



Newsletter of the Canadian Association
for the Study of Language and Learning
Volume 19, Number 3, Spring 2002

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This issue was edited by [Jane Milton](#), Nova Scotia College of Art and Design
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About Inkshed . . .

This newsletter of the *Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning* (CASLL) provides a forum for its subscribers to explore relationships among research, theory, and practice in language acquisition and language use, particularly in the Canadian context. CASLL membership runs from January 1 to December 31 and includes a subscription to Inkshed. To subscribe, send a cheque, made out to "Inkshed at NSCAD," for \$20 (\$10 for students and the un(der)employed to the following address: Kenna Manos, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 5162 Duke Street, Halifax, NS, B3J 3J6, Canada.

Subscribers are invited to submit items of interest related to the theory and practice of reading and writing. CASLL also has a website (www.StThomasU.ca/~hunt/casll.htm) maintained by Russ Hunt.

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From the Editor's Notepad

This issue of *Inkshed* connects to various parts of the ongoing conversation among Inkshedders. Theresa Hyland's piece reflects her presentation at last year's conference, Margaret Proctor's book reviews were prodded by a number of conversations held at that conference, and Carl Leggo's piece hooks up to our online conversation and the thread started by Rick Coe with his question on grammar and terminology that describes what we do. The ongoing conversation is fundamental to the Inkshed community and is alive and well on the listserv, but not quite so active in the newsletter. I don't think the listserv replaces the newsletter because the postings there tend to be short and have an immediacy about them that may not occur in the newsletter pieces. Because of the length of time between issues, the newsletter allows for more carefully worked pieces and is an important venue for such pieces. However, I would like to encourage Inkshedders to reconsider the role of the Newsletter, and re-introduce the notion of conversation here. Jim Reither, the first editor of *Inkshed*, wrote in *Inkshed* 5.6 (December 1986):

My idea of *Inkshed* has been, from the first issue (though I didn't have the language back then), that this newsletter should be a "parlour" in which people carry on their conversations about writing and reading theory and practice. It is *not* a journal, privileging text over discourse, monologue over dialogue. It never should be. It's a place where people talk with other people, collaborating with one another in the search for meaning in their fields and their worlds. It's a place for exploration, not domination....

Anthony Paré, in the piece that leads off this issue ["I would like to collaborate with Doug Brent by disagreeing with him"] calls both his agreements *and* his disagreements with Doug Brent "a collaboration" – and it surely is that. As we read his piece we see Anthony and Doug and you and me all making meaning together – *different meanings*, no doubt, but made-together meanings nevertheless, meanings we could not have come to alone, without one another's probes and provocations.

This is an accurate description of what happens in our conferences, and I'd like to see more of it in the newsletter. So if you have questions about or responses to any of the pieces in this issue, please send them along and we'll have a conversation. Or perhaps you'd like to say something about this idea of conversation and "made-together meanings." I thank Kenna Manos for sliding Jim Reither's words under my nose.

We also look forward to the next conference on "Literacies, Technologies, and Pedagogies" in Stanhope-by-the-Sea, P.E.I. I can say with confidence that the conversation there will be rich and animated. You'll find here links to the programme and the hotel, and a registration form. And while I'm reminding you of business matters, please remember that Inkshed dues cover the calendar year and this year's must be paid. The details on how much to send whom and where appear later in this issue.

Looking forward to hearing from you, or perhaps seeing you in May,

– Jane Milton

Carl Leggo

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What is Good Writing? Grammar and My Grandmother

I frequently call myself a wounded writer. Even now in middle age, I can still hear my grade 11 English teacher say, You'll never be a writer, and I can still hear other teachers and professors declare that my writing was mediocre, awkward, incoherent, faulty, loose, and fragmented. I am still learning to value my writing. For a long time as a school teacher, I recapitulated the harsh evaluation practices I had experienced in classrooms. I have now been teaching for more than two decades (the past twelve years in a Faculty of Education), and in all my attitudes and practices I now seek to nurture writers by acknowledging the value in their writing. I tell my students that in their writing, they are not competing with one another or with an idealized model paper hidden in my head. So often evaluation is perceived as a way to order and categorize and compare. I think evaluation should be done for the good of the person evaluated, and for no other reason. Evaluation ought to nurture and challenge writers. I will not teach with the expectation that some people must fail or must receive low grades. Over a decade ago I taught a university writing course as a graduate assistant. Prior to beginning the course I was informed by the department head that I had to have a certain number of B's on my grade sheet. My thirty students demonstrated a strong commitment to their writing, and the course experience was a memorable one for all of us, but I painstakingly met the administrator's expectation concerning a range of grades, even though I felt that I was being unfair to my students. I still feel badly about this. Now I refuse to acquiesce to bureaucratic expectations that students cannot all enjoy resounding success in their writing when the writing is significant for them. The root of "evaluation" is "value." Evaluation is a process of valuing the writer and the writing, acknowledging the value in both. I seek to encourage others to know the power of words in their lives.

WHAT IS GOOD WRITING?

