

Inkshed

Newsletter of the Canadian Association

for the Study of Writing and Reading

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

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COMMUNICATION: A MAJOR ISSUE IN THE STUDY AND TEACHING
OF READING AND WRITING IN CANADA

/// Nancy Carlman

In a way it seems ungenerous to raise communication as a major issue under the auspices of an association which has gone a long way toward making good communication possible. However, I think we have further to go.

My concern is that our lines of communication are restricted in two ways:

Lack of Communication among Interest Groups

Many of us read and write for journals within our particular interest areas (reading, writing, speech, language arts, language, literature, literacy, linguistics, English as a Second Language, French, communication, business and technical writing, teacher education) but do not read enough from other, related areas to know what is going on. The best example I can think of is that of "discourse analysis." Reading people use it in one way: they analyze discourse to see how readable it is for certain types and levels of students, another way of looking at readability. Writing people look at it in a different way: they analyze the written discourse of students to see what structures, vocabulary, and punctuation conventions they use. These two uses of "discourse analysis" are both valid and valuable. The same structural, vocabulary, or punctuation mismatches that make published text difficult to read also cause communication blocks for readers of student prose. We do not see that what is a reading problem for one person is often caused by a writing problem of another. Therefore, not only do conversations between reading and writing people (when they occur at all) sound a bit like the old Abbott and Costello "Who's on first?" dialogue, but also the "conversants" are unable to exchange ideas and learn from each other because they often do not understand the terminology used or the contexts from which each is speaking.

Lack of Communication among Levels of Education

Similar to the problem that people in different special interest areas do not have access to what's going on in other areas is the lack of communication among levels of education. Language Arts teachers do not understand what English teachers are doing and vice versa. (Elementary teachers teach reading but are uncertain about how to teach literature; high school teachers teach literature but feel insecure about teaching reading.) Instructors in colleges have little contact with either high school teachers or university professors. University professors complain about the teaching of English in high schools but make no effort to discuss the training of English teachers with neighbouring Faculties of Education. Theses and dissertations written for university English departments are often technical reports, but graduate students are discouraged from using readable report formats. Yet, all these teachers and instructors and professors are working in the same fields to help students learn what they want to know about reading and writing for their own purposes.

I wish I had a magic solution. If I had, I suspect this would not be a major issue. *Inkshed*, NCTE, and CCTE are partial solutions; however, the latter two have broken up into interest groups which, in the case of NCTE, are so large and influential that real communication within the whole organization is minimal. CCTE, of course, is not very large, but the same tendency to fragment is evident.

One way to improve communication across interest areas and levels of education might be to encourage authors of scholarly articles to write, in addition, summaries of their articles which could be read and understood by a broad audience, not just by the specialist who would read the full articles. These summaries should consider the implications of the research or theory for all levels and kinds of English teaching. For example, detailed analyses of the ways young children learn language certainly have implications for elementary school teachers and for teachers of English as a Second Language; but these teachers cannot and do not want to understand the terminology of linguistic analysis. In *Research in the Teaching of English*, Anne Haas Dyson reports on her investigation of young children's composing, but even the abstract and the conclusion are so densely written that no elementary teacher could glean from it the important implications for encouraging children's "ways of understanding their own experiences and of connecting with others." (Dyson 387) In a recent *English Quarterly*, Jane Ledwell Brown wrote a summary and implications of her study of business writing similar to what I envision. She ended the article with four points that apply to the teaching of writing at any level:

1. Create assignments that require students to communicate.
2. Give students the opportunity to write for multiple audiences, internal and external.
3. Help students become efficient writers.
4. Help students to write from a variety of information sources. (Brown 15-16)

The problem with this good list and the accompanying explanation is they appeared at the end of an article entitled, "Writing Practices in Management" and were subheaded, "Significance of the Study for Teaching Business Writing." Therefore, who but a teacher of business writing would have read either the article or the excellent summary and implications?

The general summaries and implications I envision would need to be distributed more widely, certainly, than the articles on which they are based. One way to do this is for CCTE to publish these summaries and implications, perhaps through an expanded newsletter. However there may be other, more effective solutions. That is why I have raised this communication issue.

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References

- Dyson, Anne Haas. Negotiating among multiple worlds: The space/time dimensions of young children's composing. Research in the Teaching of English, Vol. 22, No. 4, December 1988. 355-390.
- Brown, Jane Ledwell. A survey of writing practices in management. *English Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 1988. 7-18.

PRIORITIES FOR COMPOSING STUDIES; OR, WHAT I THINK YOU SHOULD DO WHILE I TAKE MY SUMMER VACATION

/// Rick Coe

Composition studies took a great leap forward in the 1980s with the (belated) realization that writing is a social as well as a psychological process--or, as I like to think of it, that writing is a bundle of processes: creative, cognitive, communicative and social. There are still disputes--increasingly nasty, as a matter of fact--about which strand to emphasize (or, more precisely, about which strand frames which). There is a major conflict between those who emphasize psychological approaches and those who emphasize social, essentially anthropological approaches. And a significant battle between the liberal and radical conceptions of writing as social process. (Not to mention the Australian war between the [Expressionist] process and genre approaches.) And these disputes matter, for they finally influence what happens to students in classrooms and elsewhere. So one priority is to work out which synthesis yields the best understanding, enables us best to help people write.

