



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

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This issue was edited by [Barbara Schneider](#), University of Calgary

Multicultural Hues: Using Writing to Discover Self and "Other"

**Samia Costandi
McGill University**

When I was asked to teach a course on Intercultural Education in Fall of 2000 at McGill Faculty of Education, Department of Culture & Values, I put together a course-pack that included an exhaustive and exhausting list of readings. These included the classic Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967), Jerome Bruner's *The Culture of Education* (1996), James Banks' philosophical work, *Educating Citizens in a Multicultural Society* (1997), Edward Said's exquisite and carefully crafted *Covering Islam* (1997), Sonia Nieto's *The Light in their Eyes* (1999) and *Affirming Diversity* (1992), a more radical perspective on multicultural education.

However, exhaustive and exhausting readings do not make up a course. My thesis was that readings would merely supplement what I envisioned as a process of re-discovery of "self" and "other" through autobiographical writing. I believed that giving students the opportunity to articulate their personal narratives in the context of their own cultures would create openness toward "other" communities and cultures. I envisaged this writing as an exercise that would entrench in students the perspective that knowledge is socially constructed, that reality is *not* one dimensional, and that multiple truths can be respected and celebrated. I was happy to discover from my students that I was right.

My Palestinian Arab background and teaching experiences in Lebanon provided a great educational resource. Stories I told about teaching in Lebanon under excruciating circumstances of bombing, shelling, kidnapping, and sniping left them wide-eyed. This provided a backdrop to discussions on openness towards "the other." I was intent on showing my class that prejudice, when not nipped in the bud through education, can fester like an infected wound, creating very dangerous consequences.

The first assignment was optional. "Write your own personal narrative; delve into your past. Where do you come from? Who were your ancestors? What part of your heritage do you know least about? Investigate your roots through interviews with parents and grandparents, etc. Write your story" I believed that by opening the doors for students to use writing to tap into their own personal myths, I would empower them with a strong sense of personhood and a clearer identity. This in turn would lead to openness towards other students in the class as well as other communities in the society they live in.

Montreal being the cosmopolitan city that it is, many of my students came from very mixed backgrounds. For example, Sarah had paternal Scottish origins and maternal Latvian origins with a touch of Aboriginal Canadian Miq'maq. Zein had Palestinian Arab grandparents and parents. Melanie had Irish and French origins where Catholicism was cherished.

The students used their own experiences to reflect on what they were studying in the course. Melanie, for example, was engaged to an Arab Muslim young man and both their families are struggling to come to terms with *difference*. The young couple wants their families to celebrate difference; the families find it difficult to accommodate certain aspects of the differing religious beliefs and traditions. For one of the assignments, Melanie interviewed her fiancé. She wrote,

Knowledge is socially constructed according to the environments in which we live and are educated. Culture is strictly a relative concept that cannot be used for comparison without adequate background recognition of both the people and the places. From this essay, I was enlightened to the philosophies behind Muslim religion and values, yet I still continue to hold certain biases against it.

Peter, from Ghana, had been in Canada for two years. Writing allowed him to see that ethnic differences can give way to a common human identity. Peter spoke with a universal tone and was impassioned by a universal flame. The closeness he felt towards his fellow students made him curious about the roots of racism, something his African culture

had experienced for decades. Our discussions of Eurocentrism shed light for him on the socio-political and economic underpinnings of racism developed through the building of empires.

Jackie was a Scottish student who began her narrative with the words, "Once upon a time in a land of rolling moors and mists lived the wee folk, the fairies, or the *sitheachean* as they say in Gaelic." At the peak of the course, when we were discussing stereotypes against Muslims, particularly Arab and Iranian Muslims in North America, Jackie found herself locked out of her house. Her Iranian neighbor invited her to spend the night at his house. The dialogue between them materialized into a twenty-page transcription that completely shifted her thinking on Iran and Iranian Muslims.

Shawn had a typical Anglo-Saxon background from the West coast of Canada. He decided to investigate the Spanish culture, something he knew nothing about: He was invited to dinner by Cristina, a Spanish classmate born and raised in Montreal, so that he could get a feeling for her family and their lifestyle. This is what he says:

My initial stereotypes of what I expected her family life to be like were quickly cast aside I learned that their Spanish culture is different from the Latino culture I [had] expected. Although both cultures share the same language, their traditions and lifestyles are as separate as their geography ...Had it not been for this assignment, I might never have made the effort to dine with Cristina's family and would have probably maintained many of the stereotypes I once held about her culture. Overall, I am going to make a greater effort to look. beyond my own experiences and .biases as much as possible when confronted with "others."