For a long time I have been asking my teacher education and graduate students, "What is good writing?" The responses comprise a long list, including:

absorbing	bold	convincing	direct
accessible	captivating	correct	dynamic
accurate	clear	courageous	effective
appealing	coherent	crafted	emotional
appropriate	communicative	creative	energetic
artful	complete	deep	engaged
audience-aware	concise	designed	engaging
authentic	considerate	desirous	enjoyable
authoritative	consistent	detailed	enthusiastic
balanced	controlled	developed	essential
believable	conventional	different	evocative

experimental	lively	resonant	truthful
fluid	logical	rhythmical	unforgettable
focused	meaningful	rich	unique
fresh	natural	risk-taking	unified
grammatical	organized	satisfying	universal
heartfelt	original	significant	unpredictable
honest	organic	simple	varied
informative	open	sincere	vibrant
imaginative	passionate	skillful	vigorous
innovative	personal	specific	vivid
insightful	persuasive	straightforward	voice/full
inspirational	piercing	structured	warm
intelligent	pleasurable	stylish	well-reasoned
interesting	powerful	surprising	whole
inviting	provocative	symmetrical	xylophonic
joyful	purposeful	textured	yummy
kinetic	questioning	therapeutic	zestful
knowledgeable	rapturous	thorough	
liberating	relevant	thoughtful	

My students ask, "How are you going to evaluate our writing? How do you know what is good?" I reply, "Good writing is writing that gives you or somebody else pleasure, and/or gets the job done."

Everybody is different. Everybody is starting where he or she is. There is no doubt that I like some students' writing more than others, but why should I be the arbiter of taste in the classroom? I am liberal with praise in evaluating students' writing. My students tease me about how often I use "splendid" or encourage them to celebrate their accomplishments. I do not think that I can evaluate writing according to a standard measure. It might be possible to develop a yard-stick by measuring the distance from a king's nose to his big toe, and enshrining that distance in a bar of gold forevermore, but writing has no such standard measure. What is good writing? The answers are multiple, and dependent on the eye of the writer and the reader. Good writing is writing that people care about, writing that gives pleasure, writing that touches hearts and minds and souls, writing that desires readers and nurtures desire in readers. My students revel in the praise that I offer. As one student said recently, "You invite us to write, and tell us to write about whatever we want, and praise us, and the next thing you know we are busting our butts to write the best stuff we've ever written." As a writer I am a human be/com/ing writing myself and inviting others to be written by my words, as I also invite other human be/com/ings to share their writing as they write themselves and help write me.

I am convinced that most people lack confidence in their writing. I do not know why, but I suspect that experiences with writing in school and university contribute a great deal to this lack of confidence. Certainly my students tell me many horror stories about responses to their writing in school and university classrooms, responses that have undermined their confidence as writers. Their stories reverberate with echoes of my stories. I am convinced that language use is integrally connected to our existence as people. Yet our experiences with language too often constrain us and impair us. In school we are caught up in the hoity-toity game of elitist emphasis

on correct usage, even though correct usage is nothing more than a convention that some people have decided will be valued, a convention that will change with time and other consensual agreements. As a writer in school I was so neurotically concerned about comma usage that I cared little for what I actually wrote. The content was not nearly as significant as the neatly embroidered container.

GRAMMAR AND GRAMARYE

Evaluation of students' writing is often focused on issues of grammar. For the first forty years of my life I had an inadequate understanding of the word *grammar*. I understood grammar to mean the science of language, or a set of rules, or a system of standards or general principles, or a compendium of preferred and prescribed forms. I understood grammar in the way I had learned grammar in school, but I had never learned the etymology of grammar, and I did not know its roots. An etymological dig in several dictionaries reveals that the word *grammar* is derived from the word *gramarye* which is now called an archaic word related to the old French *gramaire* or learning. Gramarye means magic, occult knowledge, alchemy, necromancy, and enchantment. Now I want to use this new (or old) notion of grammar to support a poetic return to language that subverts and disrupts and erupts and deconstructs, always playful, always purposeful. Instead of trying to construct a grammar of rules and categories and standards and forms, the kind of grammar that aims to close down wildness and chaos, and excludes more than it includes, I want to pursue gramarye which invites mystery and openness and poetry, the firm belief that what is known are flickering points of light lining a vast unknown without beginning or ending, always more to know, always more to be known.

When we speak about grammar we often confuse three basic but distinct meanings. First, there is **inscriptive grammar**, the foundational organizing structure of language which allows language users to communicate with one another. We learn this structure intuitively. Therefore, even a young child does not say, "going to with the my store am parents I." We do not teach this inscriptive grammar. We learn it early as we first learn to use the language. Second, there is **descriptive grammar** which is the kind of grammar that I spent a great deal of time learning when I was in school. Descriptive grammar refers to a knowledge of linguistic terminology and rules so that a student can parse a sentence in its constituent parts and label the parts. Third, there is a **prescriptive grammar** which emphasizes standard academic usage and correctness. This is what most people mean when they make comments like, "Schools don't teach grammar anymore." Russell Tabbert calls prescriptive grammar "'linguistic etiquette,' the rules of 'proper' verbal manners which tell us what to do to be correct but most frequently what to avoid" (1984, p. 39). Prescriptive grammar has a stranglehold on schools where it is believed that everyone must speak and write the language in precisely the same ways. This is where my biggest complaint about grammar instruction comes in. Schools cannot teach inscriptive grammar. Such knowledge is gained intuitively and unconsciously through use at a young age. There is a limited value in learning descriptive grammar unless it is explored in the context of a linguistic curriculum as a useful kind of knowledge that we can acquire. A knowledge of descriptive grammar is not going to improve significantly a student's writing because writing comes from a desire to say something, not a knowledge of how to parse sentences and label the parts. Finally, the emphasis on prescriptive grammar in schools is probably more responsible than any other factor for the wounded and apathetic and uncommitted writers that are graduated from schools every year. Most writers are so afraid to make a mistake, so afraid to look foolish, so afraid of the

