

Inkshed

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A Canadian newsletter devoted to writing and reading theory and practice.
Volume 4, number 1. February 1985.

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If you wish to be a writer, write. Epictetus, *Discourses* II.

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Inkshed

41. February 1985

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

A primary objective of this newsletter is to intensify relationships among research, theory, and practice relating to language, language acquisition, and language use—mainly (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, inquiries, and subscription requests to

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Epistemic Newslettering; or, *Inkshed* as a Mode of Learning

As many of you know, *Inkshed* was created (in 1982, as the *W&R/T&P Newsletter*; the title change came in December 1983) not only to *serve* the community of academics in Canada interested in writing and reading (composition and literature) theory and practice, but also to help develop and promote such a community. Its founding was motivated by a widely-felt sense that academics in Canada studying and teaching writing and reading were muted by the lack of a rigorous scholarly forum for addressing the questions, problems, and issues of concern to us.

It was clear in 1982 that there were people in Canadian schools, colleges, and universities who were deeply interested in writing and reading theory and practice. Nearly all of us felt isolated, however, and we envied the lively, generative communities of scholars and teachers which nurtured our colleagues in the States and England. We wanted and needed a more hospitable, supportive context in which to work. To have such a community required that we know who we were and what we were studying, what we were teaching, what issues concerned us; but no effective way of finding these things out was available to us. What we needed was, at minimum, a print forum—a newsletter—in which to exchange such information, through which to come together.

One function of a newsletter would simply be to exchange information. Our collective obligation would be to inform each other about all those matters that affect our intellectual and professional lives. We would, for example, tell about our own and our colleagues' interests, activities, problems, and accomplishments. We would describe writing and reading (literature) courses and programs, and report on research being conducted in the schools, colleges, and universities in our provinces. And we would announce meetings, workshops, seminars, conferences; report on the findings of articles and books; and describe the nature and objectives of journals and other kinds of publications.

Obviously, however, exchanging information would not be enough. Not only would we announce meetings and publications, therefore; we would also review and criticize them. Moreover, we would try to define, illustrate, clarify, analyze, interpret, and criticize events, movements, ideas, problems, issues—and the uses thereof. We would teach each other how to do things; motivate each other to do things; recognize and honour each other for doing things. We would describe and demonstrate methods, processes, and strategies for intelligent inquiry and application.

Rather more polemically, we would use a newsletter to examine the issues and problems (pedagogical, theoretical, ethical, political, economic) that face teachers of composition and literature. We would suggest, challenge, argue, and criticize. Our goal, always, would be to help each other learn, grow, change, develop, adjust (as individuals and as a community) as our disciplines and the profession grew, changed, and developed. We would do these things by communicating with one another; and that communication would create and constitute our community of researchers, scholars, and teachers of writing and reading.

Two and one-half years (fifteen issues of a newsletter, and one conference) later, much has changed. We have a clearer sense of who we are; and we have helped each other do some learning and growing and changing. We are better informed, and we have been provoked to address some of the issues and problems that concern us. But we cannot yet claim, surely, to constitute a mature community of writing and reading scholars and teachers. *Inkshed* (or, to be sure, some other print forum serving the same functions) is needed now as much as it was in the summer of '82.

So, an exhortation. Most Inkshedders can probably make at least a modest claim to knowledgeable ability or authority in our fields. Although we may not all be "at the cutting edge" of the discipline, many of us at least subscribe to the journals, read the articles and books, attend and present at the conferences; think about, criticize, and try to apply the research, scholarship, and theory; and analyze, use, extend, and cite the work of those who are actually at that edge. Those of us who don't do at least some of these things, ought to. If we're not working to keep up with what's going on in "the field", if we're not learning and changing and growing, we cannot call ourselves scholars and we have little business doing what we do, teaching what we teach. When all is said and done, our primary aim, self-interestedly and altruistically, must be to promote research, scholarship, application, and publication in the field, for we cannot function except from within, and with the support of, a robust community of knowledgeable peers.

What this means, I think, is that we all must do more to fulfill our own obligations to participate as full members of this community we're trying to build. Silence is our enemy, and the price of true membership is not merely a cheque or a filled-out subscription form: it is a contribution to our conversation. Writing is fundamental to our substance and our being.