I was impressed with the friendship that was built between Waleed, a Palestinian student, and David, a Jewish Canadian student. They were meeting outside of class, discussing political issues of common interest and going together to functions in their respective communities. David's openness allowed him to share with the class his awareness of the suffering of the Palestinians at the hands of the Israelis in the same manner that he acknowledged the suffering of his own Jewish community earlier in Europe. Waleed's openness as a Palestinian allowed him to set aside stereotypes in dealing with "the other" who had dispossessed him and put him in diaspora. This was a viable example of two students putting themselves "in the shoes of the other", as Martin Buber says, creating an I-Thou not an I-It.

The breadth and wealth of my students' final projects astounded me. Working within certain guidelines, their choices included critiques and deconstructions of movies, commentary on written texts, and analysis of music videos and CD's in order to discover their multicultural subtexts.

One of the most poignant pieces of writing was by Melissa, a Jewish Canadian student whose final assignment was a deconstruction of the film *Not Without My Daughter*, a 1991 motion picture directed by Brian Gilbert. She called it, "a stab at the heart of the Muslim community of Iran." She added, "Blinded by our Eurocentric vision of the Middle Eastern Islamic culture, many Westerners come away from the film with complete distaste for a people that are so obviously different from themselves." I was proud of this student who was able to tease away the biases and sensationalism of the plot and write a critique of the film.

Andrea and Arielle's joint project involved taking pictures of graffiti in the streets of Montreal and commenting on them from a multicultural perspective. Maria investigated segregation in the cafeterias in a Montreal college. Her work was accompanied by a video; one could actually see ethnic and cultural enclaves in the cafeterias on film, although teachers and administrators who were interviewed denied the existence of segregation.

A superb piece of writing by Michael analyzed the concept of the "other" in 19th century Victorian literature, particularly Bram Stoker's Dracula. His essay took the theme of "the other" to a poetic and philosophical level, revealing that ultimately what we detest (i.e. Dracula) is what we fear. Michelle's project on *The Art and Technique of Bonsai* was no less impressive in its description of how to teach science from a multicultural perspective. In Penny's analysis of the film *Smoke Signals*, she said, "Acknowledging our ingrained, distorted perceptions of 'others' is the essential first 'step in the right direction' to acceptance ...recognizing the universal commonalities that exist amongst us, regardless of individual and cultural differences..."

I will never forget David and Alaya's rendering of seven poems by internationally renowned poets, without divulging

the names and cultural identities of the writers. The poets were Margaret Atwood, Dan Pagis, Roque Dalton, Langston Hughes, Noemí de Sousa, Pablo Neruda, and Mahmoud Darwish. Many of us could not tell which poet had written which poem, a testimony to the universality of both human suffering and human compassion.

This course was a memorable one. Using narrative discourse in- the classroom, both as a writing and oral instructional tool, enabled my students to re-discover their personal identities and discover "the other." The "other" remains an elusive concept until the teacher can create a space and a medium to tap into empathy and compassion. This is possible through story telling, a vehicle that enables one to "put oneself in the shoes of the other." If I can put myself in the shoes of the other, it is likely that I will not be . savagely egotistical, racist or sectarian. If I can experience compassion, it is unlikely that the humiliation of another human being will give me satisfaction. If I am nurtured to be tender and sensitive, the whole cycle of life gains new meaning.

Samia Costandi is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of Culture & Values in Education, Faculty of Education, McGill University.

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From the Editor's Notepad

This issue is the last from Calgary. Jo-Anne and I have enjoyed our two-year tenure as editors of this newsletter, but it is now time for us to move on to other things. We welcome any volunteers to take over from us. I had hoped to distribute this issue electronically, but did not have the technical (or financial) where-with-all to do this for just one issue. I suggest to the next editors that they find a way to move toward electronic publication without disenfranchising those who may not have access to technology.

This issue begins with an article by Sarnia Costandi in which she describes writing done by students in an intercultural education class. Karen Golets-Pancer reports on WAC programs at Humber College and Jamie McKinnon entertains with some seasonal Haiku. Also included is the Inkshed 18 conference program. Although only a small number of Inkshedders responded to my request for information on recent publications, the list in this issue shows the diversity and range of Inkshedders' research interests.

And finally, thanks to those of you who contributed to the newsletter over the past two years. A newsletter such as ours depends on contributions from members to keep us in touch with each other and to generate discussion on topics of interest to all of us.

[Barbara Schneider](#)

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About Inkshed . . .

