

Inkshed

Newsletter of the Canadian Association for the Study of Writing and Reading
Volume 6, numbers 2 & 3. March & May 1987.

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The true center of value of a text, its most important meaning, is to be found in the community that it establishes with its reader. It is here that the author offers his reader a place to stand, a place from which he can observe and judge the characters and events of the world he creates, indeed the world itself. . . . all literature, fictional and nonfictional, necessarily has an ethical and political dimension, for it always entails the definition of at least two roles (writer and reader) and the establishment of a relationship between them that can be seen to have both political and ethical content. (17)

James Boyd White, *When Words Lose Their Meaning: Constitutions and Reconstitutions of Language, Character, and Community* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984).

Inkshed

6.2-3. March & May 1987

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Inkshed is published six times during the academic year, supported financially by St. Thomas University and the voluntary contributions of subscribers. As far as possible, its subscribers have free access to its pages. The following is a schedule of approximate submissions deadlines and publication dates:

15 January, for 1 February
1 March, for 15 March
15 April, for 1 May

1 September, for 15 September
15 October, for 1 November
1 December, for 15 December

A primary objective of this newsletter is to intensify relationships among research, theory, and practice relating to language, language acquisition, and language use—mainly (though by no means exclusively) at post-secondary levels. Striving to serve both informative and polemical functions, *Inkshed* publishes news, announcements, notices, reports and reviews (of articles, journals, books, textbooks, conferences, workshops); commentaries, discussions of events, issues, problems, and questions of concern to academics in Canada interested in writing and reading theory and practice.

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The great art of writing is the art of making people real to themselves with words.
Logan Pearsall Smith, *Afterthoughts*.

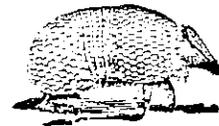
Editorial Inkshedding

/// Jim Reither

This double issue of *Inkshed* is my last as editor. I wish I could acknowledge in some appropriately public way all the debts I owe to the Inkshedders who have propped me up over the years I've edited this newsletter. But, of course, it's simply not possible. I owe too many too much. So I will say only this: Editing *Inkshed* has been a life-changing experience, if for no reason other than that I have met a great many good people who have given me a great deal. I've done things I would not have done except for *Inkshed*. I'll give no special thanks to special people: I've got to believe they know who they are. But if you've ever sent me a supporting note or a submission for publication, ever stopped in a hallway at a conference to say hello to me, ever included a note to me with your subscription form, ever given me a phone call; if you've ever mentioned or given *Inkshed* to a colleague or a student, ever cited *Inkshed* in a talk or an article or mentioned *Inkshed* in a conversation; if you've ever written to anyone in response to something he or she has published in *Inkshed*; ever, in the name of *Inkshed*, consciously or deliberately done *anything* to keep the conversation going—if you've ever done any of these things, all our professional lives have been enriched. The function of *Inkshed* is to give people a means to talk to one another across the 4,000 miles of our continent, and to the extent that we have talked to one another—not only in the pages of *Inkshed* but also at the Inkshed Working Conferences, at other conferences, in letters, in papers at conferences, in articles, and so on—the whole process has worked wonderfully, magically. I will miss being somewhere near the centre of one part of all this.

Now, just help keep the dialogue (and *Inkshed*) going. Should it stop, I will feel mighty lonely. I hate being lonely.

My summer address (after May 1st): C/O General Delivery, Aitkin, MN 56431 USA (218 / 927-7021). Send submissions—and other conversational turns—there.



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We residually speak of reading and interpreting the canon. But reading and interpreting how? With what tools, skills, questions, or goals? This is precisely the kind of fundamental question that is raised when we theorize our studies. The assumption behind the marginalization of theory is once again that our discipline is a given—that, for instance, reading is a natural, universally shared process, something inherent rather than something culturally produced. In fact it is the opposite: we read and interpret the way we do because of the questions we ask, because of the theoretical framework within which we ask them. We become strong readers only by virtue of our self-consciousness about the questions we ask. What various strands of poststructuralist theory have insisted on is that we can ask much more powerful questions about our reading experience than those afforded by the old paradigm—questions directed at the nature of textuality, the cognitive processes of reading, the connections between so-called canonical and noncanonical texts, between literature and the wide culture, between received readings of text and the ever-changing social formations in which they are read, about the interaction of text and reader, the connections between reading and other cultural practices and between the assumptions and the implications of reading.

