

INKSHED

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

Volume 15, Number 1, February 1997

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(plus the Inkshed 14 registration form)

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

1 February, for 15 February
1 April, for 15 April
1 October, for 15 October
1 December, for 15 December
Post-Conference: June-July

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Please renew your CASLL membership: \$20 for full-timers; \$10 for others. Send cheque payable to Inkshed at NSCAD to Kenna Manos, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 5163 Duke Street, Halifax, N.S. B3J 3J6

What's New....

1. Canadian Caucus at CCC Conference - Thursday, March 13, 1996 from 6:45 - 7:45

At the officially titled "Canadian Caucus," it has become a tradition for Canadians and Canadian-sympathisers to meet informally for an hour to network and talk about Canadian issues and then reconvene for dinner together. It has become a part of the *Inkshed* editor's (s') tasks to "organise" the agenda. If you have any suggestions for our discussion please email either Margaret (procter@chass.utoronto.ca) or Mary-Louise (mlc@yorku.ca).

2. Abstracts for Canadian Panel at CCCC: "Canadian Contexts for Writing in the Disciplines: Past, Present, and Future" + Anthony Paré's Talk

The Canadian Panel will be held on Friday, March 14, from 4:30 - 5:45. Please see page 4 for the abstracts of the 7 short papers and page 6 for Anthony's abstract.

3. Kudos

Congratulations to W.F. Garrett-Petts and Donald Lawrence who edited *Integrating visual and verbal literacies* and to Jacqueline McLeod Rogers who wrote *Two sides to a story: Gender difference in student narrative*. Both books are published by the Inkshed Initiatives Publication.

4. Inkshed Publications Initiatives

We found out at the May 96 CASLL meeting that there are no longer the financial resources available to keep the Inkshed Publications Initiatives publishing. While we hope that Inkshed Publications has gone into hibernation for what will be a short winter, we want to offer thanks to the managing editors, Laura Atkinson, Sandy Baardman, Neil Besner, and Pat Sadowy for their hard work and success in the publishing field.

5. New Editor(s) Needed!

With the publication of the June 1997 Issue of *Inkshed*, York will be at the end of its 3 year sponsorship of the *Inkshed* Newsletter. It is time to hand the editorship over to another university. While this should be decided at the CASLL meeting at our Inkshed conference this May, please contact me if you're interested in taking on this important job—and I'll let you know what's involved.

(Remember we're on-line at: <http://www.yorku.ca/admin/cawc/files/resources.html>)

6. Inkshed 14 - May 1- 4, 1997 - Geneva Park, Orillia, Ontario

While we will be focusing on the ways technologies (old and new) shape the processes of reading and writing, you'll find if you come to the conference—and we hope you will—that there will be many points of view represented. Henry Hubert for instance will present ideas synopsized in his sonnet:

Poem For Resisters

The computer is too much with us; late and soon,
Webbing and MOOing, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon.

Please come to the conference to hear Henry on this subject—and perhaps to hear him finish the sonnet! We particularly welcome non-presenters this year: a registration form is enclosed in this mailing (or on-line: <http://www.umd.umich.edu/~marcyb/ink14>).

7. What's in this Issue:

- The abstracts of the Canadian-sponsored Panel at the CCCC in Phoenix this March and Anthony Paré's talk
- The beginnings of our survey of 15 years of *Inkshed* publication
- An edited version of a CASLL discussion on memorisation and cultural by-products.
- References on how to provide support to students' group writing projects
- The registration form for the Inkshed 14 conference

CCCC Abstracts

1. Canadian Contexts for Writing in the Disciplines: Past, Present, and Future

This session, sponsored by the Canadian Caucus, builds on the roundtable that our caucus sponsored at the Milwaukee CCCCs. Last year's roundtable was very important for Canadian members of CCCC because it gave both presenters and audience members a chance to hear about programs at a variety of institutions from across Canada. Writing instruction at Canadian universities is, of course, quite different from writing instruction in the United States (see Hubert, "Harmonious Perfection" for a historical perspective, and Graves, *Writing Instruction in Canadian Universities*, for a contemporary perspective). Writing in the disciplines programs are distinct in status, administrative connections to academic disciplines, and funding. The roundtable proposed here seeks to build upon last year's meeting by continuing the conversation about new developments in writing in the disciplines (WID) and writing across the curriculum (WAC) programs. In addition, the roundtable proposed here seeks to add two new dimensions to the discussion. Speakers #1 and #2 will provide a historical overview of the educational movements and social developments that prevented and encouraged WID/WAC programs in Canadian universities. The other new development will be contributed by Speaker #7 who will share insights into the ways disciplines are formed and enacted. An understanding of that process should provoke some interesting comments and insights from the audience as they reflect on their responsibilities as program administrators and as teachers of writing in the disciplines.

