Inkshed

**Newsletter of the Canadian Association
for the Study of Language and Learning**

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Conference Issue: Inkshed XVI, Mont Gabriel, Québec

about Inkshed . . .

This newsletter provides a forum for its subscribers to explore relationships among research, theory, and practice in language acquisition and language use, particularly in a Canadian context. 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, students, scholars and researchers interested in reading and writing theory and practice.

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Editorial

by Margaret Procter

Well, if you couldn't be there, you can still read about it. This issue is entirely derived from the sixteenth Inkshed conference, held at Mont Gabriel near Montreal on the theme "Finding each other in a hall of mirrors: negotiating goals and values in language." It was definitely an experience worth sharing.

A spring heatwave, a ski resort, a provocative topic, and a set of interesting people talking about their lifework: no wonder the presentations produced intense experiences that included tears, laughter, heated discussion, and animated scribbling. Responding to the McGill organizers' invitation to go beyond talking, sessions involved games, poetry-reading, videos, and even dancing. They elicited more talking and writing, including the unique activity of group inkshedding: writing in immediate response to the sessions, then sharing that writing with other participants, then transcribing some for further reading. And of course the experiences continued after and beyond the official presentations —over the many bountiful meals in the wood-beamed dining hall, on the attempted mountain walks in rainy weather, and in the Talent Night that, as always, included the willing and the tolerant as well as the talented.

The articles here range from complete texts to partial outlines. None captures the whole experience, but they all invite responses from distant readers, as they did from the local listeners. Our selection starts with two challenges to our sense of modes (Brent on the new medium of hypertext, Mason and Hussey on self-expression through dance) and then moves on to ask how and why we share our ideas about writing (Artemeva and Fox on the ways engineering students learn to write like engineers; MacKinnon on the responsibilities of being an expert about writing), and ends with a moving affirmation of the value of teaching literacy in bad times (Costandi on teaching ESL during the war in Lebanon). This is far from the whole set, but it's a taste. More examples, including a selection of transcribed inksheds and some revealing photographs (revealingly relaxed, anyway), are available on the Web at <http://www.inkshed.ca>, thanks to Russ Hunt's able work as Webmaster.

This issue marks another stage of the travelling editorship. Russ Hunt took it on for a Fall/Winter issue in January 1999, and Mary Kooy and Margaret Procter have filled in for two more issues. It's been a pleasure to keep in touch with so many devoted and lively people across Canada, but now Joanne André and Barbara Schneider of University of Calgary have agreed to take on the mantle (or at least the mailing list). Please send them your responses to this issue, your latest thoughts on language and literacy in general, and your bright ideas in particular. Their first issue will send out calls to the next Inkshed conference in May 2000. Look for a Western flavour!

In the Mirror of Genre: Students Write this World
A Research Report   Doug Brent

This is a version of a talk given at Inkshed XVI on May 6, 1999. It is based on the set of slides accompanying my talk, expanded enough to be accessible to people who were not there. The research is just beginning. Please email me at dabrent@ucalgary.ca with any suggestions, ideas, responses, etc. This print version is only a paper shadow of the real version, a native hypertext that can be found at http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~dabrent/Mirror/Mirror.htm. I strongly encourage you to read the hypertext version, which will allow you to explore the sources and examples of webtext in richer profusion. It will, I acknowledge, be harder to read in the bathroom.

This piece is based on the following premises:
C   What if electronic media eventually become sufficiently cheap, portable and available that they displace print as the major medium for writing? This would not mean that hard copy would disappear, any more than pens disappeared when print arrived, or radio when television arrived. But it would be moved out of its current position of primacy.
C   What if the "hypertext gurus" such as Stuart Moulthrop, George Landow and Jay David Bolter are right: that hypertext will become the genre of choice and will displace our current linear logic with an associational logic of connections?
C   What if the World Wide Web affords everyone the opportunity not only to read but also to write scholarly, creative, popular, and workplace hypertext?
If these predictions are at least partly true, then we as teachers have a mission to figure out how this kind of text will work, and to help our students to learn the rules of this new language game.

Nancy Kaplan's Mission Statement
It's probably obvious why all of this matters, but I think that Nancy Kaplan captures the urgency of it best in her article "E-Literacies: Politexts, Hypertexts, and Other Cultural Formations in the Late Age of Print."

> Equitable access to computers, modems, and Internet services alone will not be sufficient. Unless people know how to read what they see and to write when they can—unless e-literacies are also equitably distributed—equitable access will be for naught. The humanists among us must take responsibility for the literacy education that makes access meaningful.
> So here is my challenge to English departments, Education departments, and teachers everywhere: learn this space. And contribute. Write this world.

For me, this issues a challenge. We need to do more than read books on efficient hypertext design. We need to become actively involved in discovering how web texts perform in a living social space, and to learn how to use that knowledge to empower students to construct their own web texts with full rhetorical understanding. Since web text is evolving faster than we can ever hope to understand, this task is of course impossible. But that has never stopped rhetoricians before.