Gary F. Waller, "A Powerful Silence: 'Theory' in the English Major,"
ADE Bulletin 85 (Winter 1986): 34.

Inkshedders at CCCC, Atlanta (19-21 March 1987)

Following are abridged versions of two of the papers presented at a panel session entitled "The Politics of Evaluation in Some Canadian Contexts." This very successful session, organized and chaired by Phyllis Artiss (Memorial University of Newfoundland), was sponsored by the Canadian Caucus.

Evaluation as Dialogical Praxis

/// Catherine Foy-Schryer

In his chapter on "Peasants and their Reading Texts" Freire specifically addresses evaluation in terms of teacher education and draws an important distinction between what he calls inspection and evaluation. Freire notes:

Through inspection educators just become objects of vigilance by a central organization. Through evaluation everyone is a subject along with the central organization in the act of criticism and establishing distance from the work . . . Evaluation is not an act by which educator A evaluates educator B: it's an act by which educators A and B together evaluate an experience, its development, and the obstacles one confronts along with any mistakes or errors. Thus evaluation has a dialectical character. (23)

At first it might appear as if Freire is distinguishing summative evaluation from formative evaluation or, in his terms, separating inspection from evaluation. However, on closer analysis it becomes clear that although Freire rejects the false objectivity of inspection or summative evaluation, his validation of what he calls 'evaluation' cannot be interpreted as support for formative evaluation as defined by Horvath. In Freire's terms, the evaluator cannot simply participate in the process with the student. This, according to Freire, would constitute passive acquiescence to a normative system of beliefs. Rather, the evaluator together with the learner must actively join in evaluation as a 'critical act' and thus establish distance from the work or project under consideration. As Freire makes clear in other contexts, this act or praxis constitutes one of the central activities of education—the demystification of codes, codes which are inherently ideological.

Freire's view of evaluation can lead to practical applications for writing instructors. The following describes two writing projects designed to explore the notion that formative evaluation treated as the act of disclosing and critiquing normative systems of criteria can be valuable as both a heuristic for teaching writing and as an evaluation procedure.

As part of an effort to encourage a formative approach to evaluation and to promote writing across the curriculum, the following program was offered to the faculty of the University of Guelph. Faculty were informed that at their request a writing workshop would be conducted in their classroom. The workshop would be jointly designed by the workshop coordinator and the instructor and would derive its material from papers that had been already graded or annotated. Instructors and their Teaching Assistants were asked to participate actively in the workshop with their students.

During the academic year 1985-1986 about twenty-five workshops were conducted in disciplines ranging from history to wildlife biology, and were well received by both faculty and students. The model that guided the workshop designs reflected Freire's notion of evaluation. Working from already-graded drafts or papers, the coordinator identified the areas where the students obviously did not understand either formal conventions or discipline-specific ways of thinking. The coordinator, through contrastive analysis using the students' own work on dittos

and overheads, discussed in an open way with students, in the presence of the instructor, the strategies which did or did not work in a specific assignment. The coordinators's role was to objectify, in Freire's terms, the work—i.e., to disclose its socially constructed nature—but at the same time to subjectivize or validate the real problems students were experiencing in their attempts to master the ways of knowing of different disciplines.

To fully explore the value of using Freire's model, I will describe, in case study fashion, one of these sessions conducted with Dr. Brown's fifth-semester Wildlife Biology class. Dr. Brown believed in formative evaluation—so much so that he had divided the grade for the semester's research project into two grades: 30% for the draft and 70% for the final paper. Unfortunately, however, as was the custom in this course, virtually all of the students had failed the draft portion of the assignment. Most were either infuriated or discouraged by this experience.

