
Inkshed

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for the Study of Language and Learning

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12.2 December 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.

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E-mail Discussion of *Inkshed*/CASLL Fee Structure

The following e-mail exchange occurred on the CASLL list in response to the CASLL membership/subscription fee described in *Inkshed* 12.1.

From: Doug Brent <dabrent@ACS.UCALGARY.CA>
Subject: Inkshed Fee Structure

Is anyone else concerned about the way the CASLL fee structure has been set up to include the Inkshed Publication Initiative volumes? I have little trouble with the increase *per se*. The fees are still pretty reasonable and graduate students are protected against undue financial hardship. My problem is with the general morality of using a long-standing organization and its newsletter to, in effect, force an audience for a set of monographs.

The new series looks good and I would definitely buy the books anyway. But being forced to as a condition of membership in CASLL really bothers me. I have never become an NCTE "comprehensive member" for this reason - I want to choose the books I buy—and I have a problem with CASLL going the same way. I don't really think it's fair to CASLL authors either. How many authors would feel comfortable knowing that their books have been distributed in this way?

I understand what the Inkshed Publication Initiative editorial committee (Sandy Beardman, Neil Besner, Pat Sadowy, and Stan Straw) is up against. The market for Canadian rhetoric books is small enough as it is, and if we want to get this venture off the ground, there has to be a mechanism for making sure people have an audience for their work. But is this the right way? I was not at Inkshed 10, and maybe all of this was thrashed out there already. But my impression of the conversation was that people were worried about financial hardship, not principle.

Anyway, what do other CASLLers think? Is it time for some serious electronsheading on this subject?

From: Amanda Therese Goldrick-Jones <goldra@RPI.EDU>
Subject: Inkshed Fee Structure/Response to Doug Brent

I share some of your concerns about the new fees for Inkshed, Doug. But I was at the discussion, and all things considered, I think it's reasonable to expect Inksheddors to pay extra for these monographs. I have to qualify my position slightly: as a grad student, I spoke up against increasing fees for students and underemployed, and am very glad that CASLL members supported keeping those fees lower. While I'm still in the lower fee bracket, I will be absolutely and unequivocally delighted when the day comes for me to start forking out the higher fees! So in other words, I would be prepared to pay the higher fees and support the monographs, and when I am fully employed, I intend to.

I think, for me, there are 2 main issues here. First, I will consider these monographs in the same way I think of the journals I get when I pay my yearly NCTE and SCA and RSA memberships, etc. If CASLL doesn't have a journal, there is still a channel for scholarship, which we should encourage and support. Second, because CASLL is a Canadian vehicle, and lately there has been discussion on this list for greater Canadian representation and respect at CCCC, doesn't it make sense to put ourselves 100% behind Canadian scholarship? If we are prepared to support our own, then maybe others will also be more prepared to hear Canadian voices. Thanks, Doug, for bringing this subject up for discussion. It's more than just paying higher fees. It's really a cultural issue as well.

From: "Inkshed (Jim Reither)" <INKSHED@UNB.CA>
Subject: CASLL fee structure

Regarding Doug's and Amanda's comments on the new fee structure for CASLL: I have to admit that I'm rather puzzled, too. Doug refers to CASLL as "a long-standing organization," but in fact the organization so far exists only in name and constitution. The organization has never met, and it has no officers. Yet, according to Amanda's thinking, we should "consider these monographs in the same way [we] think of the journals [we] get when [we] pay our yearly NCTE . . . memberships." As I understand the logic in this, we're paying higher fees to "subscribe" to a series of publications that are published under the auspices of an organization that has never met to appoint (or otherwise get) a publications board or editor or whatever. Is that right?

Right now, I'm also bothered by the idea that we have to "put ourselves 100% behind Canadian scholarship" - at least as long as that claim remains unqualified and categoric. I have to admit that there's a lot of Canadian scholarship out there that I do not put myself behind, because it's not relevant to my interests, because I don't think it's very well done, and so on and on. As Doug and the ads say, "There has to be a better way." I desperately want those publications to succeed - to reach an audience and to be read and to be used and cited by others. That's one of the things this "enterprise" has been all about. But I keep quoting Aviva (I'll bet she's close to wishing she never said this): "If we want to be recognized, we've got to do good work."

I have this sense that I want to think in longer terms and that these publications need to be tested more thoroughly in (what I hate to call) the "intellectual marketplace." We do our best work when we are in situations that require our best work, and requiring the purchase of these monographs as a condition of belonging to CASLL does not seem to me to be that kind of situation. Like Doug, I'd buy the publications - probably for precisely the same reason Amanda puts forward - but I want to see them succeed because (1) they're good, (2) they're favourably reviewed, (3) they're widely cited, and (4) people other than CASLLers order them.

Finally, I really do think CASLL needs more than a constitution and fees and a newsletter before these kinds of decisions and choices are made. We need at least one meeting of the organization, some officers to fill the organization's constitutionally proscribed positions, and someone making these kinds of decisions (whether that "someone" is an executive, the membership, an editorial or publications board). This all feels rather bizarrely backward to me.

