

# Inkshed

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for the Study of Writing and Reading  
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8.4 September 1989

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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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INKSHED VI: POWER, POLITICS, AND PEDAGOGY  
Bowen Island, B.C., May 15-17, 1989

Session 1: Patrick Dias (McGill) and Jim Reither (St. Thomas), "Teacher Ideologies, Texts, Power, and the Transfer of Power"

TEACHING READING AND WRITING: TEXTS, POWER, AND THE TRANSFER OF POWER  
(OR, WHAT IF THEY HAD A REVOLUTION AND NOBODY CAME?) /// James A. Reither

What I offer here is a kind of critique, but I do not offer solutions. I'm going to talk more about why than what to do. I plan to be exploratory and polemical rather than systematic and definitive, and my aim is not to lay down answers but to provoke consideration and conversation. This is the beginning, not the culmination, of what I would like to be a collaborative inquiry.

In abstract, my argument is that thoughtful teachers are caught in a distressing dilemma: While we yearn to redefine the relationship between us and our students, so that students, too, will find ways to use texts power-fully in their courses, our job is defined, in our culture and in our practice, in ways that do not afford such redefinition. In our culture and in our practice, our job is to assume and maintain control over students' texts, so that we tell students when, what, where, why, and how to read and write. As long as this is true, students will be unable to find a power source in and through texts.

Because, however, we are ourselves disempowered by the option-limiting Text --the structures, situations, and conventions: the symbolic environments--that define, govern, and (ironically) empower us, we find it almost impossible to redefine or relinquish our own roles as choosers, mediators, and evaluators of students' texts. Because, truly, schools are not places where students are empowered by reading and writing, students must get out of school--either by quitting or by graduating--if they are to assume power over and through texts.

If we and our students are going to change the way things are in school, we will have to find ways to rewrite or (more within the realm of the possible) subvert the Text that governs us, in ways that redefine teacher and student roles, so as to effect a partial transfer of power out of our hands and into students' hands. We and our students must rewrite the situations in which we relate, so that students can assume greater control over the when, what, where, why, and how of their reading and writing.

What if they had a revolution and nobody came?

Over the last few years, our professional literature has been telling us that we are in the midst of a revolutionary move from product to cognitive and social process. As Sharon Crowley tells us, however,

if taken seriously, [process pedagogy] requires an enormous shift in the hierarchy of authority which has always existed in Western classrooms, a hierarchy where teachers are conceived as repositories of knowledge which they transfer to students.... 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], p. 171.)

Similarly, Marilyn Wilson, in an article about critical thinking and reading (which I revise to include critical writing), says that

For real analysis, synthesis, and application to occur, the reader [and the writer] must be given the right of text creation growing out of the particular reading [and writing] situation. Such a restructuring of classroom relationships takes some of the traditional control from the teacher in order to give it to the students who must take more responsibility for their own learning. [Thus, the idea that reading and writing are cognitive and social processes means that] the students, not the teacher, must do the cognitive work, a revolutionary concept, given the past several decades of traditional classroom practices. ("Critical Thinking: Repackaging or Revolution?" *Language Arts* 65.6 [1988], p. 548.)

One barrier to the revolution is this: Text controls us, and we are finding it very difficult to get out from under that Text. To explain what I mean by this, I will talk about two sorts of Text (and, thus, two sorts of context): first, the Text (context) that is the "institution" of education; and second, the Text (context) that is an academic/scholarly discourse community--a discipline. (Blurred distinctions indeed!)

The first kind of Text, Institutional Text--the Text governing the places of our teaching--determines what we teach, when we teach, where we teach, how often we teach. (Stop for a moment to think about computers and why they have not found places in our classrooms.) Institutional Text also determines what it means "to teach"--which is (in our thinking and in our practice) to explain things, to organize others' learning, to change others, to help others get holds on their worlds, and so on.

But consider this: When we read, we read for ourselves--highlighting what we need or want, can use, agree with, find interesting. When our students read at our bidding, they read not for themselves, but for us--highlighting what they think we want them to remember for the exam. When we write, we write for ourselves, for our own purposes, saying what we think is important for us to say, in ways we hope will be appropriate and persuasive. When, however, our students write at our bidding, they write not for their own aims and uses, but for us--saying what they think we want them to say, in ways they think we want them to say it.

Accountability and evaluation are key components of this context where what counts are answers, not questions, solutions, not problems--where what counts is not processes, but products. As Glenda Bissex says,

One characteristic of schools...is an evaluative mind set that readily leads teachers to respond to individuals and situations--and also to themselves--in terms of praise or criticism, approval or disapproval: grading rather than understanding. (*Seeing for Ourselves: Case-Study Research by Teachers of Writing*, ed. Glenda L. Bissex and Richard H. Bullock [Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1987], p. 14.)