On reading over the heavily annotated drafts, it became clear that many of these students knew the surface features of report writing but were truly bewildered by the deep structure ways of thinking embodied in the genre. For example, during a contrastive comparison of several Results and Discussion sections it became clear that many did not understand the logical distinction between the two sections. After all, several students argued, since for the purposes of this assignment the results had been statistically analyzed, were they not already interpreted? Why was a Discussion section even necessary? At this point the instructor and his Teaching Assistant joined in the debate and presented a clear rationale for the Discussion section. They were not interested in the computer results *per se* but in how those results related to or affected the problem at hand.

In the process of the discussion it also became evident that the students were struggling with the stylistic demands of the assignment. A comparison of two passages revealed, however, that writers were being rewarded for avoiding passive constructions and yet remaining objective. This led to a spirited discussion in which the whole problem of objectivity and subjectivity and their competing ideologies were discussed. The instructor admitted that he could accept the subjective voice in scientific discourse, but that many of his colleagues could not. Accordingly, he urged students to master the objective voice only as conventional usage. This section of the workshop ended with a discussion of techniques involved in writing objectively while avoiding the passive construction.

As an outsider playing a facilitator role together with the active participation of both instructors and students (and a good deal of tact and humour), it was fairly easy to deconstruct and open up to criticism ways of knowing and evaluating characteristic of different disciplines. It is much more difficult to turn this methodology toward one's own evaluation practices. It is, however, possible at least to attempt such an enterprise.

The following dialogical model—built on the work of Bleich; Fish; Flower; O'Hare; and other commentators (Bazerman; Carey; Comprone; Ede and Lunsford; Gere; Kroll; Mier; Mitchell and Taylor; and Peterson)—was applied to student drafts by both instructor and peer evaluators. A piece of paper with only the writer's and the evaluator's (i.e., reader's) names on it was attached to each draft. Evaluators did not write on the draft itself. Instead, they wrote on the blank paper, commenting on the draft using a simple number system—1 for the first comment, 2 for the second comment, etc.—which numbers were then placed in the margin of the draft. Evaluators attempted to record, as honestly, specifically, and helpfully as they could, what it was like to read the draft. Further, it was agreed that all comments would be clearly written without any use of abbreviations, and that readers (who were, of course, at this point writers) had to justify their comments. In other words, evaluators could not simply write down Awk or Rep or Red. They had to explain *why* or *how* the text affected them. Thus, the evaluation model, which I call the Reader Protocol model (see Flower, 1981, for

Writer Protocols) asks evaluators to attempt to articulate and clarify the often unspoken and unacknowledged criteria that is being applied to the text.

Several important benefits emerged from this experiment.

1. Evaluation became a dialogue between writers and readers, a process wherein reading and writing were viewed as co-generative activities.

2. The fact that commentators never wrote directly on the students' texts became an expression of a central pedagogical position—i.e., that the writer had authority over his or her text.

3. After each Reader Protocol session reader expectations became clearer. For example, during a persuasive writing assignment it became evident that I, as reader, wanted writers to discuss alternatives to their own positions. This then became an issue in the class, an issue I had to defend and rationalize by bringing in models of my own and others' writing in order to prove that this was, in fact, an effective strategy.

4. Finally, I became more aware of my own preconceptions. I began to see how discipline-affected many of my biases are. Like many writing teachers I am a product of English Studies—which is now a battleground of competing ideologies; New Critics vs. Deconstructionists, Current Traditionalists vs. New Rhetoricians. My Reader Protocols at least allowed me to render some of these biases less opaque, more open to question and thus more shareable with my students.