One especially attractive feature of a newsletter such as *Inkshed* is that by the simple act of submitting items for publication we determine not only the kind of forum it will be, but also the kind of community *we* will be. Another is that it can publish anything from a two-line cohort report to a four-page article; we can share information or we can argue positions. Another is that it can publish more exploratory, less "finished" pieces of writing than a journal ordinarily can. (It's not that our standards are lower; it's that our functions are different.) Still another is that it can publish those observations, findings, or ideas that seem genuinely important but not really substantial enough to work up into full-length articles. This includes brief (1500-2000 word) review articles, for instance, or think-pieces or "teach-pieces", commentaries, surveys of literature, exhortations. Most of what gets published in this newsletter should come as more or less "natural" spin-offs from what we are and what we are doing as teachers, readers, thinking beings.

Inkshed ought to be publishing, each issue, cohort reports, reviews, commentaries, notices, announcements, descriptions of courses and programs, think-pieces, analyses, criticisms. And you must write them. It's not much more complicated than this: If you read an article or book that you think is in some way good or significant, tell us about it. If you use a textbook that seems to work (or not work), and you think you know why, tell us about it. If you can't find a textbook which teaches what and/or how you think you ought to teach, tell us about that. If you go to a conference, tell us about it. If you come across a piece of research or a theory that you think should be more widely known than it seems to be, report to us on it. If you give a paper or write an article, send us an abstract or an extract. If you see a problem or issue that should be addressed, address it. If you're working on an article or a book and you'd like to get a reaction to a draft or a chunk of it, write it up for us. (The idea, by the way, is not that these pieces should all be "major contributions" to the field. It should be enough if they are honest, thoughtful expressions of solid thinking about a specific issue, problem, question, situation, trend, opportunity.)

In fulfilling their informative and polemical functions, these pieces ought to provide models for others in the profession, and thus promote active, intelligent consideration and use of theory, research, and scholarship in (primarily post-secondary) composition and literature classrooms. We must, I think, demonstrate minds at work in writing (even if that means we have to write and publish in exploratory modes); we must show ourselves to be collaborators and colleagues, not entrepreneurs; and we must set standards of quality thinking and writing.

What we publish in this newsletter should demonstrate how people somewhere near the cutting edges of our disciplines behave—what they do, and how they do it; what they're reading, and why they're reading it; what research or scholarship they're conducting or pursuing, and to what end; what the current issues, problems, and questions are, and how one might, constructively and "rigorously", go about addressing, solving, answering them; what tools (journals, books, articles, conferences; research aims and methods, scholarly approaches) are available, and what their advantages and disadvantages are; how those tools can be used; and so on. In short, the pages of *Inkshed* ought to be a stage on which the activities of participating in, constructing, and developing a scholarly (or "interpretive") community are acted out.

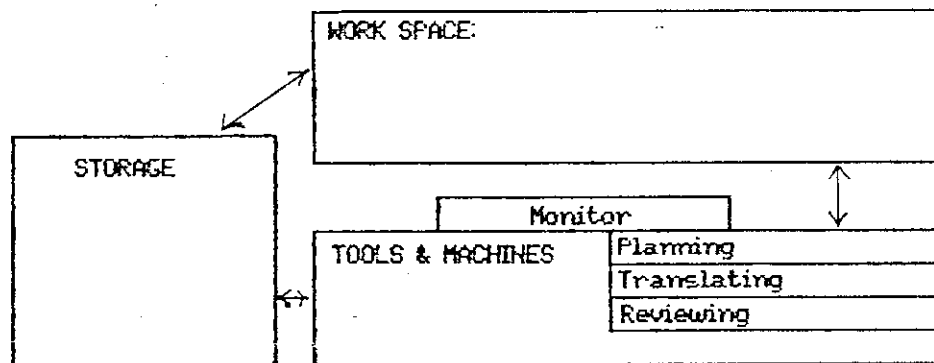
Jim Reither

Freshman Orientation at Cognitive-Meddling University

by Frank Hubbard

The Campus

The campus of Cognitive-Meddling University is laid out in three sections: Storage, Tools and Machines, and Work Space.



In the Storage Section, you can find books, of course (the Library is here), and you can also find help in retrieving your own memories, properly integrating your own Knowledge Network, or in drawing your own Knowledge Map. In the Tools and Machines Section, you will find the Departments of Planning, of Translating, and of Reviewing, all under the supervision of the Monitor. You will do most of your college work in the Work Space, formulating the problems you will work on and keeping your files up to date on the progress you have made.