Individual Presentations

"David Russell's Writing in the Academic Disciplines, 1870-1990: A Curricular History" details the educational movements and social pressures that have at various times prevented and encouraged writing instruction across and in the spectrum of university disciplines in

the United States. Speaker #1 will apply Russell's historical framework to the history of university education in Canada, noting similarities in educational movements but different developments socially and politically in the two countries. [Kevin Brooks, Iowa State]

Speaker # 2: On the assumption that specialization of the university curriculum is a leading deterrent to Writing Across the Curriculum, as well as a central reason *for* WAC, this presentation will discuss the 19th-C. impetus to the separation of learning into discreet disciplines. The discussion will offer a European and American context for the Canadian move to specialization in the late decades of the last century. This background will preface a discussion of specialization at leading Canadian universities. The presentation will remind us of not only the content of specialization in university courses, but also of the attitudes that drive both the successes and problems of this curricular organisation. [Henry Hubert, University College of the Cariboo]

Speaker # 3 will begin from the premise that most writing instruction in Canadian universities is indirect. That is, it takes place in courses in the disciplines, and students distil it from remarks in class, assignment instructions, and course grades. Writing instructors and tutors need to help students interpret what faculty say about writing, and—even more—what they do not say. This presentation will analyse discussions with students and faculty in an effort to bridge the gap between teacher talk and student understanding. [Margaret Proctor, University of Toronto]

Speaker # 4 will describe how the Social Science and Humanities Divisions in the Faculty of Arts are introducing mandatory first- and second-year "foundations" courses that include a writing component and might well be called "writing in the disciplines" courses. The courses will be taught with two-hour lectures (in large lecture halls) and two-hour seminars (with a maximum enrolment of 30 students per seminar). This presentation will describe these courses and the nature of the writing to be done in them. [Mary-Louise Craven, York University]

Speaker # 5: A potentially exciting but contentious area of writing-in-the-disciplines in Canada is the teaching of technical and professional communication. Arguably two of the greatest differences between Canadian and American post-secondary treatments of tech/pro comm are (1) the general lack of academic programs focusing on tech/pro comm in Canada (Graves et al. 1995) and (2) a "bifurcation" (Harris 1995) between two-year colleges' so-called "practical" emphasis and universities' more theoretical approach. According to the survey conducted by Graves et al. (1995), only 16 Canadian post-secondary institutions have certificate or degree programs in tech/ pro comm; universities offer 7 of these programs, but only two offer degrees (and both of these degree programs are run by departments of English). From a writing-in-the-disciplines standpoint, teaching tech/pro comm is especially challenging, pedagogically and politically. Some academics have rightly criticized its traditional emphasis on "practicality" at the expense of ethical considerations (Miller in Fearing and Sparrow 1989). Some academics are concerned that tech/pro comm caters to students' career goals at the expense of critical thinking, turning universities into training institutions. Others are worried that emphasizing tech/pro comm is another way of getting academics to play into the hands of university administrators and industry, turning us into "bank managers" (Manos and Drain 1996). Still others argue that increasing tech/pro comm courses or programs would open new possibilities for partnerships with industry, government, and communities, with benefits accruing to both academic and non-academic participants. Defining the role of tech/pro comm in Canadian universities is an important aspect of scholarship in writing-in-the-disciplines. [Amanda Goldrick-Jones, University of Winnipeg]

Speaker #6: As part of a pilot project entitled "Language Across the Curriculum" in the University of Toronto's Engineering Faculty, I have spent two afternoons each week providing on-site language support in the thermodynamics lab. For the last year, I have worked with a class of eighty students—seen in two alternating groups of forty—and I have regularly worked with the same eighty students in their Inorganic Chemistry class. From the very beginning of my involvement with this group, I explained that I was conducting a pedagogical experiment similar in structure to their weekly experiments in the lab. The objective of the experiment was twofold: to improve the students' ability to write clear and concise lab reports, and to help engineering students realize that writing is not a skill needed only by humanities students on the other side of campus, but an integral part of the work of professional engineers. In the attempt to meet this two-part objective, I implemented a series of specific strategies in the thermodynamics lab: strategies which ranged from providing individual students with help to running workshops on abstract writing and on oral presentation skills. I actively solicited student feedback, and, on the basis of that feedback, I significantly altered the strategies I employed in the lab. In Phoenix I will present the results of this unusual, but eye-opening, pedagogical experiment. [Jane Freeman, University of Toronto]

Speaker #7 will examine the second key term in *Writing in the Disciplines*: disciplines. Based upon experiences moderating an e-mail listserv on Canadian literature, this presenter will reflect on the ways this list created a shared discipline called "Canadian Literature." In the course of sending and receiving over 1000 messages in eight months, this group rehearsed many of the central issues and critical perspectives that together create a discipline. Lessons from the way this group created or enacted a discipline and the role of writing in that process will be used to draw out implications for writing in the disciplines. [Will Garrett-Petts, University College of the Cariboo]

(Panel Co-ordinated by Roger Graves)

2. "Genres and Justice: The Embedded Ideologies of Social Work Writing"

As social work students move from academic to professional life through a transition stage of apprenticeship, they experience disjunctures between the school and the workplace. In particular, students discover that the pure social justice of classroom theory fractures under the pressure of competing interests, budgetary constraints, institutional hierarchies, and the contradictory definitions of justice that operate in multi-disciplinary settings. This tension becomes obvious in the students' struggle to participate in the genres of the workplace community. To participate, students must conform to complex and repeated patterns in text production: interview protocols, recording guidelines, report formats, acceptable diction and terminology, document routing, revision cycles, etc. In adapting to the world view embedded in these regular discourse practices, students often find themselves in conflict with a social work world view developed in school.

The arena for this struggle is the revision conference that students must have with their supervisors when they write their first professional texts. Supervisors—who are professional social workers—guide students through numerous revisions and, in so doing, introduce them to the complex justice of the workplace.

By drawing on transcripts of those revision conferences and interviews with students and supervisors, this session will explore the conflict students feel as they re-learn justice in the context of workplace writing.