These case studies illustrate the role that a formative evaluator can play—the act or praxis of both dramatizing and criticizing the often unconscious criteria that we apply as readers to student texts. By doing this we can perhaps avoid the dehumanizing education Freire describes which produces students who might say:

Today at the university we learned that objectivity in science requires neutrality on the part of the scientist; we learned today that knowledge is pure, . . . and that the university is the site of this knowledge. . . . We learned today that reality is a given, that it is our scientific impartiality that allows us to describe it somewhat as it is. Since we have described it as it is, we don't have to investigate the principal reasons that would explain it as it is. (Freire 118)

In fact, Freire's notion of evaluation opens up the possibility that evaluation could be viewed as a dialectical process, a transactional event between students considered as readers and writers, an exploration of summative criteria as a formative process.

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The Threat of Mass Testing: How Do We Prepare?

/// Kenna Manos

In February 1983 the Nova Scotia provincial government established a Royal Commission on Post-Secondary Education. The three Commissioners had little by way of academic credentials or experience—one, for instance, was an actress; another was the president of a local dairy. They did, however, share long-standing affiliations with the Conservative Party, an important qualification in a province in which entire highway maintenance crews in various counties are sometimes replaced, after a changeover in the provincial government, by workers of more suitable political leanings.

During the three years before this Commission made its report, institutions across the province waited nervously. This was, after all, the province in which the faculty at the Atlantic Institute of Education (a \$6,000,000 open-access graduate program) awoke one morning to discover from the daily newspaper that their institution no longer existed.

The *Report* that eventually appeared, in mid-December 1985, was notable for its timidity, although there were the predictable recommendations for greater financial accountability, among which was a proposal to institute "a common test in the academic competencies" of English and mathematics as an admission requirement to all Nova Scotian universities. These exams were presented in an educational vacuum, with no mention of either the needs of students or the potential impact on curricula. Rather, the tests were presented as simple barriers to admission, whose sole purpose was to decrease the attrition rates at universities and hence to decrease the burden on the taxpayer of post-secondary education.

The Commission must have considered writing tests to be equivalent to I.Q. tests in order to offer this rationale for their recommended "tests of ability": "As opposed to knowledge, ability"—what this test would measure—is "dependent on the quality of the individual student" rather than on "the vagaries of teaching in different schools." By this model, writing proficiency was viewed as an innate ability, independent alike of learning, environment, knowledge, or background. The *Report* continued with a breezy suggestion that the university

'applicant's ability to read, write, and reason' could be measured in tests which would be 'reasonably easy to administer.'

When the *Report* was released, the Metro Halifax universities immediately set up a committee, chaired by the Dean of Arts and Sciences at Dalhousie University, to study the implementation of common entrance exams in English and mathematics. Susan Drain of Mount Saint Vincent University and I were selected as the 'writing people.'

With the example of the overnight closure of the Atlantic Institute of Education, as well as my previous experience with City Planning—where atrociously unsuitable buildings actually *do* get built unless opposition is swiftly mounted—I mistakenly concluded that compelling arguments had to be made immediately. My apprehension was fueled, too, by my recollection of the situation in Florida several years ago, where mass testing was suddenly instituted by legislative prerogative. Assuming that haste was essential, I made two basic tactical errors in the early committee meetings: I did not think I had sufficient time to marshal thorough documentation and I overestimated the knowledge of my fellow committee member. But I should have known better than to assume that haste was necessary. As long as a committee is seen to be working, precipitous action is less likely than, as a acquaintance put it, 'paralysis by analysis.'

When Susan Drain and I began by voicing our reservations about a mass admissions test, our opposition was initially viewed—despite our insistent clarifications—in a polarized fashion: if you don't support this test, you must be against any testing program and hence against accountability. A strategy which worked well for defusing this blunt polarization was provided by Rick Coe's suggestion to change the paradigm from 'to test or not to test' to 'for what, how, and when to test.' By changing the paradigm, we could raise questions about the best ways to test, the connection between testing and the curriculum, the possibility of diagnostic or placement tests, and considerations of other ways in which universities might address the 'literacy' problem.