teacher's red pencil that they do not take the risks in their writing or make the personal investment in their writing that is necessary in order to develop as writers with confidence and a keen sense of voice.

My children bring me their assignments with the comments of their teachers. Often the teachers' comments are incorrect. One teacher wrote "comma splice" in the margin, but there was no comma splice. The sentence was correctly written. Another teacher rejects "incomplete" sentences, even though *real writers* use "incomplete" sentences all the time. The challenge of teaching prescriptive grammar is that the English language is dynamic and organic, always changing. It is impossible to prescribe the rules for "correct" English language use because the word "use" is really not a noun at all, but a verb in constant process. What happens in so many writing classes is that writing is stunted by a dictatorial attitude that wants to protect convention and tradition.

A simple question that has to be asked is how are we going to most successfully use the time that we have in a writing class. I am not suggesting that grammar instruction is not important. My grade seven students called me Mr. Grammar because I was excited about grammar and invited them into the excitement. I am writing a collection of poems about grammar, and I find immense interest in reading grammar handbooks. But I am also convinced that I really learn about grammar in the context of my writing, as opposed to the approach that was taken with me in school where I learned descriptive and prescriptive grammar, and then had no time left to actually write anything other than boring lists of sentences that needed grammatical correction.

What is so terrible about making errors? Why do we want our students to write and for whom? I am concerned about the neurotic attention to errors. A few years ago at the beginning of a new course for English teachers, one student presented a report with a few notes on the chalkboard. Her presentation was insightful and engaging. She spelled a word incorrectly. When she finished speaking and invited questions, the first response from a classmate was to point out the spelling error. Surely there is a time for error detection and eradication, and a time for ignoring errors or at least postponing the attention. If I wanted to spend my time detecting errors in writing, I am sure I would have no problem living a busy, even if wasted, life. There are rules of grammar and grammatical terms that are useful, even necessary, to teach, but they can be taught fairly quickly in the context of the writing process, as they are needed. Teaching grammar with meticulous attention to rules will not improve writing, but teaching writing with a sense of wonder, with a sense of grammar as magic, will nurture both writers and writing.

LESSONS FROM MY GRANDMOTHER

Why do teachers wield a red pencil with such gloating delight? Why do we regard a typo as an unsightly booger visible in the nose? What is that keen thrill of delight which airs lightly on the skin when we spot a misspelled word, an incorrect use of verb tense, a nonstandard use of the dash? What is really important—correctness of language use or constancy of language use? My concern is that people do not write because they are afraid of making mistakes, the kind of mistakes that teachers delight in highlighting and exposing.

My grandmother wrote me a letter, dated September 18, 1972. I have carried the letter with me through numerous moves. My grandmother left school in grade six. When she wrote the letter

she was about seventy years old. If I evaluated her letter as a teacher I would probably point out that she does not practise the conventions of capitalization, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, and paragraph development. Her penmanship is at times almost illegible. The letter rambles with references to family and weather and television and meals and the pet dog. If I were to evaluate my grandmother's letter with my teacher's red pencil, I might throw up my arms in dismay, but I treasure the letter because it sings with my grandmother's voice, even now, more than two decades after her death, even as it sang the first time I read it. And so I have included her letter in my collection of poems, *View from My Mother's House* (1999). With her love she taught me:

THE MEANING OF X

Corner Brook
September 18 1972

well Carl my son

I had to write ye a few lines its in the night now I am bad enough in the day I suppose ye are getting settled away by now we had a lovely day here today how is poor Kathy Wendy got her jacket come it is some nice she loves the school not a bit strange ye think she was going all the time she takes her dinner ye know what she takes tin of drink pack of chips cheesies bar comes home filled right up she bars herself in her room to learn her lessons you know theres nothing undone the only thing she don't stay up so long in the night I suppose poor Paul is all dried up by now I don't know if I told you that Jerry is going to St Johns Friday on the bus there is two or three of them going poor fellow Effie said she didnt like to keep him from everything he is coming back on Sunday I don't know what time he will get in but one of them got a sister there but he will be right up with ye and Willie your mother told him to go in and stay there on till ye comes he will see Sandy when he gets there first I guess she will go with him to show him where ye are to Fanny said she didnt see ye when she was away I guess that ye were out somewhere your mother and father was some glad when they got their letter and ye know your grandmother wasnt sad Ringo stays in where Wendy is learning her lesson in her room it wont be too long please God before ye will be home for a little while some good remember me to poor Kathy your mother takes her little walk same as usual so long

Nan xxxx

I hear my grandmother's voice in her letter, even now as I first heard it in 1972. I feel my grandmother's love in her letter, even now as I felt it in 1972. Writing with desire, not correct usage, fires good writing. My grandmother was a good writer. I seek to live by the lessons of my grandmother.