Anthony Paré
McGill University

Fifteen Years of *Inkshed* Publication - Looking Backward and Forward

Margaret and I have had a great deal of pleasure reading over the early issues of *Inkshed* (from 1982-87) when Jim Reither was the editor—and Russ Hunt was the proverbial “person of many talents.” Russ was variously designated as the “far-flung correspondent,” the “cub” reporter, the “silent partner,” the copy reader, the “punctuation consultant” or the more exalted “editor” in charge of entertainment, obituaries, fashion (!), sports, and consumer affairs. (Truly a writer capable of covering many discourse communities.)

It's been informative to look back over those early days to see who was involved, how the early readers saw themselves (see Margaret's compilation of Jim's call for “consultants” below), what articles/books were reviewed, what conferences were promoted, and how the the first two *Inkshed* conferences were run. I had a real laugh when I read how Jim handled the technical side of publishing the newsletter (see “Technical Notes” below).

What we've done in this the first issue in Volume 15 is to start to republish a selection of some of the interesting stuff we found in the early *Inksheds*—the font changes to courier when we're reprinting material. Over this volume, we want to survey the 15 years we've been publishing *Inkshed*. We welcome your reminiscences about our early days. We have a number of senior states people—like Jim Reither and Patrick Dias—to whom we owe a great deal. Please help us take this opportunity to thank them.

We don't want to be too maudlin about our organization and our newsletter, but we think it's served its community well. The occasion of fifteen years of publication allows us to both look backward and forward. Now's a good time to take stock of who we are today and how we're communicating.

In the beginning Jim was mailing out the newsletter to about 130 people; when I took over from the McGill folk, there were about 230 people on the mailing list. But many of those people had not paid CASLL fees for a number of years, so in an effort to save costs, we “purged” the list—now we are mailing to 128 people. In the early days, Jim was always asking readers to xerox the newsletter and pass it on to others so that the emerging Canadian writing community would grow. Now we're back to the same number (but with many different faces) as 15 years ago. I think we need to think once again about our membership. Are we reaching all the post-secondary writing people we can? What can we do to increase membership? Perhaps, given the growth of the CASLL listserv (supported so ably by Russ Hunt) and our Web page, we should forget about sending out hard-copy of the newsletter to our members?

Please send us your contributions so that together we can look backward and forward.

Mary-Louise Craven

Technical Notes: *Inkshed* and Word processors

Please don't think the early editor of *Inkshed* wasn't on the cutting edge. In Volume 1, Issue 3, December 1982, Jim writes:

A TECHNICAL NOTE: The text of this newsletter is composed and formatted using MicroPro's Wordstar on an IBM Personal Computer with 128K system RAM and two double-sided (320K) disk drives. It is printed out on an Epson MX80F\T printer.

If you have (or have access to) an IBM PC, I'd like to hear from you. Perhaps we can get our machines communicating with one another. I have a modem, although I don't yet have it hooked up and running.

In a later issue, Jim suggests to Inkshedders that they can send him material on disk. He tells them that if they use one of the 50 microprocessors he listed (see a partial list below), he could reformat the text. (Here we have evidence of a *most* accommodating editor!)

Here's a sample of some of the more preposterous microcomputer names:

.....

Superbrain Junior

Memory Merchant

Wang MAWS CP/M

Osmosis D.D.

Hurricane Labs

Montezuma Micro

.....

Mary-Louise Craven

Resident Experts: Who, Us?

Creating a community of professionals has always been the main purpose of the *Inkshed* newsletter and organization. In the first issue of October 1982, Jim Reither proposes one way of knowing who we are:

CONSULTANTS: As a first project for this newsletter, I'd like to compile a list of educators in Canada who are sufficiently expert in matters of theory or practice that they can offer their services as consultants. If you have that kind of expertise, please send me your name, address, and a list of topics (the more precisely defined, the better) on which you are sufficiently expert to act as a consultant. Alternatively, recommend someone else, providing me with the same information.

By December of that year, he already has a list of 25 such people out of a readership of 115—a confident lot, those early readers. Jim comments with a touch of reprimand:

I now have a file of twenty-five CONSULTANTS. That is good. We know who you are. What is not good is that none of the names in the files has come recommended by someone who has seen these experts at work: all are people recommending themselves. So, I'm running the CONSULTANTS form one more time, but this time I'm stressing the need for you to send me names and addresses of people who (!) teach in Canadian institutions, and (2) have taught you important things about writing and reading/theory and practice.

Further self-definition comes in the January 1983 issue. Jim now has a file of thirty-six consultants, including some nominated by people other than themselves. Warning us to settle in for a read, he lists fifty areas of expertise. Here is *Inkshed's* first group picture:

Advanced / Intermediate Composition (2)	of Writing (1) Practical Writing (1) Process-Centered Pedagogy: Reading--Theory and Practice (2) Process-Centred Pedagogy: Writing--Theory and Practice (6) Programme (Writing) Design (1)
Bilingual Education (1)	
Communication Theory (1) Course Design--Composition (5) Course Design--ESL (1) Critical Apologetics (1)	
Developmental / Remedial Writing and Reading (1)	Reading--Psychology of (1) Reading Process (4) Reading Process--French (1) Revision--Theory and Practice (2) Rhetoric--History of (1) Rhetoric--Practice of (2) Rhetoric / Stylistics (1)
Editing for Publication (2) Elocution and Voice Production (1) ESL--Teaching ESL Writing (5) ESL--Testing (1) Evaluation of Writing (4)	Scoring--Holistic (2) and Primary Trait (1) Second-Language Composition-- French (1) Semantics--Linguistics (1) Semiotics (2)
Figurative Language (1)	
Inquiry--Teaching of (1)	
Language Arts--Theory of (1) Language Learning (1) Lexicology (1) Linguistics / Linguistic Theory (3) Literacy and Literacy Values (1) Literacy "Crises"--Sociology of (1) Literature--Theory of Teaching (2)	Teacher Training--especially re: Teaching Writing (2) Technical Writing (2) Testing (2) Testing--ESL (2)
Northrop Frye, Literature and Education (1)	Whole Language Theory, and Teaching Reading (1) Whole Language Theory, and Writing in the Literature Classroom (1) Writing Development--K through Maturity (1) Writing Process--Theory and Teaching (7) Writing Skills--Lecturing about (5)
One-to-One Conferences and Tutoring (6)	
Philosophy of Education (1) Polanyi (Michael) and the Teaching	

Jim follows this list with an offer to mail names and addresses to anyone who specifies the area of expertise required. He then asks for help with providing this clearing-house service. But no further news of the project appears in later issues. Perhaps nobody wanted the job of running it. Maybe the demand for experts was low. More likely, people found other means of making contact with each other. In fact, we could say that the newsletter itself became the medium for sharing expertise, creating knowledge as well as cataloguing it.

Margaret Procter

(Edited) CASLL Discussion on "Memorization / By-products"

In early February, I reviewed the CASLL conversations since the last newsletter, and announced on-line that I'd reproduce Jamie MacKinnon's Letter to the Editor (of *The Globe and Mail*) and then edit the replies. I hope recasting this conversation in print is useful. Thanks to all the participants; I trust that in the process of editing I didn't distort the views. (Mary-Louise)

Letter to the Editor of *The Globe and Mail* (November 7, 1996)

My daughter is in grade nine; my son in grade five. In their entire school lives, neither has been required by a teacher to memorize a poem.

Last year, I asked two people at the Ottawa Board of Education why memory work is no longer a part of the curriculum. "Rote learning isn't very useful," a curriculum specialist told me.

I spoke to a language arts specialist. I said that I thought most people benefit from knowing some poetry by heart, and that it would be a good idea for students in Ontario to be able to recite some of the same poems this, as a small step toward building a common culture. She said: "But who would choose the poems? You'd never get agreement as to what poems those should be."

I suggested that at this time of the year, "In Flanders Fields" was an obvious choice. It is, I pointed out, one of Canada's greatest war poems, a eulogy that speaks to future generations, and a poem of perfect metre and a flawless register of language. "Some parents might object to the sentiment expressed," the Board employee replied.

I'm not sure why memorization is out of fashion with our teachers and educational specialists. I would have thought that knowing a few classic poems by heart would be a good thing. A rich memory, one might think, is indispensable to intellectual growth. And I'm also not sure why the notion of a common culture is so difficult. Without common cultural reference points, citizens cannot converse, and cannot work toward the ideal of a civil society.

The teachers themselves are too young to have fought for freedom. They can, however, help our students to understand freedom as an ideal. One way they can do this (an important way, I think) is by getting students to memorize the best of our war poetry, which provides a window on the contingency and historicity of freedom.

If ye break faith with us who die, we shall not sleep, McCrae wrote. If our schools fail to encourage cultural memory, it will be the living who sleep, in an unremembering oblivion.

Sincerely,

Jamie MacKinnon

Anthony Paré: I am not sure I agree with Jamie's positions on poetry or common culture, and I wonder if there's a debate to draw out of the issue. For example, am I the only CASLLer who's thankful that students do not have to memorize poetry? And does the idea of a common or shared culture fill anyone else with dread? Which poetry? Whose culture? I suspect there may be some heat in this topic to warm up a winter week or two.

Jamie: ...two points I'd like to make to Anthony.

1. I'm interested that you'd use a common, shared forum to indicate your "dread" of "the idea of" of common, shared culture. You ask "which poetry, whose culture?" Two answers: One: As long as we live in communities, it will be the poetry and the culture of our communities. Two: The best poetry from all cultures.

Russ Hunt: It's not clear to me that my first year students and I share a common culture. I want to bring them to share mine (ours; that of academia and the life of the mind), sure—but the question is whether assigning them to memorize "About Ben Adhem" does that effectively.

Anthony: This CASLL list is a common forum frequently used, as now, to explore differences. The dread I feel has to do with the end of debate, the bland oppression of consensus. I'm all for access to discussions and displays of difference, and I don't think the purpose of this or other forums is to erase or even necessarily to reduce difference; instead, I think the purpose is to create some new ideas—that is, to make rather than remove difference. I think of culture, like knowledge, as a process rather than a product. Do we have to go back to "In Flander's Field" to consider the horror of war? There are immigrants and refugees coming to Canada on a daily basis who are escaping from some war somewhere. This multiple, fragmented, contradictory, ever-changing culture we live in will not stand still long enough to allow the shaping of a "common" culture, and for that I am extremely grateful.

Jamie: 2. I'm interested that you [Anthony], who have gained so much from acting, would be "thankful that students do not have to memorize poetry."

Sometimes it seems to me that canon bashers are the same people who have benefited a good deal from being exposed to a traditional canon.

Anthony, without some common culture, how do citizens in a polity work toward (or even engage in) a civil society? And what the heck is wrong with knowing some poetry by heart?