But basically I see this as a time of consolidation for composition studies. Some understanding of writing as social process will frame our understanding and our pedagogy. The paradigm (or pre-paradigm) has shifted. A major task--our biggest, if not our highest, priority--should be to work out the implications of this shift for each and every aspect of writing (and the development of writing abilities). For one of my favourite words--sublate--is relevant here. Everything we carry forward from the past must be reframed, re-formed--or else it will bring with it tacit contradictions, will undermine our explicit teachings.

And we will, inevitably, carry forward a great deal from the past. Academic writers will not cease using thesis paragraphs--but we must help them understand that structure in terms of the academic discourse community--just as, after a previous shift, we helped them understand it psycholinguistically, in terms of individual readers. Everything (and how we teach it) needs to be reconceived. Even commas with coordinating conjunctions. Even--or perhaps especially--freewriting.

There will also be changes--for one thing because women are an increasingly powerful part of various discourse communities. Feminist scholars, and others, will move their theses to page two, after a new kind of introduction; cf. Fran Davis in the last Inkshed, pp. 1-2. But the effects of such innovation will be undermined insofar as we fail to re-form what we conserve. (And remember, tongue in ear, what a fully serious publisher once told Marshall

McLuhan: to succeed an innovative new book must be 90% old hat.)

A 500 word essay. Due the day after Labour day, eh? Myself, I'm off to Australia (where it will be winter).

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MCGILL WRITING SEMINARS - 1989

Thurs. Feb. 23
3:00-4:30 p.m.
Rm. 436

Unresolved questions about writing
at the college level:
placement and beyond
Tom McKendy and Michael Tritt
(Marianopolis College)

Wed. March 1
12:00-1:30 p.m.
Rm. 437

Writing across the university curriculum
Mary Dean Lee (Management - McGill)
Jack Osler (Engineering - McGill)
William Watson (Economics - McGill)

Thurs. March 9
3:00-4:30 p.m.
Rm. 436

Writing and Knowing
James Reither (St. Thomas Univeristy)

Wed. March 15
12:00-1:30 p.m.
Rm. 437

Semantic manipulation in student revision
Robert Bracewell and Mary DeRemer
Judy Segal (University of Waterloo)

Thurs. March 30
3:00-4:30 p.m.
Rm. 437

Rhetoric and the goals
of a professional writing program
Judy Segal (University of Waterloo)

Wed. April 5
12:00-1:30 p.m.
Rm. 437

Writing in the world of work
Jane Brown and Carolyn Pittenger (McGill)
Anthony Paré (McGill)
Graham Smart (Bank of Canada)

All seminars will be held at the Faculty of Education, McGill University,
3700 McTavish, between Doctor Penfield and Pine Avenues.

Admission is free and open to all.
For further information call 398-6963/4528

SURRENDERING CONTROL

/// Patrick Dias

The issue I consider of central concern to teachers of reading and writing has to do with the gap between the real abilities of students as readers and writers and those abilities as they are displayed or enabled within classroom contexts. So the questions really are: What kinds of contexts promote the emergence and development of reading and writing competencies and are such contexts realizable within classrooms?

For a start, I might say that classroom contexts which promote writing and reading are primarily those contexts that assign authority to writers and readers; the trick is for teachers to step out of the way, to walk a fine line that allows them to be helpful without being directive. More often than not the kinds of help recommended in books on reading and on writing tend towards being overly directive, towards cultivating dependency. The recommended procedures cannot but leave students asking: Am I on the right path? am I following the right procedure? is this good enough?

Such questions assume that the right path exists and is known by the teacher. But right paths or right procedures are simply not there to be handed over by teachers to neophyte writers and readers. They evolve and are realized in exploration and in experiment, in frequent use. I am arguing that it is not only an attention to process that matters; process as it registers in most textbooks and in the wrong hands soon becomes reified. Processes, as they have been identified in the protocols of novice and expert readers or writers, certainly point to productive pedagogy; but they do not explain how successful readers or writers learned to read or write in the ways they do. I am sure that their learning, like the natural language learning of very young children, had much to do with supportive contexts, opportunities to test out for oneself, generally self-determined and consequential goals, and frequent and attentive feedback. Unfortunately, such notions of learning raise serious questions about the role of teachers and the place of content-based knowledge. Who dispenses and how? Or should we not ask: How do students appropriate knowledge and how do we assist? Who certifies or validates such knowledge? Or rather, how do students come to know that they know?

Asking such questions raises hackles and defenses. It invites 60s bashing, accusations of going soft and liberal and inviting disorder. Where small group work is proposed as a viable means to developing autonomy in reading and writing, the inevitable concern is that students who are bright and independent might be dragged down by the inept, lazy, and parasitic. If such a concern is turned aside, then the questions turn without fail to how one evaluates such learning. What does one choose to observe as signs of learning? How does one sort out who has done what and learned what in the collaborative effort?

The problem with developing contexts that support autonomous learning is that institutions and often, students, are inhospitable to the changes implied by such goals. Gains often register only as "I am having fun; but I am not sure I am learning a great deal." Moreover such gains are not easily testable in the short run. Unless students become committed to the goals and procedures implied by such learning, these goals and procedures are easily subverted by superficial imitation and parodies of their real intentions. Teachers often communicate an ambivalence which destroys any chance of success. Even committed teachers are unaware of the contradictoriness of their own positions. I am reminded of a recent book I reviewed on the teaching of poetry

to children, where the author argues for helping students take control of their own learning and confidently asserts: "I tried to discern how much string to let out, so that they might soar freely like kites on their own--but without getting tangled in telephone wires"(G.A. Denman, When You've Made It Your Own: Teaching Poetry to Young People. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1988. p. 149). An unfortunate metaphor, perhaps, for a model of autonomous learning--concerned and caring, but quite telling in the reluctance to surrender control.