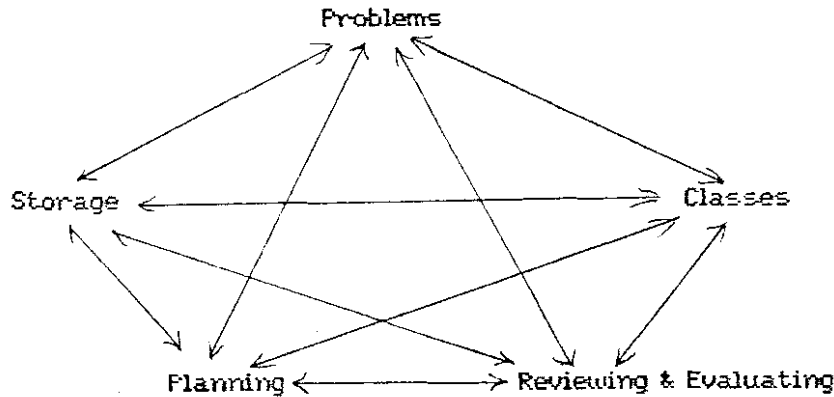
Getting Around the Campus

You need not follow the arrows from one building to the next. To do so would be to follow the Stage Curriculum, which we do not recommend. Instead, you will be issued a teleporter (we are the first university to require all freshmen to have one), and so from any point in the University you can go instantaneously to any other point you choose. In fact, we have abandoned the Simultaneity Constraint, and you can be (and later in your career will be required to be) in two or more places at one time. This eliminates all scheduling problems.

The Freshman Curriculum

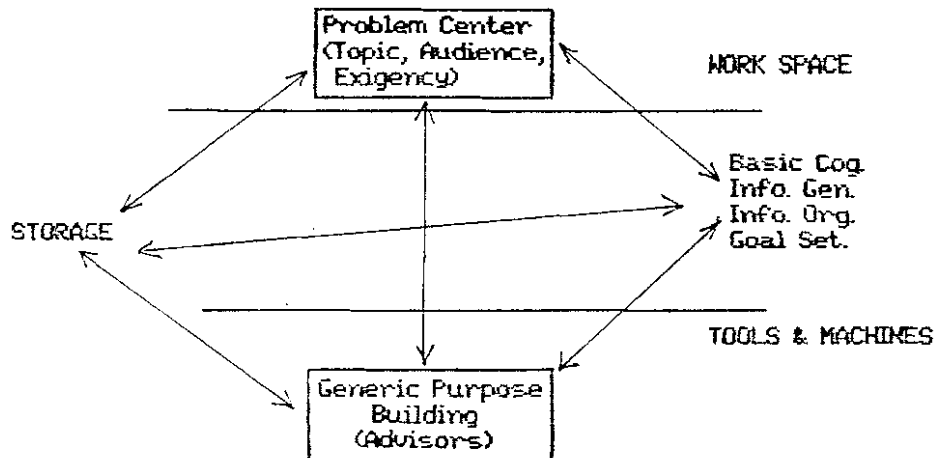
Your career begins when you obtain a task at the Problem Center in the Work Space. Take your first problem to the Generic Purpose Building in the Planning Department of the Tools and Machines Section. There Purpose Advisors will show you ways of representing to yourself the problems on which you are to work, ways of subdividing it into manageable subproblems, and ways of avoiding it should you need to do so.

Once you have the problem clearly in mind, particularly in its aspects of Topic, Audience, and Exigency, you are ready for your classes. All freshmen take Basic Cognitive Operations, Information Generation, Information Organization, and Goal Setting. These courses meet in the Planning Department, though you will often be referred to the Storage Section to find material to work with.



