Inkshed

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

Volume 17, Number 3-4, Autumn 1999

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This issue was edited by Jo-Anne Andre, University of Calgary

CWC Listserv Information

Information about Inkshed 2000

About Inkshed . . .

This newsletter of the *Canadian Associationfor the Study of Language and Learning* provides a forum for its subscribers to explore relationships among research, theory, and practice in language acquisition and language use, particularly in the Canadian context. Subscribers are invited to submit articles, book reviews, conference announcements, and any other pieces of potential interest to teachers, students, and scholars interested in the theory and practice of reading and writing. CASLL also has a website (www.StThomasU.ca/~hunt/casll.htm) maintained by Russ Hunt. This newsletter was produced by Jo-Anne P. Kabeary, University of Calgary, Effective Writing Program.

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Preferred format for submissions: e-mail attachments in Word or WordPerfect, APA style

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Kenna Manos
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From the Editor's Notepad

After some delay, the current issue of *Inkshed* is finally making its debut, a debut marked by a slightly updated look. Opening the newsletter is an article by Doug Brent focusing on the information literacy project at the University of Calgary. In the article, Doug issues a timely call to writing centres to play an active role in information literacy projects and similar initiatives. In fact, the need for writing centres and programs to play a key role in first year experience courses, retention efforts, and other initiatives was a recurring theme of this summer's Writing Program Administrators workshop and conference, which I review later in the newsletter.

Also in this newsletter you'll find a book review by Jim Bell, a poem by Jamie MacKinnon, information on upcoming conferences including the Inkshed Conference Call for Papers, and an article by Susan Logie explaining the approach taken by Carleton University Writing Consultants in working with their clients. I invited Susan to contribute this article because I think that we in other institutions can learn from CUWC's approach as we face pressures to support life-long learning, aka post-degree continuous learning, and, in the process, generate revenues for our institutions. CUWC's approach shows that we can sell our services without selling out.

In closing, I must remind you that Barbara and I are only interim editors of the Inkshed newsletter -- with one more promised issue. If the publication is to continue, we need to plan for its long-term survival and to consider the role we look to the newsletter to play vis a vis the online newsletter. Barbara will be taking the lead role in editing the next issue, and she invites you to start drafting articles for the winter issue of the newsletter, due out in March. She especially invites summaries of ethnographic and other research in progress on writing and reading.

Jo-Anne Andre

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Keeping the "Literacy" in "Information Literacy"

Doug Brent
University of Calgary

This is a story about a project at the University of Calgary that serves both to suggest an exciting avenue for literacy education and to provide a cautionary tale about the role of writing centre in an information age.

The University of Calgary, like many educational institutions, is in the throes of what we call "strategic transformation." As part of this attempt to rethink who we are and what we do, the university has adopted a list of "core competencies" which faculties are expected to ensure all graduates possess. You can guess what most of them are: written and spoken communication skills, logical reasoning, problem solving, creative thinking--the sort of competencies that are obviously central to any university's mission. Despite this centrality, however--or perhaps because of it, because its very obviousness has a "motherhood" quality for which no-one feels the need to argue--the list seems to have failed to capture the popular imagination and is rarely cited in recent strategic transformation documents.

But there is good news. One of the eight core competencies, "information literacy," has been taken up for action. The Information Literacy Group, consisting of committed and influential people within the library and the Learning Commons (the University of Calgary's teaching/learning support unit) is determined to go well beyond the standard motherhood statements to pilot-test a comprehensive curriculum-based information literacy program.

The definition of "information literacy" adopted by this group includes the following:

Within the context of lifelong learning and the broad information continuum which ranges from data to knowledge to wisdom, information literacy competency focuses on five broad abilities:

- to recognize the need for information
- to know how to access information
- to understand how to evaluate information
- to know how to synthesize information
- to be able to communicate information

An information literate person recognizes the different levels, types and formats of information and their appropriate uses. The ability to place information in a context and an awareness of information access issues (copyright, privacy, globalization, currency of information, etc.) are key to information literacy.

(concepts from, in part, Isbell, Dennis and Carol Hammond "Information literacy competencies" *College and Research Libraries News*, June 1993 p.325-327.)