In response to the questions I raised in the opening paragraph, I have suggested that we reconsider the roles of teachers as authorities, as sole arbiters of what goes and what doesn't, as transmitters of content; that we consider involving students more fully in determining for themselves the goals and processes of their own learning. But there is a major hitch: eventually, what it is to learn will be determined by how learning and knowledge is defined in the practices of university teachers. Eventually, what matters as learning and teaching is what university teachers do. Schools and colleges exist primarily to serve the needs of universities. One of the most common excuses I have heard for teachers insisting on content knowledge, on memorization of received opinion, on teaching the conventions and norms of research papers and even the five-paragraph essay is that universities, rightly or wrongly, require students to know such things. Those of us who teach reading and writing in university need to establish more clearly what it is we value as learning and the teaching practices that are consonant with such learning.

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McGILL UNIVERSITY, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, announces a tenure-track position at the Assistant Professor level in the teaching of **Language Arts**. Applicants must have a Doctorate in Language Arts or a related field.

Applications are invited from candidates with a broad academic background, professional experience in the field of language arts, the ability to teach appropriate courses, advise and supervise students at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Candidates should be able and willing to conduct research in areas related to reading/writing/literacy. Ability to teach in French will be considered an asset.

Salary at the rank of Assistant Professor is commensurate with qualifications and experience.

Letters of application with curriculum vitae and the names and addresses of three referees should be sent to Dr. Lila F. Wolfe, Chair, Search Committee, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, 3700 McTavish Street, Montreal, Quebec, H3A 1Y2. Deadline for applications is April 1, 1989, or until the position is filled.

In accordance with Canadian Immigration requirements, this advertisement is directed to Canadian citizens and permanent residents.

Perhaps the major issue for the study and teaching of writing in Canada is the implicit definition of writing as a skill that can be mastered--a kind of basal literacy that all students should have. The Canadian educational system is general believes that students should have mastered effective writing at the elementary and secondary school levels so that when they reach university or community college, they can use these skills to do important work, which in English usually means reading and explicating literature. In other disciplines, the important work of writing amounts to mastering the forms of, for example, lab reports or book reviews. In other disciplines, this writing is seen as a record of intellectual activity, not as a means of furthering intellectual thought.

Writing is more than "handwriting" or "penmanship," as it was seen in the early nineteenth century. It is better seen as learning, exploring, and thinking, not merely recording or transcribing thoughts composed entirely in our heads, previous to committing them to paper. As current composition theory tells us, writing is a recursive activity. Ann Berthoff, in The Making of Meaning, defines writing as "a nonlinear, dialectical process in which the writer continually circles back, reviewing and rewriting." And creative writers, such as Robertson Davies, support this view: "I do not write in my spare time, I write all the time: whatever I may be doing, the literary aspect of my mind is fully at work... I am busily observing, shaping, rejecting, and undergoing a wide variety of feelings that are the essential material of writing."

If we accept the view of writing as learning and exploration, we cannot help but notice that in universities, colleges and high schools, written products are evaluated; the process of writing, or exploring ideas, is either not evaluated or not allowed to happen because opportunities to rewrite papers are denied, except as last-ditch efforts to avoid failure. Writing is recursive, but most courses don't reflect this knowledge in their assignments or evaluations.

In a larger context, defining writing as skill prevents curriculum change on a large scale. Writing courses in Ontario have become a sort of political hot potato with the universities using proficiency exams to embarrass the secondary school system into teaching writing courses at the Ontario Academic Credit level (Grade 13). At McMaster University in Hamilton, one such exam produced results showing that half the students who took the exam failed. What was McMaster's response to the problem they demonstrated? They screamed, ranted and raved at the high schools. At the time, McMaster offered only one course in writing: a half-semester creative writing seminar with a course limit of about 30 students. Clearly, the point of the test was not to identify a gap in the students' learning and provide effective instruction. McMaster's administrators seem to believe that students can and should learn the skills of writing at high school and that that "gap" can be "filled."

Although Nan Johnson claims that "introductory English courses...[offer] a synthesis of composition instruction and training in critical analysis" (College English 50 (1988): 861-873), our experience as students in these introductory English courses has been that there is little instruction in composition. In addition, students of ours who have graduated from high school and gone into first year English literature courses report that they have also

had little instruction in what an American educator would understand by the term "composition."

When we were undergraduates there actually was a course called "Introduction to Essay Writing" modelled on the freshman composition course at most American colleges and universities. We could have taken this course, had we not been actively discouraged by English department advisors. Students of English (literature) know how to write; what they don't know they can deduce from marginalia and terminal comments on literary essays. Changing the assumption that students of English literature know how to write before they enter university is the first step in what must become a publicity campaign within English departments first, and then throughout the university community, to recover the meaning of writing. We need to re-establish writing as "rhetoric," a term that includes invention/discovery and arrangement, not just style.