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Theresa Hyland

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Student Perceptions of Reading and Writing Tasks and the Implications for Teaching

Introduction:

Like most teachers, I sometimes worry that what I am teaching is not what students are learning. Coughlin and Duff, in a 1994 paper entitled "Same Task, Different Activities: Analysis of SLA Task from an Activity Theory Perspective" explore this issue. They make a distinction between task (an exercise that the researcher or teacher designs with a specific purpose in mind) and activity (the actions that the students engage in when confronted with the task). Teachers and researchers design tasks in order to elicit particular linguistic behaviours from students, but Coughlin and Duff found that students may in fact engage in activities related to those tasks that are different from the activities intended. In their experiment, they had students describe a picture of a beach, with the researcher providing prompts and questions. The purpose of the task was to elicit as much descriptive language as possible from the students. In analyzing the interaction that occurred between the interviewer and the students, however, the researchers found that students engaged in a variety of activities that were different from the expected activity. One student saw the exercise as an opportunity to notice and name objects; another as a chance to relate personal experiences and engage the interviewer in meaningful conversation, and another used the exercise to engage in a discussion of cultural differences between California and his country. Coughlin and Duff speculate that because the picture was already shared information between the interviewer and the students, to merely describe it was a meaningless activity. The students engaged in a more meaningful activity by making associations between the picture and their own experience in their conversation with the interviewer or by questioning the interviewer about his/her experience of beaches.

The Research:

Iлона Leki (1995) studied how ESL undergraduate and graduate students cope with academic reading and writing tasks over a single term. She found that students may consciously change a task to suit their needs and accommodate difficulties in reading. Because reading for research and synthesizing new knowledge into essays is particularly time-consuming for L2 students, where possible the students in her study wrote about subjects and issues that they already knew about rather than subjects that would require a lot of new learning. In other words, they used the task to engage in a language production activity rather than a content-acquisition activity. Ling did a comparison of Taiwanese and U.S. shopping habits for her Behavioral Geography class, and her World History paper was a comparison of ancient Chinese and Greek education (242). Sometimes students actively resisted the requirements of the task: Julie wrote a paper on a novel she had read in which she discussed only one of the women in the novel instead of all of the women as the task required (243). Sometimes ambitious students, like Jien, engage in activities that are much more rigorous than the task set up by the teacher. She took great pains to write an intellectually rigorous review article, using a TESOL Quarterly review article as her model, when her professor had expected an annotated bibliography.

Ruth Spack (1997) did a longitudinal study of Yuko's struggle to attain academic literacy at the undergraduate level in an American university. She found that Yuko's beliefs about what she was learning when she was doing academic reading and writing tasks changed over time. After a disastrous first year, by second year Yuko had learned to “ignore the things she did not know” (39). She had begun to select readings that she thought were easy “informative... geographical” and to avoid readings that were difficult such as the Hegel readings in her philosophy course (35). By third year, she realized that “she had been paralyzed partly by the notion that what she was reading was ‘so perfect’ and she felt she had nothing to say. Now she knew how to challenge theories and analyze arguments and she understood the convention of referring to authorities to make a point” (43). In other words, she felt more confident about choosing reading activities, about what writing activities she could successfully engage in after reading texts, and about changing the tasks that she felt were too difficult.

Task/Purpose of Task/ Activities that Students Engage In :

I teach English for Academic Purposes to exchange students from China who are engaged in a full year of study in Canada to complete their Chinese undergraduate degree. These students take eight hours a week of EAP classes in listening and reading for note-taking, Canadian culture, writing, and speaking and pronunciation. I use a variety of readings in my classes to stimulate writing in a number of ways: *Pens of Many Colours* to develop an understanding of Canadian cultural and to explore issues in class discussions and in writing assignments; *Campus Bound* to teach discipline-specific reading and writing skills and finally, the *Refining Composition* to demonstrate rhetorical and organizational essay format.

The research studies led me to ask a number of questions about the tasks that I assign with the different kinds of readings, my purpose for assigning these tasks and the activities that students engage in as a result of the tasks set. My specific questions were:

1. What learning activities do students engage in when they are reading essay models?
2. What learning activities do students engage in when they are writing academic essays?
3. What are the implications of student perceptions for the teaching writing?

In order to explore these questions, I gave my students a survey asking them what they felt they learned from the reading and writing tasks I had assigned since September. The survey was done at the end of January when students had already been with me for five months and just before the busiest time of the academic year, when a lot of reading and writing tasks would be assigned. The survey is presented in Appendix A. The table on the next page aggregates and categorizes the responses that students gave to the survey.

Findings:

Many students engage in vocabulary and idiom acquisition when they read and write. This was the most frequently mentioned learning activity, with 19 mentions of it for writing and only 12 for reading. However, while students mentioned learning sentence structure and vocabulary in their writing tasks, they rarely perceive reading tasks as helping them learn about sentence structure. There were 9 mentions of learning about essay format from both reading and writing tasks. There were 9 students who mentioned that reading showed them academically acceptable discourse, and 18 mentions of how writing tasks help them develop academic discourse.