From: Doug Brent <dabrent@ACS.UCALGARY.CA>
Subject: Re: CASLL fee structure

Yes, Jim, I agree. Of course I meant Inkshed when I said "long-standing organization," but you quite rightly point out that CASLL is a brand new organization (technically) which in spirit is simply a new manifestation of a rather old one which had no official status outside the hearts and minds of its members. We are, of course, caught in the middle, like most Canadian ventures, between the free market of ideas and the cultural subsidy route. The Canadian marketplace of ideas is so small that it could blow away at any moment.

What happened to the idea of simultaneous publication through - I think it was Ohio? I don't want to suggest that Canadian publications will only survive if they get American recognition, but in fact unless we can tap the American market at least for works that are of more than purely Canadian interest, we won't get our ideas distributed very widely. As for the structural problem - the venture appearing on the scene simultaneously with rather than as a result of a duly constituted organization - this is a problem I had not thought of but which doubly disturbs me.

From: Judy Segal <jsegal@UNIXG.UBC.CA>
Subject: Re: CASLL fee structure

On the question of fee structure, I want to say . . . what Jim said.

From: Patrick Dias <INAD@MUSICB.MCGILL.CA>
Subject: Re: CASLL fee structure

Thanks Doug for raising the questions and thanks Jim for voicing so well what I would very much like to have said. I was unfortunately unable to attend the 1993 Inkshed and would have voted against the measure to include the proposed publications as part of the new membership fees. As with the vote on the constitution, I think such matters should have been discussed within the Newsletter and voted on by the full membership.

I would be happy to purchase these books; I like the idea of a Canadian publisher for work in the areas of interest to CASLLers; however, I would like such work (for all the reasons Doug and Jim have advanced) to sell on its own merits. I am not here questioning the academic quality of the proposed publications; I am merely joining my voice to those who argue that the method of distribution in and of itself does a disservice to such work.

Such work should not only speak/sell for itself (with adequate promotion) but should speak across the border as well. I would like to think that in our field matters of Canadian interest are just as relevant elsewhere.

As for the organizational issues Jim has raised, I believe he is right in saying we're doing things backwards.

From: Anthony Paré <INAP@MUSICB.MCGILL.CA>
Subject: Re: Rates

This discussion of publication/membership/subscription rates is depressingly familiar. Didn't we talk about this at Inksheds 8, 9, and 10? I was at Inkshed 10 and participated in the decision to proceed as described in the last issue of the newsletter. Along with many other people present, I was not happy with what we decided but felt there was no other way to take the immediate action that appeared necessary. But that's the problem, isn't it? The publication tail has continued to wag the Inkshed (CASLL) dog. And now, once again, we must make haste to establish the necessary decision-making procedures (board, annual general meeting, etc.) in order to review the decision taken at the proto-annual general meeting held at Inkshed 10! I agree with what Jim and Doug have said (and with what Judy and Pat would have said if Jim hadn't already said it). Perhaps a "comprehensive" membership will be a CASLL option, but I would prefer choosing my own books. However, we are stuck temporarily with the decision we took at Inkshed 10, so we now need to move forward with implementation of the constitution and the governance it describes.

From: Doug Brent <dabrent@ACS.UCALGARY.CA>
Subject: Re: CASLL fee structure

One point that shouldn't be lost here, I just realized, is that none of these musings should be interpreted as any kind of attack on what Sandy, Neil, Pat, and Stan are doing in and of itself. If they can be accused of anything, it's excessive zeal for furthering the interests of Canadian scholarship, which has to be the most venial of sins. Absolutely no personal attack is meant, and the discussion needs to proceed with the awareness of the countless hours of slave labour they have devoted to getting the CASLL publications out. The problem is one of organizational structure, not personality.

From: Ann Beer <IN1B@MUSICB.MCGILL.CA>
Subject: Re: CASLL fee structure

I've just read all the messages re: CASLL fee structure with great interest. As someone who was very involved with the first year of discussion of the constitution issue, but absent the second (maternity leave), I have sympathy with the various positions expressed. Jim is absolutely right, I believe, to say that there are serious underlying implications in the publications venture and we need to discuss them in depth at Inkshed 11. Yet I would also like to support a lot of what Doug (Brent) has said in both messages - that Canada never does very well in a "free market" approach because the market isn't free, or equal: there are economic and distribution problems for publishers here combined with recently unsympathetic government positions (e.g., the tax on reading) that mean that Canadian publishing is always an uphill battle. Perhaps the old argument applies, as it has had to apply to previously underrepresented groups in academic life: to be equal you have to be better. So yes, Canadian standards of scholarship and originality of ideas will have to be very, very good indeed ... as Jim and Pat both said.

On the actual fee structure and discussion at Inkshed 10: though I was at the meeting I was not at the session where this was discussed (very small baby-care intervened!). What I heard afterwards

made me very uneasy. Perhaps the answer is two-level membership, where people can opt in or out of the publication venture. This might make it too unpredictable, though, and also means more paperwork for the *Inkshed* newsletter editor - or someone else. I do want to say that I think we need to hear from Stan and Sandy at this point and I agree with Doug that we should all acknowledge the enormous work and commitment they have put into this venture. Clearly we can look forward to a "lively" meeting at Inkshed 11.