The Sophomore Curriculum

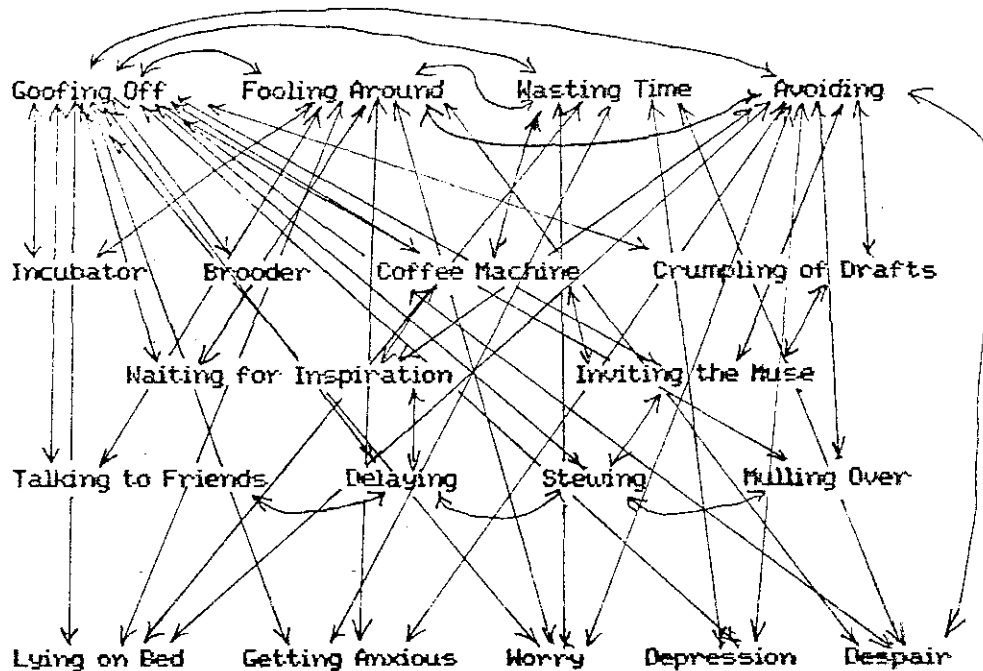
After your first year with these four courses, you will be issued a Plan, containing lots of Pointers to Information, and you will begin your career in earnest. You will begin using your teleporter more, and you will begin your Translation class, in which you start putting things down on paper. Whenever you need to, you should return to Planning, to the Organization classes or Goal Setting laboratories, back to Storage, or over to Reviewing and Evaluating.



During your sophomore year, you can expect two other important developments. One is the installation of a window in your skull, so that the administration can tell what's going on in there. The other is the issuing of your transceiver, into which you verbalize all your thoughts. You should average about twenty pages of transcript per hour through the remainder of your time at Cognitive-Meddling. It is this unique feature of CMU which accounts for the 'hum' of activity that visitors always notice.

The Junior-Senior Curriculum

Once you have mastered the basic cognitive skills during your freshman year, and have completed your sophomore Translation Project, you will be ready to enter the junior-senior program, taking courses in your major and writing about them. The procedures you will follow in doing this writing will become far more complex, far more like the way writing is done 'out there in the world.' Mini-courses in a wide variety of areas are available for helping you make this transition.



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12 (Fall 1984): 22-24.
(Thanks to Andrea Lunsford.)

Reading with a "Writer-Instinct"

It is commonplace to believe that readers read mainly for meaning and that reading is essentially an act of meaning construction. During reading, while meaning forms the focus of our awareness, language that conveys meaning forms the periphery of our awareness. This phenomenon characterizes the reading process of almost every reader, in almost every reading situation. However, there is another type of reading, done by readers who tend to read with a special purpose. Their reading is driven by what is hypothesized here as 'writer-instinct'. Although the term 'writer-instinct' is nonexistent in the psychology of instincts (e.g., Freud or McDougall), its coinage seems reasonable in the context of the way writing tyros might learn the art of writing from reading.

Operationally, the term may be taken to mean a propensity or inclination toward a certain type of language behaviour in order to be a writer. In simpler terms, it is a desire to learn about the art of effective writing. Such a desire, emerging from one's need to communicate, manifests itself in reading habits and strategies of avid students of writing. There is research evidence suggesting that writers learn about writing from reading (see, e.g., Mark A. Christiansen, "Tripling Writing and Omitting Readings in Freshman English: An Experiment," *CCC* 16 [May 1955]: 122-124; and Frank Heys, Jr., "The Theme-a-Week Assumption: A Report of an Experiment," *EJ* 51 [May 1952]: 320-322). There are also compelling arguments from several theorists and educators, and from writers themselves, that reading is an important source of knowledge about writing (see, e.g., Frank Smith, *Writing and the Writer* [NY: Holt, 1982] 177). In what follows I will briefly present my own speculations about writer-instinct.

We all know that helping students develop efficiency in the art of effective writing is a goal of school writing programmes. With that goal in view, all teachers of composition strive to have their students realize the *need* to write and, as well, to help them acquire the knowledge and skills required for the art of writing. (I take "art of writing" to be different from "writing as an art", in that while the former constitutes the practical know-how of effective communication, the latter signifies the unique achievement of an artist--a very personal, original product of one's own experience, thoughts, and imagination which hardly lends itself to replication or duplication. For example, to write precisely in the 'style' of Maugham or Hemingway would probably require one to convey Maugham's or Hemingway's feelings and meanings. While "art of writing" represents "substance", "writing as an art" represents "spirit". The writer-instinct, as I see it, is more viable in the process of the former than in the latter.)