This, too, is fairly standard. What is not quite standard, however, is the group's vision of how these abilities are to be inculcated.

Traditionally, information literacy enters the classroom under the auspices of various forms of research assignment. In all but writing classes, the details of how such assignments are to be accomplished are typically left up to the student, who is assumed not only to know how the library works but also what to make of the information she finds and how to organize it into a coherent argument. On a wide scale, "library instruction" is frequently relegated to a hit-and-run tour of the library at the beginning of students' first year. This tour passes far above most students' heads because it is not integrated into a context of immediate need.

The Information Literacy project is designed to avoid this separation between skill and setting. Information literacy is characterized as a complex set of skills, only some of which are technological in nature, which are learned recursively in context. Becoming information literate, like becoming "literate" in the older, wider sense, is a lifelong project in

which skills are gradually internalized through a combination of explicit and tacit teaching over a variety of projects that require their use.

Operationally, this means identifying a number of courses at various levels, from first to fourth year, in which information literacy instruction makes sense in terms of already existing course structure. Typically, these courses are those which involve some form of research assignment which can be refined to make the teaching of information literacy more explicit. Ideally, the hit-and-run library tour becomes a more prolonged partnership with library staff who work closely with the course instructor to design activities and guide students through the process of finding, evaluating, synthesizing and communicating information. Ideally, once the project is fully developed it should be difficult or impossible for a student to graduate without having taken several courses, at several academic levels, that feature information literacy as an explicit component.

Does this model sound familiar? Those of us who believe in a Writing in the Disciplines approach to literacy have long been dedicated to exactly these principles. Before committee after committee, we have argued that the remedial, add-on writing course, like the hit-and-run library tour, is severely limited by its outsider status and its lack of situatedness. Conversely, writing that is simply "done" in content-focused courses is likely to be unexamined and unreflexive, learned by trial and error rather than by reference to articulated principles. The Writing in the Disciplines approach is an attempt to bridge these two extremes by using various strategies--first among them being a strong and well supported writing centre--to support writing activities that are both situated and reflexive.

In one respect, then, the Information Literacy project can be seen as Writing in the Disciplines writ large. The focus is expanded to include aspects of literacy (such as information finding) that can be under-represented when literacy instruction does not have research as its main focus. Yet once information literacy is situated in the flow of learning activities rather on the sidelines, writing must be seen as central to the process, for only the need to synthesize information and communicate it in writing gives purpose to the other aspects of the process.

This philosophy is built right into the ways in which technology is conceptualized in the library's new resource area, dubbed the "Information Commons.". Row upon row of new computers are being unpacked and deployed, not merely as data access devices, but as (in some cases perhaps oxymoronic) "productivity centres" equipped with full featured word processing software and printing capability. Students are being expected to treat finding material and writing papers as part of a seamless continuum, not as activities to be artifically divided between library and writing lab.

There are obvious advantages to a program that treats writing as a necessary but not sufficient part of a larger "information literacy." If one were merely to be cynical, it is obvious that "information literacy" has a cachet that "writing" generally lacks. It is far easier to rally political action behind a skill that sounds very twenty-first century than behind what is often considered a low-level skill that "should have been learned in high school."

However, there are other, less cynical reasons for being glad to have information literacy take on the role of foregrounding language competency across the disciplines. If done well rather than as a token effort, mounting anything across the disciplines is notoriously expensive in both dollars and human energy. This is one reason why cross-disciplinary writing programs are particularly difficult to establish and maintain in larger institutions. The sheer resources required to track the content of courses across the institution and to offer meaningful support seems to rise as some sort of ghastly exponential function as the size of the institution increases, requiring increasing levels of ingenuity on the part of struggling writing centre directors. Information literacy calls on the resources, not of the frequently struggling and marginalized writing centre, but of one of the largest, most respected and (usually) best equipped sectors of the university--the library. Despite being frequently underfunded (as all campus sectors usually are), the library is in a position to put forward demands for resources on a scale that few writing centre directors more than dream of.