From: Doug Brent <dabrent@ACS.UCALGARY.CA>
Subject: Re: Rates

I think you put your finger on it, Anthony - warts or not, the publication venture and its associated fee structure is in place for now. Whether it was done in too much haste is now irrelevant. But at least the issue is on the table for further discussion, and we may want to change the system in future. Let's get on with the show for now.

From: "Inkshed (Jim Reither)" <INKSHED@UNB.CA>
Subject: Re[2]: Rates

I agree with Anthony and Doug - time to get on with things. I also agree that Sandy, Neil, Pat, and Stan have done a terrific job for us and for scholarship. We owe them a great debt. The only real problem I see now is finding time at Inkshed XI for a discussion of all the issues we're loading on the table. Talk about a groaning board! Perhaps we'll end up with 1/2 day of making sense of how people learn to write and 3 days of business meetings.

From Theory to Practice in the Post-Secondary Writing Classroom: What's Wrong With "What Works"?

I'd like to begin with autobiography, that most fictional of forms - and, significantly, a form that alternately raises hackles amongst critics offended at such an intrusion of the personal, or, amongst those differently inclined, affirms the revised legitimacy of a revised notion of subjectivity. I'm also going to end with autobiography, and I hope to have shown along the way why such an account might be relevant to discussions about what works in writing classrooms.

Along with about twenty-five others, I was a sessional lecturer in the English Department at UBC from 1976-1978. We were there for a maximum of two years, on a renewable eight-month contract. One of our conditions of employment was that we would not undertake any research; we would only teach our three courses. I mention this to underline the ways in which these lectureships,

which at that time were typically awarded to M.A.'s, were thought of as teaching apprenticeships; and the way to gain teaching experience, evidently, was to teach.

Usually, our three-course load included writing courses of various kinds, or a concentration on teaching writing: the first half of the first-year introduction to literature course; the remedial composition course for weaker students in that literature course; the third-year full course in expository writing; the third-year half course in technical writing. Most of us, if I remember correctly, had done little teaching of writing before; some of us had done a bit as T.A.'s working on our Master's.

For reasons that I cannot fully explain, I became very interested in the teaching of writing at that time. It wasn't because I didn't like teaching literature; and it certainly wasn't because I knew how to teach writing. Nor was it simply a matter of learning a skill that might conceivably get me a job, although I can't pretend that this hope played no part in my interest. It was in part because teaching writing allowed me to talk to people about texts - and to talk as much about writing as about reading, and about writing as reading - in ways that teaching literature did not, although I could not have explained how this might be so, or why.

Regardless of my interest in teaching writing, however, the truth was that writing courses were the ones most available for sessionals to teach: these and introductory literature courses. In other words, arguably the most challenging courses, and the courses that continue to generate much of the debate within and beyond English departments over curriculum, purpose, and pedagogy, were the courses we greenhorns taught.

One vivid memory I have of those first few writing courses is teaching the semi-colon with religious fervour, because I had found something I could teach, on the board, that made sense: it was all there in black and white in the *Prentice-Hall Handbook* we were given. I remember, too, teaching the precise science of focussing the topic: the example in the *Prentice Hall Handbook*, if memory serves, was a nameless student writing a paper on biology; then on biology in the classroom; then on biology lab - and ending with a finely-focussed outline, followed by the actual essay, on the ways in which the microscope should be used in the biology lab.

To this day, I can, if I am desperate, and not entirely without pleasure or passion, reel off a compelling fifteen minutes on the semi-colon; who among us cannot? And to this day I remain intrigued by the use of terms like "focus," or, more recently, "crystallize" to describe or, sometimes, to prescribe what the writer does or must do when planning an essay - as if she were adjusting a camera lens ever more narrowly, as if he were distilling essence of essay in an internal test tube. And the teaching of technical writing? The text we were given in 1976 was by Ron Blicq, who worked across town at the British Columbia Institute of Technology; it was called *Technically Write!*, a text that, mercifully, allowed me to Technically - Teach!

Back in those greying mists of time, in the fall of 1976, an American assistant professor named Rick Coe also came to the English Department at UBC. Some time into Rick's first term at UBC, he sent a memorandum around the department about the teaching of composition. It was a friendly, confessional piece, with a substantial bibliography of rhetoric and composition texts at its end. I have

forgotten almost all of this memo, although I remember that it was addressed to a collective "You" from a disarming "Me"; and I also remember its gist, which was that the teaching of writing could, and *should*, have a theoretical foundation, and that - this is what brought me up short - Rick had, as he put it, taught composition for years "by the seat of [his] pants" until he began to develop a theoretical base for what he thought he was trying to do in the writing classroom. When I read that memo, I remember feeling a quick flush of guilt and thinking "that's just what I do: I teach writing by the seat of my pants."

