there are many challenges to setting up high quality work-study positions that are feasible and genuinely beneficial for both employers and students. Downsizing in all sectors has already flooded employers offices with eager and often overqualified job-seekers. How many apprenticeship places are there to be found in meaningful and relevant work sites for young students? How many hi-tech or trades employers are willing to oversee the apprenticeship of students?

Futurology

The pursuit of the practical in education is being undertaken in the hope of meeting future economic needs. But is the characterization of the ideally prepared, agile worker who has the right technologically advanced skills for the brave new world of global competitiveness mainly an optimistic fiction, a Utopian fancy? Can we prepare for a future that can only be imagined but not known with certainty? After all, the message that labour and business is giving us is that workers need to be prepared for uncertainty, for short-term contract work, for volatility. It will be the era, as they say, of constant job changing and lifelong learning, an era for the small company, the agile entrepreneur; an era of life-transforming technological changes that will increase everyone's productivity and quality of life.

Scott Steele, in "On to the Future," featured in *The Maclean's Guide to Canadian Universities* (1996) writes "that universities are having to cope with apparently conflicting demands: while the business community currently needs graduates with concrete training in so-called hard skillsÑespecially in high-tech areasÑthe notion that graduates with broad general skills are best prepared for a changing workplace is prevalent." Steele quotes Roger Gibbins, chair of the political science department at t he University of Calgary: "It's not that universities are unwilling to respond to the business community . . . [b]ut they are hearing two things, and those things are very different'" (39).

In the same special issue of *Maclean's*, Thomas Traves, president of Halifax's Dalhousie University, "warns that it would be 'shortsighted' to see universities as 'training institutions' that meet the short-term needs of particular segments

of society. 'You can't predict which way the world will go in the next six months, let alone the next six years,' says Traves. 'It's important to have universities than can deliver grads and research programs that address a wide range of social, cultural and economic needs.'" (39).

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No one can predict what types of problems the future will pose for the job-seeking students of today. And even if we could foresee problems, our foresight would not guarantee that we would be able to come up with good solutions. As Crawford Kilian, writer and college teacher, puts it in *2020: The Futures of Canadian Education:* "Suppose we told the educators of 1960 about the effects of crack cocaine, about the frequency of child sexual abuse, about homelessness, about AIDS. Do you think they could have devised and delivered a curriculum to equip the children of the 1960s to deal with such problems, when we ourselves don't know what to do about them? . . .We like to kid ourselves that school is to prepare children for something called the real world. We trained the '94 grads to live in a real world that's disappeared before our eyesÑand theirs"(47).

Distrusting the Technologized Future

The Reformist plans for the revitalization of the economy through a retrained workforce depend on a vision of a technologically innovative future, a knowledge-based society. But what if the futurologists have it entirely wrong? Environmental knowledge and common scientific sense show that an uncontrolled drive to increase global production and consumption cannot be sustained by our limited environmental resources: there are limits to growth, and basing all of our economic solutions on assumptions of unlimited growth is folly. Donald Reid, a rural planning professor at the University of Guelph, writes in his *Work and Leisure in the 21st Century* (1995) that "To cope with unemployment and underemployment, government and business are focusing on retraining. This focus appears to be based on the assumption that there are useful jobs at the end of the process for those who are retrainedÑa reflection of the blind faith that growth is endlessly possible" (9). Reid urges us to realize that "the environment cannot accommodate much longer an approach that rapidly depletes the earth's natural resources. No longer can we afford to define citizenship through our productive capacity or our contribution to the production process" (18).

Nor will the god of technology necessarily emerge to provide the computer-savvy graduates of new technical institutes with instant access to environmentally compatible, meaningful work and higher wages. The B.C. government is committing millions of dollars to placing more computer technology in primary and secondary classrooms, but the economic returns on such investment on expensive and rapidly depreciating hardware and software are difficult to predict. At worst, more people will lose jobs than gain them in a future of knowledge-based work, and regions with highly skilled programmers and engineers but low wages, like India, will pick up the contract work for an employer who might be based in Toronto: this is the negative outcome of the displacement of regional workers described by New York sociologists Stanley Aronowitz and William Difazio in *The Jobless Future* (1994).

Aronowitz and DiFazio work through a dystopic theme in their study and argue that "[h]igh technology will destroy more jobs than it creates. The new technology has fewer parts and fewer workers and produces more product. This is true not only in traditional production industries but for all workers, including managers and technical workers" (3). The drive to efficiency that reduces the numbers of required human workers in information processing and the lack of a specific territorial base "permit production and services to be dispersed throughout the globe with impunity. Increasingly, electronically transmitted information is the medium of business, and for the most part it does not depend on place" (9).

