Inkshed Online Newsletter, August 2012

Introduction

Here's a little reading to orient yourself for the start of Fall term. Susan Drain's minutes of the 2012 AGM remind us of the healthy state of CASLL, reflecting the success of the large and lively Inkshed 28 conference in Toronto. Then three more pieces display the range of approaches in Canadian writing studies. The first, by Lucie Moussu, reviews an innovative new book using narrative case studies to connect theory and learning in second-language acquisition, outlining situations many of us will recognize in our students and ourselves. The second piece describes a new online collection of articles about world writing programs that includes two pieces about the University of Alberta and the University of Winnipeg as its Canadian examples. Finally, an interview of Margaret Procter by Christina Grant shows one perspective on program development over the past 20 years at the University of Toronto.

The upcoming 2012-13 Inkshed Newsletters need contributors, and the articles here may suggest some directions. Please consider writing a brief description of your own program, starting from the survey questions listed in the piece about world writing programs. More case-study stories about learning or teaching would also help illuminate what we're all doing. And how about sending in your presentation from Inkshed 28? You could give us your slides in PDF form, or you could write up an informal account of what you said and the conversations that ensued.

Articles

Minutes of CASLL AGM, May 30, 2012

Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning, Annual General Meeting, May 30, 2012

Margaret Procter called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm.

1. **Approval of the Agenda**: MOVED (Russ Hunt) and seconded (Dena Taylor) THAT the agenda be approved as circulated. CARRIED.
2. **Approval of the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 2011**:MOVED (Anne Parker) and seconded (Kathryn Alexander) THAT the minutes be approved with the corrections noted below. CARRIED.

1. **Corrections:** Item 7, Other Business, the words "hoped to organize" should be replaced by "was discussing organizing."
2. **Business Arising from the Minutes**, Membership Fees (Item 5): a) MOVED (Brock MacDonald on behalf of the Board) THAT membership fees be waived for those who paid for a membership in 2011, and that new members pay at the 2011 rates. DEFEATED. Chief discussion points were that more monies would enable greater support for students and underemployed, and that the availability of such support is a desirable feature of applications to other funding sources. b) MOVED (Kenna Manos) and seconded (Brian Hotson) THAT, subject to the availability of funds, as determined by the Board, financial support be made available to subsidize the attendance of students and the underemployed at Inkshed conferences. CARRIED
3. **Election of the Board of Directors:** Kathryn Alexander and Tyler Evans-Tokaryk were nominated and acclaimed to three-year terms. Congratulations and thanks were warmly expressed by the members present.
4. **2013 Conference Committee**: The meeting accepted with alacrity and great pleasure the offer of Katharine Patterson to chair a conference planning committee for an Inkshed conference in Vancouver BC, either immediately before or immediately after CASDW in Victoria in 2013.
5. **Treasurer's Report:** Brock MacDonald circulated a financial statement dated May 24, 2012 with a healthy bottom line. a) MOVED (Michael Ryan) and seconded (Russ Hunt) acceptance of the Treasurer's Report. CARRIED. b) MOVED (Susan Drain) and seconded (Kenna Manos) THAT up to $2500 be made available as seed money to the organizers of the 2013 conference. CARRIED. c) MOVED (Tyler Evans-Tokaryk) and seconded (Brock MacDonald) THAT CASLL institute permanent memberships fees until such time as the Board decides otherwise, and furthermore that those fees be set at $40 (regular) and $20 (students and un[der]employed). CARRIED. d) Agreed by consensus that the treasurer of CASLL approach the treasurer of CASDW with a view to setting up membership payments through the

CASDW website. Brock MacDonald undertook this task and also to issue a call for 2012 memberships.