Anthony: I am not sure why you are linking the memorization of poetry to acting. I chose to be in plays, and once the choice was made I memorized the lines so I wouldn't look like a complete idiot as I stood on stage in tights. Seriously, though, I'm not sure why you've linked the two. I despised having to memorize poetry and, along with other force-feeding techniques, memorization made me despise poetry and all the high culture it was associated with in my schooling and the adult society that foisted it on me. I loved the theatre and memorization was simply one of the steps necessary. In fact, although I had most of King Lear memorized just over a year ago, I have forgotten pretty well all of it now. It was a strictly utilitarian move: I needed the lines to do something else I was interested in. Same reason I've learned just about everything of value that I know. And I have learned to love poetry, but only after I quit high school because I hated the "benefit" of a forced exposure to THE canon.....

Marcy Bauman: Before last January, I might have been tempted to agree wholeheartedly with Anthony and Russ on this issue. Last January, though, I attended a Martin Luther King Day celebration at my kids' elementary school that really gave me second thoughts about this whole notion of a common culture . . . and even about memorization. Here comes a long story (excerpted) . . .

Last year...I went to a musical (written by the music teacher) put on at my kids' school. I could go on and on about this musical, but I won't. Suffice to say that by a couple of really clever moves, the teacher managed to historicize King and the American Civil Rights movement in ways that elementary students could understand... I thought it was wonderfully sensitive and intelligent, and it made me feel something I haven't felt in years—patriotic.

You have to understand, here, that I grew up in the sixties, but I'm about five years too young to have been a hippie (or of understanding the social upheaval going on in America at the time), so my ideas about patriotism were formed when being patriotic meant putting "America—Love It or Leave It" bumper stickers on your car. I was completely unprepared for the way I felt last January. I'd never conceived of a notion of patriotism based on the idea that everyone living here (choose your own "here") has a part in the enterprise that is this country (choose your own country); that this is "my" country by virtue of my having been born here, but it belongs to others by virtue of their having chosen to be here; and that no matter how we got here, we all have a stake in seeing that it's the best place we can make it for all of us to live. What's wrong with that notion of patriotism? I think if people in general felt that way, they might feel invested enough in their localities to make change. Lord knows, we could all use a little change (choose your own "change"), no matter where we are.

Now, I'm not at all trying to say that memorizing a few poems is by itself going to make better citizens—there are economic realities which are so overwhelming that sometimes it seems that nothing short of complete economic overhaul (Karl Marx, call your office) will change anything. But we don't have that option; we have to do what we can. It seems entirely appropriate that schools are the place where people go to learn that we're all in this thing together, and to learn a bit more about the country—in all its richness and diversity—that extends out from their classrooms.

And this is not to say that I think that a common culture is Ten Top Texts, which, once we identify, we can force students to read and be done with it. But what if we say that culture is the combination of our collective past and our present, and that it's the task of all of us to learn and contribute what we can to it? What if we say that our common culture isn't what you *inherit*, it's what you *create*? Then we can start to visualize lots of wonderfully engaging ways that teachers and kids might go about doing that....

Well, as to the role of memorization, I won't go on at length, but the kids in the musical at my kids' school had lines to learn and songs to memorize. Maybe some of the facts they learned in those lines and songs will stick, and maybe they won't. But I don't think that memorization per se is the problem; I think it's the stupid and senseless invocation of memorization that's the problem. And actually, I think there are important reasons to learn to memorize, and times of life and/or times in the process of learning something when knowing how to memorize things comes in very handy. (For instance, in learning another language, there comes a point when you have to say, ok, I'm just going to knuckle down and memorize these verb forms; when learning math you have to say, ok, I'm going to learn my multiplication tables now.) I also think memorization isn't so odious to younger children as we imagine: my seven-year-old daughter is soaking up song lyrics and poems like crazy now, and my nine-year-old son is soaking up hockey facts....

Well, but anyway. I think the point is, we need to find meaningful and creative ways for people to learn to memorize things (or maybe to use their memorization skills).

Leslie Sanders: That's a wonderful meditation you wrote there, Marcy. It says a lot of the stuff in this book I'm reading: *The Identity In Question*, ed. John Rajchman (Routledge, 1995). On the poetry front, one of the things that bothers me is that so few students—folks—love poetry these days. So the old canonical/memorization/and its is good for you, too, hasn't instilled love of poetry, of language, or much else. So, what's the point? But there is a lot of wonderful poetry being written, or already written, that is closer to 'home'—to where different people are actually 'at' that inspires love of poetry and even the desire to memorize, in some. And perhaps, an interest in other poetry by canonically famous folk. The African American poet June Jordan has a wonderful tribute to Walt Whitman that would make anyone want to go and read him, for example. My students are surprised that 'black poetry' exists—and they love it. Most do, anyway. One said he never knew that poetry existed about things that mattered to him, and he is an English major.

Yes, there should be some common texts in a curriculum, but that doesn't mean they need be by Dead White (European) Males, or that they be presented as 'the best of high culture.' They can be presented as representative of particular styles, points of view, historical moments, whatever, leaving room for students to seek out what else might be there, what else was going on in the discussion that goes on in a culture.

Anthony [back in with his answer to the question "Is the canon discussion over? Or, is this not a canon issue?"]