This newsletter of the *Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning* (CASLL) 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. CASLL membership runs from January 1 to December 31 and includes a subscription to Inkshed. To subscribe, send a cheque, made out to "Inkshed at NSCAD," for \$20 (\$10 for students and the un(der)employed to the followin address: Kenna Manos, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 5162 Duke Street, Halifax, NS, B3J 3J6, Canada.

Subscribers are invited to submit items of interest related to 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.

Please submit newsletter contributions (preferably via email in APA format) to the editors:

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WAC at Humber College of Applied Arts and Technology

Karen Golets Pancer
Humber College

Humber College in Toronto has a longstanding commitment to writing instruction: each of our 11,000 fulltime students must complete two Communications courses in order to graduate. Students in business and media studies take an essay writing course and a business writing course while students in technical programs take two consecutive technical writing courses. We also offer specialized Communications courses for some programs, such as Music, Journalism, Radio Broadcasting, and Film and Television Production.

Students in the Pre-University program take two academic writing courses, as well as literature and philosophy courses that require a considerable amount of writing.

Humber's Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) policy provides full-time students with a minimum of one writing course per semester. In a typical first year, the Communications courses mentioned above cover the WAC requirement. In second and third years, all full-time students are to take one WAC program course, in which the students should produce around 2500 words, preferably in a mix of informal and formal writing and over a few shorter assignments rather than one long one. The 2500 word limit is meant as a guideline for program teachers as they design assignments.

While other institutions describe their program writing courses as Writing Intensive (WI), I have suggested we call them Writing Included, a less intimidating term for faculty who may not have had much experience assigning writing in the past. However, the term *WAC course* seems to be what people at Humber prefer.

When I was appointed WAC Resource Person, I was given a one-course reduction, to four courses per semester from the usual five. One of my primary responsibilities has been to publish a newsletter, called the *Humber WAC Letter*, twice a year. Articles in the *WAC Letter* have profiled faculty who are teaching WAC courses, explained some of WAC's theoretical underpinnings, and given tips on how to design a WAC course. One of our Learning Disabilities consultants contributed an intelligent and amusing article on *Writing and the Brain* and another faculty member has begun a regular column on Electronic Communication Across the Curriculum, which he calls *Words with Wings*. I've also held grammar workshops for faculty and given a talk on the differences between writing to learn and learning to write. I'm often asked to go into classes to give students a refresher session on topics such as report writing. Until recently most of what I've done has been rather ad hoc, responding to faculty requests for help, but Humber's current Generic Skills Initiative is bringing some changes to my role.

In 1995, Ontario's College Standards and Accreditation Council (CSAC) released a report, *Generic Skills Learning Outcomes*, stressing that graduates in the 21st century need solid background in generic skills and general education to accompany their vocational training. After a long preparation period, Humber is now working toward systematically incorporating generic skills into program courses. Consequently, WAC now falls under the Generic Skills Initiatives umbrella. The hierarchy for Humber's WAC objectives has been revised to reflect this new generic-skills focus: 1) To give students opportunity to practice their existing writing skills, 2) To teach students about forms of writing they may have to do on the job, and 3) To use writing as a means of learning and/or applying content in their program-courses. Overall, I appreciate this relocation of WAC under the college wide Generic Skills Initiative because it places the responsibility for ensuring that the WAC policy is being followed on the programs rather than on the WAC resource person.

I've compiled a draft *Manual for Incorporating Writing Assignments into Program Courses* which is currently part of a Generic Skills pilot project in our Hospitality, Recreation, and Tourism division. I'm also about to solicit successful writing assignments and marking schemes and compile the results in a *Best Practices: Writing in Program Courses* document. This second task will be useful in two ways: we'll have a varied collection of student-tested writing assignments, and I'll get a better sense of how many faculty are actually assigning writing and where the gaps are that

I need to address.

Trying to implement WAC, and now WAC as a generic skill, has been a sometimes frustrating process, yet I've also been amazed on several occasions at the energy and creativity of many of our faculty. Surprisingly, reading about how other colleges or universities have dealt with WAC didn't help me as much as I'd first expected; it seems to me every institution has its own culture and its own pace for implementing and accepting change. Still, if Inksheddefs would like to contact me, I'd be happy to tell you in more detail about developments in Humber's continuing efforts to encourage and improve students' writing.

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Recent Publications of Inkshedders

Artemeva, N. (2000). Revising a research article: Dialogical negotiation. P. Dias & A. Pare (Eds:), *Transitions: Writing in academic and workplace settings*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton.

Artemeva, N. (2000). Beyond the language barrier: Teaching communication skills. *Engineering dimensions*. Professional Engineers of Ontario, September/October, pp. 40 - 42.