The reality of this displacement of work away from a region and towards the workforce with the highest and cheapest efficiency rang literally home to me a week ago when I received a telephone solicitation from a company that was publishing an alumni directory for my undergraduate alma mater, the University of Alberta.. The telephone call came from New Mexico, and when I asked the solicitor why the call wasn't coming from Alberta, she said that her company had all of the right software to handle the directory information over the phone. Fair enough, I thought, but what about the unemployed in Alberta who could also be hired to do this telephone solicitation? This is the reality of the electronic dispersion of business. Not only will local work forces contend with the relocation of manufacturing processes to cheaper offshore labour pools, but hi-tech entrepreneurs will also contend with global competition.

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As Aronowitz and Difazio so darkly put it: "These days, the terms crisis and catastrophe are ordinary components of social communication. They are no longer consigned to revolutionary or dystopian futurity but are categories of the present and are employed with abandon by journalists and savants and on the street. Walter Benjamin's once bold remark that the catastrophe is not before us but has already occurred seems almost commonplace. If this is so, we live today amid the ruins of Western civilization, but the extent of the damage is hidden by the proliferation of material cosmetics, among them the miracle technologies that make possible the consumption of considerable quantities of cheap goods." (39)

We are living through the catastrophe now. But the rhetoric of educational reform in these recessionary times of the "jobless recovery" puts an unjustifiably large burden on the shoulders of today's educators and students. While led by the rhetoric of relevance to believe that they may attain the right skills for an awaiting marketplace, today's students are really faced with the enormous task of inventing themselves, inventing their jobs, and inventing their futures. Why should today's young people invest all of their energies in pursuing self-fulfillment in a world of work that provides only limited material success and offers no loyalties or commitments or guiding existential wisdom in return. Only society as a whole can work towards the solutions, not just our schools. Conservative critics of the public funding of education want quick solutions to the economic crisis, the deficit, and unemployment. It is unfair, however, to expect that the present generation of students will be able to solve problems that cannot be solved by those in finance and government who created them, and who now make up the most powerful and affluent social groups amongst us.

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At the least, the post-Generation X youth deserve a fighting chance. The most galling hypocrisy comes from the mouths of those senior leaders who would take with one hand while pointedly making demands with the other: those who have already attained positions of great power in business or politics, positions built because of their own privileged access to one of the best education systems in the world, but who would now deny young people access to affordable education and decent social programs.

The rhetoric of relevance, which our leaders have used to initiate changes that they believe are in the best interests of everyone, needs to be met not compliantly but with demands for real commitments to social well-being. If governments continue to cut education budgets and force the raising of post secondary fees, then their targetting of the relevance of education as the problem that hinders social productivity will simply be so much conjuring to exert an hallucinatory control over our recessionary catastrophe. Reforms to educational relevance will mean nothing to our students unless we honour them with society's faith in their worthiness and invest in their education. If we expect students to aspire to greatness with the kinds of attitudes desired by the corporations, then we will have to invest money directly in students, teachers, schools, and equipment. If we need confident entrepreneurs, globally-minded business people, creative software developers, talented engineers, and developers of new technologies then we'll need to provide the money to develop programs in these areas.

If tuition fees double or triple in the next five years as governments withdraw their support, then how will students be able to afford the necessary education to acquire the skills to be competitive? If the world of work is becoming increasingly volatile, and if the amount of knowledge necessary to become a competitive employee is increasing, then how can the high school graduate receive the necessary training to be a contender in an increasingly competitive world when teaching positions are being cut or professional development is underfunded?

We need to confront our politicians, business leaders, and labour groups and put these questions to them with increased vigour and volume.

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Glenn Deer
University of British Columbia

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The Journal: Writing for Ourselves or Writing for Others?

I just realized that I am in a unique position. As a graduate student in English interested in rhetoric and composition and as a teacher of writing I am, for a brief period, straddling two sides of a complex relationship. Sometimes I wear the mask of instructor and I hold very specific beliefs about journals, expressive writing, portfolios, classroom research, freewrites, peer editing, and even grammar. When I put on the mask of student my beliefs and what I know as a teacher take on a very different meaning. I understand that as a teacher we are students for life but this is different. As a student I must anticipate "the grade." The moment evaluation enters the picture the picture changes. Not for a moment do I forget that the teacher is my number one audience because she is the one who will evaluate my performance. I write for her and any other reader is secondary, including my peers and, sadly, myself.