I think it's both a canon issue and a pedagogical issue. First, on the canon issue, to Jamie's question:

<Without some common culture, how do citizens in a polity work toward (or even engage a civil society?)>

This, Jamie says, "is one key question dodged by canon bashers." I am happy to be identified with "canon bashers," and deeply uncomfortable with the idea of a "common culture." I grew up in a "common culture"; it was called the suburbs, and I never want to go back. I might be less disdainful of a "common culture" if I knew better what Jamie had in mind. Common as defined by the past, the common culture of Canada (or just Toronto), circa, say, 1990? Common as defined by majority or power, the common culture of white, middle-class men? I'm a lot more interested in the notion of moving toward (but never arriving at) a future common culture, one which blended the rich traditions, attitudes, and beliefs of all participants, rather than one that sought to impose traditions, attitudes, and beliefs on minorities, newcomers, or the otherwise less powerful. Why, at this time and place, would we go back to a poem from W.W. I in an effort to bring a refugee from Zaire into a "common culture"? As Leslie pointed out, there are contemporary poems that might speak to something more shared, more mutual, more identifiable. "In Flanders Fields" brings a lump to my throat not because of some stand-alone, inherent power in the text, but because of a million complex strands in a web of meanings and associations - other texts, photographs, dead relatives —a sense of place and time built up over a life time. This isn't to say that the poem would not resonate for the immigrant from Zaire —I'm sure it would —but only to point out that entrance to a common culture cannot come through the artifacts of that culture. I don't think culture is learned or taken on by reference to its by-products. As genre theory suggests, text and context are inseparable—one is not figure and the other ground. "In Flanders Fields" is not one "piece" of culture which, when combined with some critical mass of other "pieces," leads to membership in the "common culture" that produced the poem (and accounts for whatever common readings there might be).

....but on to the pedagogical issue. Let's face it, we do not graduate crowds of poetry lovers, eager to buy poetry books, attend readings, or try their own hands at iambic pentameter. In my case, I managed to overcome the hatred of poetry instilled in me by English teachers, some of whom made me memorize poetry, and I now read (and even write) the occasional poem. But I suspect I would be far more positively disposed to poetry if I'd had it introduced to me via contemporary, Rosenblatt-inspired methods, such as Pat Dias has developed over the past two decades. And

though memorization was not the only reason I turned away from poetry, it was one of the chief weapons in an arsenal of strategies used to wage poetry on my generation. The message was clear: poetry was important culture and, like cod-liver oil, good for me despite my aversion to it. But I am willing to be convinced that I am an anomaly in this regard. Are there many on this list who believe memorizing poetry led them to a love or appreciation of it? We're dealing, of course, with a skewed sample, since there are many English teachers on the list, a profession likely to attract the type of student who enjoyed memorizing poetry and pulling the wings off butterflies (okay, just kidding).

Marcy came back to this point that Anthony made earlier:

> I don't think culture is learned or taken on by reference to its by-products. As genre theory suggests, text and context >are inseparable - one is not figure and the other ground.

Well, but by this very argument, genre theory allows that there *will* be by-products. So what do we do with them? Toss them, because they're inevitably artifacts of a bygone era, a past response to past conditions?

Jamie: Since when did cultural products become "by-products"?

When beer became a by-product at Anheuser-Busch, Coors, Molson, Labatt and Miller, beer culture suffered a huge setback. The very word "by-product" implies a product, a centre, elsewhere.

Critics of common culture often refer to a canon that I've never seen or had to study—some homogenous list of books by the dreaded white men, or worse, "white middle-class men" (worse yet again, apparently, if men are dead). In other words, they set up a straw man—canonical tyranny—which doesn't exist.

1. How can we expect Canada to survive or thrive (indeed, how can we expect any polity to survive or thrive) without some common culture? My idea of citizenship includes active political participation by the broadest range of people. Participation requires common reference points, to name but two: a legal framework, and some aspects of culture, including, but not limited to, aspects of language, mythology, history, and the arts. The question -- especially in Canada -- is not do we want canonical tyranny on the one hand or anarchy on the other, the question is how do we build on the tenuous common culture that we have?....

In other words it's not good enough to say that the notion of common culture is problematic. Of course it is. Let's roll up our sleeves and discuss in good will what the common cultures of our various communities are and might be.

Incidentally, I think Anthony's fear that a Zairian immigrant might be forced to study *In Flander's Fields* is misplaced. All the immigrants I know crave Canadian culture and are the most enthusiastic of Canadians....

2. Part of my original *Globe* letter was motivated by the fact that neither of my kids, in grades nine and grade five, had ever been asked by a teacher to memorize a poem. I guess when I was young, I never fell on my knees in gratitude for having to memorize another poem, but as an adult, I'm glad that I was required to....

I'm not sure if any one saw the replies to my letter, but virtually all of them were from people saying how important the memorization of poetry had been to their subsequent intellect and appreciation of literature. My real interest here is not narrowly on the memorization of poetry, but on a larger subject. I believe that "enabling" pedagogy has gone far too far in our schools. To generalize: too many teachers believe that you don't need to "know that" anything; you just need to "know how" to look up something.

I believe that studies of cognition show us that most people in most situations develop expertise not primarily (or superordinately) by learning how, by learning process, by learning metastrategy, but by mastering a huge domain of content.

I don't want my kids to be able to find the capitals of the Canadian provinces in an atlas; I want them to know the capitals. I want them to know many facts, precepts, principles, names, elements, structures, etc. I would think that most people would agree that one purpose of school is to help students to know that something. The question then becomes: what somethings do we want students / citizens to know? Might some poetry be one of those somethings?