In this Institutional Text, where evaluation governs almost everything we do (and motivates almost everything done to us), grades are fetishized--by the institutions themselves, by teachers, and, *necessarily*, by students (who are at the bottom of this hierarchical heap).

And what do we evaluate? We evaluate *products*.

The second kind of Text, Academic or Scholarly--Disciplinary--Text, determines what and how we know and think. Disciplinary Text determines how we make meaning and what we make meaning about. This is the Text we teach. Talking about just one discipline, anthropology, Clifford Geertz reminds us that

However far from the groves of academe anthropologists seek out their subjects--a shelved beach in Polynesia, a charred plateau in Amazonia; Akobo, Meknes, Panther Burn--they write their accounts with the world of lecterns, libraries, blackboards, and seminars all about them. This is the world that produces anthropologists, that licenses them to do the kind of work they do, and within which the kind of work they do must find a place if it is to count as worth attention. (*Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* [Stanford: Stanford UP, 1988], pp. 129-130.)

This world that licenses academics "to do the kind of work they do" is constituted not just in Institutional Text but also in Disciplinary Text, which bestows upon us a "shared" Canon--major and minor texts by major and minor authors. The Canon sets what we can read (and teach)--or, at least, what we can admit to reading and teaching without being judged unprofessional (witness the scorn with which people who teach popular culture are treated). The Canon, by sanctioning certain texts and not others, determines what's within and without our purview as professionals and as teachers.

What the authors of that canon "author" are not mere words, but also (and much more important) ways of seeing, thinking, knowing, persuading, etc. When we become members of the discipline, we choose to "live by" these ways of seeing, thinking, knowing, persuading: we accept their dominion.

Disciplinary Text also provides us with "shared" disciplinary values. (These are not, in our Text, necessarily "bad" values--but they might well be inappropriate ones: they might work against instead of for us. If we seriously wish to change our relationships with students from hierarchical to horizontal ones, we must reflect on and evaluate the functions of these values in determining who we are and what we do.) We value, for example, uniformity: identification with the community (while, at the same time, we clearly value our own autonomy--if not that of our students). We value obeisance to convention: orderliness, formality. We value "rationality," and all that goes along with it: soundness of evidence; critical, analytic, and synthetic thinking. We value clarity, grace. And we value knowledgeable ability, thoroughness, accuracy; originality, surprise, the "interesting"--that which is "new," which "goes against" our assumption grounds (Murray Davis).

Disciplinary Text also provides "shared" disciplinary assumptions. (Again, these are not necessarily "bad" assumptions; but, because they can frustrate efforts to change the power structure of teachers' relationships with students from hierarchical to horizontal ones, we must not accept their dominion without question.) We assume, for instance, that courses we teach are self-contained

systems, with little or no reference to anything outside them. We assume that a central part of our job as teachers is to explain things to students, to make things accessible, comprehensible, understandable. We assume (despite all our protests to the contrary) that product, not process, ultimately matters. This must be the case, since it is product, not process, that we evaluate. Hear what William A. Covino, parodying ways we have made meaning, has to tell us:

In even the most enlightened composition class, a class blown by the winds of change through a "paradigm shift" into a student-centred, process-oriented environment replete with heuristics, ...workshopping, conferencing, and recursive revising, speculation and exploration remain subordinate to finishing... while classrooms and textbooks [now] give more time and attention to process (that is, "unfinished" writing), work-in-process does not count as writing, at least not as writing that counts. (*The Art of Wondering: A Revisionist Return to the History of Rhetoric* [Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 1988], pp. 128-129).

We value process, that is, only so long as it's heading toward finished product --which is what we really value. (In the end, we do value Knowing How [and most of us love watching people who know how], but almost all school attention is on Knowing That. Everyone--"people," administrators, teachers, students--seems to expect that Knowing How will somehow take care of itself if teachers and students attend to Knowing That.)

Finally, we assume that we must honour the notion of "coverage" (within time structures); and that we have things to teach our students, but they have nothing to teach us--which is probably the most unfortunate and destructive assumption that we, our students, and our culture make.

Disciplinary Text also provides "shared" questions afforded, questions blocked; problems afforded, problems blocked (so that being a member of a discipline involves knowing what works in that discipline). Disciplinary Text provides "shared" methodologies; "shared" standards and criteria for acceptable evidence; "shared" conventions governing texts: terminology, personae, forms, formats.