6. **Inkshed Publications Report**: A report was circulated. Roger Graves confirmed that he had moved an inventory of books to Edmonton in 2011, and that Miriam Horne's book was in production. It was agreed by consensus that the remaining inventory held in storage in Winnipeg should be trashed; that Roger Graves will keep the Edmonton inventory in order to send copies to research libraries and to new members of CASLL; and that Inkshed Publications would have a visible presence at the 2012 Inkshed Conference.
   MOVED (Russ Hunt) and seconded (Marian MacKeown) a vote of thanks to Roger Graves for his work on behalf of Inkshed Publications. CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.
7. **Relationship with other organizations:** Marian MacKeown reported that CWCA has voted to stay as an interest group of STLHE for two more years, there being a common concern for pedagogy; she noted, in addition, that members also shared the more theoretical concerns of other writing studies associations. On behalf of CWCA, Marian MacKeown expressed thanks to the organizers of Inkshed 28 for the emphasis on Writing Centres in the 2012 programme.
8. **Other Business**: Margaret Procter expressed the sense of the meeting in warmly thanking all those involved in the successful 2012 conference just concluded: Nancy Johnston and Brock MacDonald, conference co-chairs; Sarah King, Deborah Knott and Dena Taylor, program committee; Patricia Patchet-Golubev, Nellie Perret, and J. Barbara Rose, local arrangements. The excellence of the space, the food, and the audio-visual support were particularly noted.
9. **Adjournment**: The meeting adjourned upon a motion by Russ Hunt and Marian MacKeown.
10. Respectfully submitted by Susan Drain, Mount Saint Vincent University.

Beyond the Zone of Proximal Development: A Review of "Sociocultural Theory in Second Language Education: An Introduction through Narratives"

By Lucie Moussu, University of Alberta, moussu@ualberta.ca

Merrill Swain, Penny Kinnear, and Linda Steinman. ***Sociocultural Theory in Second Language Education: An Introduction through Narratives.*** Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2011. Also available from Google Books as a free e-book.

Most educators (especially those working with second language speakers and writers) have heard about Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development" (ZPD). However, few of us have really taken the time to investigate the scope and complexities of this theory and how it fits within Vygotsky's theory of education or the sociocultural theory (SCT) that has grown out of it. The textbook

"Sociocultural Theory in Second Language Education" looks at second language education concepts that are familiar to language educators (assessment and feedback, for instance) through the lens of SCT. By presenting and analyzing familiar teaching and learning situations, the authors are able to make some complex SCT principles accessible to readers who might not be familiar with language education theories.

This book is for language educators, scholars in writing studies, education, applied linguistics, sociology, and psychology, writing centre directors and tutors, as well as teacher educators and student teachers (in any field). Vygotsky's SCT applies to all teaching and learning situations and will, in truth, benefit everyone dedicated to the education of the mind.

Vygotsky always emphasized the importance of the connection between the individual and the social and cultural contexts that produce learning. The chapters in this book introduce and discuss some of the major building blocks of this philosophy. Very quickly the reader realizes that these building blocks do not exist in isolation but support and complement one another to create a compelling and solid pedagogical foundation.

Chapters 1 through 7 follow the same structure: a front page with key terms and principles; an introduction to new concepts and to the narrative used in the chapter; the narrative itself; a discussion of the key tenets through the authors' interpretation of the narrative; presentation of controversial issues as well as strengths and weaknesses of the concepts and theories; a short description of key studies related to the issues discussed in the chapter; and finally some discussion questions on the implications for learning, teaching, and research. After a concluding chapter, a detailed glossary section (with some references) provides a helpful reminder of all the concepts and theories presented earlier in the book. The book ends with a bibliography and index.

After an introduction to SCT, the reasons for using narratives, and the structure of the book, Chapter 1 explains how all mental activities are mediated by material and symbolic artifacts (e.g. books, beliefs, etc.). The narrative presents Mona, an English teacher in China, then a Masters student in the US, and now a Ph.D. student in Canada, who has created reciprocal relationships with the sometimes scanty resources available to her (family, friends, educational and political contexts, work opportunities, the English and Chinese languages, books, etc.) to co-construct a successful life history and representation of herself as a student, teacher, and speaker of English. The discussion emphasizes the importance of learning about our students' and educators' life histories (their ontogenesis) to understand better the influences of personal and sociocultural constraints, goals, identities, and beliefs that shape individual teaching and learning trajectories.

Chapter 2 discusses the well-known zone of proximal development, the ways it can be created for learners, and its transformative effects, as well as the relationship between cognition and emotion.

Notions of scaffolding and community of practice are also clearly illustrated through the story of a fourth-grader in a French immersion class. This chapter might be of particular interest to writing studies scholars and writing centre directors; in fact, the section discussing the potential growth that happens when positive emotional interactions take place in educational settings makes a compelling argument for writing centre tutoring.