Traditionally, knowledge about the art of writing has been imparted in two ways: by *description*, and by *prescription*. Description involves analyzing, outlining, and emphasizing the forms and structures of "standard" English. No matter how much knowledge one acquires about effective writing through description, however, such knowledge does not help one write efficiently unless that knowledge is relatable to one's own writing needs and experience. Prescription includes rules and precepts, lists of *dos* and *don'ts*, assignment of writing exercises and correction of errors. Teaching writing through prescription has more negative outcomes than positive, since writing, as an art, cannot be taught that way. As Michael Polanyi argues, "An art which cannot be specified in detail cannot be transmitted by prescription, since no prescription for it exists. It can be passed on only by example from master to apprentice" (*Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1958] 53). Implied here is the usefulness of learning from examples, of reading other writers' writings.

Research results suggest that neither learning precepts and principles of grammar and

composition nor frequent writing practice with intensive correction of errors do much to promote writing improvement. There is, however, some evidence that students' reading has a positive influence on their writing (see the Christiansen and Heys articles; and see also Ingrid M. Strom, "Research in Grammar and Usage and its Implications for Teaching Writing," *Bulletin of the School of Education* 36 [Indiana U, 1960]: 5.) If reading helps improve writing, why is it that all good readers are not good writers? The prevailing belief is that all good writers are good readers, but the reverse is not always the case. This suggests there is some variation in the way different writers read and in the purpose of their reading; that variation would probably answer the question raised above.

Attaining writing efficiency involves a two-stranded effort: first, writing and realizing the need for writing, and second, acquiring substantive knowledge of writing. The second, an outgrowth of the first, I view as the main manifestation of the hypothetical writer-instinct. Smith elaborates this point when he argues that "the key to learning about writing from reading is to read like a writer" (179).

While readers in general are concerned with extracting information from printed pages, readers prompted by the writer-instinct are likely to pay attention not only to what is said in a text, but also to the way it is said and to the ways language is used for different purposes. Writers who pay special attention to certain aspects of their language to make their writing effective are likely also to pay similar attention to effective language use in others' writing. Their writer-instinct prompts them to attend to certain language forms and devices and to the writer's craft displayed in the text they read—without, of course, losing sight of meaning.

Reading with a writer-instinct does not mean the reader is concerned only with effective aspects of text language or that the reader attends to language forms as if they were bereft of meaning. While they focus on meaning, such readers often deliberately attend also to stylistic and rhetorical aspects of the text that evoke their writer-instinct, that appeal to their language sensitivity, that have greater aesthetic effect. Why do they read that way? Perhaps they are more sensitive than others to the needs and resources of their own writing. In light of human information processing theories and research on divided attention, such reading behaviour does not seem an unlikely phenomenon. What *is* unlikely is that people develop such language behaviour just by reading or even by reading extensively, unless they realize the need for writing and become conscious of different aspects of effective writing. Such a need is likely to be felt only by engaging in the very act of writing.

N. Sukumar Gowda
McGill University

Update: 4 Cs Canadian Caucus Session

/// Jim Reither

I've received another agenda suggestion for the Caucus session at the Minneapolis 4 Cs (March 21-23, 1985). R Howard Cross (Language Arts Coordinator, North Vancouver School District 44) suggests we look at "school-based research as a way of achieving professional development." Together with Mike Moore's and Andrea Lunsford's suggestions (see *Inkshed* 3.6: 5), we have the makings of a valuable, stimulating session. Now, how about an offer to present or organize something?

I can also suggest something: Could we have a roundtable on the question, "What's 'Canadian' about 'the Canadian context'?" Let me know.

Cohort Report

/// Anthony Paré

McGill's Centre for the Study and Teaching of Writing
3700 McTavish Street
Montreal, PQ H3A 1Y2
Director: Dr Patrick X Dias

Much of the news in education is gloomy these days: budget cutbacks, declining enrolment, bureaucratic administrators. English educators face all of these and a host of other horrors: departmental politics, the exploitation of part-time instructors, inappropriate calls for remedial English courses, back-to-basics bandwagons, and more. While we at McGill continue to struggle with all of the above, we can report some good news, a modest success story which may serve to cheer up our colleagues.

In 1978, McGill's Faculty of Education opened a Writing Centre which offered a writing tutorial service and term paper-writing workshops. Since then, the Centre has added writing courses for graduate business students (MBA), continuing education students, and undergraduate students in a variety of departments and faculties. In addition, the Centre has conducted off-campus workshops and short courses for teachers at the elementary, secondary, and college levels as well as for business and industry.

