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# *Inkshed*

Newsletter of the Canadian Association  
for the Study of Language and Learning  
Volume 12, Number 1. November 1993

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12.1 November 1993

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

*Inkshed* is published five times during the academic year. The following is a schedule of submission deadlines and approximate publication dates:

15 September, for 1 October      1 February, for 15 February  
15 November, for 1 December      1 April, for 15 April  
Post-Conference: May - June

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To  
Subscriber

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# Inkshed Notices and News

## Report on the Business Meeting of Inkshed 10

The meeting was held Saturday, June 5th, 1993, during the Inkshed 10 conference. Mary Louise Craven chaired the meeting. The following agenda was adopted:

1. Report on the constitution vote
2. Outline of the highlights of the constitution
3. Proposal to implement the constitution
4. Report on publications
  - 4.1 *Inkshed* newsletter, Anthony Paré
  - 4.2 Inkshed Publication Initiative, Sandy Baardman
5. Interim dues proposal
6. Inkshed 11 conference
7. Other business

*Textual Studies in Canada*

### 1. Report on the constitution vote

Anthony Paré reported on the vote to ratify the proposed constitution. Of the fifty-four ballots received prior to the deadline, fifty-three were in favour, and one was opposed. A number of Inkshedders also proposed revisions; these suggestions will be given to the new Board of Directors when it is constituted.

### 2. Outline of the highlights of the constitution

Susan Drain summarized the highlights of the constitution: the new name of the organization (Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning); its three categories of members; the Board of Directors; and the standing committees for newsletter, conference, and publications.

### 3. Proposal to implement the constitution

Stan Straw presented a proposal from those members of the constitution committee present at Inkshed 10, that the constitution committee be empowered to seek nominations and conduct an election for the first Board of Directors, as well as to establish a date for the implementation of the new structures, bearing in mind what needs to be done before the first AGM in 1994. The proposal was endorsed.

### 4. Report on publications

#### 4.1 *Inkshed* newsletter

Anthony Paré reported that the *Inkshed* newsletter continued financially and intellectually sound. One more issue (the post-conference issue) is scheduled before subscriptions run out.

#### 4.2 Inkshed Publication Initiative

Sandy Baardman reported that the Inkshed Publication Initiative, as approved at Inkshed 9 in Banff, had selected two manuscripts for publication. These books will appear in early 1994. Further proposals have been received and are being reviewed. The next deadline for proposals is September 15, 1993. The editorial committee for the Inkshed Publication Initiative consists of Sandy Baardman, Neil Besner, Pat Sadowy, and Stan Straw.

#### 5. Interim dues proposal

Interim Dues proposal. To cover the *Inkshed* newsletter and the two books from the Inkshed Publication Initiative, the conference was asked to approve a subscription fee of \$25 for the upcoming year. After a lively discussion, those present agreed that the subscription rate would be set at \$25, but that graduate students and others who could not afford the full fee would be welcome to contribute whatever they can (see below).

#### 6. Inkshed 11 conference

Inkshed 11 will be held in Fredericton (see Call for Papers in this issue, page 24)

#### 7. Other business

Henry Hubert reminded Inksheddors of the existence of *Textual Studies in Canada* and encouraged their subscriptions.

Susan Drain  
Mount Saint Vincent University

### An Important Announcement Regarding Subscription/ Membership Rates

At the business meeting held at Inkshed 10, a proposal was accepted to increase subscription rates for the *Inkshed* newsletter to \$25.00 for the upcoming year. The reason for the increase is that this year, along with the regular five issues of the *Inkshed* newsletter, members of CASLL will receive the first two volumes of the Inkshed Publication Initiative:

*Writing Instruction in Canadian Universities*, written by Roger Graves, is a report of the most comprehensive survey of writing instruction in Canada's universities completed to date.

*Contextual Literacy: Writing Across the Curriculum*, edited by Catherine Schryer and Laurence Steven, is a collection of papers dealing with the theory and pedagogy associated with writing across the curriculum in a Canadian context.

In addition, the \$25.00 fee also includes membership in the newly-constituted Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning.

### Two important notes:

(1) Concerns were raised at Inkshed 10 that some members of the Inkshed community might find the new subscription/membership rate prohibitive. As a result, it was decided that **graduate students and others who cannot afford the full fee are welcome to contribute whatever they can. Everyone who pays a subscription fee will receive all publications regardless of the amount paid.** (Note: the previous subscription rate for the *Inkshed* newsletter alone was \$10.00.) Those gathered at Inkshed 10 wanted to be assured that no decision we made would result in the marginalisation or exclusion of members of the community, especially since membership fees and subscription fees are not differentiated. It is estimated that over a third of our membership is made up of graduate students and people without permanent employment, and their membership in the association should not be jeopardized by an inability to pay the subscription rate for publications. Nor should this increase represent undue hardship in meeting the financial obligations of professional life. The members of the editorial team of the Inkshed Publications Initiative all trust that there is enough support in the community to pay for this new series under this subscription policy.

