

Inkshed

A Canadian newsletter devoted to writing and reading theory and practice.
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This newsletter is offered to all educators in Canada interested in processes and pedagogies relating to language, language acquisition, and language use. A forum whose primary objective is to intensify the relationship between theory and practice, it serves both informative and polemical functions.  
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Editor

James A Reither

Director, Writing Programme
St. Thomas University
Fredericton, NB E3B 5G3

Fashion Editor

Russell A Hunt

English Department
St. Thomas University
Fredericton, NB E3B 5G3

Provincial Correspondents

Chris Bullock

English Department
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alta T6J 2E5

Richard M. Coe

English Department
Simon Fraser University
Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6

Murray J. Evans

English Department
University of Winnipeg
Winnipeg, Man R3B 2E9

Jean Chadwick

English Department
Memorial University
St. John's, Nfld A1C 5S7

Susan Drain

English Department
Mount Saint Vincent University
Halifax, NS B3M 2J6

Michael Moore

English Department
Wilfrid Laurier University
Waterloo, Ont N2L 3C5

Anthony Paré

Faculty of Education
McGill University
Montreal, PQ H3A 1Y2

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*It is ten to one . . . whether you have ever read the literary histories of past ages; ---if you have,---what terrible battles, 'yclept logomachies, have they occasioned and perpetuated with so much gall and ink-shed,---that a good natured man cannot read the accounts of them without tears in his eyes.*

Lawrence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, II.ii.

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Are We Throwing out the Baby with the Bathwater?

I want to respond to Douglas Brent's "Draft Editing in the Writing Centre" in *WSR/T&P* 2:5. The problems Brent sees facing a writing centre are real ones. As he points out, the growing consensus that helping students with actual writing is better than having them do exercises can indeed lure one into providing assistance with assignments. I question, however, the basis upon which he rejects such assistance.

Brent wants to view the work of the writing centre as separate from while supportive of the writing objectives of the rest of the university. That is, he rejects the possibility of helping students with existing course assignments on the grounds that such interaction should be the responsibility of the faculty who give those assignments. He is right, of course: it should be. But opting out as he does narrows his choices so severely that he can work only on what he calls "a series of assignments that call upon them [the students] to generate brief essays of various kinds." The problem with this approach, he admits, is that he loses the chance to work on varied writing assignments that are of immediate importance to the students. I would guess he finds himself in the bind he wants to avoid, that of emphasizing product---perhaps not so directly as he would by having the students do exercises, but emphasizing, nevertheless, the separation between what one is writing about and how one writes about it.

Those of us interested in understanding the writing process are realizing that learning to juggle the many constraints which writing demands is no mean task for any writer. Working in isolation defeats Brent's purpose. If we are to help students learn how to confront and deal with writing's constraints, we must engage them in writing that is current and relevant. To argue that such help can degenerate into "sanctioned plagiarism" is to comment on the teaching process and not on the concept of helping students with current assignments itself. Thus, rejecting the idea of helping students with their class writing assignments on that basis is to dump the baby with the bathwater. What Brent needs to consider, if he is to help students write better, is how to use what we intuitively believe would be helpful---which means discovering ways of doing that without violating our beliefs.

Let's look for a moment at how one might assist students using the route Brent rejects. While we might argue that faculty should provide the support for their own assignments, in my experience few faculty have thought about what they themselves do as writers or about how they might be able to help students with their writing. We know, however, that students are actually helped to become more successful writers through feedback on class assignments which they then use for subsequent redrafting of these pieces. It seems to me important to actually help students with their assignments, but with the knowledge and involvement of faculty concerned--an opportunity to invite them to learn to about the writing process too.

Judith Newman
Mount Saint Vincent University

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QUERY

Chris Bullock (University of Alberta) wonders if the 'Canadian Association for the Advanced Study of Writing and Reading' (CAASWAR) should try to put together an annual journal publishing not only articles on writing and reading written by Canadians, but also round-ups of research, news of program developments, and that kind of thing.