The Research Project
In the research project described here, I wanted to see what students made of texts they found on the

web, and what sorts of webtexts they produced themselves based on their (albeit highly limited) exposure to these texts. In other words, I was interested in what genres they seemed to be construing.

Communications Studies 380 is not primarily a writing course; it's a Communications History course. After a term of discussing communications history from cave painting to mass media, a la McLuhan, Ong, et al., students start considering new media.

After some preliminary warm-up projects, I asked them to look for some "interesting" web sites and discuss how they work. I left the definition of "interesting" largely up to them, but as starters I pointed them to some sites that use webtext in some of the non-linear postmodernist ways described by David Kolb, such as Michael Joyce's hyperfiction "Twelve Blue" and John December's article "Living in Hypertext." Then I encouraged them to surf.

Later in the course I got them working in groups of about three or four to create their own webtexts. I let them use a "default mode" of writing separate on-line essays and linking them to each other and to source and amplifying pages (Kolb's "caterpillar text"). However, I gave them enough time (most of a term) to work themselves into more elaborate forms if they choose to.   In particular, I was interested in whether they would produce anything that resembled the highly postmodernist forms of argument listed by Kolb.

For this Inkshed research report, I highlight four pages:
C   A web journal genre: A Hypertext Fiction Review
C   A web encyclopedic genre: Virtual Adventures
C   Linked essays: VIRTUAL LIFE: Social Relationships in Cyberspace
C   A more glitzy essay: Hypertext Fiction: An Exploration of Literature and Technology
These pages and others can be viewed on my web page at http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~dabrent. Follow the "Student Web Pages" link to COMS 380, 1997-98.

What I find interesting about these pages is that they look remarkably professional, considering that most of the students who made them had little or no experience writing web pages and received relatively little direct instruction in web text genres.

"Hypertext Fiction Review" is a remarkable synthesis of on-line 'zine genres with a healthy dose of Siskel and Ebert. "Virtual Adventures" takes up the hobbyist and commercial page genres. "Virtual Life" is probably the least adventuresome of the four, taking most closely the form of hard copy essays linked together, but it still pays attention to matters of visual design and balance that could only have been learned from observation of other webtexts. "Hypertext Fiction" is a variant on this form that illustrates how quite short pieces of original text can be used as a framing text for links to other material. Interestingly the hard copy distinction between "primary" and "secondary" sources is scrupulously observed though not named as such. (This text also suggests the traps that students can fall into when they put glitzy background ahead of readability, but that, too, seems to be a common web genre: the unreadable page.)

Interviews on Web Pages
Three students volunteered to be interviewed at intervals throughout this process as they read and then

wrote hypertexts. Some of these interviews included read-aloud protocols as the students surfed their way through the web reading assignments. Others were retrospective accounts of how and why they composed their texts the way they did.

For this report, I'll cut a hundred or so pages of not-well-analyzed transcript down to one paragraph.

I asked one of the students who worked on the "Virtual Life" text what she liked and did not like about her own contribution, the "Cyberstalking" page. This is what she had to say:

> It's kind of funny, 'cause I've gone and created a site that's a little more text than anything else. Which goes against what I actually liked a lot. So I think what I would have done is maybe try to condense the text that was actually on this site. But it still would have a link to the Hitchcock case and a link to these people because I thought they were important. Even possibly have a little bit of information from myself connecting to those sites. But I don't know how to go about doing that.

In other words, she would attenuate her own text to "a little bit of information from myself" and concentrate on smooth connections to other people's material. This in fact is more like what other sites such as the Hypertext Fiction site do: the author's own text performs bridging and summarizing tasks rather than making its own argument in any detail. Students who do produce large amounts of their own argument seemed faintly embarrassed about the fact that in doing so, they reproduced the linear hard-copy essay: the only available model for extended argument.

A Brief Digression on Ethics

At Inkshed, the presentation just before mine was a set of stories by Stan Straw, Sandy Baardman, Laura Atkinson and Pat Sadowy, each of which raised a gripping ethical dilemma. This sent a cold chill down my researcher's spine.

In usual researcher style, I promised students complete anonymity in this project. However, the texts they produced are on the web for the world to see. In fact this proved to be one of the more popular aspects of the project: the unusual ability to write material that people other than the prof and the other students might actually read. Therefore, there's not much point in anonymizing people and pretending that readers can't infer in about five seconds which student wrote which quotation from the transcripts.

That observation is trivial compared to the larger issue of not only making students' texts public, but also of moving them to my server to prevent their being extinguished when students' accounts expire. This not only affords students a humble bit of immortality--it also removes from them the opportunity to edit or delete their texts in future. This is the ultimate in textual appropriation.

I have no answer to this.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

If I live long enough to analyze those many pages of transcript, the texts my students have produced, and a reasonable sample of the bargeloads of text on the web, perhaps I'll be in a better position to pretend I have a conclusion. In the meantime, I offer the following observations based on what I have looked at so far.

