

Inkshed

A Canadian newsletter devoted to writing and reading theory and practice.
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Every gardener needs a toolshed: there she winterdreams over seed catalogues, hefts and hones her digging, mulching, pruning tools. Every writer needs an inkshed: wordhoard, dreamplace, tool sharpener.

Susan Drain

Inkshed

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

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

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

Send materials and inquiries to

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Composition Teaching: Subverting Linear Structures

Like Anthony Paré ("It's a Funny Thing," *Inkshed* 3.3 [May 1984]: 8-9), I am disturbed by the tendency of composition texts to divide writing, if not into modes, then into discrete skills and strategies. Paré is, I think, quite justified in his fear that students will come away from such texts with bits and pieces but "no organic sense of what writing is or how to go about it" (9).

I feel, however, that the problem is not with this or that textbook, but with the general concept of teaching writing from a textbook, or in any other standardized fashion. If the cognitive theorists have taught us anything, it's that writing is an incredibly messy business. Flower and Hayes have produced what they claim is at least a preliminary model of what goes on inside a writer's head. Their diagrams remind me of an octopus eating a plate of spaghetti, and even at that they are clearly over-simplified. Writers do not seem to follow any neat stages, nor do they follow the same processes for each piece of writing they do. One writer at one time writing one particular piece may begin by considering his or her audience. Another, or the same writer when the moon is in a different phase, will consider audience later, or subconsciously, or at all points in the writing process, or not at all.

The process of writing may be complicated and recursive, but any standardized programme of instruction is likely to be appallingly linear. When discussing any large subject, one must start somewhere and divide the material somehow. However, as Paré notes, when the process of writing is described in bits and pieces, it's extremely difficult for students to relate the parts. One is reminded of the six blind men trying to describe an elephant.

I can't see any way of avoiding the process of division, but perhaps relating the pieces will be easier if we at least ensure each student gets the bits and pieces she most needs when she needs them. A textbook can be less rigid if the instructor guides the student to the sections he needs in order to deal with the problems he is encountering *now*, with this piece of writing, on this day. If she is having trouble with a piece of writing because her drafting sequence is too rigid, she can be directed to a section on drafting. If he is groping toward a problem-solution structure as his ideas unfold, he can be directed to explanations and examples of that structure. If she has trouble concluding, she can be directed toward a discussion of conclusions. He may still not be able immediately to relate all the bits and pieces to each other, to see the whole elephant at once, but at least he can relate them to himself, changing his own writing strategies incrementally and working gradually toward a co-ordinated system that works for him.

The question, of course, is this: If the instructor must take such a direct hand in directing the student, does he need a textbook at all? However carefully the instructor selects passages for the student to read, those passages will still be very generalized, for they must attempt to speak to all students who may need a certain type of instruction rather than to this student on this day. It may be argued that assigning text readings can save the instructor valuable time, but I am skeptical. Readings can be a useful adjunct to instruction, but because they must be so generalized, they can never replace enough of it to save much time.

As with texts, so with class discussion, although perhaps to a lesser extent. Large-group discussions are interesting, even exciting at times, and create rapport among class members and between the class and the instructor. Most important, they can provide a forum for ideas to write about. But, like a textbook chapter, a discussion of how *in general* people write, or ought to, is likely to bounce off students if they cannot relate it directly and immediately to pieces of writing they are at the time doing. I continue to use class discussion

for the above reasons, but I use it with the knowledge that most of the real work of learning to write gets done elsewhere.

Only in individual problem-solving sessions in which a student is helped to understand *this* piece of writing, to try this strategy at this particular time, to break this habit or forget this over-rigid rule, does a student really learn how to write. Life is always a compromise, and of course I can't see every student on every draft of every paper—at least not until I convince someone to institute a course that is entirely conference-based. But if I can offer at least one or two conferences to each student, and three or four to those having the most difficulty, then I feel I may have taught something. Nor do I have to sacrifice a large amount of time to hold these conferences. Instead of agonizing over a composition for thirty minutes, covering it with comments that will surely be unread or misunderstood, I mark it in ten and see the student for twenty. My days are full, but my nights are—well, not clear, but at least not haunted by infinite stacks of marking.