Chapter 3 explains the concept of "languaging" ("the process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language" (151) and the important theoretical connections between private speech (intrapersonal communication) and collaborative dialogue (interpersonal communication). The first narrative presents a young native speaker of Cantonese and English who uses self-directed speech to focus, think logically, remember a childhood song, and eventually solve a translation predicament; the second narrative shows how two learners of French negotiate meaning by talking to each other and to themselves in order to achieve second language learning. The sections on pedagogical implications and current controversies discuss the fascinating idea of letting students "play" with both their first and new languages in the classroom, allowing them to engage in complex cognitive processes in order to mediate understanding of new concepts and connect all their mental skills in the learning process.

Chapter 4 may be the most accessible and useful chapter for writing studies scholars and writing centre directors, as it discusses issues related to second language writing, such as the difference between oral and written speech, imitation, transfer, translation, audience, meta-awareness, and the process of developing a conceptual understanding of linguistic and emotional equivalencies in different languages. Many novice second language writers think in their first language and then translate their ideas into English. As the authors say, students often think of translation "as merely putting on another 'ready-made garment,' not creating a new reality and form" (63). This chapter's narrative also illustrates, through the translation attempts of a Tamil university student, the extent to which language students' levels of literacy in their first and subsequent languages can be uneven.

Chapter 5 is about the interrelatedness of emotion and cognition in language learning, and the concept of "regulation," that is, the mediation of behavior "by objects, people and the self" (152). The narrative introduces the reader to a TESL student teacher and bilingual speaker of Greek and English who has struggled to find her own identity as it shifted through the years, influenced by different life situations and people in different contexts. I relate to this student teacher particularly deeply because of my own constant hyper-awareness of my place within my social environment as a non-native speaker of English. The positive or negative emotions I feel as a result influence the "affective filter" that I raise or lower in different contexts. And after a compelling discussion about the need for teachers to attend to both the minds and emotions of their students, I found this statement remarkably gripping: "Caring for the affective state of students is more likely to be achieved by teachers whose affective states are cared for by their professions" (83). The chapter

ends with a note on the importance of teaching and assessing pragmatic awareness in addition to teaching and assessing the more usual discrete elements of language.

Chapter 6 was for me the most complex chapter of this book. It discusses "activity theory," that is, the "generative, mediated interaction of individuals and their multiple goal-oriented contexts" (149). Through the interactions between a student teacher and her English in the Workplace student, the authors show the tensions that can arise, and the ways individual and social contexts influence thoughts and actions as well as teaching and learning experiences. The discussion of these connections and interactions involve looking at the notions of rules of discourse, levels of language, division of labour, activity system network, signs and symbols, and multidirectional relationships. In a modern society that tries to standardize education and assessment, this chapter is particularly thought-provoking and inspiring.

Chapter 7 discusses a concept that is very familiar to all educators: assessment. However, SCT lets us look at assessment from an unusual perspective: co-construction of knowledge, that is, the recognition that language learning and performance do not happen in isolation and at one time only. Language assessment must therefore be dynamic and not only test the individual's accumulated knowledge of and skills in the language (the product) but also look at the individual's learning process, at how his/her performance is socially constructed, and at the potential future language development of the individual in an ideal zone of proximal development. Important to remember, too, is that our assumptions about assessment are historically and culturally constructed. Today, assessment is based on the psychometric framework, which focuses on individual performances, standardization, and the neutralization of individual variables. However, dynamic assessment does not disconnect instruction from assessment; it assists the learner in finding the correct response. In fact, "the goal of dynamic assessment is to mediate [language] development; the assumption is that change will occur during the process. That is, *development should occur during the process designed to assess it*" (129, italics in original). Issues of test reliability, validity, scoring, and fairness are also discussed at the end of the chapter.
Chapter 8 differs in structure from the previous chapters. Instead of teaching about a specific concept, the authors give us the floor and ask us to read two narratives and to discuss and analyze them using the theories presented in previous chapters. The Discussion section then looks at the authors' experiences in writing this book and teaching about SCT through the lens of the principles explained in this book—a kind of *mise en abyme* introspection of their own processes, successes, and challenges.

What I found most useful in this book is the wide scope of the theoretical explanations, as well as the reviews of literature and key research articles in every chapter. These reviews are brief but in-depth and are an excellent introduction for people who are completely new to SCT and also a great preamble to further reading. I also found interesting the discussions of other scholars'

interpretations (and sometimes misunderstandings) of Vygotsky's principles. Finally, the narratives used in this book are from many different perspectives: language students, of course, but also student teachers and teacher educators. This will allow educators and scholars in many different educational contexts to relate to the examples, and to find elements of SCT that they can apply immediately to their teaching and learning environment.