Results of Survey of Students (N = 26)

Learning Activities from Writing Tasks	Responses	Learning Activities from Reading Tasks	Responses
<i>Micro-level learning activities</i>		Micro-level learning activities	
Vocabulary & sentence structure acquisition	19	Gives new idioms and vocabulary	12
Writing styles understanding	5	Model of sentence structures & grammar	3
Other learning activities	3	Increases reading speed / facility	2
<i>Macro-level learning activities</i>		Macro-level learning activities	
Develop ease with writing in English through practice	18	Absorb course-specific content	13
Understand format of essays	9	Understand essay format	9
Understand inadequacies in own language production.	4	Note mode of expressing ideas in academic discourse	9
Learn about organizing information	4	Think about issues raised	7
Learn how to do research	3	Note beautiful ways of writing	4
Learn about content	2	Note ease of expression in everyday language	3

Thirteen students mentioned acquisition of course-specific content through reading tasks, but only 2 students felt that they learned this also through writing tasks. Seven students felt that reading stimulates thought, but no students mentioned that writing stimulates thought. Some students were interested in the aesthetics of some of the pieces they read, but only one mentioned the development of aesthetically pleasing expressions through writing. Eighteen students indicated that writing helps them practice expressing themselves, but only 9 indicated that reading helps them learn how to express themselves easily. A qualitative study of the exact comments that students made reveals still more about student beliefs about writing and the role that reading plays in the learning of writing:

- Students often characterize their learning through reading and writing as either vocabulary and sentence structure development and a better understanding of the use of models for format and organization, or the stimulation of thought. However, students rarely expressed learning in several areas at the same time. This is summed up nicely by one student who says about her writing: *"I pay more attention to write nice sentences instead of right sentences"*. This student quite clearly felt that she couldn't expect to write both elegantly

and flawlessly at this point in her development.

- The phrase “*Express my ideas*” seemed to imply or be connected to “*Learned more vocabulary and idioms*”. This may be because students feel that they can only express themselves if they have enough vocabulary. Some examples of these combination comments:
 - “*Especially, even I know some words before, I didn’t know how to use them in the right way.*”
 - “*My textbooks are my friends. I can learn some specific terms and use them to prove my evidence.*”
 - “*I sometimes learn maybe just a way of using a word or a phrase, even or a sentence from all the English books or the things surrounding me in English.*”
- Some students noted differences in writing styles or the use of informal and formal language through the different readings tasks: “To read a great deal of articles in newspaper and magazines will be more helpful. In many cases, I find these articles are different from those in the textbooks they are more vivid and the words and idioms are more flexible.”
- Some students developed a background knowledge of North America and the history and modern life of Canada through the reading tasks: “The essays and stories from Pens of Many Colours show me their actual experiences as living in foreign countries. They look at the world from various aspects.”
- Some students acquired a more practical use of English through the reading tasks: “*the skill is not only for academic study but also for common usage.*”
- Some students deliberately imitated the reading models to develop their own writing: “*Since I get the same topic with the model essay, I have done the similar research and thought over carefully for a long time. Then if I can read a good model of it, I think I will get the best information by contrasting it with my own. I can find how it’s organized, the written method and the supporting information.*”
- Some students learned more abstract skills through reading tasks: “*Research, critical thinking and analysis.*”
- Some students resisted using the model reading tasks to understand essay format:
 - “*But I feel uncomfortable that there is fixed formation of different types of writing. Those regulations limit my imagine when I write...*”
 - “*I think the model essays I have read in RCS are the most helpful, although they seem a little boring. I have never known that there are so many formats and requirements when to write an English Essay.*”
- Some students engaged in very practical activities through the reading and writing tasks: they developed speed and ease of reading, practical knowledge of computer word processing in English and even how to print using the computer!

Discussion:

The activities that students engage in may vary according to background knowledge, personality, goals in education, stage of language acquisition, or perhaps according to their view of future writing needs. However, two clear trends emerged from the data and we can begin to speculate why they appear. Some students use the reading and writing tasks to engage in practical, discrete activities which teach them very practical skills. Those students engage in vocabulary and idiom acquisition, imitation of format models and organization of information. They are perhaps displaying a sophisticated understanding of the activities that they will

eventually be faced with in their work contexts. They probably do not see themselves writing academic journal articles in ten years' time, but rather writing reports, letters and position papers where succinctness and predictability will be valued over originality of idea. On the other hand, some students use the tasks to engage in more abstract, theoretical activities such as problem solving, learning of research skills and the development of the ability to write "nice sentences instead of right sentences." They have probably set themselves these more difficult activities because they see themselves engaged in academic, journalistic or professional writing in their future careers. In Flowerdew's study of the hurdles that an L2 professional academic had to overcome before he was published in an academic journal, Oliver's final comment on the experience was "I learned a lot in terms of style" (143). For that writer, the activity of rewriting his article for a particular audience, though tedious and time-consuming, was worth the effort. Our students probably engage in those activities that they feel are most worthwhile in terms of their own view of their future needs.