Chris points out that an annual publication of this kind--intended to complement and supplement *Inkshed*--would offer us a place to publish lengthier, more substantial articles but involving us in only minimal financial commitment.

He suggests modest subscription fees at two levels--regular and sustaining--and asks *Inkshed* readers to drop him a line to indicate (1) whether or not they think the idea is a good one, and (2) at what level they would support such a publication. Write to

Chris Bullock
English Department
University of Alberta
Edmonton, ALTA T6J 2E5

Out Among the Sentence Combiners

Russ Hunt and I attended the Second Miami University Conference on Sentence Combining and the Teaching of Writing, Oxford, Ohio, 21-22 October 1983. Also attending from Canadian universities were Ian Pringle, Stan Jones, and Jim Steele from Carleton University, and Stan Straw and a colleague from the University of Manitoba. (Our new contest: In one hundred words or less, tell why Canadian academics travel to conferences in pairs or small groups.)

Max Morenberg, Don Daiker, and Andrew Kerek--authors of *The Writer's Options: Combining to Composing* (Harper and Row, 1982)--put on the kind of conference that reminds us how thoroughly we can enjoy ourselves as we learn at such gatherings. For one thing, the conference was designed to ensure that conferees got to know one another quickly, and that they had plenty to talk about. All sessions--and the morning and noon meals--were held in one wing of the conference center, so we attended sessions together, we had between-session refreshments together, and we ate two meals a day together. The sessions were short--forty and fifty minutes; and the breaks between sessions were long--twenty minutes: we had time to follow up on questions and issues raised in the sessions we attended. Max, Don, and Andy also set a good balance of working sessions to social activities. Thursday and Friday evenings we broke into small groups for dinner in the local restaurants; and then on Saturday evening there was a party at Andy's for everyone who was still in town.

Perhaps more important, however, the conference was designed to ensure that conferees dealt directly and openly with questions relating to the efficacy and role of sentence combining in teaching language skills. Although there were unrecalcitrant, apologist sentence combiners there, the only closed issue seemed to be that sentence combining was a technique that seemed to have a good many actual and potential uses. True, many sessions aimed to present still more evidence that sentence combining works--"Sentence Combining: An Experiential Overview," "Sentence Combining as Play: Preparing for Insight," and "The Versatility of Sentence Combining"; William Strong's "How Sentence Combining Works"; and several sessions reporting research results on the effects of sentence combining instruction and practice (including Aviva Freedman and Ian Pringle's "Why Better?"). Others aimed to demonstrate still another use for sentence combining in the language classroom. There were, for example, seven sessions on sentence combining and teaching ESL, five sessions on heuristic uses of sentence combining, four sessions on using sentence combining in advanced composition courses, and (most interesting of all, I think) several sessions looking at the roles sentence combining might play in teaching reading (including a review by Stan Straw of "research literature on the effects of sentence-combining instruction and practice on [developmental] reading, and a demonstration by Russ Hunt of some ways sentence combining might help secondary and post-secondary students learn "the process of engaged, "literary" reading").

Also true, many of the people responsible for sentence combining and its popularity were there--John Mellon, William Strong, and Daiker, Kerek, and Morenberg, (the only "big guns" I can think of who were missing were Frank O'Hare and Kellogg Hunt). Still, not

everyone was an apologist: Joseph Williams and Rosemary Hake, for example, challenged the assumption of sentence combining that there is "a linear connection between syntactic and cognitive complexity"; and two of the conference headliners--Peter Elbow and Don Murray--demonstrated (whether they meant to or not) the extents to which sentence combining is inappropriate and uncongenial to at least two obviously effective and popular approaches to the teaching of writing. Elbow and Murray, we might say, don't speak sentence combining.

In the end, I came away from this conference with three things. First, I came away with a great deal of respect for those who constitute what I have heard called "the sentence combining industry": these people aren't merely looking for tax shelters; they are still posing serious questions about the the extent to which sentence combining is an effective tool in teaching language abilities. Second, I came away feeling I had gained insights that would make me a better student and teacher of writing and reading. And third, I came away with a couple of ideas for further study, research, and writing of my own. (In fact, on the basis of discussions there and on the plane home, Russ and I have begun working together on an article about two paradigmatically different kinds of language we believe are identifiable in our discipline). In short, I learned some things, and I was stimulated to go home to learn more. I can't imagine a better comment on a conference than that.