For a long time after that I felt guilty about teaching writing in this way, so I read what I could, when I could, about teaching composition and about rhetorical theory. And I also began thinking seriously about working on a Ph. D. in Rhetoric. At Rick's recommendation, I began to poke around through Ross Winterowd's edited collection, *Contemporary Rhetoric: A Conceptual Background With Readings* - a book I just found again on my shelf as I was writing this paper, with a yellowing page from my 1977 desk Calendar at UBC stuck a few pages into Kenneth Burke's essay, "The Nature of Form." It looks as if I didn't make it through the whole piece. I found as well, folded under the front cover, a photocopied essay of Rick's that he must have given me (a 1977 piece he read at 4 C's, setting out a framework for thinking about the New Rhetoricians). I don't know now whether I got all the way through this essay either. I don't say this proudly or to diminish the actual or potential importance of Burke's or Rick's essays. I only mention it to document a persistent problem that I have had with rhetorical theory from close to the beginning of my career as far as teaching writing goes.

Best intentions notwithstanding, I can't say that I evolved a theory, either through my scattered reading, thinking, or pedagogical practice, that really stopped me from teaching by the seat of my pants, desirable as I might have felt that to be. I continue to try to understand what I am doing, how, why, and with what effect - to construct a rhetoric of my own teaching, in other words. But I found that what was really happening (and still happens) with my reading in rhetorical theory was that I was picking and choosing those elements that confirmed my own intuitions, sometimes explicit, sometimes closer to hunches, about teaching writing. I read, that is, to reinforce my own prejudices as much as to learn something "new" or different or better - or more systematically theoretical. At the same time, I evolved a style and pedagogy based on certain assumptions I'd arrived at through various means about important matters, given the way I taught, such as the potential relations between modes, about the ways to make connections between reading and writing, about audience and purpose, and, always, about what worked in the classroom.

Meanwhile chance and choice intervened, and I went in another direction for my Ph. D. And in Canadian literature, my primary field of interest, after some ten years I got to the point, without realizing I was doing so along the way, where my thinking evolved into a theoretical position, however tentative and subject to change, with all kinds of implications, curricular, practical, and pedagogical. But that history had no direct bearing on teaching writing.

I continued to try for some years to keep up with the growing body of writing about rhetoric and about teaching writing, so that, for example, the rise of the process revolution was something of which I was somewhat aware, and so that, in a related context, I had (and hope I still have) some grasp on and, naturally, much interest in, what went on at places like the Inkshed conferences.

But two other developments also intervened, one recently, and by my own choice - I can't pretend that this just "happened" - and one gradually, and certainly without any intention on my part. The second development was what I think of as the professionalization - some would say, with just cause, the re-professionalization - of the discipline. The first was the insistence of a still small voice that I now understand I can't quell, despite everything that I think I know, or that I want to believe about teaching writing, that asks, "Why Not?" "Why not teach writing by the seat of my pants, if it works?"

I recognize that putting the question this way immediately raises several other vital questions, the first of which might be "what do you mean by 'it works,'" the second of which might run something like "how would you know it works in the first place," and the third of which - and the order of these questions will obviously change depending on your perception of the discipline - might well have to do with how to justify such an apparently pragmatic, utilitarian, and empty reliance on alleged effectiveness - effectiveness for whom, at what, how, and to what ends?

I have no coherent or fully satisfactory answers yet for any of those questions. But I record these two developments - the healthy growth of the field and the perhaps less healthy rise of my own almost unwilling resistance to the field - alongside each other because they might be related. If there ever was a time when I could think of myself as a full member of that discourse community, loosely structured and comprised as it was and is, of serious rhetoricians in Canada, that time has passed. I cannot now pretend to really be current with rhetorical theory in Canada or elsewhere. But I like to think that my ever more solidly entrenched position at the margins of the discipline has privileged me in certain ways. It has privileged me, not to talk nonsense or common sense about the field, but to be able, I like to think (maybe this is a fond delusion) to indulge myself more freely, both in speculation and practice, in teaching writing by the seat of my pants: to ask why, and how, teaching writing this way might be good for my students, good for my developing apprehension of what writing and teaching writing is or does. I try not to ask questions like these in iconoclastic defiance or deludedly romantic rebellion; nor do I ask them in the genially dismissive tone, the benignly instructive condescension of someone who purports to know the answers to the questions he poses. I don't ask them rhetorically, and the question is not posed rhetorically, or only rhetorically, in my title, although obviously the formulation there and throughout reveals my disposition. But I do believe these are questions worth asking.

Before I get to the writing classroom, and to asking, finally, what's wrong with what works there, I need to backtrack just once more. When I refer to the professionalization of the field, I do not mean to judge this development, but only to record it. In Canada, it stands in a paradoxical, if not often in an ironic or contradictory relationship, to the continuing dance of dislocation and relocation of the university writing classroom, teacher and student. This arhythmic dance reveals only too well the discordant ways in which the culture at large conceives of writing instruction, and, by extension, the ways in which these embattled and conflicted conceptions find expression in the Canadian post-secondary setting.