Students are expert at intuiting the forms "proper" to web space. No surprise there. However, they seem to perceive web space as

- already heavily populated
- primarily information driven

In other words, they intuitively work within a cluster of genres that I call "web encyclopedia" genres, geared to the rhetorical purpose of gathering up and making available information that is already there. This is not what I think we mean by a "writing space."

The only alternative seems to be the more-or-less linear essay reproduced on the web. This should not be surprising in view of the fact that most of the on-line academic journals reproduce this form. For instance, take a look at the *American Communication Journal* on the discourse surrounding the recent Zippergate affair (issue 2.2). This issue clearly takes advantage of the multimedia features of the web, not only merging text and graphics but also allowing readers to access streamed video version of Clinton's famous apologia courtesy of C-Span. But scratch the surface—that is, actually read one of the essays—and you'll find dressed-up linear text.
Not that there's anything essentially wrong with dressed-up linear text. But it does not provide an opportunity for students to see the glorious riches of Kolbian multi-voiced postmodenrist philosophical hypertext at work.

I am not at this point quite sure what this means. Maybe it means that the hypertext gurus are too optimistic, or maybe it means that we are still at the stage print was in when it tried to look as much as possible like an illuminated manuscript. Maybe it means that, if we truly think that multi-voiced polylog is a useful genre, we will have to provide more opportunities for students to read and write it.

Maybe before students can write this world, we will have to.

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THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS:
LANGUAGE MEETS BODY LANGUAGE

Charlotte Hussey and Jean Mason

Because our time is so limited, and because it takes time to even begin to experience the sensation of "meditation through movement," there will be no verbal warm-up at the beginning of our workshop. We will start with a physical warm-up and simply carry on with the planned activities. Please read the following as a short introduction to our workshop, and come prepared to move and write. We plan to reserve about 10 minutes at the end for discussion.

In traditional "Western" culture, the image of the mirror has long signified reflection of the actual or "real." In post-modern thought, however, the mirror serves a more proactive function. Instead of confirming our view of reality and its replicability, it forces us to question the nature of the real. In so doing it undermines accepted oppositions that have long characterized our assumptions: here/there; outside/inside; visible/invisible; conscious/unconscious; rational/emotional; right-brain/left-brain; physical/intellectual. By combining movement with writing, we are seeking new ways to bridge these unnatural dichotemies and to foster understanding and creativity. Our workshop explores one possible approach, designed with inkshedders in mind.

Just as language "mirrors" a particular reality of being and knowing, so too physical movement can provide a looking glass in which to examine self and other. Musicians and painters often stand or sway about, using the body and the breath to make art. Although writing is naturally less physical, Hawthorne and Hemingway wrote standing up, while Coleridge and the Wordsworths incubated poems during their long rhythmical Lake District walks. Did these writers become physical in reaction to the fact that writing is one of our least physically engaging forms of self-expression? Today's writer is even more constrained, often sitting at a computer and employing only fingers, wrists, and a bit of forearm to create a text. Described as an embarrassing problem by post-Cartesian thinkers, the body has become a repressed, untouchable second-class citizen, possibly because of what it mirrors back to us about change and death (Stinson 1995, Smith 1993, Ostriker 1986). What, then, do we as writers lose by abjuring the body, and/or devaluing its potential to reflect our somatic perceptions?

In this workshop we will explore whether we can write more authentically if we reconnect with our bodies. Drawing on a variety of techniques, including Gabrielle Roth's "Meditation Through Movement" and Ira Progoff's "Journal Workshop" concepts, we will use simple movements, music, and sound-making as a complement to writing. Building on individual and collective energies, we will aim to move "through the looking glass" to a sphere of deeper understanding of self and others—a sphere perhaps more closely allied to the reality of dreams.

Participants should bring a spirit of openness, a notebook, and a writing implement, and wear comfortable clothing that will inspire them to "dance" with soft flat shoes or bare feet. In this dance there is no performance, and no critic. It is simply the moving body connecting to the rhythms that surround it—be they musical instruments, chanting, or the breath itself. The important thing is to let yourself experience the rhythms. We have found that casting the eyes downward and lowering the lids to a semi-closed position helps to focus attention on the inner experience. Give your self

permission to be wholly in the moment

The body knows more than the intellect and when we allow physical impulses to be expressed through movement and then give voice to what arises, we give the body a medium for revealing its wisdom.(Nina Wise)

Write your self. Your body must be heard.　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(Helene Cixous)

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Through the Looking Glass: Identifying Causes of the Alice-Syndrome in Undergraduate Engineering Writers

Natasha Artemeva and Janna Fox

This study grew out of a question asked by an engineering professor at the University of Windsor, Peter Frise, who observed while reading design proposals from his fourth year students: "Many of these kids actually write like engineers! What accounts for the difference between those who do and those who don't?" Peter had just moved from teaching Engineering at Carleton where he specialized in introducing first-year students to their engineering studies. In Windsor, his responsibilities had shifted to primarily fourth-year and graduate students. He remembered only too well how ineffective and *unengineering-like* the writing of his first year students had been. We picked up Peter's question and began to collect data.