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CONFERENCE NOTICES

The National Testing Network in Writing, Dawson College and The City University of New York announce The Seventh Annual NTNW Conference on Writing Assessment from April 9-11, 1989, at the Sheraton Centre in Montreal, Quebec, Canada; this is the first time this conference has been held in Canada. There will be a strong international perspective. Among presenters are John Dixon, Peter Elbow, Peter Evans, Edward White, Alan Purves, Helen Schwartz and Leo Ruth. Topics to be explored in panels, workshops and forums include new models of writing assessment, classroom evaluation measures, assessment of writing across the curriculum, portfolio evaluation, the impact of testing on minority students and ESL students, research on writing assessment, certification of professional writing proficiency, the legal implications of writing assessment and the politics of writing assessment.

For more information, write:

Linda Shohet
Literacy Across the Curriculum
Dawson College
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ISSUE: THE INTERACTION BETWEEN PEOPLE AND TEXTS

/// Anthony Paré

A major issue for teachers of reading and writing, for all teachers really, is the interaction between people and texts. Simply put: we form texts and texts form us, and much of that forming takes place within human groups and relationships. We need to know more about how those relationships work, and we need to implement the best aspects of that reciprocity in our classrooms.

Despite the rapid proliferation of the word social in our textbooks and journals, our students continue to experience school texts quite differently than they do non-school texts, before and after graduation. But the issue is not one of training only. As a social theory of reading and writing suggests, texts shape our knowledge and our ways of knowing; the way we teach reading and writing determines how and what our students learn. In addition, our classroom approaches to reading and writing determine our students' relationship to texts (although they can unlearn what we have taught). However, inducting students into the discourse of academic communities is only part of the answer. We need to ask more questions about how texts operate in non-school circumstances, how people and texts support and shape each other outside of classrooms.

How do texts in the non-school world empower and oppress people? How do social structures embody (give form to) texts and, in turn, how do those texts affect human relationships? How does that reciprocity encourage/discourage participation in textual "conversations"? How does it promote growth in knowledge and language?

I am concerned here with an approach to reading and writing which does not drive a wedge between our students' school and non-school experiences. Consider this excerpt from a student's journal:

Often people tell me I should study literature if I like to read so much. What they don't understand is that my love for reading doesn't extend to writing about what I've read. I'd much rather go on to the next book than reflect on the last.

What division has been created in this student's mind which allows her to love reading but dislike literature? I remember a similar split in my own experience. Reading was what I did joyfully and obsessively when I was avoiding my literature homework. I suspect the same peculiar distinction exists in most students' minds, and for writing as well as reading. Writing in school doesn't carry the impact and importance of non-school writing: it doesn't

involve or affect other people, it doesn't change writers or readers, it occurs outside of relationships.

Away at school, people have passionate relationships with texts. They fight about them and for them and with them. Their interactions with texts have a liveliness, a commitment, seldom found in schools. School texts are dead things, without place in a vital relationship. Reading is autopsy and writing is monologue.

If school texts (written and read) are not located in the context of human relationships, human interaction, they remain inert, lifeless things. We must learn more about what charges non-school texts with life. We must have greater understanding of the interaction between people and texts, and we must bring that reciprocal relationship into the classroom.

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CONFERENCE NOTICES

Conference on College Composition and Communication.
Seattle, Washington, March 16-18

Canadian Caucus, 6:30-7:45 p.m. Thursday, March 16, Room 424.
Topic: Issues in the Study and Teaching of Reading and Writing in Canada.
Discussion based on the position papers in this issue, leading to the selection of the topic for the 1990 CCCC session sponsored by the Canadian Caucus.

1:45-3:00 p.m. Friday, March 17, Room 426. 115: Adult Learners, Adult Learning. Canadian Caucus-sponsored session. Panelists: Jim Bell, Mary-Louise Craven, Anne Hungerford. Chair, Leslie Sanders; Associate Chair, Peter Myers; Respondent, Patrick Dias.

Western College Reading and Learning Association.
Seattle, Washington, March 15-18. Stouffer Madison Hotel.
Conference Theme: "Collaboration, Communication, Creativity: Learning Assistance in the '90s." Featured speakers: Carol Tavris, social psychologist; Frank Smith, reading specialist.

TIME FOR THE REVOLUTION

/// James A. Reither

A decade or so ago Donald Murray said that writing teachers must "teach process, not product." Murray's magnetized admonition pulled together what seemed until then mere episodes of research and debate about the nature of writing and how writing should be taught. His pronouncement focused writing teachers' thinking about what they and their students should be talking about and doing in their classrooms. The result, without question, was a radical adjustment of the kinds of things that get talked about in the classrooms of serious writing teachers. At least in theory, the "old," "current-traditional," writing-as-product pedagogy was, appropriately, a teacher-centered, content-centered pedagogy. The teacher had information about written products that, if it could be passed on to them, students could use to improve their writing. At least in theory, the "new," writing-as-process pedagogy is, appropriately, a student-centered, doing-centered pedagogy which gets students writing (or, to be more precise, gets students prewriting, writing, and revising) so that teachers can intervene at stuck-points and teaching-points to help the students compose purposefully and effectively.

At least in theory, we're talking a revolution here--a political revolution, in which hierarchically-organized writing-product classrooms become transformed into horizontally-organized writing-process classrooms. In the old pedagogy, teachers were the authorities; they had knowledge which they passed on to their students. In the new pedagogy, students become the authorities (but over what?), while teachers become "coaches," "orchestrators," "facilitators."