This year, in recognition of its interests and activities in both theory and practice of writing, the Centre has changed its name to the Centre for the Study and Teaching of Writing. The Centre's various courses are now compulsory in graduate and undergraduate management, electrical and mechanical engineering, social work, and continuing education. There are, as well, several sections in which students from most of McGill's faculties enroll voluntarily. From five sections serving 100 students in 1980, the Centre's offerings have grown to approximately fifty sections enrolling 1,400 students in the current academic year.

Although Linda Flower's *Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing* (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1981) is the Centre's basic text, staff draw heavily on a wide range of current textbooks in writing as well as on the many journals in the field. Through weekly meetings and frequent staff seminars, the Centre's policies, procedures, and philosophy have evolved in a dynamic and cooperative environment. Practices developed by individual teachers or borrowed from the literature are tested in the classroom, discussed with colleagues, and adapted to meet the Centre's theory and the reality of McGill's students. As a result, the Centre's courses incorporate many of the most innovative and interesting aspects of current writing instruction, including journal writing, collaborative learning, peer editing, and writing conferences. The ongoing experimentation and staff interchange are invigorating and make the Centre a gratifying place in which to teach.

Finally, although program development has taken (and continues to take) considerable time and effort, some members of staff as well as graduate students attached to the Centre have pursued or are pursuing independent research in the following areas:

- the role of the journal in the writing class
- the place and use of expressive writing
- the relationship between speaking and writing
- the transfer of writing abilities to the workplace
- the effect of self-generated topics on secondary school students' writing
- teaching ESL students
- writing about literature
- writing with the computer

A number of other projects are in the works, such as a staff handbook and an evaluation of the undergraduate writing program which will employ a variety of assessment methods, including pre- and post-course protocol analysis.

There are a number of problems left to solve. For one thing, despite our efforts to the contrary, we are seen by some as a remedial writing service--a kind of grammatical SWAT team ready to swoop down on graduate engineers. For another, we have yet to discover a successful approach to ESL students, even after years of experimenting. Perhaps worst of all, our part-time instructors remain underpaid and overworked. Still, we believe we have made important gains. We are an enthusiastic and committed group, and the feedback we receive from students and staff of the faculties in which we teach is extremely encouraging. If the fruits of our labors are turning up in lab reports, business letters, and term papers, can better salaries, offices with windows, and other forms of recognition be far behind?

2nd *Inkshed* Conference (May 12-14): News and Reminders

Program. A week before our deadline we had only one firm proposal and we were thinking of reorganizing the conference as the Second *Inkshed* Afternoon-plus-tea- break. Then suddenly we had more proposals than we could realistically use in two days. Thanks to everyone for the enthusiasm! It looks like we'll organize the program to cover the following subjects: history, definitions, and models of process; the teacher's role in the process (theoretical and practical); process vs. product: a false opposition?; process in the literature class; the reading process; assessing textbooks; a roundtable summarizing and looking ahead. Take this as a tentative indication until we have completed negotiations with proposers.

There will also, of course, be discussions, inksheddings, coffee breaks, quiet time (though not much!). Our more elaborate social plans are for a talent night on Sunday night (bring musical instruments, poems/stories to read, skits, willingness to sing or clap along, etc.), and a BBQ and dance on Monday night.

Registration. We are taking registrations on a first-come, first-served basis until we reach our 50-person limit. Please note that all we need with the registration form (see p. 10) is your registration fee and an indication of the type of accommodation you prefer; you can pay Westridge Park Lodge for accommodation when you arrive. We will confirm registrations and send further information after the registration deadline, March 1.

Looking forward to seeing you in May.

Chris Bullock / Kay Stewart

Reminder: CCTE 1985

CCTE's 1985 Annual Conference will be at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, this May. The first two 'pre-conference' days--Tuesday and Wednesday, 7-8 May--will consist of half- and full-day workshops. The conference proper will run Thursday-Saturday, 9-11 May. I'll keep you posted regarding sessions of interest. In the meantime, for information and registration forms, write Carol Anne Inglis, 10449 - 132 Street, Edmonton, AB T5N 1Z3.

Registration Form:

What Do We Mean by Process?

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*—talent night, BBQ, dance.

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).

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 (\$55.00/day—i.e., \$19.00/person): _____ X _____ days

I would like to be assigned (a) roommate(s) for a double _____ or triple _____

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 for the registration fee only (accommodation can be paid on arrival) to:

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