Focussing on students graduating from engineering programs in Carleton University and the University of Windsor, we developed 46 case studies from questionnaire responses, personal interviews, and examples of academic and workplace writing. The questionnaires and interviews were designed to elicit information about students' evolving perceptions of the value and role of written communications in engineering. Using a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin 1990), we explored the relationship between students' perceptions and the factors that were identified by Peter and supported by the literature as potential sources of students' perceptions. These factors were: language background, gender, career expectations, confidence, age, engineering task preference (e.g., management, engineering communications, problem solving or design work, academic study and research) and exposure to engineering workplace settings. Of particular interest to us was the specific nature of the students' expectations of the workplace and their perceptions of themselves as engineering communicators.

Through applying an extended metaphor of Alice in Wonderland, we intend to explore the causes of what we have called the *Alice-syndrome*. We use this term to describe what happens to some engineering students when they move from academia to the workplace and find that "nothing is as it should be". Alice moved from a regulated, rule-governed, familiar space with well defined roles and clear expectations into a fuzzy, unfamiliar and often unsafe world on the other side of the looking glass. Below is Lewis Carroll's introduction to the *Alice-syndrome*:

Chapter five. Advice from a Caterpillar.

The Caterpillar and Alice looked at each other for some time in silence; at last the Caterpillar took the hookah out of its mouth, and addressed her in a languid, sleepy voice.
'Who are you?' said the Caterpillar.
This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, ' I -   I hardly know, Sir, just at present   - at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.
'What do you mean by that?' said the Caterpillar, sternly. 'Explain yourself!'
'I ca'n't explain myself, I'm afraid, Sir,' said Alice, 'because I'm not myself, you see.'
'I don't see,' said the Caterpillar.

'I'm afraid I ca'n't put it more clearly,' Alice replied, very politely, 'for I ca'n't understand it myself, to begin with; and being so many different sizes a day is very confusing.'

'It isn't,' said the Caterpillar.

'Well, perhaps you haven't found it so yet,' said Alice; ' but when you have to turn into a chrysalis—you will some day, you know—and then after that into a butterfly, I should think you'll feel a little queer, wo'n't you?'

'Not a bit,' said the Caterpillar.

'Well, perhaps your feelings may be different,' said Alice: all I know is, it would feel very queer to me.'

'You!' said the Caterpillar contemptuously. 'Who are you?' (p. 50)

In the same way that Alice could not explain who she was because of all the changes taking place in and around her, so too student writers in engineering may wonder who they are and what has happened to them once they leave the university. Some writers are ready to play the language game. They pick up on all of the right cultural cues they receive in the workplace just as they have in academia. Others like Alice are bewildered, frustrated, inept and confused as they muddle through the unfamiliar world on the other side of the glass.

So, what did we find when we followed Alice in her adventures?

We designed our questionnaires and interviews to elicit information about the relationship between the seven factors (language background, gender, age, etc.) and students' perceptions of the value and role of communications in engineering. Only one of these factors proved to be a significant indicator of differences in students' perceptions. This factor was exposure to the engineering workplace. Through the analyses of questionnaires, interviews and samples of written work, we identified three sub-groups of undergraduate engineering students based on the integration and duration of engineering workplace experience within the academic program.

Students who had completed the academic program with no formal work placements showed limited understanding of the role communication played in the workplace and were generally unrealistic regarding the priorities of the engineering workplace.

C   Their perceptions were based on conjecture about, without grounding in, actual experience(i.e., when describing the engineering workplace they tended to use phrases such as "I think", "I believe", "It seems", etc.).
C   Much as Alice did when asked by the Caterpillar "Who are you?", they were confused about their roles as engineering communicators.
C   They placed heavy reliance on professors as the ultimate authority and had vague career plans and no contacts in industry.
C   They generally expressed the belief that technical skills alone would ensure a successful engineering career.

They often had limited skill in engineering writing, with only 30% able to demonstrate adequate skill.

Students with multiple integrated short-term industrial co-op placements had a strong sense of workplace culture including the notion of "reading the boss" and understanding the dynamics of the work scene.

C   They had a renewed appreciation of their academic experience and had less difficulty with the gap between theory and practice, as they applied and saw the value of the application of academic/theoretical knowledge in the workplace.
C   Their internalized notions of the academic versus the workplace audience were more realistic.
C   This group also recognized defining the problem as a first step in the engineering process and the necessity of dealing with issues of time, priority and cost.
C   They mentioned increased opportunities for getting jobs through established contacts within industry.

These graduating students demonstrated at least adequate skills in engineering communications.

Students who had long-term industrial internship (16 months) placements had considerable engineering knowledge and a longer term of employment than co-op students and, therefore, they were eligible for tasks which involved greater degrees of responsibility.

Key factors that influenced changes in their perceptions of the role of communications in engineering were:

C   increased effort by managers and supervisors to mentor and prepare the students for engineering work,
C   more substantial engagement in engineering tasks,   greater responsibility and more involvement in long-term projects.