As I say, at least in theory. Surely it's fair to ask: Is that really what happens in classrooms which have adopted a process approach to teaching writing? Looking at the matter from a post-secondary perspective, I have to say something's gotten lost somewhere along the line. What's gotten lost is the writing process.

It's perhaps true that writing teachers less often offer up rules to govern written products--rules about essay form, outlining, mechanics. Now enlightened, we instead offer up advice to guide the "writing process"--advice about our new formula: prewriting, writing, revising. The instructional focus may have shifted from finished product to invention (and perhaps even to revision), but, with few exceptions, our students continue to write contextlessly--arhetorically. They still write to demonstrate competence to teachers; they do not write because they have someone to write to about something that matters to them and readers. So all that's really

happened is that one set of rules has been substituted for another. And the saddest thing about it all is that the new rules are as false and misleading about actual writing processes as the old rules were about written products. The upshot is that the process approach to teaching writing has been trivialized, bastardized, into a non-process--and, to boot, into theoretical and practical nonsense.

As Sharon Crowley says, the problem is that,

if taken seriously, [process pedagogy] requires an enormous shift in the hierarchy of authority which has always existed in Western classroom, as hierarchy where teachers are conceived as repositories of knowledge which they transfer to students. However, in writing workshops, authoritative readings of students' work are supposedly the product of student-reader consensus, rather than teachers' assessment....

("Derrida, Deconstruction, and the Scene of Our Teaching." PRE/TEXT 8.3-4 [1987]: 171)

Is there anywhere evidence of any such "enormous shift" of power in writing classrooms? Are there signs that writing teachers have reorganized their classrooms to give students room to assume authority over their own knowing and writing? Where (except in the literature) do we find models of process pedagogy in which teachers, having gotten their students writing, intervene only at stuck-points and teaching-points? Where do we find models of process pedagogy that reveal students doing real writing (to real people, for real purposes, having real things to say), while teachers merely coach, orchestrate, facilitate?

A good idea came on down the pike, only to get its substance stripped at the classroom gate.

Now there's another good idea making the rounds. The notion of writing as social process is an even richer idea than writing as (cognitive) process. Thinking of writing as a social process tells us a whole lot more about what writing is, where it comes from, what its uses are, how and why we learn it. Thinking of writing as a social process helps us understand better how we relate to our world through writing--how, through writing, we make ourselves, others, and our world. Thinking about writing as social process reconstitutes writing as rhetoric, gives writing back to its origins and its history.

But even as this idea enlivens and enriches our conversation, we strip it of its essentials and its power as we bring it into our classrooms. Mainly we do this by taking a new set of rules (this time about disciplinary forms, formats, and conventions) and trying to lay on a few "social" activities (coauthority and team writing, peer

editing, writing groups)--all in the context of the same old current-traditional designs for writing (and other) courses. As if those worn-out course designs needed nothing more than a bit of embellishment to modernize and slick them up.

It really is time to abandon those old, contextless, arhetorical ways of teaching writing. How often does it have to be said that people do not learn to write by being told about writing or by talking about writing? The simple truth seems to be that people learn to write when they have a real motive for learning to write. For most people, that motive is bound up in situations where they're writing to real people about real things that matter--mainly, I have no doubt, in contexts where there's a whole lot of reading going on. (Most of what I have said here about writing and learning to write applies as well to reading and learning to read).

We need to do several things, all inextricably linked. First, we need to understand that (no matter what we teach) we are all teachers of writing and reading--of rhetoric. Second, we need to explore much more thoroughly than we have the truth that our classrooms are not just places we teach, they are places we learn. Finally, we need to be more courageously experimental in our teaching than most have been willing to be. The idea that writing is process (cognitive or social) means that "the students, not the teacher, must do the cognitive work" (Marilyn Wilson, "Critical Thinking: Repackaging or Revolution?" LA 65.6: 548). The idea that writing is process remains revolutionary, requiring revolutionary ways of thinking about and teaching writing. Those revolutionary ways must become the subject of our thinking, our teaching, and our ongoing conversation. No issue in the study and teaching of writing is more important than this.

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INKSHED VI FELLOWSHIPS

/// Program Co-Chairs

Unless our attendance estimates are way off, we should have some funds available to subsidize graduate students, unemployed, perhaps even underemployed people who want to attend Inkshed VI but can't afford the full fee. If you need such funds, write to the Inkshed Program Co-Chairs at the English Department, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C., V5A 1S6. Please be specific about how much you need and why. Include address, phone, etc.

PROCESS VS. GENRE: AUSTRALIAN-RULES MARTIAL ARTS
IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

/// Russ Hunt

Any English teacher visiting Australia in the late eighties will notice almost immediately--just after the eucalyptus trees, the dead wallabies along the road, and the fact that as the sun rises, it's going up at an angle to the left, toward the north--that there's a sense of apocalypse about English teaching at all levels there. Arguments--in print, at conferences, and over coffee--are conducted in strident and often passionately personal tones. Something depends on who wins: things are changing, and texts, curricula and even jobs hang in the balance.

Some of the specific subjects of these arguments, of course, are familiar: in North America we're used to hearing debates about explicit and direct instruction vs. discovery learning, about product vs. process models of instruction and evaluation, about literature-based vs. basal reader-based reading programmes, about "functional" literacy vs. a more "real" literacy, about literacy for a sophisticated elite vs. literacy designed to include the working classes and the unemployed classes, immigrants and minorities, women and blacks and dyslexics and hockey (in Australia, read "footy") players. But there's a different issue at centre stage in Australia. We've heard very little of it in North America, but it's one which causes tempers to flare around the hors d'oeuvre table at receptions and brings people stalking out of staffroom coffee breaks to explode in the hall.

