Inkshed

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

Inkshed is published 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

This newsletter is supported financially by the various Writing Programmes at York University-including the Faculty of Arts' Centre for Academic Writing, The Computer-Assisted Writing Centre, and Atkinson College's Essay Tutoring Centre.

Please send in your renewal form...

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What's New...

1. Seven issues in this volume

Observant readers of Inkshed will notice that there is an anomalous issue in this volume. Because of changes to the constitution, as of 1 January 1997, we are moving to a calendar year publishing schedule. With our February issue we will begin Volume 15.

2. Results of the Ballot - changes to CASLL Constitution

By the unanimous vote of those who sent in ballots, CASLL members have approved the constitutional changes proposed at the May General Meeting and printed in Inkshed 14:5 (July 1996). The vote affirms that Inkshed Publishers will no longer be committed to produce two publications yearly, but it will retain its status as an occasional publisher. It also means that starting in January 1997, the annual membership fee will be $20 yearly, or $10 for students and the underemployed.

3. Change to the Inkshed Web site

The Inkshed Website is now at:

http://www.yorku.ca/admin/cawc/files/resources.html

4. Inkshed 14 Planning Web Site

Marcy Bauman has set up a terrific web site with the proposals already received for the Inkshed 14 conference. Readers have an apportunity to add comments/questions to the proposals by means of a Web-based conferencing system. Check it out - it's not only very informative, but it's also in the spirit of the conference. As well, there are other useful Web pages-for instance, more information about the conference facilities at Geneva Park.

http://www.umd.umich.edu/~marcyb/ink14/

5. And in this issue--

Two articles by Jim Bell and Brenda McComb, as well as a book review by Margaret. A shortened Call for Papers-we've extended the deadline to the end of January, so please give serious thought to sending in a proposal.

And, oh yes, the renewal fees form. Since the Writing Programmes at York University continue to support the expenses of publishing the Inkshed newsletter, all monies go to the CASLL organization.

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Extension of Inkshed 14 Call for Papers

While we have some wonderful proposals-see Marcy's Web page as noted below-we know that there are lots of good ideas out there, and that [a] a bunch of you just haven't gotten around to sending us yours (do it NOW!); [b] a bunch of you might be put off by the technology emphasis and may be worried that there's no place for a Lover of Books at this conference; and [c] a bunch of you might want to come, but don't want to present anything.

So we wanted to remind you that Inkshed 14 is fundamentally a conference about **reading**. While at this conference we thought we would focus on the ways technologies (old and new) shape the processes of reading and writing, any discussion about **reading** would be welcome.

Maybe one way to think about a proposal, would be to think about you at the conference-sitting in a Muskoka/Adirondack chair in a soft breeze, next to a lake that's liquid, with liquid in a glass on the arm of the chair. But the question is: what to read while you're in that chair? If you had a few days to spend next to a lake in a chair reading, what text-vaguely having to do with reading, or maybe technology-would you bring with you?

O.K. Now, have any ideas come to you about a proposal? And if you're not interested in doing a presentation (in whatever form), please consider coming and participating in the reading ambiance.

If you're not hooked up to the Web, contact Russ Hunt or Marcy Bauman who are the principal organizers for Inkshed 14:

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Otherwise check out the Web site: http://www.umd.umich.edu/~marcyb/ink14/

The new deadline is January 31, 1997.

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Small-Scale Evaluations for Writing Centres in These Times of Trouble