To sum up so far: These ways of thinking and doing...this Text... Do we write it? or does it write us? Except in small ways, we (individual teachers, administrators, students) do not write this Text. It writes us. Our behavior is shaped by the social, economic, political, ideological "ecologies" (Marilyn Cooper) within which we function. These institutional and disciplinary systems (of values, assumptions, conventions, language--of meaning-making ways)--these symbolic environments--shape not just what and how we teach; they also shape the ways our culture "thinks" about teaching and learning. Most important for readers of *Inkshed*, these learning systems stipulate the roles of reading and writing in teaching and learning.

Structures/Text/conventions govern us and therefore shape the ways we relate to--the ways we govern--our students. But there may be some room for hope. Edward E. Sampson: "The person is the mediated product of society and also, in acting, reproduces or potentially transforms that society. People can transform themselves by transforming the structures by which they are formed." ("The Deconstruction of the Self," in *Texts of Identity*, ed. John Shotter and Kenneth J. Gergen [London: Sage, 1989], p. 6.) I would say: People can transform

themselves only by transforming the structures by which they are formed. What we need to think about and act on, it seems, are ways of transforming the structures which form us.

By way of conclusion, then, some talk about consequence: Whatever classrooms *should* be, they are, sadly, adversarial arenas, and teacher-student relationships are adversarial relationships. It's us vs. them. All these (and other, similar) conventions, values, assumptions, conditions, constraints conspire to ensure that the relationship between teachers and students will be hierarchical and adversarial, as opposed to horizontal and cooperative. Our and our students' strategies are not so much for teaching and learning as for getting and maintaining control (i.e., for manipulating one another). Because our classrooms are adversarial arenas, students habitually lie to teachers and teachers lie to students. What happens in classrooms is mainly about power, not persuasion, not rhetoric.

As long as this is true, we will be unable to relinquish textual power to our students.

Evaluation is clearly at the centre of our dilemma, for, as Ursula K. LeGuin tells us, in *Always Coming Home*, "Like and different are quickening words, brooding and hatching. Better and worse are eggsucking words, they leave only the shell." The situation is such that teachers, because they must evaluate (because students must be held accountable), wield power simply by knowing more than their students. Well, so what? That's how the system works, eh? Can't do anything about that.... But, given the ways we now exercise the power our superior knowing gives us, and the bind that puts us in, perhaps we'd better try.

The problem is this: to the extent that we teachers use our knowledge to wield power--whether or not we do so willfully or unconsciously, deliberately or as a condition of our place in the system--we occupy the centre of our classrooms (we are at the centre of reading and writing) and cut students off from the centre. Knowledge really *is* power, and perhaps, if we are serious about wanting to enable some kind of transfer or sharing of power, we need to find ways to do something to counter that fact.

I think we need to forge new notions about what teaching is and how to relate to our students. We need, that is, a new grammar of teaching (new ideas about what's worth teaching) and a new ethics of teaching (new notions about what we have a right to teach).

I'll leave you with a couple of questions (or perhaps it's two versions of the same question). The first question is this: What values, assumptions, conventions--ways of making meaning--could you (or we) challenge, adjust, modify, subvert in ways that might allow students to assume greater ascendancy over the when, what, where, why, and how of their reading and writing? The second question is this: What kinds of knowing and what kinds of power can teachers (in the interests of the revolution) most readily relinquish and still be teachers, still "teach"?

(A slightly different version of this paper was presented on the opening evening of Inkshed VI, Bowen Island, B.C.--the wonderful working conference on "Power, Politics, and Pedagogy" organized by Rick Coe, Anne Hungerford, and Susan Stevenson. The conversation which occupied us for

the duration of that conference was a powerful one. I hope we can keep it going here in the pages of *Inkshed*, now including not just those fifty or so people in that parlor but also those who read this newsletter as well.)

St. Thomas University  
Fredericton, New Brunswick

### Collaborative Inkshedding 1

Starting with Jim's question, "What kinds of knowing and power can we relinquish and still be teachers?" we reached no consensus--but found at least three areas of contention within this group:

1. Are the same strategies appropriate for all students: gender differences; learning styles/modes (audio, visual, tactile, kinesthetic, intuitive, authority-based); previous experience/knowledge (socio-cultural); motivation; present context/situation. Can learning really be cooperative--students as teachers/teachers as students.

2. Are the same strategies appropriate for all subjects: do advanced courses in technical language require more direct teaching than other subjects?