As always, when tempers run high and tenure is at stake, positions become extreme. In caricature, the opposing sides are these:

(a) In this corner, the reigning champion, wearing warm fuzzy trunks, hailing from Canada, New Zealand and the American midwest, the Donald Graves/Ken Goodman/Frank Smith/Progressive Whole Language school. It argues that expressive writing rather than fill-in-the-blank exercises should dominate the curriculum, that pieces of writing should not be treated and evaluated as rootless texts, dissociated from their writers, but rather should be seen as one stage in a long process, and understood, taught, and evaluated as parts of that process. Readers, it insists, are meaning makers who use texts to make their own meanings. As teachers our concern should be for the individual's own growth rather than for arbitrary external standards and criteria.

(b) In this corner, the challenger, from Sydney University, wearing full body armor, the systemic linguistics/power genre school. It argues that the child-centred softheadedness of the reigning champ has disempowered and confused teachers and, by allowing minority and lower class students the "freedom" to continue making the bad choices their backgrounds have conditioned them to make, has perpetuated the schools' discrimination against the powerless. It asserts that children need to be firmly guided in their reading and especially their writing, that they need explicitly to be taught the characteristics of the various genres whose control will help them gain power in our society.

This doesn't immediately sound like a debate which has much relevance to the situation in North America. It obviously in some ways reflects a reaction against what many (not always partisans of the systemic linguistics school)

contend has been an overenthusiastic and uncritical embracing of whole language principles by Australian departments of education and school administrators (and at least a few teachers). Now such an embrace has not occurred (putting it mildly) in North America, even in Canada, even in Winnipeg or Nova Scotia. If you agreed that Whole Language in Australia had "gone too far" (I emphatically don't) you perhaps might see the need for some such "stiffening" or "structuring" of its basic ideas. But, as Ken Goodman (Goodman, Shannon, Freeman and Murphy, 1988) and Allan Cole (1988) have made clear, Canadian education, and even more that of the United States, are still in the paralyzing grip of the basal reader industry. A "back to the basics" reaction would be just as premature today as it ever was; if "basics" are what Frank Smith (1986) calls "drill 'n' kill," we've never left them.

Why, then, do I suggest that anyone in North America should be interested in all this? The question is answered most elegantly by a little book published by the Centre for Studies in Literary Education at Deakin University (Reid, 1987), in which not only are the two antithetical positions neatly outlined (by principals representing each corner), but an elegant and important synthesis proposed--one which has, I think, immediate and serious implications for teaching anywhere, under any circumstances.

The book, slender as it is (124 pages), manages not only to convey a respectable picture of the state of the debate, but also to suggest something of its vehemence. Reid, in his introduction, is about as testy as I've heard a referee get in such situations, in turn rebuking each side for hanging on in the clinches, hitting below the belt, etc. (He comments, for example, that Wayne Sawyer and Ken Watson, in the "Process" corner, "take a stand on an orthodoxy" in a way that allows their own paper to resemble the ones they attack; or that Jim Martin, Frances Christie, and Joan Rothery are rather "harsh" in attacking John Dixon for not including examples of student writing in his paper.) A reader who simply proceeds through the first six papers will come out with a fairly clear notion of what all the fuss is about--and will also see, I think, why Reid might have become impatient. The contributors (besides those I've mentioned, Frances Christie and Gunther Kress for the systematic linguistic position) cross swords on such issues as the status of fixed genres (such as reports) in school curricula (are there, for instance, "a small number" of such genres?) and the role of direct instruction in language learning (it might be argued on the one hand that genres will be learned--discovered--by students who are allowed freedom to explore language, or on the other that it is necessary to lay out generic requirements for student writing so that students can make informed choices among the limited number of alternatives available).

Let me offer one specific example of the sort of debate that occurs. Sawyer and Watson observe that one argument of their opponents is that "there is too much emphasis on narrative forms in primary school and that this is poor preparation for working in expository modes in secondary school, especially since such modes are characterized by an impersonal, neutral tone not provided for in most primary school narrative" (46), and contend that such a view ignores the evidence that language is a developmental continuum, and that the children learn when "allowed to use their own language rather than forced to conform to the particular language conventions of specific subject areas" (47). Martin, Christie, and Rothery, on the other hand, cite Christie's demonstration that "the most important factor controlling what children write is not their stage of development, but rather the way in which the teacher sets up the writing context" (63), and contend, with Kress, that to leave the

learning of more sophisticated forms to chance and the children is "to ask those least able to do so to carry that burden" (44). Thus the question is not really whether children should learn to write in adult ways, but whether they can be "trusted" to do so in the absence of a specific theory about what constitutes those "ways"--and a conscious instructional plan to create particular generic occasions.

All this is available elsewhere and in greater detail for those interested (as Reid points out, this book provides in its lists of references a basic bibliographical guide to the dispute, a sort of program to take along to the match), and, as I have said, is in detail only glancingly relevant to current debates in education in North America. (I should make clear that I consider this unfortunate: it's the sort of thing we ought to be arguing about, rather than endlessly belabouring questions of testing, evaluation and accountability.)