This realization, that I wore two masks, came recently while I was attending a seminar of writing teachers. It was an end of the year meeting where classroom stories, strategies, and ideas were exchanged. I was invited as a student interested in writing theory. Of course, I wore my teacher's mask. I was both excited and inspired by the enthusiasm and dedication that was expressed that day. It was toward the end of the first day of discussion that I replaced my teacher's mask with my student's.

They had begun to discuss the journal. Some of the stories they related were funny, like the student who always wrote about his hair; some were frustrating, like the student who resisted the exercise altogether; others were sad like the student who sought friendship. We've all experienced students like these. I was tempted to describe my own experience as a student who was willing to play the game but not really engaged with the notion of journal keeping. After all, who has the time? Somehow I was not surprised when one by one each teacher came out of the closet when they admitted

that they were unsure of how to respond to the journals and, in fact, didn't like to read them.

That's when I slipped into the role of student. I could identify with the student who wrote about his hair and with the student who resisted the exercise. I was tempted to relate my own experience of journal keeping in the classroom where I would write a week's worth of entries at one sitting. On one occasion, to my horror, I realized that I had post dated the entries and wondered what my teacher would think when she realized that I was a fraud. This isn't even a very original story as I hear it repeated back to me by quite a surprising number of successful students. Teachers don't want to read them and students don't want to write them so what are *we* doing?

Of course, this attitude is not shared by all teachers or all students. However, I do think, as a student and as a teacher, that use of the journal should be re-examined and re-evaluated. The assignment of journal writing in almost all writing classes and in many literature classes has become *de rigueur* in recent years. The problem lies in the fact that the assignment of this writing is often haphazard. It is assigned because it is something that should be done and not because of its intrinsic value.

As a writing tool the journal is invaluable. I know this as a writer. I keep a journal which I do not think would be of any interest to anyone because it is my writing to me, about me, and anything/one else I feel like writing/thinking about. To hand in even "samples that I want to share" for evaluation is a practice that I want nothing to do with. Geoffrey Summerfield says that we must not lose sight of the value of journal writing as a social activity (34). Certainly language cannot be dissociated from social living. It is always interrelated, intertwined and involved with human struggle. The moment we pick up the pen or sit down at the keyboard we are responding to someone/thing. Even if every word is launched into some sort of social space audience is implied. As a journal writer my audience is very specific. My audience is myself. I may benefit from social learning but the journal allows me to be a private learner as well.

In his essay, Summerfield cites Amelia Earhart's log-book as an example of a journal keeping. While this may serve to demonstrate the different forms that a journal may take it is somewhat removed from the freshman experience. Students, especially freshmen, are not writing for the world. They are writing for an "A." Most often they are unaware of the fact that they *could* be writing for themselves, they believe that they are doing what they are told. My understanding of the journal as a writing tool only became apparent when I no longer *had* to hand it in, when I began keeping a journal outside of the classroom. It became a habit when I discovered its value as unique to my needs.

As a student I would want to be introduced to journal use. There is a conflict of interests, however, when a student is told to freewrite to explore and then urged to share. If sharing with the teacher or peers is the intention, then the journal takes on a new form. The student is now forced to deal with a specific audience. It is no longer a 'free'-write.

If the journal is to be private then it is unfair to insist or even suggest that some hand in selected pieces. Those selected pieces will then take on a new form. Without the experience of regular journal writing it is difficult for the student to differentiate between writing for self as exploration or response to a text, and writing to satisfy the instructor. If it is a private habit then how can it be included in evaluation? I am uncomfortable sharing my private exploratory habits with anyone. Even if the journal is limited in scope to a reading journal or log, I think it is conflictual to view this writing as both private and public. Summerfield reminds us that a journal which is initiated, required, and overseen by someone other than the writer is no longer a journal, as we know it. It may be, he argues, something better.

Sharing is, of course, important to learning. The notion of a group journal, where a group of students contribute to a single classroom journal or a dialogue journal where the teacher and student carry on a conversation in the journal are only two examples of collaborative learning strategies. A dialogic notebook is not, however, a journal. It may be what Summerfield means when he suggests "something better," and, indeed, it is worthwhile to hear multiple perspectives on our ideas as well as be provided with a supportive audience. But the dialogue journal precludes private reflection and most freshman would not be able to put aside the notion that they are being judged for their entries.