Jim Bell

Writing centres have resisted evaluating themselves. Some do not evaluate at all, while others rely on questionnaires given to clients at the end of conferences and on surveys mailed out to students at the end of the semester. The questionnaires turn into thank-you notes, as relieved students give sessions unrealistically positive ratings, and the surveys have return rates too low to justify confidence in the results. Given the rate at which writing centres have been extirpated recently, I believe writing centres should develop, share, and use small-scale evaluations. Such evaluations have three essential characteristics: they are inexpensive, synecdochical, and, potentially, ongoing. I would like to see the first few small-scale evaluations do three other things: focus on the major goals of writing centres; define their purpose and audience as justifying the writing centre to influential people outside of the centre and the writing centre field, and display methodological rigor. If a writing centre conducted one small, affordable, rigourous evaluation of one important aspect of its operation every semester, it could soon combine the many small evaluations to create a fairly comprehensive picture. If writing centres shared their plans and their results, they would not have to develop all their evaluation schemes from scratch, and, with appropriate cautions, could compare others' results with their own. As an example, I present one small-scale evaluation designed and conducted in the Learning Skills Centre at the University of Northern British Columbia last semester.

The Centre's principal goal is to improve students' writing processes. For the first small-scale evaluation, I decided to examine this important goal, assuming I would be wiser to do a reasonable job of evaluating something crucial and difficult to measure than to do an excellent job of evaluating something relatively unimportant and easy to measure. Knowing that half of our clients visit the Centre only once during a semester, I wanted to see if a visit improved students' writing processes. This is extremely difficult to determine because I have no measurement of the students' writing processes before they come to the Centre, and even if I did, I could not very easily watch clients write their next term papers. Who would know best how students wrote papers before and after visits to the writing centre? The students. So I decided to ask them. I asked them at three times: immediately after the conferences (paper- and pencil-questionnaire) as an indication of whether the students learned anything (Group 1); two weeks after the conference (telephone interview) as an indication of whether the students retained and implemented what they had learned (Group 2); and six to eight weeks after the appointment (telephone interview) as an indication of whether what they had learned would benefit them long-term (Group 3). A graduate student was hired as evaluator, he and I worked together to design the evaluation, and then he implemented the plan. Although part of the evaluation was consumer-oriented, measuring clients' satisfaction with their conferences, the main thrust was objective-oriented. During conferences, tutors negotiated objectives with students, and recorded the objectives. When conducting follow-up telephone interviews, the evaluator read each student the objective(s) of the conference, conducted the interview in light of the objective(s), and asked how well the objective(s) had been met.

All writing conferences during three two-week periods were selected. Early in the semester, all sessions during a two-week period formed Group 3, for six to eight weeks had to elapse before these students received follow-up telephone calls. Near mid-semester, Group 2 was selected, allowing time for telephone interviews two to three weeks later. Finally, before the panic of the final two weeks of the semester, Group 1 completed evaluation forms immediately after conferences ended. Any student selected to one group was ineligible for inclusion in another because, if the student were interviewed as a member of one group and then entered a conference as a member of a second group, the student would know that a follow-up interview was imminent, and this knowledge could change the conduct of the conference and the student's transfer of knowledge to his or her writing.

A selected session typically went as follows. After initial greetings, the tutor asked the student if he or she would volunteer to participate in an evaluation of the Centre. The student read the consent form approved by the Research

and Ethics Committee. The form described the general plan of the evaluation but did not specify the nature of the follow-up telephone call. If the student signed, the tutor proceeded with the introductory phase of the conference as normal, until the student and tutor had agreed on what to cover in the body of the conference. At this point, instead of an oral agreement only, the tutor wrote one or two objectives on a piece of scrap paper. If the focus of the conference shifted later, the tutor wrote another objective. Immediately after the conference, the tutor edited the objective if necessary and wrote it on the Student File form.

Two principles informed objective writing. First, an objective focused on the student , not the tutor. Second, an objective specified what the student would be able to do, not what topic(s) the tutor would cover. Tutors rehearsed the start of every objective: "By the end of this session, the student will be able to . . . ." The following are typical objectives: "To use clustering to generate ideas for an argumentative essay" and "To do a paragraph-by-paragraph outline of her rough draft to see if the organization is logical."

Participants were asked to respond on a six-point Likert scale to four statements, and to answer an open-ended question about the Centre. The four statements on the evaluation form read as follows:

1. I am satisfied with my conference at the Learning Skills Centre.
2. I am satisfied with the objectives or topics focused on during my conference.
3. I can immediately apply to my school work what I have learned during my conference.
4. What I have learned during my conference will help me in the future as a student.