In short, I suggest subverting as much as possible the traditional class and the linear structures it encourages. Forget the textbook entirely, or recommend sections individually. Replace some of your detailed marking with individual conferences. Subvert some of the lecture time by using it for small-group work and peer-editing sessions to give students individual feedback beyond what you can provide. Use the essay anthology not as a source of models to imitate but as a mine of individual strategies to which individual students can be referred as needed. Don't just individualize grammar instruction: individualize everything you can get your hands on.

None of these suggestions is new, and there is not a composition teacher alive who does not use some sort of individual instruction to augment course material. But I suggest that our entire thinking needs to be turned inside out. The trappings of the traditional course—textbooks, lecture-discussions, written comments—may be appropriate for advanced composition students. For beginners, however, these methods of instruction must be treated as at best a means of augmenting individual instruction, not the other way around. Teaching the messy and recursive process of writing will always be an immensely difficult job, but linear structures by and large make matters worse. Time pressures and class sizes will always dictate a compromise, but even the most overloaded and overstructured composition course can be subverted.

Douglas Brent
University of Calgary

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Francis Bacon is frequently credited with 'proposing the covenant whose fulfillment we now seem to be living: 'Knowledge is power.' But what Bacon wrote was, rather, '*Nam et ipsa scientia potestas est,*' which is to say, 'In and of itself, knowledge is power.' The difference? He was not making . . . Mephistopheles' vulgar claim that knowledge facilitates power, that dominion over the world can be wrung from knowledge as a practical consequence. Bacon was asserting something that these days seems subtle: that knowledge is power in its own right. To know something—really know it, not merely know of it—is to think in a particular way and, necessarily, not to think in certain other ways.'

Horace Freeland Judson, 'Century of the Sciences,'
Science 84, 5.9 (November 1984): 42.

Good News: *Journal of Basic Writing*

Good news (from Andrea Lunsford [UBC]) for *JBW* readers: *The Journal of Basic Writing*, founded in 1975 by Mina Shaughnessy, has recently fallen on hard times, publishing only one issue in two years. Now Lynn Troyka writes with double-barrelled good news: the journal is being resurrected and revised, and Lynn will be taking over as the new editor. She reports that "we have been working our way through the subscriber list to update each person on the status of his or her description," but if you don't hear from *JBW* then write to her for a new subscription. Four issues are in place for 1985 and the first 1986 issue will feature articles by David Bartholomae, George Jensen and John Tiberio, Myra Kogen, Marilyn Sternglass, and others.

Lynn will be soliciting contributions as well as subscriptions, and inkshedders may well want to send articles to this journal. Lynn's address:

Journal of Basic Writing
166-25 Powells Cove Blvd
Beechhurst, Queens, NY 11357
U.S.A.

Reminder: *Inkshed* Subscription Form

As you know, I am revising *Inkshed's* subscribers' list. I ran a mailing list-subscription form in the November issue of the newsletter, and I'm running it again this issue (you'll find it on p. 5). Here's the deal: Those who wish to continue receiving *Inkshed* must fill out the form and return it to me. If, however, you no longer wish to receive the newsletter, simply ignore the form and I will remove your name from my mailing list.

This means that those who do not send a completed subscription form to me by mid-January will no longer receive *Inkshed*.

Again I say I'm merely trying to ensure that *Inkshed* will be mailed to people who actually want to receive and read it. We'll all be losers if even a single inkshedder is lost (Marion Blake, where are you?) because I had to go and try to get organized and someone out there isn't. Again I ask *all* who wish to subscribe to the newsletter to fill out and send the form, whether you're a charter subscriber or a recent subscriber who's received only an issue or two. And again I say that new subscribers are most welcome (we need to continue to build our community); I urge you to photocopy this issue--complete with subscription form--and pass it on to others.