This advantage, of course, comes with concomitant dangers. Even in classes devoted to the study of writing, the "research paper" is frequently treated as a strange sort of beast that requires mostly instruction in the extreme ends of the process: finding material and documenting sources. The part in the middle, forging a meaningful argument using sources as support rather than decoration, frequently seems to disappear almost altogether (witness the "research paper" chapter in nine out of ten rhetoric texts.) The ascendency of information literacy bears witness to the fact that the

common *topoi* of the academy have increasingly become databases rather than lines of argument. In this environment, it is even more likely that the extraordinarily difficult task of constructing an argument in which sources are genuinely internalized and used to advantage will disappear under the avalanche of instruction in bibliographic tools.

This is the challenge to writing centres: to continue to take an active role in information literacy. As the unit charged with filling the gaping hole in the middle between finding and documenting sources, the writing centre must continue and redouble its involvement in helping students understand how to find a voice in the deafening roar of information sources. If information literacy is to be integrated into a diverse cross-section of courses taught by people who may have neither the time, the inclination or the training to focus on writing, it will be up to the writing centre to support the old-fashioned rhetorical "literacy" that is still at the heart of information literacy.

For more information about the University of Calgary's Strategic Transformation initiative, see
http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/Transformation/welcome.html

For more information about the Information Literacy project, see
http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/departments/INFO/library/ILG

Official lists of the core competencies are alarmingly difficult to find on the UofC web site, but significantly the library has made such a list available as part of an information literacy slide presentation at
http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/departments/INFO/library/ILG/infolitcoord/tsld002.htm

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Carleton University Writing Consultants (CUWC): What we do and how we do it

Susan Logie

Manager, CUWC

This past summer at the CATTW conference in Sherbrooke, I had the opportunity to share ideas with several new colleagues about our writing consulting group at Carleton University. Following the conference, I was invited to contribute a piece for the newsletter explaining what we do and how our work evokes collaboration between the university and the business community.

CUWC - WHO ARE WE?

CUWC is a writing consulting group that provides writing services under the umbrella of the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies at Carleton University. CUWC works solely with clients from the private and public sectors and has in several cases provided services to clients from other provinces and other countries. Quite coincidentally, the majority of CUWC's clientele work in the fields of engineering and science.

WHAT IS OUR APPROACH?

CUWC's approach to writing training is grounded in North American genre theory and theories of situated learning (Freedman & Medway, 1994a, b; Lave & Wenger, 1991). The five key elements of this approach are the following: a needs analysis, a training plan, the training (one-on-one coaching using authentic writing tasks), progress reports, and post-training follow-up.

The Needs Analysis

CUWC believes that to ensure that writing training responds to the real needs of the client in the workplace, any writing training project must begin with a "needs analysis." A needs analysis is a form of diagnostic that allows the consultant to

1. identify the writing concerns as perceived by the writers, their supervisors, and their readers,
2. develop a taxonomy of document types produced by the writer so that the consultant can become familiar with the specific writing styles of the client and perhaps begin to identify any relationships between the various documents,
3. become as familiar as is possible, in a short time frame, with the mandate and structure of the organization and the role writing plays in accomplishing its work, and
4. become familiar with both the writers' idiosyncrasies and examples of what management considers to be exemplary writing.

The outcome of the needs analysis is the training plan.

The Training

Although we have developed writing workshops geared to the needs of specific organizations, we most often use a one-on-one coaching approach in our training.

One-on-one coaching

One-on-one coaching is a technique that allows the consultant to work directly with the writers as they engage in writing activities over time. Because the client contacts us as soon as a writing task is assigned, the consultant is able to respond to real writing situations as they occur in the workplace. This approach accommodates the fact that texts are produced over time and are deeply situated in the workplace context. Training in the workplace allows the consultant to better understand the organizational culture within which the writing takes place. This is so because typically one-on-one coaching is a lengthy process, sometimes six months to a year.

Use of authentic writing tasks

Use of authentic workplace writing tasks in the training is as important as the one-on-one coaching. From a purely practical point of view, the use of authentic writing tasks allows the client to remain in the workplace. This means less downtime and less reduction in productivity.