(2) The subscription rate for the Newsletter and Inkshed Publications has been set and approved by those gathered at Inkshed 10. Once the new Board of Directors is elected, however, the discussion will be re-opened. The membership/subscription rate set at Inkshed 10, then, is an interim figure used to cover the costs of the first year of publication.

### Invention Re-Visited

After the Inkshed 10 activity of generating invention strategies, I thought Inksheddors might enjoy adding this quotation to their repertoires:

I would stand and look out over the roofs of Paris and think, "Do not worry. You have always written before and you will write now. All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence that you know." (Ernest Hemingway in *A Moveable Feast*.)

Pat Sadowy  
University of Manitoba

### Update from the Constitution Committee

Since the constitution for the Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning (CASLL) has been ratified, there remains the business of actually implementing the organizational structures described in the constitution. At the business meeting of Inkshed 10, approval was given for the constitution committee to organize a call for nominations and conduct an election of the first Board of Directors. A call for nominations, then, will appear in the next issue of *Inkshed* along with the details of the process.

Sandy Beardman  
University of Manitoba

## Welcome to the CASLL

In case anyone who reads *Inkshed* and has access to electronic mail doesn't already know about it, Inkshedders now have a dedicated list for announcements and discussion of any issues we may want to talk about. To get more information, send an email message to Russ Hunt (hunt@StThomasU.ca); to subscribe, send a one-line email message to [LISTSERV@UNB.CA](mailto:LISTSERV@UNB.CA), with the following as the only text:

SUBSCRIBE CASLL Your E-mail address

As of the end of September, the following Inkshedders will get any message sent to this address:

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## Publication Announcement

### *Social Reflections on Writing: To Reach and Realize*

Edited by: Sandy Baardman, Stan Straw, and Laura Atkinson

Published by: Literacy Publications

*Social Reflections on Writing* includes papers by: Henry Hubert, Sam Robinson, Roger Graves, Gordon Wells, Marion Crowhurst, Roy Graham, Deborah Berrill, Phyllis Artiss, Judy Hunter, and Fran Davis and Arlene Steiger.

The effect of social accounts of writing over the last decade has been pervasive to the extent that, as Reither and Vipond (1989) note, "the case for writing's social dimensions no longer requires arguing." Nonetheless, much of the work done over that period has generally been cast in relief against the individualist assumptions of expressivist and cognitivist schools of writing theory and pedagogy. What Reither and Vipond's comment highlights is an emerging consensus about the social nature of writing which has provided the field with a new, rich set of assumptions from which to continue a disciplinary conversation. And, out of the current consensus, what is unfolding is a set of patterns within the field based on a variety of orientations which tend to be sociological (or socio-rhetorical) rather than psychological in origin. In other words, the consensus-building activity of the last decade, which derived from a relatively singular notion of "writing as social," is now giving way to a much more diverse set of perspectives. This book is a reflection of some of the initial patternings of the conversations which will emerge as the social dimensions in writing theory, practice, and pedagogy increasingly become a taken-for-granted part of our disciplinary discourse. (From the Introduction, written by Sandy Baardman)

**Distribution Notice:** The publication of *Social Reflections on Writing* has been generously supported through grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Secretary of State for Literacy, and the First National Writing Conference. Literacy Publications is a not-for-profit coalition of organizations devoted to literacy and literacy education. In the absence of a need to cover costs of publication, and in an effort to distribute this book to its intended audience, **this volume will be sent free of charge to all those who subscribe to the *Inkshed* newsletter in the upcoming publication year.**

Sandy Baardman, Stan Straw, Laura Atkinson  
University of Manitoba

## In Memoriam

Inkshedders will be saddened to learn that Dennis Quon (UBC, Ohio State University) died on October 7 in Vancouver. We will miss his kindness, wit, courage, and friendship.

Andrea Lunsford  
Ohio State University

Further sadness comes with news of the July 16 death of Garth Boomer, who joined us at Inkshed 4 in Winnipeg, and the September death of Dawson Harms, who presented at Inkshed 9 in Banff and had recently moved to the University of Winnipeg.

## Listening to Silence

What is silence?

Not the mere absence of utterance.