There was considerable variation in these students' perceptions of workplace culture and their understanding of the role it plays in impeding or facilitating their own work.

Important outcomes of this type of work placement were

C   a redefinition of specific career directions based on the experience,
C   a broadened understanding of the personal, social, ethical and business aspects of acting as a professional engineer,
C   increased recognition of the relevance of the academic program,
C   realization that oral presentations and writing are an integral part of engineering practice and
C   a realization that it is impossible to do engineering work without ample and effective documentation and skill in writing.

In this group, 100% of the students demonstrated adequate skill in writing.

Conclusion

So, how does the story end?

Recent research by Winsor (1996) and Dias, Freedman, Medway & Paré (1999) suggests that relevant engineering workplace experience integrated as part of the academic program is one of the most important factors influencing the early career trajectories of successful professionals. For the student writers participating in the co-op and industrial internship models of engineering education, genres common in their workplace settings provide an initial site of   professionalization. As Jamie McKinnon (1993) found in his study of writers at the Bank of Canada, "writers... became more effective as they increasingly understood the very real social, cultural, and political dimensions of their work, embodied in typified discourse practices" (p.54).

The present research shows that actual workplace experience is the key factor in the evolution of students' perceptions of the importance of engineering writing and communications and their role in engineering design. It is especially important to note that none of the other factors considered in this research (e.g., age, gender, language background, confidence, engineering task preference, etc.) proved to be significant indicators of students' evolving views of writing and communications in the engineering   profession. Without workplace experience, students' perceptions are limited to the dynamics of academia and as a result, their career expectations lack realism: they expect either too much or too little. They often overestimate the importance of technical skill and underestimate the complexity of the roles they will play as engineering professionals. The advantage of the long-term industrial internship model is that students are provided with a better understanding of engineering workplace issues within one professional setting, while the co-op model provides a broader base of engineering experiences on which students can draw. Integrating workplace experience as part of the academic program not only improves students academic performance but also provides essential background for successful early career trajectories and enhances students' ability to do more effective work especially in engineering practice where communications are so critical to success. Industry also benefits from educational models which integrate workplace experience since newly graduated engineers, who already understand the nature of workplace expectations, are more likely to be able to meet them. As Winsor (1996) notes, "Classroom instruction alone can never completely prepare a student to write at work. Any such training has to be supplemented by situated practice" (p. 20).

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Editor's Note: This set of notes accompanied a presentation on "Expertise and Ethics" that ranged over some of Jamie MacKinnon's interests as a writing consultant at the Bank of Canada and a fifth-generation Canadian. He stated as the first "piece" in his argument: "I strongly support the idea of a wider body politic, which is implied when more people can understand, use, react against, and write themselves the documents of public life. This means that I'm interested in plain language, literacies, and citizenship, as well as learning and the notion of expertise." The text of that fascinating and provocative talk can be found on the *Inkshed* site at **<http://www.stthomasu.ca/inkshed>**.

Suggestions for providing ethical expertise

Jamie MacKinnon

1. Recognize that all discourse carries an ethical burden. Acknowledge the power inherent in and sought by language, as well as the unequal distribution of social and political power and language facility.

2. Make expertise humane. In designing a public document, ask yourself if what might be deemed to be a demonstration might better be thought of as an argument. Don't be afraid to argue, plea, inveigle, exhort, opine, etc.

3. Acknowledge the problematic nature of language, style, structure, plain-ness etc. Admit to complexity.

4. Contextualize expertise. In working as an expert, tell your client what kind of expertise you're drawing on, its methods, assumptions and limitations.

5. Be prepared to question and advise on rhetorical and ethical concerns, not just the surface (style, format, etc.) of text.

6. Give expertise a human face. Introduce yourself; use I or We. In any document that may be read by an unknown or distant audience, say who you are, describe your office and/or capacity, and note any context that could help locate the writer, the *kairos* and the motivation of the document for a distant reader. In the text, don't be afraid to reflect a sense of subjectivity.

7. Define your audience explicitly. In documents that may be read by an unknown or distant audience, be explicit about the intended (or original, or ideal) audience.

8. Consider the ongoing relationship that the provision of expertise can establish. As St. Exupéry's Little Prince discovered, we are responsible for our roses.

Cultural bridges and student testimonies

Samia Costandi

Teaching in the environment of war, bombardment, and the threat of being kidnapped is an experience that has molded me into the kind of teacher I am. Through narrative, I can share with you mental images and glimpses of what it was like to teach in an ESL program at Beirut University from 1983 to 1988.

Personal and collective experience of hardship, including standing at the gates of Hades more   than once, raised our consciousness; "our" since my experience was not isolated. The ESL program, ingeniously devised by the linguist and educator Dr. Raja Nasr to fit the needs of students at different levels of proficiency and from different backgrounds, employed forty female teachers. The heroic efforts students made to arrive safely in classes could not but be matched by teachers' complete dedication. We took on the roles of friend, mentor, mother, advisor, role model–that is, presence in every way. Most of us did not miss a day of teaching during our five years in the program. If our students were ever absent, we feared that they could have been killed or kidnapped. They sometimes arrived in classes to do their exams after having spent the whole night in a shelter.