Implications for teaching:

Leki states "An EAP curriculum cannot legitimately teach discipline-specific discourse but rather would seek to determine what might best prepare students to acquire discipline-specific discourses, what tools would be useful to them in their accommodation to the demands of various disciplines" (237). The survey showed me that my students engage in many different activities when assigned reading and writing tasks: vocabulary and idiom development, understanding of essay format, development of methods of argumentation, acquisition of discipline-specific content, understanding of cultural and historical background as well as acquisition of meaningful and elegant turns of phrase.

The findings led to three important implications for my teaching. First, different students get different things out of the same reading regardless of what I am trying to teach them through the reading because they concentrate on what they believe to be important. An example from the survey is student perception of the usefulness of newspaper articles. While I minimized use of newspaper articles because they are not good examples of academic writing, the students asked for more newspaper articles because they saw them as good sources of background knowledge of Canadian political and social mores, as well as models of idiomatic usage of the language. Second, even though vocabulary and idiom development was not a primary goal in the tasks that I set, and I did little beyond explaining difficult vocabulary items to the students, the activity that the students were engaged in was primarily vocabulary and idiom accumulation. This is also an important discovery because in order for vocabulary to become an active part of a student's lexicon, that vocabulary has to be understood and not just imitated. In other words, the students have to be able to take the item out of the immediate context of the reading they found it in and use it in a variety of contexts. In fact, what was happening in my classes was that students were not just borrowing the word or idiom from the readings, but were borrowing the context as well. Therefore, summaries or critiques of the readings tended to be cut and paste pastiches of the words of the reading texts. Finally, students require a variety of skills in order to write successfully for different discourse communities. By providing them with a variety of open-ended reading and writing tasks, I can increase the possibility that they will learn not only what they think they need to learn, but other necessary skills as well.

Strategies that I use:

I have begun to use a variety of open-ended reading and writing tasks that I hope will allow students to engage in academically relevant as well as personally satisfying activities.

1. **Response Journals:** Students are allowed to respond to the readings in any way they like. They can analyse the language used, summarize the argument or simply respond to the argument with thoughts of their own on the issue presented. I collect these journals at a set time each week, and read through the response for that week. I never edit their response for grammar and spelling (although at the beginning of the year they really pressured me to do this). I always respond in a way that acknowledges their ideas and suggests ways in which those ideas might be further developed. This is an attempt to develop what Vygotsky calls the Zone of Proximal Development. Please see Riazi and Cumming,(2000) for a discussion of how journal responses can do this.

2. **Language Diaries:** The back half of the journal is a language diary which is a set of notes that students keep for themselves. Sometimes these notes are just lists of idioms and vocabulary that they have come across in their readings; sometimes they include interesting style and rhetoric issues that have come up in the classroom discussions (e.g. Some students were intrigued when I gave them models to demonstrate how the passive voice emphasizes the results of an action and ignores responsibility for that action). I encourage the students to keep these notes but don't mark them or respond to them in any way.

3. **Vocabulary and Idiom Study:** I now consciously incorporate vocabulary in my reading classes. Each week I select 10 words or phrases from the readings and have students write original sentences which they hand in. This allows me to see whether they understand appropriate contextual and syntactic use of these items. I explain the idiomatic use of the most frequently misunderstood items and encourage the students to use the class set of Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionaries when they are having trouble with vocabulary. These dictionaries give examples of idiomatic usage of all the words defined thus offsetting the damage done by electronic translators which often give the closest word in the native language to the word given, but rarely put these words in context. Students are encouraged to rewrite and resubmit sentences as often as they like.

4. **Direct Demonstration of Analysis Techniques:** Students are given a reading from which they have to select a quote, paraphrase a sentence and summarize an idea. They then incorporate these three pieces of writing into a critique of that reading. This is done in groups on overheads. When we look at these paragraphs we examine how the citations are integrated into the body of the paragraph and we try to make a distinction between instances where the integration is merely a summary or paraphrase of the idea and where it takes the form of an analysis of that idea. I often examine and make explicit the heuristic that a particular reading uses to support the argument in it. Yeh's (1998) student uses a particularly good bridge heuristic that shows students how each reason and opinion can be bridged with facts, "if then" statements and values statements. The students apply the heuristic in a short argumentative paragraph of their own which is submitted for evaluation but not marked. Again, students may chose to submit or to

resubmit as often as they feel is necessary.

The survey helped me understand how the students use the tasks I assign to engage in activities which they feel are relevant to their own individual learning contexts. Through open-ended tasks, I invite them to engage in activities that they believe to be relevant and I empower them to reach an understanding of the complex interaction of reading and writing in an academic environment.

August, 2001.

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READING MODELS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you assign readings as a regular part of your writing classes?
2. What kind of readings do you assign?

3. How do you use these readings to stimulate writing?
4. Have you noticed differences between the way the L2 students and L1 students in your class approach the readings?
5. Is there anything in particular that you do to help the L2 students get the most out of these readings?

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University of Toronto

Knowing What We Do: Two Books about University Teaching and Learning

Richard J. Light, *Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds* (Harvard UP, 2001).