James A. Reither
St. Thomas University

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Canadian Society for the History of Rhetoric

Subscribers to *Inkshed* may want to consider joining the *Canadian Society for the History of Rhetoric*, a group devoted to the study of the theory and practice of rhetoric in all periods and to the relationship of rhetoric to other aspects of the cultural context. Members receive the Society Newsletter and are invited to attend the annual meeting, which takes place during the Learned Societies' Conference each spring. The Society hopes to sponsor a Canadian lecture tour by an eminent rhetorician each year; if sufficient funds can be raised, next year's lecturer will be Wayne Booth.

For membership applications or additional information concerning the Society, contact

Andrea Lunsford
Department of English
University of British Columbia
Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1W5

Literature is Reading is Writing

Recent research into language and language learning processes has helped us realize that we don't actually understand enough about how reading and writing relate to one another. Articles like Carol Chomsky's "Write First, Read Later" (*Childhood Education*, 1971), and Uta Frith's "From Print to Meaning and from Print to Sound, or How to Read Without Knowing How to Spell" (*Visible Language*, 1978) have challenged the assumption, for instance, that reading naturally comes before writing, and suggested there's no clear or direct relationship between the kinds of texts one reads and the kinds one writes. The immediate, crucially important question--for all of us concerned with teaching either, at whatever level--may be stated this way: What, exactly, is the nature of the connection between writing and reading? How does one affect the other?

Among teachers, there is no lack of commonsense (and often tacitly-held) ideas about that connection. The "current-traditional paradigm"--after Richard Young, "Paradigms and Problems," in *Research in Composing*, 1978--obtaining among many members of English departments these days, for example, assumes a one-directional, causal connection between reading and writing: reading good texts causes--or is at least a major factor contributing to--good writing. Such a view is, of course, based on the unquestionable statistical correlation between people who read a lot of what we all tend to agree are "good" texts, and people who are good writers. One version of this theory tends to see this relationship as a matter of "imitation of models"; and those who hold it are most likely to prescribe the close reading of well-written essays as a central strategy in composition instruction.

Many literature teachers embrace a more adventurous argument (though recently I have seen it in print only in publisher's blurbs for anthologies), maintaining that what I have heard termed "traditional high literature" can act as a set of models in the same way--that is, that students will learn to write better by being exposed to examples of written language being handled well by Shakespeare and Pope and Wordsworth.

There are some serious problems with either version of this argument, however. One is that a convincing model of how such an influence might work has yet to be developed. Another might be pointed out by William of Ockham, who urged us always to seek the simplest hypothesis. He might suggest we look for a more elegant way of explaining the undoubted statistical association between readers of good texts and writers of good prose, which is probably that both phenomena are due to some other, external factor such as general language skills or attitudes toward language and linguistic culture.

Most important, though, is the empirical, pragmatic argument against what we might call the "models model": there is simply no evidence that it works. One reason it doesn't work is that it is based on an erroneous assumption about what reading is. This assumption, stated crudely, is that because texts determine readings, textual devices have essentially the same impact and influence on every reader, and, therefore, reading Milton or McPhee is at bottom the same process for every reader.

The consensus that such an assumption can't be accurate is spreading rapidly. Among the dramatic changes in our view of reading in the past few years, the one most important to college writing and literature teachers is the emergence of a new metaphor for the activity a reader is engaged in, and a new view of the nature and role of the contexts in which texts exist. Virtually unanimously, research in learning to read, in the psychology of reading, in the nature of the fluent reading process, and reader-response criticism has concluded that readers don't "accept" or merely "respond to" texts; that reading isn't passive but is, rather, as active a process as writing; and, most important in this context, that what two readers do with the same text will vary as much as what they might do in social interaction with the same person. Reading, in other words, is not governed by the text, but is rather what Kenneth Goodman ("Behind the Eye," 1967) calls a "psycholinguistic guessing game" that is actively played by readers.