Bell, J. H. (2000). When hard questions are asked: Evaluating writing centers. *The Writing Center Journal*, 21(1), 7-28.

Coe, R., Lingard, L., & Teslenko, T. (Eds.). (forthcoming). *The rhetoric and ideology of genre: Strategies for stability and change*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton.

Coe, R. (forthcoming). The New Rhetoric of Genre: Writing Political Briefs. In Ann Johns, (ed.) *Genres in the classroom*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Coe, R. (1999). The Zen of Writing as Social/ Symbolic Action. In D. Roen, S. Brown, and T. Enos (Eds.), *Living rhetoric and composition: Stories of the discipline*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, pp. 37-41.

Freedman, A. & Artemeva, N. (Forthcoming, April 2001). 'Just the boys playing on computers': An Activity Theory analysis of differences in the cultures of two engineering firms. *Journal of Business and Technical Writing*.

Garrett-Petts, W.F. & D. Lawrence. (2000). *PhotoGraphic encounters: The edges and edginess of reading verbal and visual narratives*. Edmonton: U of Alberta Press.

Garrett-Petts, W.F. (2000). *Writing about literature: A guide for the student critic*. Peterborough: Broadview Press.

Garrett-Petts, W.F. (2000). Photography as invention: The secret victorian aesthetic. In G. Coulter-Smith (Ed.); *The visual-narrative matrix*. Southampton: Southampton Institute, Fine Art Research Centre. 110-15.

Garrett-Petts, W.F., Ed. (2000). *The heritage fair documentation project*. Kamloops: The Centre for Multiple Literacies Research.

Heckman, G. (2001). *The Nelson guide to web research 2001-2002*. Toronto: ITP Nelson.

Jacobs, D. (2000). Teaching in two worlds: Critical reflection and teacher change in the writing center. *The National Writing Project Quarterly*, 22 (2), 10-15.

Jacobs, D. & Ronald K. (2000). Coming to composition, or a collaborative metanarrative of conversion and subversion. *Composition Studies* 28 (1), 59-77. Sargent, E. (2000). Thinking and writing from the body: Eugene Gendlin, D. H. Lawrence and "The Woman Who Rode Away". In Paul Poplawski (Ed.), *Writing the body in D. H. Lawrence: essays on language, representation, and sexuality*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Sargent, E. & Watson, G. (2001). *Approaches to teaching the works of D. H. Lawrence*. New York: MLA. .

Sargent, E. & Watson, G. (2001). D. H. Lawrence and the dialogical principle: "The Strange reality of otherness". *College English*.

Schneider, B. (2000). Managers as evaluators: Invoking objectivity to achieve objectives. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 36, 159-173. Segal, J. Z. (2000). What is a rhetoric of death?: End-of-life decision-making at a

psychiatric hospital. *Technostyle*, 16, 67-86. Segal, J. Z. (2000). Contesting death, speaking of dying. *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 21, 29-44.

Segal, J. Z. (Forthcoming). Problems of Genrelization: The case of the doctor-patient interview. In Rick Coe et al, *The rhetoric and ideology of genre*. Creswell, NJ: Hampton.

Smart, G. (2000). Reinventing expertise: experienced writers in the workplace encounter a new genre. In P. Dias & A. Pare (Eds.), *Transitions: Writing in academic and workplace settings*. New York: Hampton Press

Smart, G. (1999). Where the general ends and the local begins: An important issue for professional writing programs. Science, Technology, and Communication: Program design in the past, present, and future. *Proceedings of 1999 conference of Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication*, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 7-8.

Smart, G. (2000). Review of *The new work order: The language behind the new capitalism*, by J. Gee, G. Hull, & C. Lankshear. In *English for Specific Purposes*, 19, 403-406.

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Haiku

Jamie MacKinnon
Bank of Canada

From thick air, summer's
gift: water beads on beer glass
casting specks of light

Ivies, creepers -- red
leaves curling and vines exposed
recall old folks' hands

In Matt's hand snow melts
chickadee pecks . . . sunflower
seeds scatter on snow

Pollen shower -- green
sidewalks, cars and plastic chairs
painted by the trees

Just Like Blood, Jamie MacKinnon's first book of poetry, will be published soon by Corrie Creevie Press.

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Saturday, May 12

4:00 pm Bus leaves Calgary International Airport; meet at 3:50 at the Information Wagon on the lower/arrivals level.