Janice Newton et al., eds., *Voices from the Classroom: Reflections on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* (Garamond Press and York University Centre for the Support of Teaching, 2001).

These two books about university teaching and learning -- one from York University, one from Harvard -- come out of a lively period of institutional self-examination in the early 1990s. Both demonstrate explicit commitments to active and exploratory learning, to critical thinking and discussion, and to respect for student diversity. They're also both relevant to our specific interests in CASLL because they give pride of place to the uses of language, both oral and written, in the types of learning they value.

Making the Most of College is based on the Assessment Seminars undertaken at Harvard and several dozen US and Canadian universities (including York, at least for a period) – assessment in this case meaning self-reflection by faculty, not just testing of students. These seminars brought faculty members together to study and evaluate their own teaching practices, and at Harvard they eventually focussed on students as the best judges of the learning experience. Richard Light, trained as a statistician and now an expert on designing educational research, supervised an intensive set of research projects to follow up the discussions at Harvard. His book, like the two initial Reports he published in 1990 and 1992, is based on rich empirical evidence, but it wears its statistics lightly. The survey results are discussed in very readable and quotable words; the book contains no tables and gives almost no numbers. In fact, the 214 pages of text consist in large part of long passages quoted (with some editing, Light admits) from intensive student interviews. Some of the topics are not likely to be relevant to the Canadian experience: the desirability of holding tutorials in dorms, for instance, and of scheduling them close to the supper hour so that students can continue to chat together as they eat dinner together in the residence hall, for instance. There are also gaps of attention: in his eagerness to talk about the advantages of well-managed diversity, Light labels people relentlessly in racial and religious

terms, but it's noticeable that there is no data on non-native speakers of English and no inquiry into gender issues.

Those of us working to reposition writing from a marginal requirement to a central place in the learning experience can take considerable comfort in what Light's research established about the value of language-based learning – often to his surprise, he says repeatedly. Students told him (and he quotes them vividly) that the chance to learn to write well was the most valuable skill in their university experience; that they hungered for intensive one-to-one feedback on their writing; that they discounted freshman composition, but wished for more writing instruction in their “substantive” upper-year courses; and that they learned best when they wrote to other students, not just to the professor. Light and his students also have much to say about the value of discussion in small classes and of foreign-language learning, of group work in class and outside, of mentoring between professors and students, and of inclusiveness across ethnic and religious groupings. In one section, Light reiterates a message he took across the continent with his Assessment Seminars, that the one-minute paper – an impromptu note that students write and hand in at the end of a class -- can let professors know what students have taken in from their lectures. In representing student opinions so centrally, this book gives a strong impression that Harvard students have heard the message of liberal education very well. It makes good reading for anyone concerned with writing across the curriculum, and may be useful for convincing Canadian administrators that what most of us now consider good practice is backed up by solid research -- and that it worked for “good” students.

York University's book *Voices from the Classroom* is an impressive demonstration that a non-elite Canadian university can be committed to the same goals of inclusiveness, inquiry, and student development as Harvard is. It also shows that these ideals may be much harder to achieve in real-world conditions than Light's book suggests. Its 77 articles by 62 faculty members and teaching assistants (with a few students heard from in the first chapters) shows a teaching culture focussed on critical skills and grappling with issues of diversity in skills as well as in personal backgrounds. Clearly the faculty here have talked to each other as well as listened to their students. As with the Harvard studies, most of the pieces come from the early 1990s, and some show the impact of Light's visits to York to encourage Assessment Seminars in that period. These are pieces about how to teach effectively and reflections on the challenges of aiming at inclusive and critical practice. The structure and tone of the book reflect the ongoing struggle to keep teaching goals alive in real-world circumstances.

In contrast to the book dominated by Light's fatherly voice and his students' youthful wisdom, this is a collection of disparate pieces, varied in modes of presentation and sometimes overlapping in topic. Putting ideals into practice isn't as easy as reflecting on success afterwards, and practice may well need to be as diverse as the students at this large urban university. Some of the articles set out practical teaching tips (I counted at least three on using the one-minute paper), often reprinted from pre-1995 issues of York's *Core* newsletter or based on workshop or class handouts. The concluding chapter consists of long documents from the York Senate setting out the rules for teaching evaluation and also giving helpful case studies: this is an institution where even committees write well. Other chapters consist of extended theoretical articles, sometimes versions of pieces already published in scholarly journals.

The best pieces combine personal accounts with indications of theoretical or research grounding. Leslie Sanders' three short articles stand out for their ability to narrate challenges honestly: she lets us know that even our best intentions may not be adequate to the situations that real students bring to the classrooms, though in her two pages she can also suggest ways to recognize and adapt to challenges. Articles by Pat Rogers, the former director of the Centre for the Support of Teaching, and Linda Briskin, a professor of Social Science, give useful overviews of theory and research about student development. One pleasure of the book is noting the diversity of perspectives. After reading ten upbeat short pieces on reaping the benefits of group work, it's satisfying to come to Linda Briskin's longer article on the problems of negotiating classroom power in that type of project. It is also refreshing to find Janice Newton's incisive note pointing out that the standard one-minute paper embodies the assumption that the professor is the source of knowledge and that the classroom enterprise is to transmit it clearly.