However, this is not a "how-to"book. Some chapters discuss specific skill areas (such as speaking, in Chapter 5), and the narratives provide a personal and accessible overture to complex theoretical concepts. The book discusses ideas and describe and analyzes pedagogical situations, but gives very little concrete advice. While some chapters focus on specific skills such as speaking, it is difficult to imagine how some of the ideas could be applied to other skills. For example, while Chapter 8 discusses spoken language testing at length and quickly mentions written portfolios, I have a difficult time imagining ways to apply dynamic assessment principles in the composition classroom or other classes. I must also note that people in writing studies and writing centre pedagogy/administration who are not familiar with second language education may find certain sections in this book a little challenging. Nevertheless, anyone with an interest in second language education and/or a background in TESOL/TESL and applied linguistics will enjoy looking at well-known theories in the field through the fascinating lens of SCT.

World Writing Programs: Big Picture, Two Canadian Snapshots

by Margaret Procter, University of Toronto, procter@chass.utoronto.ca

In 2009, Chris Thaiss and his colleagues at UC Davis published a useful statistical report about WAC programs in the US and Canada, based on an online survey of writing program administrators. Now this edited collection, *Writing Programs Worldwide: Profiles of Academic Writing in Many Places* (free online from the WAC Clearinghouse), offers more information and analysis on a larger scale, based on a broad international survey that collected answers from 350 respondents in 54 countres.

Thaiss' first chapter outlines a list of key questions from the survey and summarizes the answers received:

- What do students write? (90% of the respondents confirm that undergraduates write a lot in a range of genres, and nearly all note that graduate students write theses in fairly standard forms.)

- Who at the institution cares about student growth through writing? (Half the respondents suspect they may be the only ones, but the other half mention a range of administrative and collegial interest.)
- Has there been cross-disciplinary curriculum planning? (Negative answers dominate, but 25% describe some collaborative efforts.)
- What kinds of theory and models are in use? (Genre and process approaches get 10% each, but otherwise there is no clear pattern; people use whatever means they can to address huge challenges.)

The other 41 short chapters take up these issues in profiling a selection of programs from 23 different countries. The variety of social and economic circumstances is striking, and so are the aims and achievements, ranging from Cape Town (replacing a culture of remediation with one of critical access to dominant forms), Copenhagen (mandatory 30-hour courses for thesis supervisors) and CUNY (creative use of graduate students as Writing Fellows), to Xi'an (the first writing centre in China). A substantial number of Western European universities describe rapid change and growth, often focussed on graduate thesis-writing; South American universities outline both innovations and frustrations in developing discipline-based instruction; writing units in other countries also struggle with their positioning in institutional structures (especially as "academic support" and ESL services in the UK and Australia) and misunderstandings about the nature of their intellectual work (all too common everywhere). Research and theory are important to many of these units, and they are used well to illuminate local circumstances, though these profiles don't attempt the depth of Bazerman's 2010 collection, *Traditions of Writing Research.*

The two Canadian chapters make a nice contrast in themselves, as well as providing thoughtful contributions to the analysis of shared issues. Chapter 10 (Graves and Graves) outlines the new Writing Studies program at the University of Alberta, showing how specific courses inventively match local needs; Chapter 11 (Turner and Kearns) describes the established department of Rhetoric, Writing, and Communications at the University of Winnipeg, with its commitment to a specialized degree program. These chapters both seem to have been written in 2010 and lack the most recent news on graduate programs, but they make a good start at describing what is distinctive about writing instruction in Canada.

It would be very useful to have a collection of profiles like this to depict the range of Canadian programs in all their variety. How would you answer the four questions above? What else would you say to define your program? What would it all add up to?

From Uproar to Firm Footing: Successes and Satisfactions Mark Margaret Procter's U of T Career

By Christina Grant, Grant MacEwan University and University of Alberta, cmgrant1@ualberta.ca

On one of the hottest days of the year in Toronto, July 6, 2012, I interviewed Margaret Procter, who retired the same month from her position as University of Toronto Coordinator, Writing Support. I'd had the pleasure of meeting and talking with Margaret during the Inkshed 28 conference May 29-30 in her even-then-sweltering city. When I approached conference organizer Brock MacDonald, director of the Woodsworth College Academic Writing Centre at U of T, about the idea of a "swan song" article on Margaret's lengthy and fruitful career, he was enthusiastic. The following is the result of my telephone chat with Margaret, conducted from my home in relatively cooler Edmonton, Alberta.