With minor changes to the verbs in 3 and 4, the statements remained identical for the telephone interviews. Statement 1 is partly a warm-up item and partly a client satisfaction question. Statement 2 gets at how much the students bought into the objectives of their sessions. Statement 3 addresses transfer, and Statement 4 deals with lasting changes to students' writing processes.

The six-point Likert scale reads: 6=Strongly Agree, 5=Agree, 4=Mildly Agree, 3=Mildly Disagree, 2=Disagree, and 1=Strongly Disagree. A six-point scale is the best choice. It is better than a five-point scale because, knowing that centre evaluations will tend to be positive, we should differentiate as much as practical among degrees of positiveness, and the five-point scale offers only two options, Strongly Agree and Agree. Both the five- and seven-point scales offer an undesirable neutral or middle option that allows respondents to avoid commitment. A more detailed system such as an eight-point scale is both unfamiliar to respondents and offers too many options for respondents to remember in telephone interviews.

The open-ended question on the paper and pencil evaluation form was simply "Comments?" Phrased for the telephone interviews it became "Do you have any comments on how the Learning Skills Centre could improve or what it's doing right that it should continue?"

The evaluator telephoned clients in Groups 2 and 3 and asked the same questions posed to Group 1. A phone protocol was used to minimize the changes in the evaluator's manner from one day to the next. As soon as the evaluator guaranteed anonymity and obtained a student's permission for the telephone interview, he read the objective(s) of the conference and asked if, in the student's recollection, the objective(s) was accurate. Doing this identified the particular conference under discussion, reminded the student of what the conference tried to achieve, and placed the interview in the context of the objective(s). Calls were placed between 4:00 and 9:00 p.m. Up to five attempts over a two-week period were made to contact students.

Quantitative data were entered into a spreadsheet program. Qualitative data, Group 1's written responses to "Comments?" and Group 2 and 3's critiques of the Centre as summarized by the evaluator, were left on their original forms to be re-read and summarized by the evaluator.

The evaluator attempted to contact 135 students, approximately half of the students who had writing appointments during the semester. He reached 104 clients, and one refused to participate because he was "too busy." The response rate of 76% gives us confidence in the results. The quantitative results for all three groups are presented in the tables below. Key words are supplied to help identify Statements.

Table 1: Results for Group 1: Percentages

Likert Rating	Statement 1 Satisfaction	Statement 2 Objectives	Statement 3 Application	Statement 4 Future Use
1 (Strongly Disagree)	0	0	0	0
2 (Disagree)	0	0	0	0
3 (Mildly Disagree)	0	0	0	0
4 (Mildly Agree)	0	0	0	0
5 (Agree)	35.5	41.9	25.8	25.8
5 (Strongly Agree)	64.5	58.1	74.2	71

Table 2: Results for Group 2 (two-to-three-week follow-up): Percentage

Likert Rating	Statement 1 Satisfaction	Statement 2 Objectives	Statement 3 Application	Statement 4 Future Use
1 (Strongly Disagree)	0	0	3.3	0
2 (Disagree)	0	3.3	3.3	3.3
3 (Mildly Disagree)	13.3	6.7	3.3	3.3
4 (Mildly Agree)	6.7	13.3	6.7	6.7
5 (Agree)	50	46.7	33.3	33.3
5 (Strongly Agree)	30	30	50	53.3

Table 3: Results for Group 3 (six-to-eight-week follow-up): Percentages

Likert Rating	Statement 1 Satisfaction	Statement 2 Objectives	Statement 3 Application	Statement 4 Future Use
1 (Strongly Disagree)	2.4	0	0	0
2 (Disagree)	0	2.4	4.8	2.4
3 (Mildly Disagree)	2.4	2.4	7.1	2.4
4 (Mildly Agree)	16.7	14.3	14.3	28.6
5 (Agree)	35.7	50	35.7	26.2
5 (Strongly Agree)	42.9	31	38.1	40.5