Another useful slogan for producing thought about the potential destructiveness of policies undertaken in the name of cost-effectiveness was to raise the question of 'Cui bono?' Given the government's insistence on accountability, it's regrettably easy for administrators to come up with the panacea of mass testing and forget the importance of our ultimate accountability to our *students*—an accountability dramatically brought home to me in a comment at last year's 4 Cs when Sylvia Holliday, from Florida, quoted this plaintive appeal from an undergraduate: 'You've spent so much money testing us; I wish you'd spent it on teaching us.' A test which is not informed by teaching or considerations of students' needs, which is divorced from the curriculum, which is undertaken for the sole purpose of creating a barrier to admission, merely treats symptoms without providing solutions. In asking 'Cui bono?' we made the necessary step back to consider what we might be testing and why, rather than falling into the trap of premature discussion about the format of an exam.

But the early discussions of the exam format—a subject of keen interest for the other committee members—revealed another flaw in my initial operating assumptions. I assumed that my fellow committee members—university faculty all—had done some thinking about writing assessment and were more versed in the issues than they turned out to be. Their field was either mathematics or, in the case of the Assistant Dean (who served as committee secretary), restricted to teaching literature in a traditional English department. One mathematician suggested that writing could be tested by a multiple choice test of grammar and parts of speech, while the literature teacher suggested that the exam consist of a sight poem. I had not expected to have to start so far back. What was clear from their suggestions was how much background Susan and I had to provide to demonstrate that the issue was too complicated to be addressed with a single-shot province-wide admissions test.

So, we adopted the tactic of mailing out, every couple of weeks, a new batch of documents to our fellow committee members. Susan began by circulating her survey of writing proficiency testing in Canada. I followed up with copies of the 1978 NCTE Resolution on Testing. That was followed up by the Evaluation Policy prepared by Peter Evans and voted on by the CCTE in 1985. We passed out recent material on writing samples from the Educational Testing Service as well as Canadian commentary on "Student Evaluation Practices from the CCTE Newsletter. Next, we circulated Lee Odell's lengthy article on "Defining and Assessing Competence in Writing." With all this material, we were attempting not only to counteract the simplistic notion of an "easily administered test," but also to underline Peter Evans' contentions, in the CCTE Evaluation Policy, that it is essential to consider how large scale evaluation "can be conducted with the greatest benefit (and least harm) to those who should be the principal beneficiaries: the student[s] directly"; and that "design of the evaluation" must be "such that data can't be usefully related to program and to decisions leading to improved program design and pedagogy."

In shifting the discussion from the anecdotal reports of students' deficiencies which plagued our early meetings, we began raising questions about reliability and validity—useful words when you're addressing mathematicians. We stressed that considerations of reliability and validity depended on clarifying the rationale and function of the proposed entrance exams. We emphasized, too, that a testing program should serve teaching, and that tests which don't lead to diagnosis and feed into courses are repressive. We quoted from Simon Fraser University's response to Susan Drain's questionnaire that "an approach which punishes students for educational deficiencies over which they have had no control is not compatible with the philosophical values of a university." In underlining the complexity of the issues, it did us no harm to indulge in parenthetical conversations about, say, the relative merits of primary trait scoring and holistic systems.

As Rick Coe pointed out in a letter: "All of this, of course, complicates the issue (which sometimes leads the proponents of testing to decide that they don't really care enough to do the requisite work—in which case they may go home)." And they now seem to have done exactly that. Given the threat of a quarter of a million dollars being spent each year, in a time of severe financial cutbacks in all university programs, on a quick-fix solution in the name of financial accountability, Susan Drain and I are delighted to have convinced our committee that the implementation of such mass admissions exams would be at best ill-conceived at this time. But continued vigilance, as well as continued sharing of our experiences, is obviously essential. If the solely punitive approach of a barrier test is unacceptable, an approach which rejects that punishment while offering no positive suggestions is equally unacceptable. "In sum," as Peter Evans reminded us in *English Quarterly* almost two years ago, "the situation is very promising for our profession, despite all the 'back to basics,' 'what happened to skills?' clamour." But the situation is promising, Evans stresses, only if the profession continues to work and takes a "leadership role when the opportunity (or threat, if you prefer) of large-scale assessment comes along" (1985, p. 23).