Finally, finances. It costs a great deal to put out six issues a year of a newsletter such as *Inkshed*. St. Thomas University will continue subsidizing the costs of photocopying and mailing the newsletter, but they have asked for some relief from that burden; and, as well, there are costs for such things as paper, printer ribbons, mailing labels, computer maintenance, and software. If you'd be willing to help defray these costs, a small contribution (of, say, \$4.00 or \$5.00--cheques payable to *Inkshed*) would be much appreciated. (To those of you from whom I've already heard, many, many thanks.)

Jim Reither

Correspondences—A New Kind of "Journal"

Wendy Strachan has sent along a copy of the first issue (undated) of *Correspondences*. Edited by Ann Berthoff (University of Massachusetts/Boston) and published by Boynton/Cook, this innovative little publication bills itself as 'a broadsheet of continuing dialogue on the concerns of writing teachers seen in a philosophical perspective.'

Here are a couple of paragraphs from Berthoff's opening 'Dear Reader' letter:

We invite your support in a new venture, an occasional publication featuring in each issue a short [invited] essay, with a response [also invited], and correspondence [written by readers, vetted by the editor] about pieces which have previously appeared. Our aim is to develop philosophical perspectives on reading and writing, to facilitate the exchange of ideas and second thoughts, speculations and analyses that could make a difference in what we're all trying to do in our classes and in our professional lives. Theory and Practice will keep one another company: one of the three annual issues will feature a piece on course design, curriculum reform, or writing in the disciplines-- contributions to a pedagogy of knowing, ways of coming to see the English classroom as a philosophic laboratory.

and

We will not offer formal papers; rather, we hope to get the dialogue/- dialectic going by inventing a new genre, something between a monograph and a journal article, a form which can accommodate work-in-progress, partial formulations, writing as heuristic, as well as more nearly finished pieces, work that already exists, awaiting an attentive, tolerant audience. The comment and correspondence appearing in successive issues will build up a Thick Description of the philosophic perspectives we are trying out: *Correspondences* in its helical, dialectical plan of publication will itself represent the dynamic activity of critical and creative inquiry.

Those of you who know Berthoff's work will not be surprised to learn she will devote future issues of her broadside to 'Friere's pedagogy, a new look at Vygotsky's theory of concept formation, metaphysics and metaphor, dialectical notebooks, the core curriculum, listening and note taking.' We can also expect, presumably, discussions of I. A. Richards, C. S. Peirce, composing as forming.

Whatever else can be said about Ann Berthoff, this much is clear: She provokes and challenges us; she forces us to rethink, clarify, and fortify our own convictions--if only to define and defend, for ourselves, our disagreements with her. It's just not possible to remain passive when listening to or reading Ann Berthoff. And there's every reason to believe the grasp of her editorial hand will be strong and firm. *Correspondences* will be worth reading.

The subscription price is \$5.00 (U.S.) for three issues. Write to

Eileen Patterson
Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc.
P.O. Box 860
Upper Montclair, NJ 07043
U.S.A.

4 Cs Canadian Caucus Session Agenda

In *Inkshed* 3.5 I asked readers to suggest agenda items for our Canadian Caucus session at the Minneapolis 4 Cs (March 21-23, 1985).

Mike Moore (WLU) wrote to point out that Canada is much less sympathetic than Britain and the U.S. to research and scholarship relating to writing and reading theory and practice—so much so that talk about curriculum and pedagogy or about theoretical and research opportunities in Canada occurs almost *in vacuo*. He suggests we discuss ways to address, concretely and practically, the task of building a more hospitable environment for our work. [Although Mike has had to "back-burner" his survey of writing programs in Canada (see *Inkshed* 3.4, p. 1), he would like to remind all of us that he continues to look for suggestions and information relevant to that important project.]

Andrea Lunsford (UBC) suggests two agenda possibilities. She wonders if it would be possible to organize a workshop on how to apply for and get *grants* in Canada. If not, then how about addressing 'a controversial topic (e.g., 'Do Schools of Education turn out useful, good researchers?'), get some pros and cons, and set up a panel?'