Speculate briefly on the kinds of warring assumptions, for example, that might underlie the following common but contradictory assertions about the place of writing classrooms and

programs, about the practices that evolve there, and about the practitioners who teach writing in the Canadian university:

The teaching of writing belongs in the English department; it belongs in Continuing Education. It belongs in a separate institute. It belongs to all departments. It is a remedial program; it is a service program; it is the quintessential interdisciplinary program. It should be taught by Ph.D.'s in Rhetoric; by T.A's in English departments; by M.A.'s in the Sciences and Social Sciences; by a designated member of every department. It should be linked, explicitly or implicitly, with other first-year courses across the curriculum; it should be taught at the upper levels; it should be taught alone. It should teach skills; it should teach a way of thinking, learning, and knowing. It is intimately related to reading; it has nothing to do with reading; it is grounded, first and last, in language instruction. It is discipline-specific and serves as an invitation to join a discourse community; it cuts plainly across disciplines and invites students to join a broadly-cultured and plain-speaking public. It fixes the damage done by weak high school curricula; it prepares the student to engage a university curriculum. It is the first and best site for collaboration; it is the best path to individuation.

About which other discipline taught in the contemporary Canadian university could you entertain all of those assertions? And what effect might this volatile conceptual framework, this very fluid meta-rhetorical context, have on what goes on in the writing classroom?

One response might be a powerful insistence on rigid codification. Another response might be to think that anything goes. Still another response might issue in the form of a question, and this time it is rhetorical: what is wrong with what works?

Among the practices that often work for me, for example, is to teach modes. Yes - those outmoded, idealist, universal, invalid, essentialist, Platonic aberrations. Sorry for the defensive tone - it's a reflexive response to the assertion, so much taken for granted, that modes don't exist. I teach, for instance, narration and description. I talk about and read texts, most often texts written by the students in the current course, in terms of qualities of language, voice, relation, form, diction, tone, syntax, style - even, yes, punctuation, even the holy semi-colon - by using as a point of departure and arrival a conception of mode as purpose, and of purpose as a function of audience. I also teach a conception of relations among modes. I try to show that no mode - no "how" - ever evolves in isolation from other "hows," other modes. And I teach models - most often, models of students' writing - as a way of getting at what works (and, of course, what does not work), given particular or common purposes.

I don't directly teach invention; I don't directly teach discovery, process, recursion. I try to work from reading - the reading we all do together, sometimes in groups, sometimes alone - to writing - almost, although this is a naive and reductive way of putting it, from product through to process. I try to teach collaboration through insisting that each individual become as aware as he or she can of composing, revising, inventing strategies - by describing them to others and to themselves. I try to teach reading; and teaching reading, arguably an important goal in any literature class, becomes paramount for me in a writing classroom. Above all, my ideal, never realized, I admit, is to try to get out of the way. I talk, endlessly, it must sometimes seem to my students, about writing as if it were, because it is, their writing - whether it be an argument, an incitement, a

dispassionate explication, an autobiographical fiction, a reasoned denunciation, a C.V., a letter to the editor, an application for a job, an abstract, a technical report. What does not work for me - I speak from sad experience - is to take a curriculum based, to be sure, on soundly articulated pedagogical principles, on carefully and comprehensively conceived methodological and theoretical grounds, and move it, alongside myself, into the writing classroom. At one level, and with all the good faith in the world, it is exceedingly difficult to teach a theory about writing when the way you yourself write is radically different. At another level, no matter how either mere fashion or real thinking about a discipline develops, the people who teach writing will always, and, I think, should always, also be left to their own devices; they should never entirely forget the seat of their pants. I doubt that they can. I can't. No matter how much I might wish to think otherwise, I teach what works.

I acknowledge that what works for me might not work for others, of course, and I'm not primarily interested either in defending my idiosyncrasies or persuading someone else to adopt them in the lunatic hope that they will thus multiply innumerable until they become orthodoxies. What I am interested in is asking why we so distrust such formulations, why we seem to have so much disdain for practice unless it can be shown to issue first and last from theory. Why is the functional always distrusted as if it were only functional, merely operative, or sadly outdated - unless it can be shown to be the distillation of an explicitly articulated, theoretically coherent position? To be pragmatic - to ask what works - does not necessarily imply, or only signify, the abdication of theory, or the shirking of responsibility to educate for change, or something suspiciously redolent of a complacent endorsement, an endlessly qualified apology for cleaving to the status quo as it was in, say, 1976, when sessional lecturers at UBC marched into the classroom and taught writing as best they could. Asking what works might include, without insisting that this is the only true path, some interest in teaching writing by the seat of your pants, and I think it should. My own small hope is that by allowing for the possibility of teaching writing this way, by not insisting that what goes on in the class always be entirely theory driven, we might find ourselves with a more workable context for the writing classroom and those of us who like to live there.

[An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Second National Writing/Literacy Conference, Winnipeg, October 20-23, 1993.]