The telephone survey yielded some impressive results. All of the clients were satisfied with the objectives focused on in their conferences and thought that they could immediately apply to their school work what they had learned. Apparently tutors negotiated conference agendas successfully, and they helped students understand how to make writing process changes when working independently. Two to three weeks later, when most clients had completed the conferenced papers and many had had them graded, 83.3% agreed or agreed strongly that they were able to apply what they had learned in the conference. An impressive 86.6% said what they had learned in the conference would continue to help them in the future. This is testament to the practicality and powerful impact of the conferences. Two months after a half-hour or hour conference all impact might be expected to have dissipated, but three-quarters of the clients agreed or strongly agreed that they could still apply what they had learned, and two-thirds agreed or strongly agreed that it would continue to help them in the future.

When students were asked what the Centre "could improve, or what it's doing right that it should continue," they were positive, even two months after their conferences. One student in the six-to-eight-week follow-up group stated, "[My] writing has greatly improved" and "[My] grades have gone up." Several students said that tutors were "very supportive" and "very helpful and friendly" as well as "knowledgeable." Only one student stated that he or she did not "get along" with his or her tutor. Having one student out of a hundred not hit it off with a tutor is outstanding. Some

comments from students indicated a desire to see "extended hours" and "more tutors" at the Centre in order to fit the students' timetables. A few students said that they didn't get a chance to go over everything they wanted during their conferences. In these cases, the outside evaluator, like the tutors, suggested setting up multiple conferences so that more of the student's needs could be met.

The small-scale evaluation provided considerable information at little cost. Although many hours were spent planning the evaluation, pilot-testing the forms and procedures, and revising the questionnaires, that work need not be repeated. To replicate the evaluation itself would cost a minimum of $500. Telephoning 140 students at 10 minutes per student takes about 25 hours. At least another 25 hours are required for orientation, file organization, data analysis, and report writing. Hiring a student at, say, $10.00 means collecting powerful information at a reasonable price.

According to the clients, the Centre had a valuable impact on their writing. Students who have not visited the Centre should be confident that they too will improve their writing processes. Professors should refer students to the Centre confident that the students will learn something-and something that lasts. Administrators deciding the Centre's budget should know that the students are highly satisfied with the help they receive and say that it makes them better writers.

I have provided one evaluation scheme for those interested in evaluating changes in the writing process. I have also provided our results so that others using the evaluation plan can, with the usual cautions, make a comparative evaluation. I would like to see writing centre professionals develop and share other evaluation designs and results. In 1984, North called for writing centers to test their assumptions, offered a pre- and post-tutorial protocol study to evaluate our claim to change writing process, and concluded: "By 1995 we will either have some answers-or we won't be around to need them" (33). Although many of us are still around, our existence looks more precarious, and we need to evaluate our writing centres more than ever.

Works Cited

North, Stephen M. "Writing Center Research: Testing Our Assumptions." Writing Centers: Theory and Administration. Ed. Gary A. Olson. Urbana: NCTE.

James H. Bell
University of Northern British Columbia

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Xiao-Ming Li. *"Good Writing" in Cross-Cultural Context.* Albany: State University of New York, 1996. xiv, 142 pages.

This is a fascinating study of the ways writing is taught as a subject in two very different cultures. Xiao-Ming Li learned the art of composition in high school in China; then, after a period of rural "re-education," she emigrated to the US and studied rhetoric and composition as a graduate student. Her book, based on limited but intensely worked data, is clearly a version of her dissertation. She began by interviewing two teachers from China and two from the US, asking them to read and comment on six short personal narratives produced by high-school students from both countries. She then asked forty-five teachers divided between the two countries to mark and comment on four of the pieces. Her book quotes the compositions and outlines the commentaries and interviews, as well as giving sketches of the four teachers and their lives -- the depiction of their different homes is worth reading in itself. Then, buttressed by citation of theory and careful formulation of her own perspective, Li analyses the criteria each tradition uses to value the various pieces. The book has been published in China as well as the US.