Toby Fulwiler describes the academic journal as a cross between private diaries and class notebooks. Like diaries, journals are written in the first person about ideas important to the writer; like class notebooks, they focus on a subject under study in a college course *(Writer, 85)*. The issue here is that students and teachers can make the journal whatever they want it to be. The successful writing class today provides many opportunities for collaborative learning and peer

conferencing and instructor/student dialogue. Maybe the journal should remain simply a journal.

Before introducing journal writing in the literature, or the engineering, or the writing classroom it is mandatory that the instructor have a clear idea of her intent. She must ask herself: why am I assigning the journal, what is my goal, how is it to be used and do I really want to read and respond to this writing? If the teacher is not a journal writer (unthinkable??) then assigning this form of writing may not work either for her or the student. Students are not fooled by a do-what-I-say-and-not-what-I-do attitude. The teacher would be well advised to decide what a journal means for her. Is it a notebook, a diary, a daybook, an almanac, a calendar, a chronicle, a report or maybe even a picture book? We must remember, as Ann Berthoff writes, that "journals can be just as deadly as any other heuristic, if we don't think about what we are doing with them"(12). If the instructor is going to insist that the journal be submitted then she must be prepared to read and respond to hair and fashion statements.

Students need, actually crave, clear ideas and focus. In my teaching I will try to keep in mind the diverse approaches to learning that teachers and students adopt. I will exhort the students to keep a journal. I will explain the wonderful rewards that one can expect from such a private practice. It is a way of sorting out and discovering meaning and personal response to literature, to theoretical readings, to the class, to their lives. Journals, I believe, help students become better thinkers and communicators. I will offer examples of journals which were written to be read, perhaps including Amelia Earhart's record of her first flight. But I would differentiate between journal writing as a genre and the practice of private learning. I will get them started on strategies for their journal such as a discussion starter, but only as a starter. The journal to be a journal must be self-directed. I will allow the student private space to take their journal wherever they choose. I will not suggest that they hand it in. It will be enough for me to see them actually writing in their books. This prevents the journal entry from becoming a burden, one more thing to do at perhaps the last minute, rather than a learning tool. Of course, I will write in my journal at the same time. If I leave them alone and remain true to my word that this practice is for them and for their learning health then there is a greater chance that they will become addicted to a good thing.

As I replace my teacher's mask I realize how complicated teaching really can be. The goal is to encourage learning, we cannot force it. Every time we walk into a new classroom we confront a new set of unique needs. There is, of course, no system of teaching that guarantees success. This includes journal assignment. It is too often assigned and forgotten and, yet, do we dare not assign the journal? What if someone in the department found out that we don't "do it."

I do support the practice of journal writing and I think the rewards can be worthwhile. But I know that I must formulate the meaning and purpose of the exercise before it is assigned. When I teach Shakespeare, I don't think I will have the patience or the time to read about Mary's blind date or Joe's hair style decisions. Perhaps Joe needs to think on paper about his hair before he is able to consider Edward's illegitimacy or Iago's ruthlessness. How do I know? I do know that one of the best uses of the journal is to make connections between what Fulwiler describes as "college knowledge and personal knowledgeÑeach reinforces the other and the connections often lead to greater total understanding" *(Writer, 86)*.

I hope never to find myself operating in a situation where 'Joe' is trying to impress me with his private disclosures while I am hoping 'Joe' will view me as an attentive reader as I write "wow," or "tell me more about this" in the margins of his journal. If I assign the journal I will assign it as a private space for the student to respond, reflect and work out problems. My goal will be to respect this space while encouraging the student to use it.

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Joanne Farrell
Ph.D. Candidate, McGill University and
Teaching Instructor, SUNY, Plattsburg

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Happy Birthday, Sara!

I'm not ready
for the big black Sony Space Sound radio
taking up half her dresser space
the classical tapes
returned to the stereo cabinet
Red Riding's Hood given away

I only just folded the diapers into dustcloths
dismantled the crib
donated small sleepers to the playroom dollhouse

I watch her
by her radio
still deep in thought
dreaming to the raucous music

I see myself
by the screen door
tears pouring down my eyes
I gaze out at prairie sunset
blood red dulled by summer haze
chequered in the tiny squares
of front door lookout
my mother's radio playing
songs that make me cry
apron tied
she dances round our kitchen
making dinner

I want to hide that radio
in her room
cover it
paint it white
unplug it
smash its speakers
glue the buttons down
give it away

But I won't
it's me there by the radio
the sunset's calling
it once spoke to me

I'll play her radio
dance around her room
put clothes away

tuned to a classical song I like
wish it wasn't there

Renee Norman

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