3. Are the same strategies appropriate for all socio-cultural settings? Do we want independent thinkers or obedient workers? Who decides on the curriculum? How do you create an appropriate balance of power (an opportunity for acquiring power, a condition where someone can acquire/take power)? Creativity can get you an A or an F. Evaluation permeates all this.

Session 2: Stan Straw (Manitoba), "The (Conservative) Politics of Literacy";  
Suzanne de Castell (SFU), "Literacy as Disempowerment"

From a review of the history of the concern with literacy, Stan Straw concluded that "policy-makers and those who decide funding for literacy hold essentially conservative views about literacy and, in particular, on what 'functional illiteracy' is." Both the government and the public at large still conceive of literacy within transmission and translation models that view communication--"the shunting of information and knowledge from one source to another"--as the sole purpose of language, particularly written language. Their perception of meaning as "in" either the author or the text leads them to believe that "literacy is determinate, measurable, and deconceptualized." National literacy policy thus operates "as if literacy were a personal, private skill." However, literacy needs to be thought of "within the social contexts of literate behavior, that it, how [it] is needed and used."

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Suzanne deCastell distinguished between two possible meanings of "literate society": "a society whose cultural heritage is preserved in an accumulated corpus of literary texts" or "a society whose organization is everywhere textually mediated." The first definition focuses attention on literary texts; the second shifts the focus to documentary texts, those "forms of text essential to the operation of bureaucratic institutions." DeCastell went on to argue that

in both school and society, documentary texts have a more important role than literary texts, a role that is "largely disempowering." Yet the reading and writing of documentary texts is nowhere taught or even discussed.

## Individual Inksheddings 2

Ann Beer (McGill)

Both papers (Stan Straw, Suzanne de Castell) brought into focus ideas that I've been mulling over too--especially the question of the written word in relation to power and powerlessness. I was reminded of Claude Lévi-Strauss's point that in ancient societies slave-owning developed along with the written word (or symbol)--and the start of bureaucratic control. I was a little surprised (and discouraged) to hear in Suzanne's paper an assumption that in fact our students are still not being exposed to the techniques and implications of the documentary (non-literary) text. In the course I teach they certainly are, and in other teaching situations I've always tried to strike the balance, and show that there is no "innocent" published text--often we do comparisons of the same news item in different newspapers, or look in detail at the rhetorical techniques being used in a supposedly neutral or fact-based text. One of the most glaring examples is often the school history textbook--it's astonishing how blatantly these often distort and rework reality so that, for example, one culture's contribution is seen in more glowing, positive terms than another or (this is changing) native people, women, children, minority groups are not seen to participate in social and political change. It seems to me essential that our students become aware, in any course examining language and written material, of the "artifice" or deliberate rhetoric involved in the production of what we read--and what we see on tv, hear on radio, receive through the advertising media. A fascinating example to use is that of scientific language--a language which in our culture is treated almost like gospel truth. In a lab report the use of impersonal, supposedly "objective" language gives authority to the writer and tries to instill acceptance in the reader. But what if the scientist is fraudulent? It's easy to do a class activity with this. "The test tube was observed to contain a clear liquid" sounds great--but who observed it and how clear is clear? Language, once you start to look at it closely, simply doesn't allow for a kind of mathematical exactness. Students often seem really amazed at this idea (and it can make me feel, at times, as if I am destroying a kind of innocence) but it definitely begins to empower them as part of a writing course, in a quite specific way--they recognize the need for a personal, contextualised, "actualization" of the text under discussion, and other texts, rather than a passive acceptance.

P.S. I have done this not only with university-bound college students and university students but also with night-school part-timers, most of whom worked in factories or were on welfare. The effect on the latter group was, if anything, more exciting and dramatic than on the former group--it's the latter group who tended to be, as Suzanne said, the most "documented."

Nan Johnson (UBC)

Literary literacy is essentially "use"less. In its preoccupation with textuality, literary literacy encourages us to "forget" that all texts are authored and all texts read (composed) by readers who read them as if these texts meant something. Literary literacy encourages us to lull ourselves with the

fraud that texts do things--texts don't do things--people use texts to do things. We should not be teaching literary reading--we should be teaching awareness of discourse in its many forms. Teaching literary literacy--which assumes teaching "a" canon--just keeps perpetuating the essentially stupid idea that knowing how to interpret literary texts is worthwhile--when it isn't and when such an enterprise just distances us and our students from reality.

Cathy Schryer (Guelph)

I would like to address the issue of the politics involved in large-scale literacy assessments. It seems to me they appropriate responsibility for defining what literacy means. This means groups are absolved of the responsibility of clarifying their ways of speaking and writing for initiates. Large-scale literacy assessments are, in fact, self-fulfilling prophecies.