More importantly, authentic writing tasks situated in the day-to-day operations of the workplace facilitate the learning process. Lave and Wenger (1991) believe that

> . . . a training program that consists of instructional settings separated from actual performance would tend to split the learner's ability to manage the learning situation apart from his ability to perform the skill.

The job of the writing consultant is to facilitate the transition of the writer from novice to full member into a community of practice. If the consultant does not have access to and does not make use of the information and resources available within the organizational context of the writer, how can the consultant help the writer to become a full member of a particular community?

Progress Reports and Post-Training Follow-ups

CUWC recognizes that many factors can affect the training process and, therefore, consultants must be prepared to accommodate changes to the original training plan. Progress reports bring together the writer, the supervisor and the consultant at predetermined points in the process to ensure that the training plan addresses changing needs.

CUWC uses information gathered from post-training follow-ups to assess the effectiveness of its training and inform and enrich its approach.

THE BENEFITS OF UNIVERSITY/ BUSINESS COLLABORATION

Because almost all CUWC consultants both teach and research writing, they bring to writing training a wealth of experience and knowledge of the most recent developments in writing theory. This exposure to cutting edge work in writing lends credibility to CUWC consultants and enhances their ability to produce the most innovative solutions to writing problems.

One of the many foci in writing research today is the transition from writing in academia to writing in the workplace. Both academic and non-academic organizations tend to overlook this important transition and its effect on writers. CUWC recognizes that writing in the workplace and writing in school present very different challenges. Dias et al. (1999) suggest that newcomers to organizations often have trouble making the transition from university writing, where they write to demonstrate their knowledge, to workplace writing, where they write to get the job done. Because of this understanding of the differences between academic and workplace writing, CUWC consultants can help clients to understand and perhaps facilitate the necessary transition of newcomers from "initiates" to full members in the organization.

Carleton also benefits from this opportunity to work with workplace writers. The consultants are able to gather information about writing practices in a variety of workplaces. These data inform writing pedagogy and bring to the students a current and realistic picture of how writing is accomplished in the workplace and the problems workplace writers face.

UWC's MAJOR CHALLENGE

The major challenge CUWC faces is convincing clients that there are no quick fixes. The writing consulting market is currently flooded with agencies claiming to be able to rectify writing problems in one- or two-day workshops. CUWC's approach to writing training is so radically different that it is not always easy to convince potential clients that the approach is viable. However, on more than one occasion CUWC has worked with clients who have had unsatisfactory experiences with these one- or two-day workshops. In these cases clients were ready to accept an

alternative approach. So our major challenge continues to be convincing potential clients that there are no quick fixes when working with writing problems.

Because our approach to writing training in the workplace is radically different from what is currently being promoted in the marketplace and because it is always evolving, we are open to new ideas and would appreciate input from our readers.

References

Dias, P., Freedman, A., Medway, P., & Paré, A.(1999). *Worlds apart*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc.

Freedman, A. & Medway, P. (Eds.) (1994a). *Genre and the new rhetoric*. London: Taylor and Francis.

Freedman, A. & Medway, P. (Eds.). (1994b). *Learning and teaching genre*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann.

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

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Translation
by Jamie MacKinnon

Truth is: "old" cheddar's mild
Soft, jejune, not yet walking
Need medium underwear?
Buy a "large" pair

"Two thumbs up"
Means sucky, infantile
Better to read a book instead
In which opposable truths
Are sometimes wed

"One size fits all"
But not you it seems
"Convenient, electronic" leaves
You on your own, abandoned
"Gracious living" is commercial code
For no unwanted folks can call
"Virtual" denotes not really
And sometimes not at all

"Handy to," "within minutes of," portends
A life in cars, commuting without end
"Complete selection" means
You're out of luck
If your waist is 33 or 35
If you like "foreign" films
If you want a cassette
Something "better"
(Something else)
Is all you can get

"Married" white male
Seeks "romance" and "affection"
In Edmonton, call "Stan"
SWF seeks "secure, professional" man
Like distant starts visible
To the well trained eye
You discern asterisks trailing

Our commitment*
Our pledge*
A nominal* fee
Six per cent financing*
Lifetime* guarantee