Ringed with its own voice(s), gaps and fissures and pauses dividing discourse, open spaces for making meaning, active performance, revelation and concealment, signifier of disseminating significance.

The comedian Red Skeleton (holding up a white canvas): "What do you see?" Nothing, of course. "This, folks, is a picture of a ghost milking a white cow in a snowstorm." Of course.

\*

Rather than being that which thwarts language, silence is that which opens the way for language's potency . . . . Speech is born from silence and seeks its conclusion in silence. (Dauenhauer 119)

\*

Why are some letters written and not pronounced: silent letters? How can letters be silent?

\*

My students . . . talk a lot about silence: about what kinds of silence there are: the voices inside you that tell you to be quiet, the voices outside you that drown you out or politely dismiss what you say or do not understand you, the silence inside you that avoids saying anything important even to yourself, internal and external forms of censorship, and the stress that it produces. (Annas 4)

\*

Silence is the unarticulated, the unspoken, the unwritten that cannot be articulated, spoken, written.

Silence is the failure, the unwillingness to hear.

Silence is both a verb and a noun, a subject and a predicate, a sentence complete in its ideational oneness (silence silences; silences silence).

\*

The dumb silence of apathy, the sober silence of solemnity, the fertile silence of awareness, the active silence of perception, the baffled silence of confusion, the uneasy silence of impasse, the muzzled silence of outrage, the expectant silence of waiting, the reproachful silence of censure, the tacit silence of approval, the vituperative silence of accusation, the eloquent silence of awe, the unnerving silence of menace, the peaceful silence of communion, and the irrevocable silence of death illustrate by their unspoken response to speech that experiences exist for which we lack the word. (Kane 14-15)

But do we really lack the word? Is silence not the word? Are not all experiences known in words? Is silence not a sufficient word?

\*

I can learn from silence by listening to silence, but the trouble with listening to silence is the problem of hearing the voices of silence. Perhaps the voices are echoes only of my voice(s). Perhaps the voices are illusions I pretend to hear because I fear silence. Perhaps the voices resist my control, are uncontrollable. Perhaps the voices voice languages I do not know.

\*

A person who can "impersonate in writing" (inscribe) many different voices is an accomplished stylist, for style in writing is largely a matter of giving voice to what is silent. (Scholl 267)

\*

Because silence is a word, a sign, can silence ever be silent? Is silence in the eyes, ears, tongue, nose, fingertips of the beholder? Do I hear/not-hear silence? feel/not-feel silence? taste/not-taste silence? smell/not-smell silence? see/not-see silence?

\*

### From a Window Silent Seen

a girl in pink  
    and a girl in blue  
walk under a red tree  
(with just a dash of green)  
crunching dead leaves  
the blue girl  
    picks a yellow flower and  
        offers it with a low bow  
            to the pink girl  
the pink girl giggles  
    the blue girl giggles  
the girl in pink  
    and the girl in blue  
stare at the blond boy  
    passing  
    in the black Fiero

\*

Silence of intimates, silence of mime, silence of private reading, silence of liturgical worship, silence in death, silence of the to-be-said, silence of God, silence of the unknown, silence of an unanswered letter, doorbell, telephone, call, silence of nothing-to-say, silence of nothing-I-want-to-say, silence of consent, silence of omission, silence of reservation, silence of good manners, silence of the mute, compelled silence, compelling silence, silence in sleep, silence of the absurd, silence of nothingness, silence on a crowded bus, silence of fear, silence of the past, silence of indifference, silence of an unwritten or unread or unspoken or unheard text, silence at a party, silence of not-listening, silence of no noise, silence of the abyss, silence of the universe, silence of autism, silence of the deaf, silence of a monk, silence of the abused, silence of memory.

\*

Be silent. Being silent. What is the difference?

\*

"Language after all consists of silence as well as sound, and mime is still communication..., but by the language of action" (Barth 67).

\*

To write is to make oneself the echo of what cannot stop talking - and because of this, in order to become its echo, I must to a certain extent impose silence on it. To this incessant speech I bring the decisiveness, the authority of my own silence. Through my silent

mediation, I make perceptible the uninterrupted affirmation, the giant murmur in which language, by opening, becomes image, becomes imaginary, an eloquent depth, an indistinct fullness that is empty. (Blanchot, *Gaze* 69)

\*

When Job sat in the ashes scraping his leprous flesh, Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, sat with him for seven days and seven nights in silence. But eventually they insisted on explaining Job's catastrophe. If only they'd remained silent.

\*

Am I one of the silenced or one of the silencers?