6:30 pm *Dinner*

8:00 pm WELCOME & SESSION ONE:

Comparing Inkshedding and Freewriting—And Exploring the Benefits for Students' More Careful Writing

Peter Elbow, University of Massachusetts Writing Program

Sunday, May 13

8:00 am *Breakfast*

9:00 – 10:00 am SESSION TWO: Reading Academic Writing Contexts

Co-ordinate Disjunctions

Susan Drain, Mount Saint Vincent University and Kenna Manos, Nova Scotia College of Art & Design

“What does ‘Discuss’ mean, anyway?”: Helping Students Read Assignments
W. Brock Macdonald, J. Barbara Rose, Alan Stewart and Kathryn Voltan, Woodsworth College Writing Lab, University of Toronto

10:00 – 10:15 am *Break*

10:15 – 11:45 am SESSION THREE: Students Reading

Teacher/Student Perceptions of Writing Models: The Link Between Reading and Writing

Theresa Hyland, Huron University College

What Do They Say They Do? Strategies Students Say They Use to Read and Understand Textbook Material

Suzanne McGillis, Mount Royal College

Student Responses to a Burkean Reading of a Business Text
Anne Hungerford, Simon Fraser University

12:00 noon *Lunch*

1:00 – 3:00 pm SESSION FOUR: Applying Contextual Knowledge to Reading and Writing – Part 1

Self-reflection by Student Writers as a Catalyst to Re-reading and Re-visioning Their Work

Geoff Cragg, University of Calgary

Evaluation Guidelines for Reading and Writing Philosophy
Jim Gough, Red Deer College

Reading Pharmaceutical Literature

Marcy Bauman, University of Michigan, Dearborn

3:00 – 3:15 pm *Break*

3:15 – 4:15 pm **SESSION FIVE: Applying Contextual Knowledge to Reading and Writing – Part 2**

Writing Upwards, Writing Outwards: Science Writers and Their Audience
Patricia Patchet-Golubev, Innis College, University of Toronto

Students Reading Contexts in a Neo-Expressivist Writing Program
Guy Allen and Jean Mason, University of Toronto

6:30 pm *Dinner*

Monday, May 14

8:00 am *Breakfast*

9:00 – 11:00 am **SESSION SIX: Moving into Workplace Contexts**

“Writing in the Workplace” – An Experiment based on *Worlds Apart*
Leslie Sanders and Nanci White, York University

Reading/Writing in the Workplace: The Case of Engineering Student Interns
Barbara Schneider and Jo-Anne Andre, University of Calgary

“Knowledge management, I’d like you to meet epistemic rhetoric”
Jamie MacKinnon, Bank of Canada

Reading the Context: Writing the Reality
Barbara Schneider, University of Calgary

11:00 – 11:15 am *Break*

11:15 – 12:15 am **SESSION SEVEN: Shifting the Boundaries of the Writing Classroom Context**

Reading Writing From the Margins: Art and Design Students’ Anti-Writing Rhetoric
Victoria Littman, Ontario College of Art & Design

Reading and Thinking Beyond Patterns: Why First-Year Students Should be Reading Gendlin and Comp Theory
M. Elizabeth (Betsy) Sargent, University of Alberta

12:30 pm *Lunch*

1:30 – 3:00 pm **SESSION EIGHT: Enriching Writing Contexts**

Reading Youth Writing

Michael Hoechsmann, Young People's Press

Weaving a Safety Net: The Benefits of an Inkshedding Classroom

Samantha S. Patridge, University of Alberta

Contexts of Reading (and Writing)

Russ Hunt, St. Thomas University

3:00 – 3:15 pm *Break*

3:15 – 4:15 pm **SESSION NINE: Mistaken Contexts**

Plead the Fifth: A Case of Mis/read and Mis/written Identity

Linda Meggs, University of Prince Edward Island

"Adam and Eve Who?": Teaching Composition without Mutual Context

Robin A. Cryderman, University of Victoria

4:30 – 6:00 pm **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of CASLL,**
The Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning

6:30 pm *Dinner*

8:00 pm **TALENT SHOW**

Tuesday, May 15

8:00 am *Breakfast*

9:00 – 10:00 am **SESSION TEN: Reading in New Contexts – Part 1**

Reading Each Other Online: Sharing the Stage

Margaret Procter, University of Toronto

Beyond Netiquette: Reading Interpersonal Conflict in an Online Writing Course

Amanda Goldrick-Jones, University of Winnipeg

10:00 – 10:15 am *Break*

10:15 – 11:15 am **SESSION ELEVEN: Reading in New Contexts – Part 2**

Reading a Compact Disc: Students' Responses

Bev Rasporich, University of Calgary

Reading the Writing Centre Online

Janice Freeman, University of Winnipeg

11:30 am *Lunch*