What makes the book particularly worth considering (and what made it exciting reading for me) is the way the last essay, by Anne Freadman of the University of Queensland, takes the two sides, tosses them up in the air and juggles them for a moment, and produces an entirely new position, one which I think might well make a difference to anyone teaching language at any level. In "Anyone for Tennis?" Freadman argues that it's a mistake to think of genres (both sides seem to do this) as categories of objects, like, say, species of trees, and shows why it's much more accurate, and more productive, to think of genre as a game, "consisting, minimally, of two texts in a dialogical relation" (97). Further, she points out that a game isn't equivalent to the rules that delimit it; it's what we do when we've accepted those rules and when we're acting inside the social conditions (what she calls the "ceremonies") which frame and enable the game. The "shots" which make up the game of tennis aren't equivalent to, or prescribed by, the rules of the game. The rules, she points out, aren't a recipe for shot-making, and no shot can exist as such without its proper, dialogic response, ("uptake," as it would be called in speech-act theory). We know the game is tennis because there are shots (recognizable as such because of the frame of the rules) being exchanged; in the same way, we recognize a genre because of the kinds of texts being exchanged. But by themselves, outside the context of the dialogue, the texts cannot (any more than the shots) have the qualities which define the genre. You can't play tennis with a wall; you can't have poetry when your reader is "receiving, but not returning, the ball, quite possibly caressing, it, and asking for the video replay immediately" to "contemplate in tranquillity the way it came" (93).

What Freadman does, in general, is to apply to the notion of the "kinds" of writing the same sorts of questions which semiotics have applied to the notion of a "linguistic system," and with the same result: the supposed "objects" (words, sentences, meanings, genres) with which we began vanish, and what we're left with is what Saussure called a system of differences. But she goes further, I think, and shows that it isn't "merely" a system of differences, nor merely arbitrary and indeterminate. Like Pierce, who offers the same alternative to Saussurean semiotics (and with whose work she is familiar), she argues that we do indeed, as it happens, actually succeed in playing tennis: the shots don't dissolve into unending self-reference or indeterminacy. But only, she implies, when we DO play it, not when we contemplate or analyze it. For me, the most powerful use of the tennis analogy is her assertion that you can only pretend to play in the classroom, and that won't work: "the use of simulation techniques in the ceremonial frame of 'straight' classroom practice subverts the simulated game: its stakes are no longer at stake; the stakes of

playing are those of the usual work-for-marks-and-teacher's-feedback game" (98).

What this suggests is that the whole question--do we (a) "teach" genres and help students "practice" them, or do we (b) hold the faith that they'll learn them by engaging in the writing process in the classroom--is misplaced. Neither can work without authentic experiences of genres, but genres can't exist in the classroom. It is not linguistic forms which constitute genre; it is the "place" in which the text is situated, the conventions with which we surround it and with which it surrounds itself, and the uptake which it entails--if, she stresses, "the 'receiver' is positioned in the right game" (121)--which determine its mode of existence.

"Learning to write," she says, "is learning to appropriate and occupy a place in relation to other texts, learning to ensure that the other chap will play the appropriate game with you, and learning to secure a useful uptake: the rules for playing, the rules of play, and the tricks of the trade." And thus the real question is whether we can ever create in our classrooms games in which the real stakes really are at stake. If we can, we can hope that students will learn to handle the rules and the tricks; if we can't, I think it makes little difference whether we have them memorize the rule book or wait for them to invent the game themselves. This idea, it seems to me, has relevance which goes well beyond the debate currently under way in Australia. It suggests another reason to take very seriously the sort of writing represented by inkshedding (Parkhill, 1988) and the sort of teaching represented by collaborative investigation (Hunt, Parkhill, Reither and Vipond, 1988; Reither and Vipond, in press; Hunt, 1987). To offer our students a situation in which their writing counts for something that matters to them, in which it's read for what it says rather than to be evaluated, in which writing and reading have authentic social consequences--in which their shots are part of an authentic game--is to offer them a chance to learn the rules and the tricks of what is arguably the most important game our society has to offer.

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WRITING IN THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

/// Alan Mason

In a recent issue of Inkshed, two how-they-teach-writing papers advance the proposition that social writing is better than solitary writing. Paré (1988) describes how the "value of interaction" in small group writing is transformed into better writing and Parkhill (1988) reveals how writing may be used to establish group coherence. I was struck by these descriptions because, while they both make appeals to the social side of writing, they are, from the point of view of sociality and of writing, wildly different:

Paré emphasizes the interaction of his students and argues that their dialogue produces a beneficial writing effect: "the finished group paper is better...than it would be for the majority of individual students." There is no reason to doubt Paré's judgment on the finished product, but the cause is open to question. What binds the students, that is, what makes them social as opposed to solitary actors, is their labour objective. They have been assigned to work together. In this context, the perceived improvement in the writing of the group-author over that of individuals may just as likely be due to the effect of putting two (or more) heads to the same task. Thus, the better writing that Paré perceives may be nothing more than the writing of better students. There is nothing remarkably social about that.

Parkhill stresses the social qualities of his students' writing and maintains that his class was formed, even transformed, into a group. But his students did not put their heads together to write. Rather, they exchanged their goods, which happened to be writing ("the swapping of inksheddings"). The process Parkhill describes is a near-perfect, textbook case of the sociology of exchange, except that "inksheddings" take the place of courtesies, women, dances, etc., as described by Mauss (1967) in one of the classic texts on exchange. Thus, the value of "inksheddings" is not that they are good to write, but that they are good to exchange (Cf. Lévi-Strauss).