\*

There are these two sides to language: *langue* and *parole*. *Langue* is the great-given, the sum total of words and grammar and literature and concluded speech. *Parole* is what one of us says, the uniqueness of the speaking (writing) person. If you are unlucky, the great-given swamps you, and even when you speak, you are silent. If you are incredibly lucky, and if you work your ass off, the great-given sounds, not over, but in your unique speaking. If that happens, then you have found a Voice. (Kroetsch 23)

\*

Louis L'Amour once bragged to a reporter from *People* that he could write on a busy New York street. Of course a *People* photographer took a picture of a grinning Louis L'Amour sitting in the middle of a busy New York street with a typewriter, apparently typing. Why do I need silence?

What is the relation between silence and the ocean of textuality? Am I awash in unsilence? Then silence punctuates the unsilence and makes it possible to hear the unsilence, to know the unsilence as unsilence. Silence is the sign that divides the seamless web of textuality. Without the productive gaps of silence, voice(s) in writing/talking comprise(s) cacophony only.

\*

"Talk is essential to the human spirit. It is the human spirit. Speech, not silence" (Gass 159).

\*

"Silence mothers language; it is the womb of discourse" (Kamboureli 52).

\*

"Silence can be a fullness - emptiness, pregnant with meaning, or it can be a void, a wasteland in which no creative thinking can grow" (Bindeman 128).

\*

The composer John Cage performed his piece called 4'33" by walking on the stage and sitting at the piano in silence for four minutes and thirty-three seconds. Many regard it as Cage's finest work.

\*

We need ... to learn to listen to the often silent speech of the masses" (Pêcheux 633). Why? How?

\*

In Aesop's fable of the boy, the father, and the donkey everybody speaks except the donkey (the silence is wise). In the Old Testament story of Balaam the donkey speaks (the speech is wise). Moral: silent or speaking an ass is a smart ass.

\*

As a student in elementary school I learned silence, learned to sit patiently, learned to pretend listening, learned to speak only the right (officially sanctioned) answers. I learned silence well. Too well. A well of silence. How can I know if I've drowned in the well?

\*

"When a silence opens up before us, we quickly cover it over with words" (Bindemann 1).

\*

"Silence posits itself as the language of the hidden, the articulation hiding in the recesses of the throat, in the cave of the mouth" (Kamboureli 52).

\*

Are the voices of the silent ever heard?

\*

Most school students or pupils most of the time are silent, or better, silenced. They are silent because their communicative capacities are regulated by the approved, proper, rewarded occasions for talk and writing. (Corrigan 20)

\*

Are voices of conscience, memory, spirit, unconscious, hungry with desire for the other, ever silent? Have I ever known silence? What do I hear in this quiet room? Refrigerator cooling system, clock, furnace, cars, water in pipes. What sounds would I hear in a sound-proof room? Noises of the body - gurgles, cracks, squishes. Can a living body be silent? Is a cadaver silent? Always I hear sounds - so many sounds - actual, imagined, remembered. Is silence ever silent?

\*

"...silence is a screen between, silence reflects what does not get said. the apparent silence of two heads looking out of each its own space" (Marlatt 174).

\*

With each new year I grow more silent, less sure of my words, less sure of their worth, less sure of their reception; I grow less gregarious, less demonstrative, more still, perhaps still more.

\*

"The majority of working people ... remain, for the most part, strangers to the public realm, upholding the status quo through their silence" (Repo 95).

\*

Am I so conditioned and habituated to hearing certain voices that I can no longer listen to silence, the hidden voices of unconscious or cunning control, subliminal silence, sublime silence, the unspoken or unwritten which lurks behind the spoken or written, the background voices drowned out by the foreground voices, the suppressed voices which are inevitable in all texts because all texts are produced and transmitted and constrained by historico-socio-economic processes that valorize some voices and discriminate against other voices?

\*

A monk was cloistered in a bare cell. Before locking the door behind him the abbot explained, you have taken a vow of silence. At the end of five years you will be permitted one sentence, two sentences at the end of ten years, and three at the end of fifteen years.

At the end of five years the abbot appeared before the monk. You have one sentence.

The monk grumbled, It's a little cold in this cell.

At the end of ten years the abbot appeared again. You may speak two sentences.

The monk reluctantly whispered, It's a little cold. The food is a bit meager.

At the end of fifteen years the abbot again showed up. You may say three sentences.

The monk glanced quickly around his cell. It's a little cold. The food is a bit meager. The stone floor is hard for sleeping.

The abbot exploded. OUT. OUT. You've been here for fifteen years and all you've done is complain.

\*

Since profane or coarse language often fills the speech of people living in dehumanized environments - battlefields, ghettos, assembly lines - the practical effect of banning such speech is to cut off the voices of soldiers, workers, minorities, and others whose plight tells us things we don't want to hear. (Moffett 122)

\*

"Silence is powerlessness" (Faery 204).