3. Anthony seems to be upset by being forced / required to do some things in primary and secondary school. What's wrong with being forced to learn something? ... As one gets older, one gets more choice, or at least forms of choice.

Which brings me back. If the syllabus in primary school is largely a matter not of student choice, but of parent / syllabus designer / citizen choice, then isn't it possibly useful for my kids to know some of the same literature that kids in, say, Nova Scotia know? If they don't have some common cultural reference points, how are they going to discuss common problems as adults?

Rob Irish: As Jamie wrote:

- > I believe that studies of cognition show us that most people in most situations develop expertise not primarily (or >superordinately) by learning how, by learning process, by learning metastrategy, but by mastering a
- > huge domain of content.

I immediately thought of Benjamin Bloom's old taxonomy. Bloom, of course would consider these "metastrategies" as part of the higher level, open cognitive objectives, but as I hear Jamie, I wonder can we reach those higher levels without first wallowing in the world of knowledge of specifics? In short, and somewhat surprisingly, I find myself agreeing that teaching the young something of what it means to be here, to be Canadian, is important. If that involves memorizing Flanders Fields or even (gulp) Shakespeare, maybe it also involves memorizing Susan Musgrave (whose best poetic line is "Hot damn and we hoof it") or Maxine Tynes (my favourite neglected Nova Scotia poet). Having the ability to strategize, to evaluate, to synthesize without having the facts at one's fingertips is like having a Pentium computer with a gazillion Meg harddrive but no programs or operating system.

As for Jamie's subsequent question:

- > what somethings do we want students / citizens to know? Might some poetry be one of those somethings?

I want them to know everything. Poetry and all.

Rob Irish: Part of the problem seems to me the word "common". Jamie posits

- > My idea of citizenship includes active political participation by the broadest range of people. Participation requires
- > common reference points, to name but two: a legal framework, and some aspects of culture, including, but not limited
- > to, aspects of language, mythology, history, and the arts.

The problem with common reference points seems to be that the cultural elite, those of the dominant social group who have defined those cultural reference points in the past, have expected not only acceptance of reference points like "Flanders Fields" but a shared perspective on such reference points. If by "reference" Jamie means points of contestation—he points at which we meet to fight out who we are as a collective—I wholeheartedly agree that we need them; however, if common reference means denying other points of reference or denouncing resistance to points of common reference then not only are we failing as a collective to be critical thinkers, but we have canonical tyranny. As Jamie asks

- > The question—especially in Canada—is not do we want canonical tyranny on the one hand or anarchy on the other,
- > the question is how do we build on the tenuous common culture that we have?

By resisting it. Thus, there is a place in the creation of common culture for Anthony. His resistance to memorizing poetry, to the notion of shared culture generally, is precisely what will enable a community to forge values it shares, to challenge its own structures. As Marcy suggested in the original debate, why not let the students themselves decide what poems they might memorize. Why not! Of course, Anthony you may note that in this idea of common culture as points of contestation, your resistance is implicated in the creating of common culture. Resistance is futile, but necessary.

Cathy Schryer: This whole issue of memory vs. problem solving, learning etc. is, of course, an old debate. One of the most interesting arenas in which I have seen it staged occurs in medical schools. The "science" oriented folks insist that the student must learn "facts". So in the early part of the program—Overwhelmosis occurs. The students are exposed to legions of "facts." Of course, what exactly counts as a "fact" and how they are made is an interesting question.

Clinicians or practitioners, on the other hand, had a very different view of facts. For them problem solving was more important than facts. They did not dispute that facts were important, but they resented bitterly the kind of memorizing that went on at the expense of practice itself.

It seems to me we have the same kind of debate going on here. The Classical rhetoricians valued memory highly because memory gave rhetoricians things they could use. But memorizing for its own sake, I think is problematic. For one thing it leads to that sense of "fact." As if things were unchangeable.

After wandering through this argument I have discovered my own position. Memorizing is valuable only when we show at the same time how and why something was made, and if we balance memory with practice–problem-solving, strategic learning etc.

Russ: I've been thinking what I might say about this "cultural by-products" business (some awful metaphors lurching about there in the darkness, about the way they make cattle feed in Britain), and Cathy raises what I think is a peripheral issue, but an important one.

Two observations. The dispute she alludes to in medical faculties runs right through the health sciences, and is absolutely central to the institutional restructurings that have been going on in such faculties for over a decade now, whereby problem-based learning has become, if not the most common educational practice in medical and health science faculties, certainly the powerful and accepted alternative to the classical "memorize the definition of the femur" ones.

I don't think, though, that it usually presents as a dispute between scientists and clinicians—at least the people in those faculties that I've met at problem-based learning conferences or faculty development seminars have been equally divided between scientists and clinicians.

> It seems to me we have the same kind of debate going on here. The Classical rhetoricians valued memory highly because
>memory gave rhetoricians things they could use. But memorizing for its own sake, I think is problematic. For one thing it
>leads to that sense of "fact." As if things were unchangeable.

I guess I agree with this, though I think there's another issue behind it, which is that memorization favours the people who already have internalized the social structures which undergird it. Those classical rhetoricians could *assume* that the people they were asking to memorize stuff already shared with them fundamental values and habits and assumptions that nobody had to address explicitly. Further, I think memorization itself is influenced largely by acts of valuation and ordering: I remember thousands of lines of poetry, not because I ever memorized it, but because it fits into my world and illuminates it. Skiing through the woods the other day, I heard myself repeat Frost's "Dust of Snow," which I certainly never memorized.