At the same time, working with a contextual definition of literacy is enormously difficult. It means giving up the notion that you know what literacy means in a given situation or discourse community. This stance can generate a great deal of useful information as one investigates the context. However, insiders to the discourse community are often unhappy about the ambiguity of this stance.

Session 3: Jane Ledwell-Brown, Carolyn Pittenger, M. Alayne Sullivan (McGill),  
"Power: A Shared Venture"

In this session on responding to student writing, Jane Ledwell-Brown first presented the results of a questionnaire on responses adult writers had received both at school and at work. Comments from teachers and employers were almost always critical and made on final versions; peers were somewhat more likely to look at drafts and make helpful suggestions. Carolyn Pittenger suggested strategies for improving responses in terms of the writer's role, reader's role, and teacher's role, and emphasized the importance of timing for effective feedback. Alayne Sullivan demonstrated and discussed the use of taped responses by both instructors and peers.

### Collaborative Inkshedding 3

We started by remarking on the difference between the two morning sessions: one was "big-picture" theoretical and the other was close-up practical, although informed by theoretical assumptions. But then we found ourselves concentrating on a similarity: both sessions (second half of first session and second session) appropriated a subject's literacy experience as disciplinary knowledge. Not knowing whether the presenters had permission for these re-transmissions, we speculated on the ethics of such appropriation, and discussed this central problem in both research and theory which incorporate formal or informal ethnographic means. At the same time, we recognized the value of stories in learning about human behaviour or in communicating our findings.

Session 4: Steve Whitmore, Research Report (studies of gender differences in writing styles); Deanne Bogdan (OISE), "Feminist Criticism Papers"; Susan Drain (Mount St. Vincent), "Margaret Gatty" (rhetorical issues in a popular Victorian author)

#### Individual Inksheddings 4

Jane Brown (McGill)

A diffused brainstorm about being female, I know that's what's expected! Or at least--that it's OK.

In our struggle to recognize that different cultures (male, female, legal, medical, etc.) discourse in different modes what are we seeking--an understanding of positions for sure. But trying to describe, analyse the female mode seems somewhat paradoxical. If the female mode is characterized by intuition, Rogerian argument, construction, synthesis, etc. OK--but the act of describing, analysing, etc. derives from what people say is the male rhetorical mode.

Are we female condemned to this feminine mode? Does the current interest in the feminine mode say now we privilege that mode--welcome to the club?

Michael Hoechsmann (Simon Fraser)

Re: "Opening" the Canon

I disagree with the dichotomization of gender differences presented in Steve's paper. However, I feel that his project can be integrated into an "inclusive" rhetoric.

My problem arises from the comment, "Well, if we're opening the canon, let's bring in Confucius, Chief Seattle, etc."

For me, one of the greatest lessons of feminism is the issue of authority in discourse. I am not "we." And you are not "you know what I mean."

Yes, there is a gender difference, a social and a historical difference. However, there is also a commonality of both a cultural and class nature. Feminism teaches us to discover ourselves, to locate ourselves subjectively in our work, home, and play. In the work context, we can work towards this by integrating feminist concerns into the teaching of writing.

I don't mean to say that there is a monological, monolithic feminist discourse. What I mean to say is that as a WASPish man I feel more comfortable trying to assimilate the work and thoughts of my peers, who happen to be women, into my thinking and teaching, than to integrate and teach the ideas of other cultures.

Feminism should not be viewed as "just" one of the new voices struggling to enter the canon. (This would lead to tokenism and marginalization.) Instead, I prefer to view feminism as the absent presence (or vice versa) in our culture.

Anyhow, my problem with Steve's talk is in its methodology (pseudoscientificity and dichotomization), not in its spirit. Also, trotting out Rogerian persuasion as the solution is a wee bit simplistic (particularly since it smacks of Ciceronian adversarial rhetoric).

Judy Segal (Waterloo)

I am reminded of something Carolyn said this morning, quoting a student--

that as writers we get to take readers where we want them to go. As readers (and as listeners with respect to speakers) we insist on the right to refuse to go there.

Kay Stewart (Alberta)

Much to think about. I found myself resisting the dichotomies of masculine-feminine psychology and rhetoric, suspicious of Steve's reliance upon "studies" that show differences, knowing how sloppy much of the social psychology research in this area has been. "Teaching" Rogerian rhetoric (or even native, Eastern, working class) is not the issue, it seems to me. The issue is becoming aware of our biases and at least trying not to impose them on our students unnecessarily--not to assert the active voice as always preferable when many students do most of their writing in the sciences, where the passive is still sometimes required, not to value the exploratory in principle but to penalize it in practice by always giving higher grades to the lucid commonplace than to the less polished, glorious "failure." We need to liberate male students from our expectations of "masculine rhetoric" as much as we need to liberate female students.