Margaret at a retirement event

In the beginning…there was an uproar!

Margaret Procter's career in the field of writing started in "a big uproar." Not one she caused, of course. Rather, the upheaval was prompted by a sudden, 1992 administrative decision regarding the Scarborough campus writing lab, one of nine units scattered across the broad U of T system that provided one-on-one tutoring to students. Margaret had just taken on the job of director for the writing centre at University College downtown. She had never met the other writing-centre directors.

“On August 31st that year,” Margaret relates, “the principal called the director at Scarborough and said, ‘Don’t bother coming in for work anymore. We’re going to take over what you’ve been doing by installing five Mac computers equipped with ‘Grammatik’ to check the students’ work for them.’”

As an E.M. Forster and D.H. Lawrence scholar who had taught English literature at the U of T since 1967, and had recently taught a few business writing and composition courses at the Mississauga campus, Margaret knew that an interactive grammar-checking technology could not replace humans in the complex art and science of writing (and thinking) instruction. So she joined many equally appalled others in a bid to reverse the move and stop the trend. Faculty members compiled petitions, and students wrote scathing articles in the student newspapers. They all saw that students needed writing support to succeed at university. “Eventually the provost formed a steering group, really a writing commission, with representation from department chairs and other powerful administrators. The writing-centre directors put together a long submission describing what they really did in their work. The steering group read it and came up with the recommendation that there should be more writing support and a coordinator to help develop it, and when that was implemented in 1994 I was chosen for the position.”

“So that was my introduction to the field,” she says, “a demonstration that it was vulnerable to misunderstandings and to people misusing their power.” Musing on the current state of writing studies across North America, she agrees that “unfortunately, it is a story that does keep repeating itself,” though “writing centres and programs have changed a lot,” having distanced themselves from “fix-it shop” approaches and gained respect as professional entities informed by theory and staffed by people well-grounded in pedagogical knowledge and techniques. Margaret is pleased that she has played a part in that evolution over the past 20 years. “It’s no longer so easy to misunderstand writing centres or writing instruction in quite that way anymore.”

Faculty and peer tutoring systems: the path not taken

Asked to share her thoughts on the alternate system of peer tutors—undergrad and graduate students skilled in English who are (ideally) trained by writing-centre directors to coach students—such as exists at the University of Alberta and in many other writing centres across North America, Margaret thinks for a moment, then responds: “I think peer tutoring is a very interesting system that I know is very valuable to the tutors and has many advantages for the students.” At some point, she explains, the U of T simply opted to “take the other path” of faculty status in writing instruction, confirming already existing appointments and focussing on providing students with “a sense of the rhetoric and the reasoning and the kinds of intellectual expectations in their disciplines.” It seemed to the group of writing-centre directors who developed U of T programs in the 1990s, she adds, “that faculty members, sessional instructors and teaching assistants, rather than other students, were more likely to have the breadth of knowledge and approach to help

students with those challenges." She also points out that individual instruction, while "still core," is "only one part" of what the 14 current U of T writing centres do. Much of their work is "Writing-in-the-Disciplines" (WID) within specific faculties, which demands the high levels of expertise that faculty members can provide. Nonetheless, Margaret points out that some U of T units "do make good use of students as peer mentors and as leaders and facilitators in study groups. Our WID programs also depend on graduate students as TAs within their departments."

Shifting from English to Writing

In reflecting on why she decided to shift out of traditional English instruction and into the clearly volatile field of composition or writing studies (though at the U of T the discipline is simply called "writing") Margaret cites "practicality" as the initial factor. She had withdrawn from active instruction for about four years to raise her family; then, when she was ready to come back, "it was pretty clear that the field that was opening up was writing," although her familiar English department "was not about to put a lot of money into it or make it a key part of what it did." She recalls that "English was forced to offer some sort of writing courses in the 1980s," which "it did, reluctantly. So, I got what apprenticeship training I could," which consisted largely of "teaching from textbooks, and then talking with professors in other departments and speaking to their classes—not in a very enlightened way, I must say," she remarks with a laugh. She adds that she benefitted greatly from the mentoring of Margot Northey in teaching business-writing courses at the Mississauga campus, and then from following Guy Allen's methods in teaching Expressive Writing courses there. When the part time writing-centre job came up at University College in 1992 she was glad to take it, joining "about seven or eight other people in the field" and meeting more as they joined together to push back against the Scarborough crisis. Her interest in the field grew from there, and her coordinator position let her join in the expansion of writing instruction at the university that resulted from the effects of the steering group after 1993. Today, the U of T has "a whole suite of writing units that teach writing in different ways to match disciplinary needs."