Neil Besner
University of Winnipeg

Sexist Language

How do we Handle the Sexist Language in Pre-1980s Writing?

First, let me make clear that I definitely believe in avoiding sexism (and other kinds of bias) in my writing, and I've noticed that even the most traditional of business people, such as lawyers, have learned that they cannot use "Dear Sir" in their letters any more.

However, what do we do with writing from the past? It seems that we have four choices:

1) We can quote it without comment, assuming that the date of the quotation will explain to readers why "man" or "he" is used generically.

Reading maketh a full man,
conference a ready man,
and writing an exact man.
Francis Bacon (1561 - 1626)

2) We can translate the "man" into "person" or turn the quotation into the plural, thereby taking ownership away from the original author and probably damaging any poetic qualities of the quotation.

Reading maketh a full person,
conference a ready person,
and writing an exact person.
(Corruption of Francis Bacon, 1561 - 1626)

3) We can quote the comment verbatim but footnote the sexist language (as we do in our Wordsmith/Wordswork brochure).

Reading maketh a full man,
conference a ready man,
and writing an exact man.*
Francis Bacon

*Today we would write "person."

4) We can avoid quoting anything that uses sexist language, thereby robbing readers of some of the wisdom of the ages.

Language changes rapidly in use; and we need to respond to new vocabulary, styles, and politics as we guide students and others to learn how to write more effectively for the audiences and purposes in their contexts. I'll be interested to hear what other Inkshedders (CASLLers) think about this issue.

Nancy Carlman
Wordswork

Knowing Virginia

I have been both haunted and inspired by Virginia Woolf. She is there in the bibliography of every feminist book I have read so far. I have written poems about her, used quotations from some of her books, and I feel her presence all the more whenever I write my words or encounter her once again in yet another book.

I know she was married to Leonard, had no children, suffered recurring bouts of debilitating melancholy, loved other women, declared her feminism even more strongly when she was in her fifties, and I know that she walked into a river in 1941 and committed suicide.

I know, too, that she wrote in *A Room of One's Own* that there were many women who would not be listening to her public lecture (upon which the book is based) because they were home "doing the dishes or putting the children to bed."

I know that she admitted that someone has to bear the children, because she wrote such words in *A Room of One's Own*, and I know, too, that she advises the women whom she is addressing that perhaps one or two children are enough.

I know that she felt, during her difficult times, that even having children would be useless, because she wrote those very words in her diary.

I know that she was nurtured and cared for by her husband, Leonard, and that it is entirely possible that, were it not for his care, many of her great works would never have been written.

I know, too, that there are feminist scholars who are quite critical of Leonard; who say that he failed in his intellectual assessment of some of her work, and in the manner in which he treated her illness.

I know, too, that in his preface to her diaries, which he edited, he does not mention one word about his great grief or sadness about her suicide and death, nor does he refer to how difficult it might have been for him to even consider her diaries for publication.

I have read - and am still reading - books by or about Virginia Woolf, and I suspect that I will go on reading these books for many years to come, and that there is still much I have yet to synthesize.

I have charted all feminist books I've read, and somehow all the arrows in my flow chart diagram circle back to Virginia.

And I wonder about her. I wonder what she was thinking about when she walked into the river, when she felt the first cold shock of soothing water upon her ankles, upon her knees, when she felt her skirts dragged down by the weight of the water, water rising up to her neck as she walked her way out of our life and into her everlasting words. Words which we still read, which I see

everywhere in every feminist book I have ever read. What was she thinking in the underwater room of her own, that cold, wet room rising over her nostrils, closing her eyes, her hair spreading out above the water like the thin, skeletal hands of a thousand, thousand threads of time. Holding her hand up out of the river of her words to reach across to all of us who have learned from her.

And I wish I could tell her: she was never alone, even when she walked into that river, when she could no longer bear the pain.

All of us were listening to her words echo across the water, in that final, wet auditorium of time.

Renee Norman
Language Education Department
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Marjory Bousfield is a biologist working for the Cree in Northern Quebec. In response to her request, people in McGill's Faculty of Education sent her books and she set up a library in her trailer. Recently, she sent us this poem.

Tuesday evening

8 p.m. - library's been closed for nearly an hour.
The door-knockers are three boys - about 9 years old.
"Library?" asks one.
I think: it's too late, I'm making supper, I'm tired.
But boys at library are rare.
I say: "You want to take a book out?" The speaker nods.
They enter from the porch,
keeping to the mat of spread-out cardboard boxes that once contained 1-litre UHT milk cartons.
The last, and smallest, boy wears glistening-green hip boots:
the seasonal lake running behind the houses across
the road provides new entertainment daily for kids
stuck in the village at Goose Break.
In English, I explain how the library works.
The dull-eyed silence encourages another explanation,
in French (I can't go beyond, to Cree).
The smaller two immediately decline to borrow books,
'though I've emphasized there's no cost,
as long as the books are returned on time.
I remember how earlier, Kerrie had said they hadn't money for the small fine