Even doors betray their promise
The architect planned four
The builder built four
But try one—locked—as by decree
Four doors, and some janitor

Always locks three
You grow used to the equating
Of incommensurate things
You get used to decoding
Discounting
Translating
It's the price you pay
For mundane living

Sad it will be therefore
(But in keeping with the times)
To discover scare quotes around
The gate of everlasting life
To discover that
Whosoever believeth shall live, though he die
Was really meant
To be translated, deflated
Bereft of promise, or
To discover that there is in fact a gate
Real and untranslated
A gate of supernal promise
A celestial portal the other side of which
Is all you've longed for
(Truth, love, music of the spheres)
That has, alas, been locked
By some overzealous janitor
Who's been drinking too much beer

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Canadian Writing Centre Listserv

Barbara Christian, Acting Coordinator, Writing Services, Learning & Writing Services, at the University of Guelph has recently set up an open listserv for Canadian Writing Centres (canwcs). To subscribe to this list, users must send mail to:

listserv@listserv.uoguelph.ca

In the body of the mail message, simply type:

subscribe canwcs Full name e.g. subscribe canwcs Barbara Christian

To post to the list send e-mail to:

canwcs@listserv.uoguelph.ca

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WPA Conference Review

Reviewed by Jo-Anne Andre

One of the highlights of the past summer for me was attending the Writing Program Administrators (WPA) Workshop and Conference at Purdue University in Indiana. The four-day workshop, led by Doug Hesse from Illinois State University and Martha Townsend from the University of Missouri-Columbia, brought together 29 writing program administrators from across the U.S.--plus me as the token Canadian--for an intensive series of workshops and discussions on diverse aspects of writing program administration. Although it targeted new WPAs, the workshop also attracted a few veterans including at least one WPA back for a refresher course.

Workshop sessions focused on a variety of issues: long-term planning and priority-setting; administering and staffing WAC/WID, freshman composition and other courses; dealing with higher administration; and evaluating courses, programs, and instructors. The facilitators effectively designed the workshop to allow participants to focus on issues of concern to them. In one session, participants split into groups focusing on WAC or freshman composition depending on their interests. Later sessions split the group up into smaller discussion groups to discuss administrative problems of concern to them; problem-solving scenarios for discussion were drawn from a hot-off-the-press NCTE publication, Administrative Problem-Solving for Writing Programs and Writing Centers: Scenarios in Effective Program Management, edited by Linda Myers-Breslin. The workshop also included time for participants to meet in pairs for a half-hour with one of the facilitators. I met with Marti Townsend, a WAC administrator, to strategize ways of implementing WAC programs.

An excellent three-day conference on writing program administration followed the workshop. I found two sessions especially valuable: one proposed an innovative approach to course evaluation and the other reviewed the relevant literature on organization change and culture and applied it to the task of writing program administration.

I found both the workshop and the conference highly valuable: I returned home with a binder full of notes and resources, a tentative three-year WPA plan, a three-page to do list, and lots of ideas. (Now if I could only find the time to implement some of them . . .)

The 2000 WPA Workshop & Conference

The next WPA Summer Workshop will be held July 9-13, followed by the WPA Conference July 13-16, 2000, in Charlotte, North Carolina. For information, see www.cas.ilstu.edu/english/hesse/wpawelcome.htm

The Council of Writing Program Administrators also publishes a journal Writing Program Administration. A sampling of articles in recent issues includes "Identify and Location: Astudy of SPA models, memberships, and agendas," by Jeanne Gunner, "New Visions of Authority in Placement Test Rating," a set of guidelines proposed by the WPA council. Susanmarie Harrington, and "Evaluating the Work of Writing Program Administration."