Satisfaction: the unique rewards of teaching writing

From the time she first began coaching and instructing people in writing, Margaret has revelled in its rewards. "I've always found it very satisfying to see individual students develop," she says. "The results are quite immediate and far-reaching; it really affects students' ideas about what writing is. Not just specific skills, but how it's connected to thinking and their own identities."

Further, she says, watching instructors glean the benefits is equally rewarding. "It's exciting to see faculty members who join in get real satisfaction from seeing their students do much better." One of her most recent projects was working with administrators, faculty members, and graduate TAs across the disciplines in the Faculty of Arts and Science. "Arts and Science now has lead Writing TAs in 18 different departments, who each work with instructors and other graduate students from

those departments in providing writing instruction within courses." This kind of focus on WID activities has been accelerating since 1993. As a result, faculty and TAs familiar with writing instruction methods are increasingly common at U of T. They're "key to the well-known Engineering Communication program, for instance," she notes. She adds that it's satisfying to see the largest undergraduate faculty, Arts and Science on the downtown campus, finally get into the swing: "It's the most recent faculty to make writing in the disciplines an official aim."

The challenge of "buy-in"

I asked Margaret if instructors are always eager to embrace writing studies methodologies, and she said this varies, especially at the start. While better marks for their students or essays that are easier to read may be direct results they seek from involvement with a writing initiative, she says instructors often want to solve larger teaching problems. For example, "their students may not be learning in the ways they want them to learn, or they find that they can't assign papers that require a lot of deep reading, or they can't ask students to do complicated analyses of the material in their course." Worries about plagiarism when assigning conventional, one-shot essays is another common concern, and she notes that "our attention to assignment design can help with that."

Sometimes it takes changes in their courses, Margaret notes, to get the results they want for their students, and writing faculty serving as consultants "work with people from where they're ready to work from, then together develop a sense of what's possible in integrating writing into that course." Once things get rolling, writing faculty might work with an instructor to adapt the course syllabus to include several smaller, linked or sequenced assignments "instead of one big, very high-risk research project." They might support instructors and TAs in teaching their students "how to understand assignment expectations and also how to use feedback," or work with them to turn a "mechanical" grading rubric that simply "adds up numbers" to one that is "more sophisticated, tailored, and helpful." Gradually, Margaret says, "we see people becoming more and more flexible" in accepting "a variety of approaches in student work," and also "getting more and more committed" to writing studies theory and methodologies— "and seeing beyond what we see as possibilities.

"The initiatives we've taken," she points out, "have always depended on instructors coming to us." While occasionally an enthusiastic administrator might push a reluctant instructor to work with a U of T writing specialist—a move that yields predictably mixed results— Margaret says that the preferred dynamic of "never imposing" writing studies ideas on faculty is critical to the overall success of the programs' success and their steady, positive forward movement within the university system.

Hands-free operations

One element in place at the U of T which differs from many other North American institutions is that the writing programs are not tied to the English Department (though there exist some novel and mutually satisfying collaborations), and "there is no writing or English course that everyone has to take" as a foundational course. Further, Margaret explains, "at U of T it's not English teachers who teach academic writing, but writing teachers. "This independent writing program status both increases the need for the writing centres generally and for their WID work specifically. "Also, in many ways it has left our hands free," Margaret says, in term of how the centres operate. "Each unit is lucky in that it can offer individualized or group programming" as it sees fit, tailoring its services to the local needs of students and faculty. Reflecting the needs of the diverse student body, specific programs and courses for "multilingual" or "English language learners"— terms U of T prefers to "ESL" learners"— have been created, notably within the English Language Development program at Scarborough, the English Language Learning program recently established alongside the WID initiative in Arts and Science on the downtown campus, and the numerous specialized courses offered by the writing program in the School of Graduate Studies. However, the writing units as a rule "avoid labeling," preferring to tailor each student meeting as well as group instruction to specific needs rather than assuming generalized concerns. Margaret notes that the kinds of freedoms enjoyed by the U of T writing programs "are probably unusual in Canada."