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Call for Proposals

/// Susan Stevenson

Last month in Atlanta the CCCC Canadian Caucus resolved to sponsor yet another session at the March 1988 CCCC Annual Convention in St. Louis, Missouri. After this year's impressive session on "The Politics of Evaluation in Some Canadian Contexts," Inkshedders (new and old) met to set a theme and decided upon the working title "What's So Different about Teaching Writing in Canada?"

We arrived at this question through a discussion of the different profiles of Canadian and American post-secondary students. We realized that, while we share many concerns with our American counterparts, our situations often differ in significant ways. We listed a number of areas worth investigating, including basic writing, ESL, curriculum, objectives in teaching writing, and the history of composition. We also considered a number of distinguishing features such as bilingualism, multi-culturalism, provincial control of education, distance and northern education, and the resistance to teaching writing in Canadian universities.

If you plan to attend CCCC in St. Louis next March and would be interested in presenting a 15-20 minute presentation which addresses some aspect of this question, please send a 200-word abstract to

Susan Stevenson
3231 West 30th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V6L 1Z5
(604) 266-2728

Please include your institution and preferred mailing address and telephone number. Also indicate whether or not you have been on a CCCC program before.

Since proposals for CCCC 1988 must be in Urbana, Illinois, no later than June 1, 1987, we must have your proposal no later than May 18th, and preferably by May 8th (the Friday before the Fourth Annual Inkshed Working Conference begins in Winnipeg). We would also appreciate a note from anyone interested in serving as Associate Chair or Recorder for this session. If our session is accepted, participants will be officially notified in September.

If we get enough proposals to mount a session, this will be our third Canadian Caucus sponsored panel. Surely we should keep this good thing going. Several people left our CCCC meeting considering the possibility of proposing or of contacting others who might be interested; and there must be many out among the Inkshedders who could help us articulate what makes our situation different. Do send an abstract, or call me to talk about possibilities.

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. . . it is an illusion that discourse can ever be un-influenced by other texts and can fully originate from the self; yet this illusion perpetuates a current attitude toward scholarship—that is, the only valued thought is the originating thought.

Jim W. Corder and James S. Baumlin, "Lonesomeness in English Studies,"
ADE Bulletin 85 (Winter 1986): 38.

Doublespeak and English Studies

/// Rick Coe

WBR/TBP Newsletter. That was how Jim Reither first titled what we now know as *Inkshed*. The implicit terministic assertion was that writing & reading / theory & practice are one—that literature and composition should belong in one department, that literary criticism is a type of reading, that composition (perhaps even as it occurs in the traditional first-year university course) is a type of writing, and that principles and practicalities make most sense when not dichotomized.

Doublespeak, as Bill Lutz emphasizes, is not "bad writing." When then-U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig, testifying before a congressional committee about the murder of four U.S. churchwomen in El Salvador, said

I'd like to *suggest* to you that *some* of the investigations would *lead one to believe* that *perhaps* the vehicle that the nuns were riding in *may* have tried to run a roadblock, or *may accidentally have been perceived* to have been doing so, and there'd been an exchange of fire and then *perhaps* those who inflicted the casualties sought to cover it up. And this *could have been* at a very low level of both competence and motivation in the context of the issue itself. But the facts of this are not clear enough for anyone to draw a definitive conclusion. [Emphasis added.]

—he was abusing language with great skill. Definitely definitive conclusions are hard to come by, but the facts were clear enough (the women had been shot in the backs of their heads and three had been raped first) for almost anyone to draw a reasonable conclusion. By "exchange of fire," Haig said the next day, he had meant to suggest the possibility that Salvadoran soldiers had fired into the women's van from opposite sides of the road—and who could prove definitively that he was perjuring himself?