\*

### Diseases of the Tongue are Many

surgical removal:

1. mouth widely opened  
with a gag
2. tongue transfixed  
with stout silk
3. tongue pulled well  
out of the mouth
4. tongue at the base  
cut with short snips
5. tongue seized with  
Wells' forceps, removed

\*

Women have been silenced as women - told we are stupid because we are women, told that our thoughts are trivial because we are women, told that our experiences as woman are unspeakable, told that women can't speak the language of significance - then had our ideas appropriated by men, only to notice that those ideas have suddenly become worthy, even creative. (MacKinnon 112)

\*

"What has caused the cultural alienation - the silence, the marginality, the secondary status of women?" (Gilbert 35)

\*

A scream of silence. A cliché? I don't want to use a cliché (arriving at a party with a Tip Top sweater wrapped around my shoulders) except that the starving, the dying, the tortured, the grieving, the abused, the lonely scream with screams of silence - no clichés. Why aren't they heard?

\*

"If we have been silenced for centuries and speak an oppressor's tongue, then liberation for the lesbian must begin with language" (Zimmerman 213).

\*

In the culture of silence the masses are mute, that is, they are prohibited from creatively taking part in the transformations of their society and therefore prohibited from being . . . . They are nevertheless alienated from the power responsible for their silence. (Freire 50)

\*

Each culture of silence requires opportunities for a dialogic exploration of lived existence, an interactive reflection on praxis, a passionate, radical gesture of love manifested and extended in the politicizing, problematizing, thematizing, codifying of the actual, real experience of persons whose understanding of themselves as subjects depends on becoming more human, more created in the image of their Creator with personality and will and freedom.

\*

The dependent society is by definition a silent society. Its voice is not an authentic voice, but merely an echo of the voice of the metropolis - in every way, the metropolis speaks, the dependent society listens. (Freire, 73)

\*

At the end of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Ludwig Wittgenstein concludes: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (189). But (Wittgenstein invites my audacious "but" with a gracious disclaimer: "My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them" [189].) is there anything we cannot speak/write about? Is not the "being silent" a kind of speaking/writing, even signifying more in the silence than an uttered statement - logical, linear, level - might signify? In other words, are there occasions when silence signifies more potently than utterance, not because silence and utterance are inextricably related, two manifestations of language, diastole and systole, like the two pistons of the Acadia double-cylinder engine traditionally used in Newfoundland fishing boats, pumping with the immutable rhythm: put put put put put put.

\*

Whole books have been written about silence. Why does silence generate so much noisy discussion?

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Gary Leggo  
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## Poems

### Sonnets for Zoë: X

You go feet first into your books—  
it started with *Horns to Toes*, a story about  
a monster's body parts. First you took  
to biting your fists, sticking them in-and-out  
of your mouth, as you considered his snagged bite.  
Curious, you placed your hands over his paws—  
stubby thumb and fingers—the size was right!  
You grabbed your nose and hummed quite in awe  
of his blue bulb snout. His feet—  
you slipped yours over his chubby, flat prints  
on their laminated cardboard page—squeak!  
You love that slippery, cool feel, the glint  
of words. Sound and sheen, a book can be  
a ground on which to stand and see.

Charlotte Hussey

## Second Language

Loving you  
is a foreign language  
on my  
tongue  
you are  
awkward and hesitant  
the words won't  
come  
and you shut down  
afraid to  
speak.

Then I detect your trembling,  
soft leaf who needs  
to deny the gentle wind,  
and I taste  
the common language  
of your tears.

I hold you hard as you cry  
and I struggle to understand,  
wishing you could have learned  
my language first  
instead of his.

When my soft lips  
find your hard scars  
I'll know  
why my language  
doesn't  
come  
easy for you

but I won't accept  
that you will never learn it.

Pat Sadowy

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### First Kiss

Your waiting blush the first soft rose of spring  
invites my arms around you and your sigh  
encourages my needing gentle hands  
your tender touch our boldest shy demands  
eagerly become the exploration  
of lips together wetwarm timid tongues  
wanting and so much afraid of wanting  
all this hot promise till the searing pain  
of new or never be pulls us apart  
my heart trapped in the tangle of your hair  
our eyes deep with raging calm and questions

Pat Sadowy

(Originally published in *Contemporary Verse 2* Vol. 15 No. 3, Winter 1993.)