This method with writing is concerned mainly with group formation: "What began as writing to one another about...methodology" culminated in common mind among the members of the class ("The result was, remarkably, a consensus.") Furthermore, the achievements of "inkshedding" are all socially solidary effects: "sharing presuppositions can help build trust in the learning group"; "inkshedding" on presuppositions is a process that "helps them cohere as a group, to do what the groupologists call maintaining the group." What makes this kind of writing so different, so much more sociable as compared with the writing of Paré's students, is the social formation that it effects. Writing is important in Parkhill's class not because there is anything better about it done socially but because it is a more acceptable good in the academic context than, let us say, some other material or spiritual good, such as wine or "witnessing", in forming a group. In any event, writing is not essential to the process.

There is yet another difference of sociability in these two kinds of writing. The group-author of Paré's class makes an appeal to others in the world based on the relationship established with an object of knowledge (x-ray machines in the particular example); what makes the group-author worthy of attention and the writing legitimate is measured by the penetration of the object written (consider the exchange concerning tungsten narrated in Paré's paper). The model for this kind of writing is the very familiar writing as a solitary act. Parkhill's students, on the other hand, performed the real "writing as a social act" in the sense intended by that phrase. They appealed to one another to share such "inner" matters as experience and presuppositions. Writing was their means of sharing.

What seems to me important about the sociality of writing is not that it is social, but what kind of social act one or another sort of writing is. Paré's example of group-authored writing is in the mold of the old solitary writing, even though it is performed by a (small) group. On the other hand, some social acts may employ writing, as in Parkhill's example, but, as in that particular case, writing may be merely a function of the setting, such as the university, where it is acceptable behavior.

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WRITE A LETTER TO DEANNE

/// Rick Coe

English Quarterly is endangered. Why? So what? Money is the root of all evil, eh? But only the root. There's more to this story. Read on, MacDuff (and you too MacDoo).

But first, a paragraph of his/herstory (as the case may be), to deal with the "So what?" (In truth, I drafted this paragraph as part of a grant request for Inkshed VI; feel free to skim, or to plagiarize for similar causes.)

Those of us in Canadian universities and colleges whose speciality is composition/rhetoric realized, just under a decade ago, that our connections ran mostly through the United States, that we came together most frequently as an informal Canadian caucus at composition conferences in the United States, that we communicated with each other about our research through U.S. publications, and so forth. In response to this realization, we--read "Jim Reither, with help from his friends, for he supplied the impetus"--created a Canadian newsletter, started an "occasional" working conference (which has, in fact, now met annually since 1984), and helped reorient and transform English Quarterly into a respected academic journal. This tripod--newsletter, journal and conference--now supports the primary cross-Canada community for those who study and teach writing in the universities, colleges and corporations. One leg of the tripod is now endangered.

The Canadian Council of Teachers of English (CCTE) is suffering a major budgetary crisis. Funds available equal roughly half of what the 1988-89 budget would have been. The bulk of CCTE's budget supports three publications: English Quarterly, the Canadian Journal of English Language Arts (CJELA), and the CCTE Newsletter. So the short term solution has been to halve the support for the two journals.

Fortunately, English Quarterly's intrepid editors had had the foresight to apply to SSHRC for just about enough money to handle the shortfall. Unfortunately, SSHRC noted that 84% of subscribers are schoolteachers or others in "applied fields", that English Quarterly's review process "explicitly requires the judgment of practising readers," and that the "best" articles carry an emphasis on the improvement of practice." Since SSHRC reserves its funds for "scholarly journals," English Quarterly did not "meet the criteria...with respect to the quality of content and service rendered..." Tell that to the politicians who are always being lobbied to support academic research because of its practical implications.

Meanwhile, the budgetary pressures are forcing CCTE to reexamine its priorities, as they say. Three publications

seem to be more that CCTE can afford. Some CCTE Executive members think CJELA, which is addressed to teachers (especially elementary school teachers), is just what CCTE should be publishing; and English Quarterly, they say, is filled with academic gobbledygook (which, once deciphered, turns out to be saying very little) and of no service to teachers. Tell that to SSHRC.

If I may summarize crudely--and then get on to current events--SSHRC says English Quarterly is not worthy of support because it is a teachers' magazine, not a scholarly journal. And a substantial faction of the CCTE Executive says English Quarterly is not worthy of support because it is a scholarly journal, hence of no use to teachers. Another faction (smaller, I believe) whispers in response that CJELA, though addressed to teachers, does not actually speak to many of CCTE's schoolteacher members. So CCTE commissions Deanne Bogdan to investigate, solicit opinions, and report back this May.

If you care about either of these journals and how they may be re-formed or re-paired or just pared, check out my title again. (You might check also whether you've let your CCTE membership lapse, a sin some Inkshedders are rumoured to have committed.)

Then write a letter to

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If you care about English Quarterly, you might also write a letter to Victor Froese and Stan Straw, the editors who made it the journal it is, for they are reexamining their options--and aren't sure they have any. (If you really get into it, perhaps you should write SSHRC, too--and whatever Minister is in charge of funding SSHRC.)

Myself, in addition to suspecting some kind of false dichotomy underlying this tempest, I think...--well, I'll save that for my letter to Deanne.

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