when she returned her overdue book,
and little Jordana had decided not to borrow a book at all
because she thought she wouldn't remember
to bring it back,
but 6-year old Marcella had wanted so badly to borrow one
that I let her,
'though she already has a library book at home, since February -
her small brother "broke" it, she explained.
I told her it didn't matter, to bring it back, anyway,
and we'd fix it;
her two sisters' books are overdue, too,
and now I learn their father
(who drank a lot, according to Catherina, my nearly 10-year old trilingual translator)
had a heart operation
and lies in a Montreal hospital;
Sylvanna, his eldest, turned 8 last Friday.
Also in hospital is Kerrie and Bradley's 12-year old cousin Amanda from Pikogan,
who was accidentally shot in the chest
when her brother set a loaded gun down hard
and carelessly on a table.
The leader of my present visitors, perhaps 11 years old,
now decides not to borrow a book, either.
As the boys leave, my small dog brushes past
and takes her wet and muddy paws to her box,
without having to be told.
Later, I see these boys in front of my trailer,
reading the 'library times' sign.
Later still, they have melted into a group of about 8 boys,
who focus their play around 'the lake',
but test slingshots from time to time.
In the lunchhour sun, four tree swallows, the season's first,
had swooped and twittered overhead.

Marjory Bousfield
Waskaganish, Quebec

Responses to Doug Brent and Pat Sadowy

The following inkshedding excerpts come from students in a graduate course on Language and Learning Across the Curriculum. The writers - all practicing teachers - were responding to pieces in *Inkshed* 12.1 by Doug Brent and Pat Sadowy.

Doug Brent's "Learning from Text" project has worthy goals and is an inventive method of dealing with budget cuts. His rationale for the structure of the writing assignment is reasonable given the constraints he must work with, but I do wonder whether he will be able to "immerse" his students in a "communication-rich environment" as much as he hopes. Why do the psychology students have to write a summary of the text? Couldn't they also respond in a more individual way as well, which would allow them to make connections to the rest of their course? This would make the evaluation criteria more difficult to determine, as qualitative elements would be introduced into the writing. Also, two times does not seem enough for students to benefit from writing assignments. If the psychology students are supposedly writing to learn, their writing must be tentative and exploratory and that will depend on the nature of the responses they get. A check list with limited space for commentary that smells vaguely like a report card is not enough. A better dialogue with the reader is needed. The success of this enterprise is to be determined by a few questions on the multiple choice exam, which was what the project was designed to circumvent. There seems to be a contradiction here. The education students who are being trained to do the marking should benefit the most from the instruction and experience they will receive in evaluating writing, but I think all concerned might learn more from true response logs.

Myrna Hynes

[Judy Kalman suggests that the Learning from Text Project described by Doug Brent offers students too few marks (5%) and an unpleasant task (summarizing); she proposes an alternative practice that she and her husband have devised:]

Calvin Kalman of Concordia University uses a concept technique to encourage students to write in his physics classes. In his introductory courses, in which he has up to ninety students, he requires students to write three sentences on three concepts they have discovered in their reading of the material to be covered in the coming week. The students are required to produce this writing for each lecture, and the assignments are worth 20% of their final mark. The value of this technique is twofold: the students must be familiar with the material before the professor lectures on it, adding substantially to their understanding of it, and the student becomes aware of the concepts underlying the topics being discussed, rather than viewing material as an agglomeration of disembodied facts and formulae to be learned.

In his more advanced courses, Calvin turns each week's lecture into what he calls a "mini-research project." He sees each class as divided into three segments which parallel the format of the research project. The pre-summary is the equivalent of the planning phase of an essay, as the student reads the material that will be covered in class, writes down two mini-objectives that the professor will be addressing, and prepares a brief outline of all the material that will be covered in the lecture. The lecture itself then becomes the research component, the material to be responded to. And finally, the post-summary, which presents what was covered, is the body of the research. This "mini essay" consists of a short introductory paragraph, followed by a presentation of what was covered in the lecture just past. No jargon or technical mathematics is allowed, the material being rendered solely in a verbal format. In this way, the students come to understand the ideas that underlie the course, to "see the woods instead of the trees," and to be able to express them in more than a formulaic, abbreviated manner.

This method can be used for an entire semester's lectures, or can be scaled down to one or two applications, specifically those lectures which the professor deems contain the essence of the course. With such a strategy, teachers in all disciplines can address the twin problems of oversized classes and instantaneous answers which are a true measure neither of the students' abilities nor their understanding.

Judy Kalman

I had a hard time believing that the psychology students in Brent's Learning from Text project will see the writing activities as anything but additional busy work. I remember being a student in a similar situation. Although I was a good and dedicated student, like most others I found myself scratching together a summary moments before I ran out the door to class. Summarizing does not mean that a student has read and understood. It is quite possible to summarize an entire chapter without understanding it. Key words, headings, rhetorical structure, and even textual summaries make it possible to summarize without ever reading the text. Some may say that this is rare and unlikely, but again, I did it myself and do not think that I am so out of the ordinary. I am not convinced that this activity will be anything more than busy work for both the students writing and the graders.