The program had been created specifically to help students from lower-status and lower-income groups, sometimes from villages or poor areas. We knew very well that their parents were putting everything they owned into the education of their young, hoping that their sons and daughters would procure a scholarship enabling them either to enter university or perhaps leave the country to create new lives for themselves. Remember, education was not, and is not, free in Lebanon.

This educational milieu was fraught with complexity: here we were alumni who were educated in the Western tradition, mostly in English and American schools, had traveled widely earlier in our lives, spoke with a British or American accent, trying to teach kids whose communities were bombarded daily by Israel and other local parties with American-made bombs and shells. These kids were mostly Moslem Lebanese living in what was called Western Beirut. It was a welter of contradictions; all teachers in the program, no matter whether Christian or Moslem, considered the Israeli and American assault on Lebanon despicable; however, here we were teaching English literature and English language to traumatized students who were yearning for an opportunity to enter American universities!

The moral basis of our endeavor stemmed from three basic implicit beliefs: First, cultural boundaries must be crossed in order for dialogue to ensue, in order for bridges of understanding to be created. Second, despite the West's antagonism towards our communities, our students had to learn to appreciate what Western societies thrive on internally: democratic rights and privileges. Third, and on the other hand, knowing the "enemy" was crucial in order to fight it in different, non-violent ways, ways that had to do with success, travel, the media, empowerment through knowledge, and gaining access to the West through its own ideals. More importantly, it was about appropriating the text of the colonizer.

None of us teachers had diplomas in teaching ESL, but theory was matched with practice since we were required to procure our diplomas while we were teaching. These were exciting times since we would always meet and exchange views on what was working best. Seeing students pass the TOEFL exam was our reward. Each passing grade was a victory on the social, psychological, ethical, and linguistic levels.

I believe strongly that the fact that we were all women made the program successful. I am saying this simply because it is difficult to find many men adhering to feminist ideology in Beirut. Carol Gilligan's description of the difference between female and male consciousness and ways of engaging the world morally (in her book *In a Different Voice* suggests an adequate comment. One of her interviewees, an adolescent female, said the following: "I have a very strong sense of being responsible to the world, that I can't just live for my enjoyment, but just the fact of being in the world gives me an obligation to do what I can to make the world a better place to live in, no matter how small a scale that may be on" (Gilligan, p. 21).

What Gilligan calls "the complexity and multifaceted character of real people and real situations" (p. 21) changed the pedagogic act from an information-transmitting act to an act of rebirth, regeneration and deep engagement in the lives of students on many levels. It became an endeavor that required what Edward Said calls the ethical commitment of the intellectual. As Helen Buss says in her book *Mapping Ourselves*, we had to contend with cultural myths that were not useful and create new myths, new fictions to make truth. We constructed new frameworks, named priorities, assumed particular readings—and, I would add, interpreted readings in new ways—in order to give our students new visions. We carved our own identities as teachers in that complex culture, in language, despite all odds, with difficulty, but probably successfully. We helped our students construct their own truths, new truths that were framed in new contexts that were not in harmony with the prevailing patriarchal and political hegemony (Buss, p. 29).

The job of the teacher was to make the class interesting, entertaining, captivating, if you like, to take students on mental trips that opened their horizons and gave them alternative world views. It was very challenging, particularly since we were working against all odds. Aside from the lack of physical safety and security, many of our adult students had immense responsibilities to contend with at home since parents or siblings had been killed. For most, this was not really English as a Second Language, but a foreign language, considering that language is embedded in culture and that language is much more than words. "Different worlds had to meet." After all, what would make a young Lebanese man or woman who had no background in Western education enjoy European or English literature?

Whether it was the first chapter of *Pride and Prejudice*, in the conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Bennett, or the fascinating plot of a more accessible book, Jeffrey Archer's *Kane and Able*, I tried to make those literary pieces and situations accessible to my students through drawing comparisons with their own lives. For example, many identified with Mrs. Bennett's enthusiasm to marry off her daughters they came from homes where their families, particularly mothers, were interested in marrying off their daughters. The characters of Mr. and Mrs. Bennett were not strange to them. However, they needed to get over the intimidation of the language and the worry about grades before they could enjoy the literature and the readings.

I would make students enact dramatically certain sections of our readings of novels, and they enjoyed doing that. It was a welcome contrast to the monotony and sterility of the political rhetoric they were used to tuning into every day. Sometimes they volunteered to do the acting, and sometimes I pushed them, particularly those who were mischievous and needed to be engaged. Humour was one of the most salient features of the teaching-learning process that led to comprehension. As Parker Palmer says, "To teach is to create a space, a learning space that has three essential dimensions: openness, boundaries, and an air of hospitality" (Palmer, 1983, pp. 69-72). Although our boundaries were violated daily by the war, we managed to thrive on openness and hospitality.