Not surprisingly, she finds considerable differences. They are visible, first of all, in the pieces themselves-all chosen by teachers as "models." The Chinese students aim more often at poetic effects and tend to offer concluding summative statements. The US students use realistic details, write more forthrightly of emotionally troubling situations, and try some open endings. There are also distinct differences among the teachers' ways of valuing the pieces. In the larger-group marking, most Chinese teachers admired a Chinese composition giving a tribute to a revolutionary heroine but disapproved of a US one referring to the suicide of a friend. Most US teachers found one Chinese piece sentimental, but admired the emotional depth of an American one. Intriguingly, however, there was more diversity in the ranking of

the pieces among the twenty-three Chinese respondents than among the twenty-two American ones.

I found it remarkable that both cultures depend so much on the writing of short set pieces as a staple of adolescent education. Li points out that for over 1500 years writing was the sole content of the Imperial examinations by which a Chinese youth could attain the prestigious rank of civil servant. A composition test can still determine whether a Chinese student will go on to further education. The present American teachers, by calling with such fervour for sincerity and truthfulness, depict the writing of these short personal narratives as the definition of their students' selfhood. Both sets of expectations are heavy, and both constrain the types of writing done and the way it is valued.

Li's final chapter summarizes and comments on the cultural comparisons, while avoiding oversimplification. She names the realist tradition in fiction as the root of the US teachers' call for specific detail and their dislike of "telling," but cites Richard Ohmann's criticism of this principle. She refers also to the US dislike of sentimentality in students' compositions, but comments that many elements in the culture wallow in sentimentality. Both cultures, she has shown, hold an ideal of naturalness and a tradition of Romanticism, and both are inconsistent and contradictory in applying their ideals to students' work. As we might expect, she outlines the Confucian tradition and the ways it has shaped Chinese ideas about the function of writing and the desired formal principles of literature. She can say from her own experience as well as her research that this tradition is still dominant even in current Chinese culture, but she also shows that some individual teachers question it. Having been puzzled as an entering graduate student by her US teachers' demands that she use her own voice in her writing, Li is now able to explain where her puzzlement came from as well as why her new teachers expected her to accept their aims.

The cross-cultural context explored here is not quite the one that we see when we try to explain Canadian expectations to our international students, but Li's sensitive and vivid analysis does suggest ways we can become more aware of our assumptions about "good writing." Most important, it makes clear that students may find our demands difficult precisely because they have already absorbed a rich tradition in their own culture. This is a book that calls for extension of its insights to a range of other cultures and situations.

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Literary Criticism and Critical Literacy

> With renovations underway in many universities designed to accommodate intensive and effective teaching of writing and critical thinking, it seems timely, if not a little late, to assess the effectiveness of the older disciplinary structures in meeting newly discerned needs. This article, an abridged version of a paper presented at a 1989 conference at York University, attempts to measure one discipline-English literature -against the criteria being developed for teaching critical skills. We put these excerpts forward for purposes of argument, to encourage discussion between those teaching in the disciplines and teachers of writing and critical skills of a perennially challenging question: how can what we do in the classroom allow students to develop sound judgment in reading and writing, what can be referred to as *critical literacy*?

With moves at York and other universities towards writing-across-the-disciplines, departments of English are being disentitled of their traditional role as the primary keepers of the language. But the heightened regard for the place of writing in the learning process of all disciplines is often accompanied by unexamined estimates of the particular place writing occupies in literary studies. A vague consensus that those trained in literary studies cannot teach writing well is often extended to the assumption that they do not use writing well in their courses. The recognition outside literature departments that "reading, writing and thinking are all integrated" has even led some promoters of writing-across-the-disciplines to feel, and here I quote from handouts at an early Critical Thinking workshop, that the task "which rightly belongs with the English faculty [is] improving the surface features of the written product"; that "much of the writing [teachers of literature] assign is based on literature-on what somebody else has written-and therefore has no reality."