Session 5: Panel on "The Ethics of Effectiveness," introduced by William Boswell (McGill), respondents Bob Elton (Price-Waterhouse), Graham Smart (Bank of Canada), Anthony Paré (McGill)

#### Collaborative Inksheddings 5

##### Group A

Ethics is to politics what reform is to revolution. [another voice] Hence, teaching persuasion means more than the teaching of skills. Agonizing over ethics from the position of privilege--i.e. I have them, you don't--obscures the power politics in the teacher-student dyad--so then it seems that it is the form of the teaching and its content and intent that needs revisions. The ethics/persuasion problem may work itself out--would it? [another voice] One question seems to be: is ethics contextual or acontextual? (re the problem of the "ethics of business" on one level, the "ethics of the financial report" on a lower level, and "ethics in the teaching of effective writing" on a larger level, and ETHICS encompassing them all). Contextual or acontextual and within whose contexts?

[Another voice] The problem of ethics as a focus of discussion for teachers of composition is that it smacks of reformist politics. To teach ethics to accountants, for instance, is to help soften our [?] contradictions which will not disappear but will be more obscure. Progressive writing teachers should work towards social change, not towards helping accounts to assuage their social conscience. [another voice] When we teach how to persuade, therefore, we must at least expose the contradictions of this act. That is, we should be aware of the purposes our writing serves so that people can decide who to write for and for what aims.

##### Group B

We'd like to call attention to the likelihood that what all our sessions

together seem to be disclosing is our own self-delusion about the sort of power we tell ourselves we want to give away. For example, the Monday evening session revealed the possibility that we invite students to do what we would not or cannot do: to read and write out of alien agendas. The literacy session likewise showed that we only pretend to value function, competence, and readerliness, whereas in fact we set store by bricolage, impracticality, and writerliness. Perhaps the most poignant moment in the session on Responding to Student Writing was our allowing ourselves to laugh at the parody of ourselves that the novice responder displayed in our usual role, to mime our unrealized desire. The gender session mistakenly assumed that a feminization of the discipline is desirable and is not already the case; in fact, Oedipally, to want to feminize oneself is to hate the mother and love the father, hence to obliterate the feminine by destroying difference. Finally, all this came together in the Ethics session when we expressed such noble anxiety, even paranoia, about our repressed desire to make the teaching of writing and reading about ethics and not about function. Why don't we just admit it, and stop wring our wrists in public.

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A final comment from Nan Johnston (UBC), which was written on the first evening but seems appropriate here:

Teaching is not about power--it's about intimacy.

[I've tried to give a sense of issues arising out of sessions for which I had inksheddings rather than a summary of the conference as a whole. For this reason, many excellent sessions are not represented. Conference organizers made clear that the inksheddings would (or might) be put to some use in the newsletter; nevertheless, I decided not to publish unsigned individual inksheddings.--K.S.]

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CLASSROOM VS. REAL LIFE: A RESPONSE TO INKSHED 8:2      /// Coralie Bryant

I too thought Inkshed 8:2 was exceptional (see Barbara Roberts 8:3:12). I was struck, though, by the tendency of several writers to characterize the classroom and real life as entirely distinct realities, to dismiss the classroom as a place where only contextless writing occurs, simultaneously to ask the theoretical question whether it is possible to create meaningful contexts in the classroom for writing and to admonish teachers to create them. Anthony Paré writes:

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. (8:2:9-10)

And in the subsequent issue, responding to Allan Mason, he says:

Most school writing...is really just contextless writing: saying nothing to no one for no reason. (8:3:11)

I wonder if school writing is contextless; I have for some time taken that for granted but lately I am uncomfortable with that position. I wonder if it isn't always a matter of degree. Ideally, school is the place where students' lives and experiences intersect with academic and even nonacademic writing. It makes more sense to see school and other social contexts as arranged on some kind of continuum in terms of difficulty of finding or generating meaningful contexts in which to write or building in authentic social consequences.

I think we ought to be careful about saying that writing in school doesn't occur within relationships or affect others or change writers or have the importance of non-school writing. For many of our students, school is virtually the only environment where they write anything more than notes or phone messages; it is even for many the most comfortable and trusted and nourishing environment that they inhabit in a given day. And for most, as real as our work worlds are for us.