Legacies

Over the course of the two decades and more that Margaret has taught, tutored, mentored, and administered writing—one way or another— at U of T, several projects stand out in her mind as legacies she's pleased to be leaving behind. "Certainly the website," she says, referring to www.writing.utoronto.ca, a site she launched in 1994 as soon as she took on the Coordinator role. The site contains volumes of information on U of T writing centres and programs, ways to find various writing courses, and advice file as well as e-links for both students and faculty. Margaret has authored a number of straight-across and upbeat help files accessible through the website aimed at disciplinary faculty and TAs with little writing studies background. One is titled: "I'm grading a set of student papers. How can I comment on my students' writing without killing myself —or them?" Now managed and developed by Jerry Plotnick, the Writing at U of T website continues to be "very useful as a tool to keep writing in public attention."

Another source of "personal level" satisfaction for Margaret has been her work on behalf of writing instruction faculty. It was worthwhile, she comments, to have spent time working on developing decent employment policies: "We now have 25 full-time continuing faculty members teaching writing at U of T, plus another 40 or so part-time or nearly full-time sessionals." Gaining faculty status for writing instructors simultaneously garnered increased respect for the field, ensured that students and faculty got top quality support, and built confidence and a sense of importance within

the instructors as they taught alongside others. It has also buffered the writing system from cyclical financial cuts. Given "a wider scope" of responsibility and possibility than they had before, writing instructors moved from merely "helping students" to "actually teaching students," Margaret says. They now also work to prevent some of the problems they saw students bringing to writing centres "by shaping curriculum course by course, taking part in university administration and governance, and getting involved in research and theory."

The future: no resting on laurels

Asked if she's happy with things as they've evolved over the course of her tenure, Margaret is unhesitating. "I'm excited about it. Writing is on firm ground at the U of T. A new generation of faculty now understands that writing is part of learning." She adds, "I'm very happy seeing how many faculty members are fully on board, are leaders in all this. And I'm also happy to see how much writing instructors develop when they get involved in projects." She quickly adds, however, that U of T`s writing leaders cannot simply "rest on their laurels." Rather, they must "keep redefining" that hard-won writing ground. There will always be "continued resistance" to unfamiliar practices and new structures, she says, and the way ahead will contain rocky patches.

Margaret notes that administrators at the U of T and everywhere who lack writing studies experience and knowledge sometimes "haven't really thought about writing particularly." She chafes, for instance, against the reality that "in many statements and policies we continue to have to use the word 'skill.'" It's a limited and misleading description, she asserts, because it "tends to reduce writing instruction to a single entity that can be immediately grasped and then transferred," and thus undermines the perceived legitimacy and value of writing instruction programming. "We still have work to do to help everybody understand that writing is simply part of learning," Margaret asserts. Further, she says, people must accept that "writing develops within students over the years and is different in every discipline, so it needs to be measured and taught in different ways."

In the practical world of universities everywhere, Margaret observes that "budget matters"— regardless of administrator sentiments— and writing centres and instruction will always be under pressure, especially when "governmental bodies are demanding outcome measurements" which "can be dangerous if taken too literally and too simplistically."
In current writing studies literature, the field of writing studies is said to be growing exponentially. Margaret agrees that "it certainly is at the U of T and the U of A. There's interest, all right, and a growing body of specialists. "But I wonder," she says, "if budget pressures haven't actually reduced the field in some cases." As an example, she points to McGill University in Montreal where the ambitious and specialized writing programming once offered out of the education department "has kind of fallen apart; the key people there have lost that interest." She noted in her keynote talk to CASDW in 2010 that many Canadian writing centres were under pressure to become part of student-service operations or libraries. Margaret feels, however, that "over the last 20 years things

have gotten a lot stronger for writing studies in Canada generally, and I think we've got some really excellent programs to look at as models, and some very good research." She cites Doug Brent's June, 2012 *CCC* article on knowledge transfer entitled "Crossing Boundaries: Co-op Students Relearning to Write" as an example of "terrific" work happening in the field. She is impressed, too, that "current research is both practical and theoretical."