It takes considerable skill to rename a steel nut as a "hexiform rotatable surface compression unit" or a hammer as a "manually powered fastener-driving impact device." (It also takes something else if the purpose of the renaming is to charge the government an extraordinary price for these "units" and "devices.")

Doublespeak proliferates because it succeeds, because the doublespeakers get away with it. The doublespeakers are more skillful in their abuse of language than their audience is at reading. And the success of public doublespeak is an indication that much of the public does not read skillfully enough. Thus doublespeakers manage language to interfere with clear thinking and honest consideration of issues. The average person's reading ability, though perhaps superior to what it was thirty or fifty years ago (when school dropout rates were much higher), is not good enough. People are sufficiently fooled by public doublespeak so that many of their decisions (as voters, consumers, etc.) are made on the basis of false information.

Doublespeak should be a matter of direct professional concern to those of us whose discipline is reading and writing / theory and practice.

We should, therefore, interfere with the doublespeakers' success by improving the public's reading ability. In the short term, this means public education through the media, preferably the same media used by the doublespeakers. In the long term, this means education in the schools. It means modifying the curriculum to include *as part of reading* what is now called "critical reading" (and thus subordinated, defined as an optional extra). It means modifying the curriculum to include "defensive rhetoric" (i.e., how not to be fooled by someone else's rhetoric) as part of our units on persuasion—or perhaps as part of the treatment of the type of "wordiness" known to our students as "BS-ing."

The Canadian Council of Teachers of English adopted a resolution last year which asserted that the English teachers of Canada have a 'special interest and responsibility in the preservation of language as a medium of thought and communication' and which created a CCTE Commission on Public Doublespeak.

But in a country as regional as Canada, such a Commission cannot really constitute itself until members from all the regions take it upon themselves to send examples of doublespeak (newspaper clippings, etc.) to the Commission. Such a Commission should have at least one member from each region; depending upon how you define 'region,' that means somewhere between five and eight volunteers.

For less public doublespeak in Canada, resolve, first, to be alert as you read your daily newspaper, listen to the radio, watch TV—and to get the worst examples in the mail to

Professor Rick Coe
CCTE Commission on Public Doublespeak
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For less public doublespeak in Canada, resolve, second, either to volunteer or to make sure someone else in your vicinity volunteers for the Commission. For more detailed instructions, see *English Quarterly* 19.3 (Fall 1986): 236-238 (and the Fall 1986 *CCTE Newsletter*, p. 8).

Research Project in Wordprocessing and Writing—An Update

In *Inkshed* 5.3 (6-7) Peter Myers and G. A. Tilly reported on a research project they had undertaken, entitled "The Influence of Wordprocessing on the Writing and Attitudes of Community College Students." What follows is an update on that report, prepared for presentation at the Atlanta CCCC.

Research Project on Wordprocessing and College English

Principal Investigators: Tony Tilly and Peter Myers

Location: Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology
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(416) 491-5050; NetNorth: Myers at Seneca

Purpose: To describe the influence of wordprocessing on the writing and attitudes of first-year college students.

Context: Students entering first year college are taught wordprocessing as a tool in writing in their initial English course. Students have access to machines for about 72 hours a week, and their instruction in English classes ranged from 4 hours in the semester to 15. We wish to describe a profile of these students and their attitudes to writing as they enter college and undergo changes. Important questions include their education background, their feelings about their competence in writing, native language, the methods they use in writing, the nature of their experience with writing until now, the kinds of writing they voluntarily undertake, the preferred atmosphere for writing, their expectations about using writing in college and at work, and so on.

Narrative: Ten faculty assisted in the study over the course of the fall semester 1986. In September we surveyed 622 first-semester students from 29 classes; of these, we interviewed 33. In December we surveyed 405. In September the students wrote a survey essay by hand, and in December one on the wordprocessor. In March 1987 we mailed a follow-up survey to 358 students who continued studies in the January semester.