Hence it provides a marvelous opportunity for us to generate with them meaningful contexts for writing. In fact, authentic social consequences are practically handed to us in the form of peer response. And when they aren't, when we need to go outside the range of linguistic forms appropriate to that audience, elementary and secondary students are still children enough to love role-play and stimulation.

Finally, in many classrooms, the community and world are always a vital presence and available audience.

In reporting on an article by Australian Anne Freadman, Russ Hunt writes:

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.

'...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.'...And thus the real question is whether we can ever create in our classrooms games in which the real stakes really are at stake. (8:2:16-17, my underlines)

Are the conventional stakes in the classroom qualitatively different from many in the workplace? How different is selling an article to a newspaper or a story to CBC or receiving a promotion from receiving a mark for it and/or praise from a teacher and promotion to the next level? Aren't we overrating the authenticity of discourse and social consequences in the so-called real world? I have seen some students and teachers play the genre game very convincingly--and it seems very close to "gaming" if I understand the analogy. I emphatically don't want to support conventional (and I agree, rather empty) classroom writing contexts. But aren't we drawing rather sharp theoretical distinctions that overemphasize the artificiality of classrooms?

Although Patrick Dias puts it somewhat more gently, the same pessimism is implied by his central point:

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? (Dias 8:2:5-6)

Dias answers his first question by naming the kinds of things that create the sort of environment that promotes literacy. The second he leaves hanging. Presumably it would be answered by evidence that in fact such environments exist, evidence that there are teachers and students who have managed to negotiate a curriculum in which writing takes place in powerfully meaningful contexts--with (as Hunt says) authentic social consequences, stakes intrinsic to the "game." I think there is plenty of evidence that the answer to his question is yes.

For example, I watched a group of students do layout on a book of biographies they had written of their immigrant ancestors. They were busy matching the photo of a Filipino grandmother in a wedding dress, or a Vietnamese father newly arrived, or an Italian couple outside their first home, to the appropriate biographies. The widely-distributed book celebrated the school's 50th anniversary as well as more than 15 different cultural groups that made up the school's population. I thought to myself of summers spent with my tape recorder (as the students had), taping my aunts' stories about my great-grandmother from Norway, and wondered as I looked at the pride on their faces: were the social consequences any more powerful for me?

My own students, I recall, spent two or three months reading, interviewing and writing about the Sherbrook-McGregor Overpass that was proposed, and never built--thanks to efforts like theirs--in Winnipeg. The plan to build an overpass over the CPR tracks, in order to allow traffic from northern suburbs to flow more freely into the downtown area, would have required demolishing block upon block of single-family homes. Many of our students' homes lay directly in the path of the proposed overpass. The students studied aerial photos, invited speakers to the class, interviewed adults in the school and community and published these interviews, conducted debates and published them in the school newspaper, attended city council, wrote to city councillors and in most cases received replies. I see an increasing amount of this kind of activity in schools; what, here, is school writing and what non-school?

Another class of grade 8 students, after three weeks of saturation in the topic of acid rain, prepared a presentation which they gave to each class in the school's auditorium. They presented the facts through slides, talk and charts, displayed their projects, and answered questions from the audience. Some had written poems on acid rain which were published in the class's magazine.

The other day I visited students who were writing about kites. They had each designed and built one, and had written various pieces--a description of how they built it, an advertisement extolling its virtues as a product, a letter

to request a patent. The kids were on their way to the park to try to fly their kites for the first time. Apparently they had willingly suspended disbelief because the stakes in this "simulated game" seemed quite real enough.

Then I observed a class of Grade 12 students sharing in small groups their journal entries on "They are Hostile Nations" by Atwood, written following the previous day's discussion conducted on the Dias model. Many of the entries read were written with a good deal of passion concerning whether Atwood's subject was an intimate relationship or larger groups of people living in conflict or both, a controversy clearly begun in class the previous day. It was very clear that this small audience was trusted and their feedback important; I felt I was witnessing a meaningful context for writing, a vital discourse community.

Is there a clear distinction between the "classroom" and "reality" in these examples? Isn't this real discourse with pretty real social consequences? Or are the stakes, contexts artificial? I quite agree that the amount of contextless writing still occurring in school is unacceptable, but it is something else to argue that the institution prevents contextual writing or that the stakes are never intrinsic to the communication. I believe there could be few places better to help our students experience writing as a social act.