Important support for, and extension of, this view of linguistic activity is offered by research in other areas of language learning. An excellent example is the study of infant language development and the origin of conversational patterns in early social relations. There has been a flood of research in this area--often called "developmental pragmatics"--in recent years. One way of characterizing its impact is to say that it strongly supports Vygotsky's early suggestion that language, even in its most "egocentric" forms (in Piagetian terms), is essentially social, both in origin and in fundamental character. A particularly cogent statement of this view is in his "Piaget's Theory of Child Language and Thought" (*Thought and Language*, 1962; originally published 1932), but the prototypical illustration of the argument appears in his account of the development of pointing in his essay "Internalization of Higher Psychological Functions" (*Mind in Society*, 1978). A child's early attempt to grasp, he says, becomes a communicative, protolinguistic, social gesture--a point, in other words--only through the response of another person. The "meaning" of the gesture is neither a product solely of the infant's intention (communicative "intention" in this sense, in fact, comes into existence through this process), nor does it exist by virtue of the mother's imputation of meaning to the motion. Meaning, in this case at least, is clearly a joint, mutual product, the result of a cooperation and sharing--a transaction--between two people.

If this metaphor is as powerful as recent research makes it appear to be, it becomes tempting to hypothesize that language is always a social dialectic between at least two people; no instance of language can ever be truly unilateral. If this is true, we have reason to refuse to consider either the text or the reader in isolation as separate and autonomous entities, and to believe that what a reader does, or can do, or *chooses* to do in his transaction with a text is at least as important in the language situation as any characteristic which we may think the text itself unilaterally "has" or exhibits. And what is most important, we would consider what that reader does, or can do, or chooses to do in his transaction with that text to be particularly crucial in language learning situations--which, as M. A. K. Halliday reminds us regularly, potentially include all situations where language is genuinely being used.

One of the most immediate implications this insight has for the traditional paradigm, in which we learn writing as a consequence of reading, is that there isn't much we can say about the consequences of reading because reading varies so much from one case to the

next. No text by itself, in other words, will determine that the reader will actually perform any particular act, or employ any particular skill. Depth of processing and levels of engagement vary from reader to reader, and, indeed, from reading to reading by the same reader. A text may invite a reader to engage himself with it in some particular active and whole-minded way, but many readers (and this is especially true of those who are also poor writers) simply don't know how to recognize, much less accept and act on, such invitations. It is vitally important to acknowledge, furthermore, that what we are dealing with here is not a problem we can solve by telling people to read more deeply, or by assigning texts which 'require' that sort of reading. Reading in such ways involves a sophisticated set of attitudes toward language and of linguistic and social skills and abilities, which must be patiently nurtured and helped to develop.

* { Thus, we cannot simply use texts to teach writing. We have to teach reading as well; or--perhaps a better way to say it--we have to find ways to help students learn how to read so they will be able to use reading to learn how to write. Probably the clearest way to think about the relationship is to use James Britton's (and, perhaps, Roland Barthe's) terms, and talk about learning to read "in a writerly way" and then about learning to write "in a readerly way". The one clear conclusion is that we can't expect writing to improve simply because we require reading. We must find ways to help readers read in a writerly way, so as to produce writers who write in a readerly way.

It is not difficult to describe the main characteristics of writerly reading; they are very close to the characteristics that Kenneth Goodman and Frank Smith identify as typical of any fluent reader. The writerly reader experiences reading as a temporal process, and is active in generating possible hypotheses and alternatives as he reads. He takes risks. He reads a word, a sentence, a paragraph, a text, as he would if he were writing it; he uses the structure he's building in his mind, and his knowledge of the codes within which the text is being constructed, as devices to anticipate what might be coming next and to reorganize what he's already read, both in the short and the long term. What this means is that his attention is predominantly constructive: he's looking not at things, but at relations between things. He doesn't attend to letters, for instance, but uses them to construct words; nor to words, but constructs connections between them which make up propositions and sentences; nor to propositions, either, but to the building of relationships between them which add up to a speech act.