### But/Butt

always I am  
the butt of language  
a stuttering but

I butt my head  
against but  
the adversative but

a player in a game  
king of the hill  
where only one reigns

logic law learning  
academic discourse  
built on but(t)

but must my words  
butt your words, my words  
to claim a space?

the but of difference  
contrastive coordinate:  
oxymoron? or

the but of dialogue  
abuttal not rebuttal  
lines leaning linked

where but abuts  
the way of play  
always pushing against

the written  
to clear other sites  
for the unwritten

where but begins lines where  
previous lines are not erased  
where but begins lines where

but butts closure  
but abuts carnival  
but is a bumper car ride

Carl Leggo

(I)

(I) live in  
parentheses

a circle with no  
top and bottom

(I) am inserted  
a side remark

a supplement  
to the whole

the sentence  
complete with

my presence  
or absence

(I) live in  
parentheses

Carl Leggo

## Why We Don't Write?

we don't write because there's laundry to do

we can never find a decent pen  
there are mountains to climb  
tonight's hockey game should be a classic  
we live off the on-ramp of the expressway  
a picture is worth a thousand words  
a thousand words are required to discuss the use of symbolism in *Othello*

we read Hemingway at a delicate stage in our development  
secretaries and plumbers seem to make a lot more money  
our software isn't compatible with our hardware  
our hardware is hot-wired

we're never sure when to use a ;  
we fell asleep at the word processor  
Mr. McCaskle always re-wrote our English papers in red  
it's inappropriate to appropriate someone else's voice  
too many trees are being lost to 8 and 1/2" X 11" pieces of paper  
Michael Jordan, Bo Jackson and Mario Lemieux don't seem to write much

the room's too quiet  
there's not enough time  
there's nothing to say  
it's too intimidating  
it's too time consuming

of Grade Eleven  
one flew over the cuckoo's nest  
War and Peace has already been written  
we fell asleep at the word processor (again)

we're too busy living  
there are too many voices in our head  
we're intimidated by ambiguous antecedents and misplaced modifiers

we don't write because writing reminds us mostly of rules of how and why and when to use; ;;;;; or  
!!!!!! or ,,,,,, or - - ( ) ( ) or """" or """""""" or i (before) e (except after c)

we don't write because talking works just fine

G. W. Raspberry

# Interim Report:

## The University of Calgary "Learning from Text" Project

It is conventional wisdom that if you want to teach writing, or to use writing to teach material in "content area" courses, you need a manageable class size - that is, a class size that will permit a reasonable amount of individual attention to a reasonable amount of written work. Since manageable class sizes are becoming more and more scarce, particularly in popular first-year courses, writing as a mode of learning is everywhere succumbing to multiple-choice testing to produce grades that are not totally arbitrary.

At the University of Calgary, three faculties - Social Sciences, Education, and General Studies - are collaborating to fight this incoming tide. Armed with a \$13,500 startup grant from the Alberta Heritage Trust Fund and the University of Calgary, these faculties are embarking on a pilot project which will attempt to confirm two hypotheses:

1. Small amounts of writing and response can still have a beneficial effect on learning, and
2. There is a lot more expertise in the teaching of writing available at the university than the university is taking advantage of.

The expertise in writing is to be provided by practicum-year students in an Education course called "Learning from Text." The course is intended to teach future teachers that reading and writing are tremendously effective ways of teaching content-area material, and to acquaint them with ways of using text in class and of responding to student writing. According to Jim Paul and Mary Sheridan, who teach the course, students do not always leave the course convinced of the teaching power of text because they lack opportunities to practice the theories they are learning.

In the "Learning from Text" project, these students are being given an opportunity to practice responding to students in Psychology 205, an introductory course which typically has section sizes of up to 350 students and which consequently features multiple-choice exams as the only mode of evaluation. In an experimental section taught by Jane Raymond, students are being given two brief assignments in which they write summaries of passages from the textbook. Education practicum students will mark these summaries and return them with criterion-based grading sheets. Jo-Anne Andre and myself from the Faculty of General Studies' Effective Writing Programme are facilitating the design and evaluation of the project and the training of the respondents.

The project has been designed along what we consider to be minimalist lines. Two assignments is the absolute minimum needed to allow for some feedback and repetition; without at least one opportunity to try a task again, growth is extremely unlikely. Although we think that detailed feedback is the most useful, we chose to use a simple grading sheet that will allow respondents to check off their reactions to the overall quality of the summary and its expression, as well as mechanical correctness, with space for only a brief global comment. Finally, the assignments will count for only five percent of the final grade, just enough to maintain student interest without making the assignments a large part of the course.