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Conference Calendar

Mar. 14-18	Vancouver BC	**TESOL 2000** *Navigating the New Millenium* A conference for ESL educators	bcteal@interchg.ubc.ca www.tesol.edu
April 12-15	Minneapolis MN	**Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC)** *Educating the Imagination and Reimagining Education*	www.ncte.org/cccc/2000/
May 11-14	Bowen Island BC	**Inkshed 2000** *Resisting Teaching (in and out of the classroom)* Proposals due: January 14, 2000	www.sfu.ca/writing-centre
May 24-26	Edmonton AB U. of Alberta	**Canadian Society for the Study of Rhetoric (CSSR)** *Rhetorical Approaches to Workplace and Academic Communication* - joint session with CATTW Proposals due: January 31, 2000	pspoel@nickel.laurentian.ca
May 25-27	Edmonton AB U. of Alberta	**Canadian Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (CATTW)** - *Rhetorical Approaches to Workplace and Academic Communication (session with CSSR)* - *The Role of Feedback in Technical Communication* - *Visual Aids in Professional Presentations* Proposals due: January 5, 2000	Nartemev@ccs.carleton.ca
June 14-17	St. Catharine's ON, Brock U.	**Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE)** *Into the Millennium: The Changing Faces of Teaching and Learning* Proposals due: January 31, 2000	www:brocku.ca/stlhe2000
July 31- Aug. 4	Charlottetown PEI	**17th Annual Faculty Development Summer Institute** *Active Learning & Teaching in University & College*	www.upei.ca/~extensio/ FDSInstitute.htm

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

INKSHED 20

Thursday, May 8 to Sunday, May 11, 2003

Come and Celebrate 20 years of Inkshed conferences at Hockley Highlands Inn and Conference Centre, Orangeville, Ontario

It's a relaxing spot, with all kinds of amenities (like an indoor pool and exercise facilities); however, for most of us, the prime recreational activity will undoubtedly be walking (or sitting on the huge outdoor deck looking out at) our famous Bruce Trail.

Cost: a very reasonable $130 a night for a single room with bath shared between two rooms or $140 for a single room with private bath; all meals included. The conference fee itself will probably be similar to last year's conference: $75 ($35 student and un(der)employed)

Details about registering will be distributed later . . . Right now we want you to start thinking about how you can contribute to this year's program. Inkshed conferences are always good, but we want this to be a REUNION conference so we encourage all current and former Inkshedders to return to the fold. We also encourage first-timers to come and experience what has kept us going for 20 years!

This year's theme:

TEACHING IN CONTEXTS: READING, WRITING, SPEAKING, LEARNING

Thinking about context is a crucial part of understanding any rhetorical situation, but what is the exact nature of such thinking? How do we teach our students to do it? And how does the context in which we do that teaching -- the classroom, the discipline, the institution -- affect our efforts? Do the differences between the classroom and the world outside (the oft-invoked "real world") help or hinder our efforts?

For Inkshed 20, we invite proposals that address topics in this area, broadly defined. What role does context, and thinking about context, play in your teaching and in your students' learning of reading, writing, and speaking? Here are a few of the kinds of context which might be important here:

- classroom contexts in which our students read, write, and speak
- contexts in which we ask our students to imagine themselves when reading, writing, and speaking
- contexts in which we respond to our students' reading, writing, and speaking
- non-university contexts, in which expectations and learning objectives may be very different
- contexts where physical contexts are not shared, such as distance learning situations
- political, ideological, and sociocultural contexts
- contexts that ease or enhance the processes of teaching and learning
- contexts that hinder teaching and learning or render them problematic

Inkshed encourages presentations in unusual and innovative formats as well as straightforward "stand and deliver" papers of the sort given at most academic conferences. Proposals may be individual or collaborative; workshops, panels, and performances are all welcome, and a special session will be set aside for poster presentations. The conference will also feature a reading table to which all attendees are invited to contribute items they would like others to read, and which will furnish the basis for a structured discussion session and lots of informal discussion.

Please note: Some funding is available to subsidize travel and conference expenses for graduate students and underemployed individuals.

PLEASE SEND PROPOSALS BY JANUARY 30 TO THE CONFERENCE ORGANIZERS at Inkshed20@yorku.ca. Conversations about proposals are welcome on the CASLL listerv -- or on the special Inkshed 20 listserv, about which details will follow.

From your trusty conference organizers: Margaret Procter, Barbara Rose, Brock Macdonald, Patricia Golubev (the U. of Ters) and Leslie Sanders and Mary-Louise Craven (from York, where else?)