His reading, in other words, operates primarily from the 'top' of the text 'down' to its smaller elements. That is, he continually hypothesizes not only about the next few words or sentences or paragraphs or arguments or events, but also, and more broadly, about what we can call--using a term drawn from Schank et al. (*Cognitive Science*, 1982)--the text's 'Point': the pragmatic, interpersonal, social purposes and intentions of the text's author. He then uses the hypotheses about those larger matters to look for ways of constructing meanings and intentions out of the smaller ones. He will not be conscious of doing all these things, of course, but they'll be part of what he's doing as he reads, just as they are part of what he does as he writes; and just as they are part of what we all do as we listen to each other talk. If a reader does not do these things, he will not learn much about writing from his reading.

My conclusion to all this is, in one sense, nothing more than a restatement of the same old conclusion: better readers, better writers. (It works the other way, too, of course.) But I think it's now a slightly different conclusion, with different consequences; and there's a new basis for believing it, because we have a new model of how it might work. Most important, we have the groundwork of an argument that helping students learn to write entails helping them learn to read--and that the more active, creative, engaged readers they are the better writers they are likely to be. The kinds of texts that allow for, and most richly reward, that kind of reading are, of course, literary texts. But until we begin finding ways to help students learn to read such texts in such ways, literature courses will continue to be largely irrelevant to the process of improving writing.

Russell A. Hunt
St. Thomas University

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Would anyone who attended the October 'Creating Word' conference at the University of Alberta review it for us?

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Composition and Literature: The Troubled Connection

You will find on the last page of this newsletter a "Call for Proposals" for our conference--*Composition and Literature: The Troubled Connection*. Please photocopy that page, circulate copies among your colleagues, and tack them up in strategic places. Although we will later send posters and announcements to various places and publications, for the time being this call for proposals will not be published elsewhere.

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*"... with no bloodshed . . . but with immense beershed and inkshed."*

Thomas Carlyle, 1850. (O.E.D.)

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A Call for Proposals

Composition and Literature: The Troubled Connection

A Working Conference Sponsored by

Inkshed

and

St. Thomas University

Fredericton, New Brunswick

Friday through Sunday, 17-19 August 1984

Six one-hour sessions + 'inksheddings'

Deadline for proposals: 1 February 1984

Limited to 40 registrations

Deadline for registration: 30 March 1984

Registration fee: \$85.00 (includes a midnight chowder, a lunch, a dinner and a party)

Kinds of proposals:

Most important, we will welcome proposals that promise to involve participants in active and constructive ways. That is, sessions should do more than present the products of inquiry; they should also engage participants in the processes of inquiry. (For instance, sessions on the history, the politics, the economics, the ethics, or the pedagogy of the relationship between composition and literature at secondary and post-secondary levels could begin with, or include, inquiry into those relationships at participants' own institutions--or into those relationships in their own secondary and post-secondary educations.) Although we will ask session leaders to make available some kind of text that can be distributed and studied before the conference sessions, we will expect those texts to be texts-in-process rather than publishable artifacts. (For ideas, see *WSR/TSP Newsletter* 2:5, pp. 6-8, and Kay Stewart's 'Suggestions...', in 2:4, pp. 6-7.)

In addition, we will welcome demonstrations of methods of, and approaches to, inquiry, --i.e., sessions that show participants how to conduct their own inquiries into the relationship between composition and literature.

We will welcome talks that present the contexts for inquiry, and that identify the tools and materials of inquiry. Who are the people to read, and what are the documents to read? What should researchers be looking for, and looking at? Where should they be looking?

We will welcome, in every case, proposals that address these questions and issues as they occur in the context of Canadian education, society, and culture.

Proposals should include name, address, phone numbers; title of proposed session, brief (200 words) description or abstract, brief description of method, and a statement of the aim or purpose of the session. Write to:

R. Hunt & J. Reither
The Troubled Connection
St. Thomas University
Fredericton, N.B. E3B 5G3