We chose this minimalist approach for a strategic reason. Although the Education students could do considerably more with this one class, we want to be able to expand the project as far as possible if it is successful. The respondents are undergraduates with other responsibilities, and we wished to keep their workload light so we could employ them in a variety of classes; the boundary between "supplying valuable experience" and "extorting slave labour" is always a hair-thin line.

But we have another agenda as well. Although inflating enrolments are going to make it increasingly difficult to mount the writing-intensive classes we desire, it might just be possible to maintain a presence for writing in the academy if we can demonstrate that even in relatively small doses, with a response system that does not drown the instructor in paper, writing can benefit learning. We are hoping, therefore, that this project will show others across the campus that even if they do not have a pool of Education students to do the marking, they should not consider writing to be an impossibly labour-intensive mode of teaching.

Accordingly, the project has an intensive evaluation component. First, we are going to do the obvious pre/post comparisons of writing samples to see if the feedback the students received has resulted in any improvement. But frankly, we don't expect to see much, and did not claim to expect much when we proposed the project. Our experience tells us that two brief assignments of this type really won't do much to change what students put on paper in the short run (although we hope to be pleasantly surprised).

Rather, we are after larger though more tenuous fish. First, we hope to show that the Psychology 205 students have learned more Psychology than they otherwise would have done. Accordingly, Jane's final multiple-choice exam will contain a few items related to the material about which the students have written. She has convinced a colleague to include the same items on his exam; this control group will be taught the material only by reading it and listening to lectures about it. We will not be at all surprised if Jane's group shows better scores. If they do, perhaps more of our colleagues across the university will be receptive to the value of writing as a mode of learning.

Second, we hope to change students' attitudes to writing as measured by a survey administered to the experimental and control groups. By immersing them in what Jim calls a "communication-rich environment" in which they are made aware that their writing has a real audience and that that audience has reactions to both the surface features and the meaning of their writing, we hope to make them think more about the way their writing appears to others.

Here is where the project builds toward more significant, if harder to measure, long-term results. If the students exposed to more writing indicate that they are more aware of their own writing, that they are more inclined to believe that writing is not just a communication tool but a learning tool, that they are more interested in improving their writing than are the students in the control group, then maybe we have grounds to suspect that they will be more likely to write and to improve their writing over the long term, even if they manage to avoid writing-intensive courses.

Attitude shift, then, is the real goal of this project. We want to shift students' attitudes to their own writing and to shift the academy's attitudes toward the ways in which writing can be included in the learning process. Moreover, we want to shift the Education students' attitudes, many of whom

are not planning to be writing teachers, by showing them how they can use writing as a mode of learning. If we can meet these goals, maybe we can maintain a presence for writing in the academy even while deficit-cutting threatens to make the optical scanning card the chief mode of contact between professor and student.

Watch this space for more details as results begin to appear.

Doug Brent  
University of Calgary

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## Teachers' Invention in Report Card Writing

As Anthony Paré was talking about writing in social work at Inkshed 10, I was trying to make parallels to teachers' writing in public school classrooms, and was recalling my own difficulties when teaching elementary school. As a grade four classroom teacher I was expected, three times a year, to write report cards for students. This was my hardest writing task. I had not learned this anywhere in my teacher training. When I think about it (which I had not done until that very minute!), the only background I had for this kind of writing was the memory of the reading of the elementary school report cards my siblings and I had received a decade and a half earlier.

I did not perceive myself as an expert either at reporting or at teaching. My reports served somewhat like social workers' nooses in their pre-sentencing reports: my statements sentenced students to ability levels (low group/top group) that further sentenced the students to live under parental judgements of the students' worth as human beings. Each student and her/his parents had immediate interest in the document I was creating. My principal examined the documents - to become knowledgeable about his school, to protect himself and/or the school board from my possible errors, and implicitly, to evaluate me. Furthermore, photocopies of the documents would remain in students' cumulative files for future perusal by my colleagues (later in the year and up until the students completed high school), who would/could use my judgement statements to judge my students, my programs, and my abilities both as a teacher and as a reporter.

The report cards we wrote varied in format throughout the years but always involved an anecdotal comments section, sometimes supplementing a list of numerical or alphabetical grades, and sometimes replacing such lists. Not knowing how to do this kind of writing I went "to the files" to see how other teachers had written about a particular child, or to see how, in general, other teachers had written reports. It didn't even occur to me to select the reports of colleagues I admired. Somehow I assumed all my colleagues were experts (even those who, like me, were novices) and I was the ignorant one. Unlike in the social work context, we were never told/advised to "go to the files" for this purpose. I would, therefore, go to the files of individual students on the stated pretext

of "to see how he was doing last year." I would then copy sentences which I felt were well-crafted and potentially useful as general structures. I would delete the specific detail and create frame sentences for myself. I also compiled lists of useful phrases and adjectives, something I perceived as essential for variety. (I see it now as a misplaced application of the stylistic dictum "don't overuse particular words" or "don't use the same word twice"; no one but the principal and I would read the entire class set of reports, and probably no one but me thought of the set as one document.) I do believe I called the lists my "Report Card Bullshit Lists" or something similar. I did not, somehow, see this writing as authentic, yet to do this unauthentic task well was crucially important. (Funny, but I can't help but see a parallel between this and some of the "dummy run" tasks I was expecting my students to do....)