Admittedly, as tools for developing the strategies of critical thinking, literary works seem unlikely candidates. It is ironic that if one of our objectives is to foster general critical skills we should try to reach it by exposing students to the works of literary artists, of whom few are known for their general level-headedness or critical acumen. While their

judgment in doing what they do can be deadly accurate, writers are most often undistinguished critics, sometimes even of their own work, but more often of just about everything else. We have the notorious examples supplied by poets in English of our century: Eliot with his Anglican hyper-conservatism; Yeats with his faeryism and cosmology; Pound with his fascism. It is clearly pure coincidence if literary artists are also clear-headed in non-literary areas. In these cases we're led to ask: if writing works of literature served the authors so poorly in developing sound judgment generally, how can reading and studying them be expected to serve the students?

Of course, one could object that it is not the writers as people or thinkers that students primarily encounter in literature classes, but the writers as writers-that is, in their works. But again there is little by which works of literature-organized as they so often are by wholly non-rational principles-directly recommend themselves as tools for the sharpening of articulate judgment. As models, a good essay, an argument, a piece of discursive prose would seem obviously to serve better.

Yet the almost anagrammical quality of the pair *critical literacy* and *literary criticism* suggests a close relationship; after all, in asking students to read works of literature, we are asking them to be what has conventionally been called critics. The mode of inquiry central to literary studies has three major concerns:

1) establishing a body of texts, usually called a canon, for interpretation;
2) interpreting those texts; and
3) generating theories about 1) and 2) - that is, about what constitutes a canon, how interpretation should proceed and to what end.

It is knowledge about the meaning of texts, derived from the act of reading, articulated as critical analysis and refined by dialectic.

These ground rules of literary criticism-rules of logic, evidence, and dialectical confrontation for establishing authenticity and worth of interpretation-are perfectly aligned with those of critical thinking. This is not surprising, since they constitute a particular case of the general critical ground rules of scholarly inquiry, which uphold the classical sense of critical thinking. So there is no conflict here. By practicing literary criticism, students should be practicing and developing critical literacy.

Yet research yields little evidence that these skills arise automatically from any part of the standard curriculum. Accordingly in literary studies, I think any exposure or immersion metaphors for the operation of the positive effects of courses in literature, in which the merits of the language "rub off" or "leak in," are simplistic, and their optimism unwarranted in the case of the majority of students. For students like the majority of seventeen-year-olds in one study who thought that the line of a Hopkins' poem "into my heart an air that kills" referred to air pollution (Benderson 6), the language of literature and its potentially beneficial powers is truly water off a duck's back.

Here literature departments can break a cardinal rule of critical skills teaching: that of making explicit the steps involved in reaching a goal, or breaking down the task into manageable portions. Premature emphasis on the linguistic and structural features of the work tends to lead to the ghettoization of literature departments. The texts are regarded as hermetic secrets, to which only the elect are privy. The language-rich become richer, and the language-poor are denied entry, on the understanding that "if you can't understand this, you shouldn't be here." But when the majority of students are in the latter category, the onus is on the literature departments to provide a threshold of entry. I think, in fact, the study itself offers such a threshold.

Two elements of literary studies which I think foster the development of critical habits of reading and writing are the ones that determine the general sphere of attention in the classes. First, literature deals with words, and works. While all disciplines, of course, deal in language, of the standard disciplinary divisions only literature has language as its exclusive focus. Therefore, in our efforts to get students to attend to and manipulate words, literature provides a unity of substance and goal to a degree not found in other classes (except perhaps mathematics). Only in literary studies do we find this particular snake with its tail in its mouth.

Second, there is in contemporary literary scholarship, as almost a first commandment, the relatively modern but thorough-going dissolution of the distinction between form and content, which I believe applies across methodological

camps. Measured against the methods of developing critical literacy and their insistence on the unity of thinking and writing, this basic tenet of literary analysis is perfectly in line.

These elements should, and I believe often do, make it harder than maybe in a psychology or sociology or history class for teachers of literature to ignore how students are writing what they write. They underscore the urgency of students' applying themselves in written form, ushering them into the world of discourse.