> After wandering through this argument I have discovered my own position. Memorizing is valuable only when we show
>at the same time how and why something was made, and if we balance memory with practice–problem-solving, strategic
>learning etc.

I'm hesitant even to accept this . . . "we show at the same time" sounds to me a lot like "we say at the same time." How does that translate into classroom action?

Cathy: Well, let me explain or rather explore a little more.

First, I agree with you that I always remember what I have invested in for my own reasons far more than what other people have required that I remember. At U of T we were required to memorize large sections of Shakespeare for exam purposes. I remember almost nothing of these sequences although I appreciate the poetry whenever I hear it. However, I have a darned good memory for ideas, concepts etc. that I wanted at one time to learn (part of this has to do with a learning strategy that involves journals).

Also the kind of teaching that requires memorized sections of poems etc. sometimes (not always) does treat poems as things—almost like party tricks that one can drop into a conversation and thereby acquire some cultural capital.

On the other hand, we could go back to some of the classical teaching techniques which required some forms of imitation. So in other words, taking a bit of Shakespeare and locating the figures and tropes and then imitating them with different diction. I have done some of this kind of thing with students. Oddly enough they think it's a blast. I usually give them a wonderful topic to work on. Sin works well, as does love. Candy works too.

Strangely enough we usually spin off into discussions of grammar—but it's a discussion on grammar, not a lesson on grammar. You know—like what happens if you put a noun here, and how come that adjective totally throws off that parallel structure.

Then we often spin off into how Shakespeare was the greatest professional writer of his period. Today he would probably be a multi-media specialist. After all the stage was a medium, his actors were a medium, and his language—well what can one say.

No I don't teach Shakespeare—but maybe sometimes I inadvertently do. A word master is a word master...

Rob: Those interested in the memorization debate might find the NCTE Chronicle of interest. On pp 9&11, it summarizes some highlights of another on-line discussion of memorization. Not that we should look there for solutions, but isn't it interesting that what Cathy called the "old debate" is rearing its head in several places at the same time.

Marcy: Rob, I wonder if it all has something to do with intellectual property? Seems to me memorization is strongly linked to the idea of owning words, of making them your own. The ownership of words is being talked about in a number of contexts: intellectual property, the renewed interest in quoting and paraphrasing, collaboration . . . maybe I've got—as Russ would say (copyright, 1997, in personal e-mail to author)—Carpal Tunnel of the Mind Syndrome, but it seems to me that all these discussions are an attempt to deal with and define the new writing environments computers and computer technology affords us. Or maybe to revise our notions to include what computers and computer networks are teaching us about writing and reading.

Mary-Louise (off-line) : Marcy's comments certainly provide a good segue into the theme of the Inkshed 14 conference...

Another CASLL communiqué: References for providing help to students on how to do their collaborative writing assignments:

--> In response to Roberta Lee's request for information on providing help to students who are doing group writing projects, Richard Coe, Henry Hubert and Jamie MacKinnon supplied these references:

Anderson, Paul. (19xx), *Technical Writing: A Reader-Centred Approach*.

Coe, Rick. (1990). *Process, Form, and Substance*, Prentice-Hall, 2nd ed. Especially pp. 137-40, also pp. 48-49, 66, 71, 116, 142-44 (this last on constructive criticism).

Student Writing Groups (1988) , a video from Workshop Productions, Tacoma, Washington.

-->Here are three references and a few observations from Cathy Schryer:

Lanyi, Gabriel. *Managing Documentation Projects in an Imperfect World*. Columbus, Ohio: Battelle Press, 1994.

This is a real techne book—written by a tech com professional describing the way he manages complex projects. It's useful because many of the techniques could be imported directly into the class room i.e., actually teaching students how to set up and manage their own projects.

It's a cold, hard book in some ways because it also makes a case for contracting out projects—but it also articulates the other point of view as well—an argument for developing expertise within an organization. Project management, by the way, is becoming increasingly important in this world of contracting out.

Lay, Mary M. and William M. Karis. Eds, *Collaborative Writing in Industry: Investigation in Theory and Practice*. Amityville, NY: 1994.

This collection provides some good information about the ways documents are produced in organization. It's useful for convincing students that they need to learn to work in groups and respond to external critique. It also has some useful classroom applications.

Forman, Janis, ed. *New Visions of Collaborative Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton Cook, 1992.

This is an interesting cross over collection of articles between people in composition and people in tech comm. Again a research orientation.

Other observations—most of the recent tech comm text books have extensive sections on project management—not only the necessity of group work, but also some good management tools i.e., progress charts etc.

None of this means, however, that group projects are easy or unproblematic. I use them a lot and have learned a lot mostly by means of some ghastly failures and some successes as well.

If people want to continue this conversation talking about the things that seem to work vs. the ghastly failures, please use the reply button. [In hard-copy, just send your ideas to the Inkshed editors and we'll circulate them in the next newsletter.]

--> And Amanda Goldrick-Jones adds this reference:

JoAnn T. Hackos has written a book called *Managing Your Documentation Projects*. (Wiley Technical Comm. Library, 1994). It stresses publications project management and, thus, incorporates considerable discussion about teamwork as part of the process. Its target readers are clearly professionals—management and tech. writers—rather than students, but aspects of it could probably be incorporated into an advanced tech/pro comm course.