These class assignments gave us moments of fun, humour, and healthy interaction. The classroom was a hospitable place where everyone was encouraged not only to express themselves but to make suggestions about what to do next. I once had one of my most troublesome students dance with one of the girls as they played Darcy and Elizabeth at the ball in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Once, I brought a friend into the classroom to play guitar, and the students and I sang with him. You must understand that in a traditional setting such teaching is unheard of. No one taught us teachers to act like this. We had to be inventive and make the classroom a safe and inviting meeting place which anchored students, yet entertained them to arouse their interest.

We watched videos, like the screen adaptation of Hemingway's classic *The Old Man and the Sea*. I used that story as a metaphor for the struggles they were going through as human beings. Even though one student challenged me and said that it represented nothing to him, I threw the question back at the class, and other students challenged him in turn and spoke about the courage of the old man, about unfulfilled dreams and ambitions, about determination, persistence and commitment.

As far as grades were concerned, I used to say at the outset of every course, "No one can fail this class unless they are determined to do so!" We tried to give students confidence in themselves and continuous encouragement.

The first class I taught was actually the best one, the most enthusiastic and brilliant. Sixty students all passed their English exams, forty with an average matching a master's student's score of over 600. Many of them traveled abroad and unfortunately never came back. Total disgust with a life in the midst of a vicious war made them incurably disillusioned. Was that a success, the fact that they never came back? I wonder about that sometimes, but then personal autonomy and integrity were, for them, not possible at the time in the existing frameworks. Others succeeded and stayed in Beirut; many left to study abroad but did eventually come back. Some are employed in various ministries today. At the end of the semester I invited that very first class to my home, and they brought me a gift, a tree, with a card hanging on it saying, "From a very special class to a very special teacher." But this was not my legacy only; it was the legacy of every teacher in that program in the blood-filled city of Beirut.

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How to Feel Very Old: A Tiny Talent

<div align="right">Doug Brent</div>

Having signed up for Talent Night at Inkshed 16, I turned my attention to what I could do, being unable to sing, dance, write poetry or fiction, or strip convincingly.

It came to me in a vision. We had just finished indulging in the Inkshed tradition of staying up far too late and trying to figure out whether this or that trivial incident happened at Inkshed 67 or Inkshed 165. We had moved on to listening to and singing along with Sandy, and realized to our mounting collective horror that we could all remember most of the words to Simon & Garfunkle and James Taylor songs.

That was it! For Talent Night I could help newcomers into the Inkshed community by making them feel as old as I did.

Disclaimer: This is not wholly original (please don't take away my Booker Prize!) In true postmodernist dialogic style I cobbled together material I had seen on the Internet with other bits and pieces and produced the following:

If you want to feel old, just contemplate the following facts about the 18-year-old students who are coming into your first year classes next September.

1. They were born the year the CD was invented.
2. For them, not only has there always been TV, it has always been in colour and it has always had more than 12 channels. The little rabbit ears that are usually on top of a TV in cartoons to show that it is a TV are totally meaningless: they have no concept that rabbit ears have any function except for a rabbit.
3. They probably have a dim memory of the Gulf War but probably have no idea what it was all about.
4. They neither remember nor particularly care where they were when they heard that Kennedy was shot, that John Lennon was shot, that Pope John Paul I was shot (nor even that there was a John Paul I except by mathematical deduction) or that the Challenger had blown up.
5. A picture of Pierre Trudeau sliding down a bannister has no cultural or mythic significance to them—likely no significance at all.
6. They have never been afraid of dying in a nuclear war.
7. They think that "Killing Me Softly" was first released in 1998 by the Fujis. If you tell them otherwise they will probably believe you, but won't particularly care.
8. For them, Michael Jackson has always been white.

The Lament of the Loser Writer

Patrick Dias

CHORUS:

Please leave my writing alone;

Stop messing with my soul.

Drop that awful red pen and count up to ten

So you'll leave my writing alone.

1. Now listen awhile to the facts:

    I grew up that side of the tracks,

    My mother took washin',

    And daddy did drinkin',

    My sorrows I drowned in sick-packs.

CHORUS

2. At school I didn't do well

    'Cause nobody taught me to spell.

    If they'd only done BASICS

    And some of that phonics,

    I wouldn't be getting such hell.

CHORUS

3. I've gone down to the Writing Centre,

    I'm linked to an e-mail tutor.

    Processing words

    Is just for the birds,

    And where is that blinking cursor?

CHORUS

4. I guess I've been beaten by grammar.

    As writer, I'm just a big loser.

    Who says we need writing?

Talking's my thing!

At worst, my texts can be hyper.