In the middle of our conversation, I ask Margaret if she considers herself a writer; it's a question I ask all my students in Writing Studies 101 at the U of A both at the start and end of the course, and it often yields an interesting set of answers. "That's a good question," Margaret responds, "and I have to say I'm not entirely satisfied with any answer I can give you. My own writing has been focussed so much on handouts for students, handouts for faculty, reports, administrative work, and so on, that I really can't think of myself as a writer; certainly I'm not a creative writer. And though I've done some academic writing I'm not a huge producer of it." Still, she says the label is part of her identity, and reluctantly answers that on the continuum of novice to expert she'd "have to claim expert status just because of the years of practice!"

When it comes to the importance of writing studies, Margaret sees the knowledge that writing studies scholars, instructors, and tutors offer "as a matter of access. It gives more students broader and deeper access to the kinds of disciplines they're studying, to the life of the university, to the goals of university education." She loves to "see the students develop as people, to see them feel that writing is part of what they can do and who they are—something they can adapt and use in various ways. It's all very satisfying."

Phased-in retirement an easy way out

Although Margaret left U of T officially and for good this summer, her retirement has been "phased in" for the past three years, with workloads and expectations gradually decreasing. "It feels great," she says of the final stage. "I'm going out at a time when the most recent initiative—the one in Arts and Science—is doing extremely well. Andrea Williams has been hired to coordinate it, and she's absolutely terrific. Leora Freedman now has a faculty appointment to lead the English Language Learning program she started, which is a big success too. It feels great to go when I can see U of T in a position of real strength in terms of its writing programs."

Because of the smooth and gradual transitioning, she says she has come to enjoy the reality of not working so hard. "I've said goodbye without too many regrets to some things I used to do." While she will continue to follow what goes on at U of T and across Canada, she doesn't feel a need "to be involved as much anymore… or at all, perhaps." However, she's open to consulting and in fact is already helping advise the social science faculty at a new university in Oshawa, Ontario about integrating writing into its courses. Nonetheless, she can foresee a steady reduction in that kind of active work. "I'll be out of touch after a while, but at the moment I feel I can still pull people

together and draw their attention to resources and possibilities." She's also still there as the moderator of the new Inkshed website. In these ways, she says, she'll continue to feel part of the field.

Asked if there's anything about her old job she'll miss, Margaret ponders a moment, then answers: "I will miss the contact with the people I've worked with and grown to like as people and enjoy as colleagues." However, she expects that by staying active in social events around Toronto and keeping in touch by email she'll maintain at least some of these connections.

Margaret has enjoyed a relatively quiet summer. This fall she'll be travelling, starting with a month-long trip to visit a daughter who is teaching anthropology at the UK campus of Memorial University, and whose own daughter is about to start kindergarten. Retirement will also permit her to see more of her other daughter, who teaches astronomy at McMaster University in Hamilton, and her two children.

And so, with writing programs rolling solidly forward at U of T led by "a great cohort of colleagues in writing studies, and increasingly by a new generation of faculty—who become administrators—with writing studies experience," Margaret feels confident that things will carry on just fine without her.

About torches

Before we say goodbye, I feel compelled—as an emerging writing studies scholar— to ask this question: "If there was a torch you'd like to see me, and others, carry forward for the field, what would it be?" She answers without hesitation: "It depends on the individual and what you are interested in." She urges me to follow my inclinations towards multi-language learners and deaf students, noting that "the sense of commitment" that comes from deep personal interest leads to the best teaching and scholarship. Considering the question further, she concludes, "There are many torches that could be carried. The one I happened to pick up is Writing in the Disciplines. Also, I think for years we didn't do enough for English language learners, so I`m glad Elaine Khoo and Leora Freeman have found that torch and are carrying it; we all benefit from their expertise and can join in too. "

Despite writing studies' precarious position on the cusp of new paradigms of writing instruction, Margaret says she's "very hopeful about the field. It's interesting to see it develop." She's keen to follow developments in the European education systems, she says, noting that they have undergone "a lot of reforms" over the last 15 years, including adopting WID, which is "bringing in research attention that I think will be valuable for us." Indeed she believes it would be better for Canadian writing scholars to keep watch on developments throughout the world rather than merely imitate the U.S. In any case, she's pleased with the general reduction in focus on composition

courses everywhere because “there’s a lot more happening in the field that is equally interesting and valuable.”

The Toronto heat has begun to wilt my interviewee, and our allotted time has evaporated. We wish each other well and hang up, and indeed I feel my own writing studies torch glowing just a little more brightly.