These are excellent suggestions. Can we get something going on any (or all) of them? How about some feedback, folks? Information, ideas, discussion, offers? Mike's survey, *Inkshed*, Canadian Caucus sessions—these are all ways to warm the inhospitable climate within which we try to work. Do you have ideas about what else we might do? Are you willing at least to tell us about them? Do you know something about applying for and getting grants in Canada? Will you share your knowledge with us? Would you be willing to address an issue such as that raised by Andrea? Keep those cards and letters coming.

Inkshed Subscription Form

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

Send to

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Fredericton, NB E3B 5G3

Call for Proposals:

What Do We Mean By Process?

(The Second *Inkshed* Working Conference)

The University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta

Sunday morning through Tuesday morning, 12-14 May 1985

7-8 sessions, plus inksheddings. *Deadline for proposals: 15 January 1985.*

AIMS

The aims of this conference will be to explore the potential and the limitations of the process approach to teaching writing and reading, to clarify values implicit in a commitment to process, and to examine relationships between these values and various forms the process approach can take.

KINDS OF PROPOSALS

We are asking for proposals focusing on process as it relates to the following concerns:

- (1) Our assumptions about what we are doing when we teach reading (including the reading of literature) or writing. Are we imparting knowledge of a cultural tradition or an academic discipline? Are we developing skills? Are we doing both, or neither?
- (2) Our pedagogies. What does teaching writing and reading as process actually involve?
- (3) Our sense of our professional roles as researchers, scholars, writers, members of academic institutions. Do we see ourselves as part of the process or as somehow outside it, a disinterested observer? How can we become more conscious of our place in the process?
- (4) Our political ideologies, on institutional and social levels. What are the political implications of a process approach to teaching? Whose interests are we serving? How can we best accomplish our goals within the constraints of our individual teaching situations? To what extent do institutional constraints mirror the demands of the society as a whole?
- (5) Our conception of human nature and the nature of human intelligence. In adopting a process approach to teaching, are we assuming that there is one best method for teaching everybody, if only we could find it? Are we participating in the broader social rejection of linear, analytic thinking in favour of holistic, relational thinking? If so, should we be?

METHODS

We would like sessions that are process-oriented in their mode of presentation as well as in their content. We will therefore welcome demonstrations of teaching methods, informal reports on work in progress, and collaborative learning situations, as well as formal papers.

Though some sessions will focus on the practical and concrete, we will ask presenters to link their talks to the kinds of theoretical and philosophical concerns suggested above.

Proposals should include name(s), address(es), phone number(s); title of proposed session, brief (200 words) description or abstract, brief description of method, and a statement of the aim or purpose of the session. To propose a session, to register, or to request additional information about the conference, write

Chris Bullock / Kay Stewart
Inkshed Conference
Department of English
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2E5

What Do We Mean by Process?

Registration Information

Dates: May 12 - noon May 14, 1985 (following the CCTE Conference).

Place: Westbrook Park Lodge, Devon, AB (on the North Saskatchewan River, 20 minutes from Edmonton International Airport).

Program: 7-8 working sessions, including "inksheddings"; plus *Social activities* (an informal dance? a sing-song? golf at the lodge's 9-hole course? walks along the river?).

Registration deadline: March 1, 1985. Limit: 50.

Fee: \$50.00; graduate students and others without full-time employment, \$25.00 (includes transportation to and from the lodge, a brunch, a barbecue, and a lunch).

Additional information will be sent to registrants by April 1.

Registration Form

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

Telephone _____ (home) _____ (work)

Position _____

Fee enclosed: _____ \$50.00 _____ \$25.00

Accommodation requested:

Single (\$40.00/day): _____ X _____ days

Double (\$50.00/day--i.e., \$25.00/person): _____ X _____ days

Triple (\$56.00/day--i.e., \$19.00/person): _____ X _____ days

Name(s) of person(s) sharing room: _____

I will travel to Edmonton by _____ car _____ plane _____ train _____ bus

I will _____ will not _____ be attending CCTE.

Send your completed registration form and your cheque to

Chris Bullock
Inkshed Conference
Department of English
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB T6G 2E5