In the face of evident progress, I believe we have to guard against the use of quite unequivocal language in describing classroom theory and practice. There are good teachers of composition who are struggling all the time to create, or more properly to help students create, purposeful contexts for writing. You, and I, may wish there were more, but we need to celebrate those who are doing it, and by virtue of their having done it, cast aside a theory which suggests it can't be done. I know perfectly well that Paré, Dias and Hunt believe it can, and I think the contribution they are making to encourage and support collaboration and interaction in classrooms is tremendous.

Elmwood Resource Centre  
Winnipeg School Division #1

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Call for Proposals

INKSHED VII  
MARGINALIA AND OTHER RHETORICS  
May 12-14, 1990

Inkshed conference themes grow out of discussions at previous Inksheds as lines of thought spin out from the central web of talking and listening, reading and writing, and provoke the desire to explore further. Inkshed VI's theme of power, politics, and pedagogy inevitably meant a constant shift of focus between the powerful and the powerless, the politically privileged and the oppressed, the teacher and the taught--and all the shades and grades in between. It made sense, as we looked forward to our third conference on a Canadian seacoast, deliberately to turn our thoughts to reading and writing on the margins, to the defining and defying of borders, to other rhetorics and the rhetoric of otherness.

It will be necessary to consider our metaphors and definitions, to question the oppositions, for example, that shape much of our thinking, reading, and writing about otherness--inside, outside; central, peripheral; included,

excluded. Inkshed VI identified several strands of otherness for further exploration, but the suggestions are far from exhaustive. Recurring expressions include gender, border crossing, mapping (as in "mapping discourse communities"), other discourses, the definition, protection, and challenging of canons, alternative voices, other ways of knowing. It may be fruitful to look at ESL and at literacy in all its definitions, 1990 being the Year of Literacy and literacy being the CCTE conference theme.

As always, we call for presentations that involve participants actively and constructively, texts-in-process as well as publishable papers. We are looking for a variety of formats--contexts as well as texts, co-operative presentations, devil's advocacy, even risk-taking approaches. Formats which have worked well in the past include 10-minute informal talks on current research and interesting pedagogy, 20-minute papers or formal talks, and 45-minute workshops, interactive demonstrations or panel-provoked discussions, but we are open to all sorts of innovation and would like to be surprised by your ideas. All proposals should explain clearly what contribution they will make to the exploration of the conference's thematic web of boundaries, margins, or otherness in reading and writing. Proposers may also find themselves being invited to collaborate with one another or with the conference organizers to ensure a coherent, balanced programme. We will also make time available for Inkshedders to report briefly and informally to the Inkshed community on their current research, whether or not it is explicitly linked to the conference theme.

Proposals should include the name, address, and phone numbers of the chief proposer, and the names and addresses of any co-presenters; the title of the proposed presentation, a brief description or abstract (at least 200 words), a brief description of method and statement of aim or purpose. We intend to circulate material to registrants in advance of the conference, so please plan accordingly.

DEADLINE: December 11, 1989

SEND PROPOSALS TO: Susan Drain  
English Department  
Mount Saint Vincent University  
Halifax, NS B3M 2J6

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EDITORIAL INKSHEDDING

/// Kay Stewart

"Writing in the World of Work" will be the topic of the November issue. Sandra Mallett, a friend, colleague, and long-time *Inkshed* supporter, will be minding the store while I'm away. Please send material to her by November 1. That includes reviews, conference notices, and responses to previous contributors, as well as submissions on the special topic.

\* \* \* \* \*

Many participants at the CCCC Canadian Caucus meeting in March expressed frustration over the lack of jobs in composition and rhetoric and the provisional status of many writing programs. One participant suggested that a special issue of the newsletter would be a good forum for these concerns. If you would like to share your experiences or air your views, please send a piece (maximum 5 pages double-spaced) by January 15, 1990.

\* \* \* \* \*

Selected papers from the 1988 Inkshed Conference on Values and Evaluation have been published by Memorial University. To order a copy, send \$10 to Phyllis Artiss, Department of English, Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland, A1C 5S7. Congratulations on a handsome and stimulating volume.

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A reminder--subscriptions are for the academic year. Check your address label--if it doesn't indicate "89-90" (or later), please send your cheque with the subscription form on the last page.

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Research in progress (including theses) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ (attach sheet if necessary)

Material you would like to see in the newsletter: \_\_\_\_\_

Material you are willing to contribute:

Reviews \_\_\_\_\_ Selected bibliographies \_\_\_\_\_ Testing \_\_\_\_\_

Courses/programs \_\_\_\_\_ Polemical Notes \_\_\_\_\_ Pedagogical Notes \_\_\_\_\_

Conference Notes \_\_\_\_\_ Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_