I was a good teacher and I was, as I recall, fairly confident if not very confident. I did not fear formal evaluation by my principal to the debilitating degree that several of my colleagues did. Yet I - who was also a good writer - had no confidence about myself as a writer of report cards. Now, as a teacher educator, I wonder where/if report card writing is taught in our Bachelor of Education programs at the University of Manitoba (or in anyone else's). Was I alone in my fears of inadequacy? Was I ahead of the game because I had strategies, albeit surreptitious ones?

Pat Sadowy  
University of Manitoba

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## Inkshed 11: How Do People Learn to Write?

Fredericton, 6-9 May 1994

The theme of this conference grows out of (at least) the last three conferences. Inkshed 8 (Montreal) focussed on "Schooling and Other Cultures"; now, we're asking, "How do those cultures enable or inhibit learning to write?" The theme of Inkshed 9 (Banff) was "Textual Practices"; here, we're asking about the role texts and textbooks play in learning to write. Inkshed 10 was concerned with Invention; in Fredericton, we ask: "In what ways is learning to write an individual activity and in what ways is learning to write a collective and cultural activity?"

As we enter the second decade of Inkshed Working Conferences, we hope to begin as we began the first: by rethinking the idea of what a conference might be. Inkshed 11, we hope, besides being the same, will also be something quite different. We hope you'll join us in this exploration of what a conference might attempt and achieve.

The central idea of inkshedding, from the very beginning, has been this: writing to and being read by others as a way of being in, and constructing, community. Further, inkshedding has been a way of getting everyone's ideas "on the floor," of giving everyone with a pen or keyboard virtually simultaneous access to the community, rather than restricting exchange to those few who could gain and hold the oral "floor."

For many of us, inkshedding has extended well beyond the original notion of an extempore text, read and responded to by a limited number of others, who may select some passages to be "published" for the whole community. As we have explored its boundaries, it has become clear that many forms of writing can be treated as inksheds, that there are many other ways of structuring the process of choosing interesting or valuable passages or ideas to pass on to a larger readership.

Just as the first Inkshed working conference was an attempt to explore what might happen if we took an idea from one context (the classroom) and put it into a new one (an academic conference), so we have decided again to push the limits of our expectations about what a conference is.

At Inkshed 11 every registrant will be a presenter; every presenter will be a full participant. The primary activities at the conference won't be presenting and listening to presentations: they'll be working with the texts and ideas people bring with them, with the aim, through all the resources of inkshedding, to produce a book-length manuscript recording and reflecting on our growing understanding of how people learn to write.

This is your invitation to join us. What you need to do is the following:

If you intend to attend the conference, send us, by December 3, a title and short description of the piece of writing (about eight pages, or 2000 words) you have written or expect to write, and which you will present to the rest of us at the conference. This piece of writing should address the theme of the conference ("How do people learn to write?") but beyond that it can be anything you want, from a report of research, to a theoretical analysis, to a reflective personal account of how you, or someone you know, learned to write. Address the questions of most interest to you - they might respond to the issues raised in Inksheds 8-10, or raise new ones. Upon receipt of your proposal, we will respond with a written invitation to present it at the Inkshed 11 Working Conference.

Here is a short, tentative list of some starters: how do people learn to write outside school contexts? In them? How do postsecondary students learn to write in particular academic discourse communities? How does what we know about young children learning to write (and speak) help us understand how young adults learn to write? How do people learn to write in new or unfamiliar genres when their jobs literally depend upon it? Do males and females learn to write differently? What's the role of technology in learning to write? What - as the winds blow from the right - are the implications of standardized testing, multiple-choice exams, and "accountability" for learning to write?

What you bring should be a piece you'd like to work further on, but which is ready to be read by "trusted assessors" like the rest of the Inkshed community. It does not have to be (indeed, probably should not be) a polished, finished piece of work. What will happen to your writing, as you might guess, is that it will be revised and edited and become part of a larger, more public document. We expect to spend most of our time at the conference reading and writing, in and between fairly small groups.