This degree of attention to written forms in literature classes implies a high degree of attention to the marking of the students' works. To some degree, the students do join the tradition of writers, and the teachers can be entirely consistent with the methods of criticism in attending to the students' writing (if not as entirely rewarded). Nancy Comley and Robert Scholes recommend dismantling the binary oppositions between literature and non-literature, production and consumption, real world and academy which sustain the hierarchy of English studies, where literature and interpretation are on top, and composition and "pseudononliterature" are on the bottom (Comley and Scholes 96-108). While I'm not entirely sold on these recommendations for reorienting literary studies, I believe a reorientation can occur to some degree in literature classes by virtue of the subject matter, which generates a unique degree of attention to student writing; it comes with the territory and constantly weighs against the established hierarchy.

But this advantage has a catch. The attention to written works which comes with the territory is attention almost exclusively to finished "works of art," of which we accept that not one word can be altered but for the worse. While there is nothing in the scholarly methods that precludes teaching appropriate to the development of critical skills, this belletristic disposition is counter to the teaching of critical thinking and writing, where, as teachers of composition have been harping for years, attention to process over product is crucial. It is this disposition which has largely earned teachers of literature their bad reputation with researchers in Composition. Yet without abandoning their critical methods, I think literature teachers can avoid this trap by carefully structuring assignments to build upon each other by stages from the ground up, thereby encouraging students' germinal efforts at criticism.

The "ground" up from which assignments can be built in this case is the students' raw response to the work, which brings us to another characteristic of literary studies that can act as a threshold for the critically illiterate, barred to some degree from the central qualities of the work. Because literature "revolves around" classics, readers are exposed to models of expression and thinking and feeling no longer conventional . Now teachers vary, depending on their methodological stripe, in their intentions to rebuild for students the context-linguistic, social, biographical-within which any given piece of literature originally existed, in an attempt to allow them to grasp the consciousness of another era. Some despise this effort; but regardless of their methodological preferences, teachers will try to accustom students to the idiom of the work. In doing this, I sometimes feel they do not dwell long enough on the untrained students' native response, which tends to be: what on earth is the writer doing here?; and whatever would possess someone to do it ? Here I think teachers can only capitalize on inadequacy. The sense of eerie weirdness in a student's first encounter with a work can lead to a bracing sense of ignorance, a kind of Socratic awareness of all one doesn't know-a good place to begin in both critical thinking and literary criticism, allowing for novel insights.

Where can one proceed from this untrained native response? The concept of exploratory writing is developed by William Zeiger in his article "The Exploratory Essay: Enfranchising the Spirit of Inquiry in College Composition" (454-64). He is not alone in subscribing to this idea; the theorists of composition Linda Flower and James Britton are others. In this company, Zeiger maintains that the teaching of writing has focused too exclusively on the scientific model that attempts to demonstrate the truth of a thesis. He sees this "obsession with the thesis " as having reached a point of "diminished returns" 459). "By slighting exploration" we are asking students "to make bricks without straw" (459). Exposition, he feels, is choked off without exploration; "the demonstrative composition depends on inquiry not merely for its thesis, but for virtually all of its subordinate concepts and their interrelationships" (458).

Zeiger writes that there has been a growing theoretical interest in the art of inquiry leading to the development of strategies for generating ideas, of heuristics for examining ideas from several angles. But he feels these have not yet had a great effect in the classroom. He has directed his own efforts to promoting and mounting two-term composition courses, the first term of which is devoted to exploratory writing, the second to composition. I am more interested in Zeigler's ideas in another context that I develop later; but they do underline students' need to build by stages in their assignments and lend themselves readily to describing students' writing in order to understand what they are reading.

In the enforced pluralism of the students' position, literature classes are like other disciplines, especially in the humanities, which proceed dialectically and thereby ask the student to consider rival positions. Faced with an array of differing or conflicting positions, the student is discouraged from any absolute embracing of one and almost forced (for diplomatic if for no better reason) into a position of skepticism.