Some Raw Data: September 1986 Profile: The students in the survey came from more than 40 college courses in 5 programme areas. More than 70% were between 18-20 years old; 53.3% were male; about 32% had Grade XIII English or equivalent; nearly 40% had a mother tongue other than English. About half had some experience with microcomputers; about 40% got this experience at school. 17% had a microcomputer at home; 58% thought they would have to use a computer to write with when they went to work (3.7% had already used a micro at work). Fewer than half indicated they were confident about their writing, but some 75% thought their writing adequate for the demands of both college and work. 73% answered 'no' to the question 'I like to write with people around me.' 80% thought they do their best writing at home; 32% liked to get help in writing from a friend, while another 32% liked to get help from a teacher—yet 74% thought the best advice they ever got about writing came from a teacher.

End of Semester Experiences, December 1986: 93% of those surveyed said they used wordprocessing for assignments in English; 24% used wordprocessing for personal writing. About one-third of those surveyed used wordprocessing for 1-10 hours in the semester; another third for 11-20 hours; 18% for 21-30 hours; and 13% for more than 30 hours. 87% rated learning to use the wordprocessing as easy or very easy; it took 74% of them less than 10 hours to learn to use it. 68% rated writing with a microcomputer as enjoyable—though only about half rated *composing* on a micro as enjoyable. Nearly 20% said they used wordprocessing for fun. 70% rated the wordprocessor as useful or very useful in reducing errors; 65% rated it useful or very useful in organizing; 86% useful or very useful in editing; about 50% rated it as useful or very useful in generally improving writing.

Continuation: This project is scheduled for completion by September 1987.

Note: This research was funded under contract by the Ministry of Education, Ontario. This report reflects the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the Ministry.



... only a theorized discipline can be an effective site for a general social critique—that is, a discipline actively engaged in self-criticism, a discipline that is a locus for struggle, a discipline that renews and revises its awareness of its history, a discipline that inquires into its different relations with other academic fields, and a discipline that examines its place in the social formation and is willing to adapt its writing practices to suit different social functions.

Cary Nelson, 'Against English: Theory and the Limits of the Discipline,' *ADE Bulletin* 85 (Winter 1986): 2.

Exemplary Inkshed Correspondence

To: Professor Jim Reither, Susan Stevenson.

At the Canadian Caucus meeting (Part II) we agreed to submit some questions to *Inkshed* to help us get a grip on the provisional subject for next year's Caucus panel at CCCC, namely: *What is distinctive about rhetoric/composition/the teaching of composition in Canada?* Here is my list of questions:

1. Have our schools taught writing in ways different from schools in the States, the U.K.? At the elementary level? The secondary level? The post-secondary level?
2. Have the writing textbooks widely used at different historical periods been similar to or different from textbooks used in the States, the U.K., during these periods? (Nan Johnson's research is clearly relevant to these questions.)
3. Do current composition textbooks and anthologies contain anything distinctive in approach, or are they mainly branch-plant versions of American texts?
4. Do important Canadian writers of nonfiction in different fields share an identifiable constellation of rhetorical strategies?
5. Do important Canadian writers of nonfiction in particular fields—e.g., literary criticism (Frye, Atwood), conservation (Mowat), theology (Grant)—have a distinctly different rhetoric from their colleagues in similar fields in the States, the U.K.?
6. Have distinctive Canadian ideologies (liberalism, CCF-ism, red Toryism) shaped distinctive rhetorics?
7. Should we be interested in developing a distinctive Canadian contribution in rhetoric / composition / the teaching of composition? Why?

I'd be willing to offer a paper on question #3 (textbooks) if it would be helpful to the panel.

Warm regards,

Chris Bullock

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'... knowledge is not storage but activity, and making sense of it will be very impoverished if this involves looking for only one account of it, the so-called 'literal meaning,' at the expense of all the other 'potential' meanings' (85).

Brian V. Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984. Cited in Lawrence Poston, 'Putting Literacy at the Center,' *ADE Bulletin* 85 (Winter 1986): 17.