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning, Mont Gabriel, Québec, May 9, 1999

PRESENT: Kathryn Alexander, Natasha Artemeva, Laura Atkinson, Hourig Attarian, Sandy Baardman, Marcy Baumann, Ann Beer, Martin Behr, Audrey Berner, Janet Blatter, Bill Boswell, Doug Brent, Rick Coe, Mary-Louise Craven, Patrick Dias, Janna Fox, Patricia Golubev, Ralph Harris, Betty Holmes, Chris Holmes, Lynn Holmes, Anne Hunt, Russ Hunt, Charlotte Hussey, Jane Ledwell-Brown, Ana Maria Klein, Jamie MacKinnon, Shurli Makmillen, Kenna Manos, Jean Mason, Laura Mastronardi, Jane Milton, Pam Nason, Joan Page, Anthony Paré, Margaret Procter, Pat Sadowy, Leslie Sanders, Donna-Lee Smith, Tania Smith, Stan Straw, Gail Vanstone, Andrea Williams, Yaying Zhang.

1. Moved, seconded, and carried: to approve the minutes of the fifth annual general   meeting (Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia, May 1998).

2. Election: Nominated as members-at-large for a three-year   term:

3. Reports:
a) Financial Officer (Kenna Manos): Kenna circulated a financial statement and reported that

After discussion, it was moved and seconded that   from the CASLL balance be set aside for distribution to subsidize attendance at the Inkshed 16 conference by graduate students and the underemployed, at the discretion of the financial officer, with applications to be made by June 1, 1999. Carried.

b) Inkshed Publications (Sandy Baardman): Sandy reported that no new publications have come out since 1997. Because the University of Manitoba no longer subsidizes the publications, there will be no new publications until the Inkshed Publications account (separate from the regular Inkshed/CASLL account) has built up enough money. The account currently stands at   There are no immediate plans to issue a call for publications.

 c) Inkshed Newsletter (Margaret Procter): Russ Hunt, Mary Kooy, and Margaret Procter have served as interim editors during 1998-9. Joanne André and Barbara Schneider have agreed to take on the editorship after September 1999, and will welcome participation from other CASLL members and possibly their classes.

4. Discussion of plans for the Inkshed XVII conference, May 2000: Rick Coe and others from Simon Fraser offered to make plans for hosting the conference in British Columbia next year. The suggestions was enthusiastically received.

5. Thanks and a standing ovation were offered to the conference organizers for Inkshed 16: Ann Beer and Jane Ledwell-Brown.

6. The motion to adjourn was moved, seconded, and carried.

(Minutes summarized by Margaret Procter)

Inkshed Publications

Inkshed Publications is a collective operation of the Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning. On an occasional basis, as funding allows, it publishes monographs and collections related to the study of language and literacy. Current titles include the following:

Roger Graves. *Writing Instruction in Canadian Universities.* 1994. ISBN: 0-9698352-0-5. $16.95

Catherine F. Schryer and Laurence Steven (editors). *Contextual Literacy: Writing Across the Curriculum.* 1994. ISBN: 0-9698352-1-3. $16.95

Martin Behr. *Critical Moments in the Rhetoric of Kenneth Burke: Implications for Composition.* 1996. ISBN: 0-9698352-2-1, $16.95

W.F. Garrett-Petts and Donald Lawrence. *Integrating Visual and Verbal Literacies.* 1996. ISBN: 0-9698352-4-8. $25.00

Jaqueline McLeod Rogers. *Two Sides to a Story: Gender Difference in Student Narrative*. 1996. ISBN: 0-9698352-3-X. $16.95

Orders may be sent by email to Pat Sadowy at sadowy@ms.umanitoba.ca,
or by regular mail to:

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Cheques and money orders should be made out to Inkshed Publications.
Please add two dollars per item for shipping and handling.

See also **<http://www.stthomasu.ca/inkshed/pub>**

Welcome to the CASLL

[This is an edited version of the Web page which introduces people to the electronic mailing list. It's printed here as an invitation to Inkshedders who haven't yet joined the list and thus are missing out on a connection to the rest of the organization between issues of the print newsletter.]

CASLL is the acronym for the Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning. It's also known as "Inkshed," the name of the annual working conference held in various locations in Canada since 1984, which gave rise to the organization.

CASLL / Inkshed maintains a Web site where you can find current and back issues of the *Inkshed Newsletter*, information on conferences, and other information about and from the organization. Visit **<http://www.stthomasu.ca/inkshed>.**

More to the point, there is an electronic discussion forum, run on a LISTSERV situated at the University of New Brunswick, and "owned" (that is, he sweeps the streets) by Russ Hunt of St. Thomas University. The list is electronically archived at **<http://listserv.unb.ca/archives/casll.html**>. The archive is arranged by months, is searchable, and is complete back to the beginning of 1995.

To subscribe to this list, send to LISTSERV@UNB.CA a one-line mail message saying simply "subscribe CASLL [your name]." The message will be forwarded to Russ Hunt, and he'll complete the process.

You can do this by sending a cheque, made out to "Inkshed at NSCAD," for $20 ($10 for students and the un[der]employed) to the following address. Request a receipt if you need one.

Renew your subscription and membership in CASLL

Kenna Manos
Nova Scotia College of Art and Design
5163 Duke Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 3J6
Canada

If you don't know whether your subscription has expired, it almost   certainly has. Send the cheque anyway and   Kenna   will apply it to next year's membership—and CASLL will have money to support attendance at the conference by students and un[der]employed scholars.