One of the thorniest questions for teachers of critical skills is that of authority-or, in fact, the question of questioning authority. They have to negotiate the difficulty of trying to teach at once a body of material, and the ability to criticize that material. I believe that in relation to this paradox if authority, literary studies offers a unique solution. Literature classes are peculiar in that when teachers expose students to texts, they become subordinate to that authority, and thereby allow themselves to some degree to be supplanted as teachers. Professors of literature, unlike professors of philosophy or history or biology or psychology, are not practitioners of the same endeavour as the writers of the texts (at least not the primary texts, or not in their role as professors). They are not "experts" in the activity the text represents; to that degree, students and teachers are pitched into the same waters, facing the authority of the text, cohorts in exploration.

I referred above to the concept of exploratory writing developed by William Zeigler. He suggests some examples for use in the classroom of non-fiction prose essays which qualify by his criteria: exploratory writing

> does not pursue a linear sequence, but holds several possibilities in suspension simultaneously, inviting the inquisitive mind to play among them. Rather than refute counter-arguments, it cultivates them. [It] entails a readiness to entertain alternatives, to examine two sides of an issue to permit contradictory elements to co-exist. (456-57)

We do not have to extend Zeigler's criteria very far, if at all, to include literary texts in a suggested reading list; and in fact to postulate that the exploratory habit of mind is exercised to a unique degree in reading and criticizing literary works. Zeigler's criteria strongly recall Keats's commonly quoted formula for the quality of mind most appropriate to the literary artist, that of "negative capability." More specifically, what Zeigler says about exploratory essays calls to mind (when we ask "where?", in just what locus is this exploring going on in these texts?) the operation of metaphor. The unearthing specifying activity which Zeiger sees at play in reading and writing exploratory essays is analogous to that called into play by metaphoric language.

While metaphoric language is certainly not reserved for literature, nor the attention to metaphor reserved for literary criticism, its operation in literary works is distinguished by degree: first, by its concentration and structural complexity; second, by its relative immediacy and accessibility; and third, by the tentative nature of literary metaphoric structures. Novel metaphors like those any undergraduate student must deal with if he or she takes even one survey course in English require that the reader at once hold onto and suspend the categorical order. In this way, they invite the reader to "re-see" the world, and are essentially radical, units of novel world-making. In this way they render the benefits for critical literacy that Zeigler sees in exploratory writing.

With this apology for exploratory kinds of writing in place, I'd like to proceed with a bit of bare-faced speculation. The question I want to explore very tentatively is that of the critical attitude, the most problematic among the elements comprising critical thinking. One of the least acceptable things to say about critical skills is that some students have what it takes and some don't; and I share a distaste for the fatalism and elitism implicit in this position. Still, many researchers in critical skills seem to say, in a rather circular fashion, that none of the conditions are sufficient without the critical attitude, which remains largely undefined. And I've found very little insight into how teachers are supposed to put that particular bee in a student's bonnet. When I've asked myself what it is that this attitude specifically entails, I've come up with no better answer than anxiety-a kind of propensity for smelling rats; that the critical attitude is a sane and positive reaction to the general fear that all is not right around one-morally, logically, or aesthetically.

Without this attitude, we do not have critical thinking but sophistry-the successful performance of critical-like actions. As Linda Flower says in connection with composition, "people only solve the problems they define for themselves" (369); you can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink. While I certainly don't want to corner myself into saying where anxiety fits in literature, or worse, that reading literature makes one anxious(!), I've assembled this small zoo of horses and rats and bees in an attempt to suggest that before we can expect our students to think, talk, listen,

read and write clearly, they must have something to think and feel the need to say it. And I think it may be that it is on this end of the operation that literature classes are pre-eminently instrumental: in prompting students to define problems for themselves of central human importance which demand attention and a response. The case here is not one of hoping that the qualities of the text will leak in, but that of the text finding or creating its appropriate audience.

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