I also have to wonder how it is that the education students are grading writing for a psychology class. What are the criteria used? It seems only fair that the criteria be given to the writers before they have to turn in their writing so that they know how they will be graded. If the papers are to be included in their mark, it is only fair to know how they will be evaluated beforehand and prepare accordingly. Some might argue that this would jeopardize the writing. In an academic setting where grades are stressed it is unfair not to provide the student with all the background that he or she will need.

Finally, after all of the writing and grading, Brent suggests that the main goal is a shift of attitude in the students. While this may be important, I do not feel that writing two chapter summaries is an effective way to do this. As a student and a teacher myself, I see that the shift in attitude needs to come first with the teacher. Teachers need to be converted before the students will

be. In this project the teachers are left completely out of the exercise. Where is the example? Where is the motivation?

I shall be interested to see what the results of this project are, but I remain skeptical and dubious.

Miriam E. Horne

I would like to talk about the pros and cons of report cards. I, like Sadowy, never received any instruction in report card writing in my teacher training. When I first started teaching, report cards were simply lists of numerical, or letter, grades, which were easy enough to fill in, as you based these marks on class tests, assignments, and homework exercises. With the introduction of "Whole Language" into the elementary school system, how we looked at students' progress changed drastically. Teachers were encouraged to keep daily anecdotal records for each student, in order to have some valid criteria with which to write up the report cards. This was not an easy task at first, as each teacher had to find a system of recording data on each student which was quick and yet followed a student's progress in each area of study. In addition to this, the recording system had to be one which the teacher was comfortable with, which was often a matter of trial and error.

We have worked hard in our school to come up with a report card format which is acceptable to all teachers and parents, and which best describes our students' progress throughout the school year. The report card we are presently using isn't perfect in every sense of the word, but it is better than what we were using a number of years ago. We no longer print out hundreds of copies at a time. We go from year to year, thinking that perhaps we might see an area that needs to be updated. I would like to see an area on the report card set aside for "suggestions and activities for parents to work on at home." Perhaps this addition will come sometime in the future; for now I squeeze these ideas in the comment section on the back!

Debbie Banton

Pat Sadowy's feelings of "inadequacy" when writing report cards are probably very widespread - among teachers, students and parents. They are horrible experiences for all involved. They are also one of the many things that are learned on the job and should probably stay that way for several reasons. Not taking a course is a lame excuse for not learning something. Also, if this "genre" of writing were to be validated by serious academic attention instead of the groans of protest it deserves, it is less likely to be blown away by the winds of change. As things are, I (like many teachers I know) hold my nose and do my best to deal with them. I have found that it helps to write the comments before deciding on the grade. That way I can see more of the child than a specific skill. I also try to imagine myself speaking directly to the child and parents and put as much of my own voice into my remarks as possible. My school board issues teachers a list of euphemisms, such as "working at his own level" for "below average." I'm sure Pat Sadowy's lists were better than that!

Myrna Hynes →

I remember my experience with "discipline reports." I don't know if they are common in English schools, but in the French high schools where I taught it was mandatory to fill in "un rapport" on any student before confronting his homeroom teacher or parents. Something had to be, "on paper." Every so often there was a kid...well, you just had to fill in "un rapport." Being in a French school I naturally had to write it in French. Being a language teacher, I was determined that there be no errors. How would *that* look?! The first time I completed one I had one of the French teachers look it over and "correct" it. Since she knew the student well, she wanted to embellish it. I resisted, though it was tempting. Over the course of two years I amassed quite a collection of key sentences on deviant classroom behavior. After a while I had a sentence for just about any "offense."

I can still see myself trying to look nonchalant as I slid open the drawer that held the magic phrases I'd worked diligently to collect. It was through those carefully crafted sentences that I really began to learn French grammar! Ah! Plus ça change!

Mary Cullinan

In some ways, it's easier to write a major paper for a university course than it is to deal with writing the elementary student's report card. As I look back over my years of teaching, I think that many things were said to parents and students, that should have been left unsaid or re-worded, but there's always the hope that those things were forgotten and didn't leave a lasting impression. I wonder if there's as much chance that written remarks on report cards have faded into oblivion. It is possible to buy a book full of ready-made report card comments ("What to say when..."). It might be quite an embarrassing experience to publish a collection of comments that have been written on report cards by teachers.

I think that the most important characteristic of anecdotal comments ought to be clarity of speech. Terms like "decontextualization" mean nothing to parents or students. Our comments should be "down to earth," standard English, but understood by all who read them. This is not the opportunity for the teacher to display expertise in theoretical viewpoints or latest research findings.

Next in importance would be the positive approach in what is written. Granted, there is a place for "calling a spade a spade and some issues need to be confronted before improvement will be seen, but exceptions notwithstanding, positive statements yield greater returns. I respond better as a writer, when I sense that my efforts are respected and appreciated. It makes me want to work all the harder. It also sets the stage for me to respond positively to constructive criticism.

Our overriding goal in creating report cards ought to be "how can I bring out the best in this child?"

Ellen Strike