Navigating the book, however, isn't always a pleasure. It can be hard to find specific pieces in the nearly 400 pages of short articles and introductory comments. It's understandable that the book has no index, but less so that the Table of Contents omits contributors' names and that the list of Contributors does not include page numbers. To make up for those flaws, I will note here especially the pieces by Leslie Sanders starting on pages 54, 93, and 95; the concise note on computer-mediated communication by Mary-Louise Craven, 210; the advice for TAs on working with student writing by Miriam Jones, 291; the theoretical overviews by Page Westcott, 110, and Pat Rogers, 118; the weighty but enlightening theoretical reflections by Linda Briskin, 25 and 255; pieces by Janice Newton on the reading problems that underlie much plagiarism, 171, and on alternative techniques for recognizing what's going on in your classroom, 321 and 326.

For people who care about the university enterprise, both these books are worth having on your shelf. The Harvard book makes encouraging reading and offers models for local research. The York book makes disturbing, frustrating, and stimulating reading. It comes close to home, challenging us to think deeply about what we do as well as keep finding efficient ways to do it.

CASLL MEMBERSHIP AND INKSHED SUBSCRIPTION NOTICE

Membership in CASLL (and subscriptions to the Inkshed Newsletter) run from January to December. This means that yours has expired. You need to send \$20 (or \$10) to Kenna Manos (address and details on the inside front cover) as soon as possible to maintain your membership – unless you've already done it. You also need to inform Kenna, at the same time, if you prefer to continue getting the Inkshed Newsletter as a printed and mailed copy.

If you would like to have access to the Newsletter as a .pdf file, so that you could download it from the Inkshed Web site and print it with Acrobat Reader (in that way pagination and layout would be exactly as in the printed version, but we'd save the labor, envelope and postage) please indicate that as well.

After this issue only those who have indicated that they wish to receive a paper copy will do so: the Newsletter will be available on the Web site, as a hypertext file, as it has been for some time.

CONFERENCE REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Inkshed 19: Literacies, Technologies, Pedagogies

Working Conference of the
Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning
May 9-12, 2002
[STANHOPE BY THE SEA](#)
Prince Edward Island

Please join us for Inkshed 19, the annual Working Conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning. This year's conference will feature a return to the scheduled reading time format initiated at the Inkshed 14 conference, along with presentations, interactive sessions, and poster sessions on issues ranging from email in the workplace and the classroom, to responding to student writing, to the interactions between genres and response. And, of course, the traditional low-stakes talent night, and this year's innovation: lobster season opens. For a more extended description of what we hope to achieve at this conference, see the call for proposals , in the last Inkshed Newsletter .

One thing that's particularly important to note is that everyone who attends is invited -- nay, exhorted -- to bring materials for the "reading table." This might be something you've been reading recently that you think other people interested in how people learn to use written language would like to read, or something you've written that you'd like to share with inksheddors (it might even be a draft you'd like to have comments on). Bring a couple of copies. Put them on the reading table. There will be substantial time at this conference for people simply to read. Bring your slippers. (There'll be time to talk about what we read, too.)

The draft conference program is available at

<http://www.stthomasu.ca/inkshed/nlett302/ink19pgm.htm>

Arrangements for accommodation to be made directly with Stanhope-by-the-Sea Inn. For a preview visit the website at:

<http://www.peisland.com/stanhope/bythesea.htm>

Telephone: 902-672-2047; Fax: 902-672-2951; E-mail: stanhopebeachsuites@pei.sympatico.ca
Cost information (prices include accommodation and food, tax and gratuity)

Single Room: \$153.24 per night

Double: \$127.70

Triple: \$114.93

Quad: \$102.16

The meals included are breakfasts, coffee breaks, lunches, and dinners from dinner on the 9th to lunch on the 12th. One of these dinners is a lobster dinner on Saturday.

Registration for the conference:

To register, copy this form and send it, along with your cheque made out to **Inkshed 19 Conference**, to:

Linda Meggs
 Department of English
 University of Prince Edward Island
 550 University Ave.
 Charlottetown, PEI C1A 4P3

- \$75 Regular conference fee (\$25 daily rate)
- \$35 Students and Un(der)employed (\$10 daily rate)

Name: _____ Institution: _____

Address: _____

E-mail: _____ Phone: (____) _____

Your air carrier & flight number: _____ Arrival time: _____

Do you need a receipt mailed to you before the conference? Yes No

I am a presenter, and I need the following items for my presentation:

- Computer for power point presentation
- Overhead projector
- Tape recorder
- Video player
- Other

Please make cheques or money orders payable to the Inkshed 19 Conference

Transportation

There are a variety of choices regarding transportation to Prince Edward Island. Air fares may vary considerably. For those coming from Ontario and westwards WestJet goes as far as Moncton, N. B. Moncton is about a two-hour drive (across the Confederation Bridge) from Stanhope. If this is your preferred option, please let us know as soon as possible; we'll help with organizing transportation from Moncton. If you are coming to Halifax and need a ride to P.E.I., we may be able to organize that too. There are some Haligonians driving to PEI and there are private mini-van shuttles available. If you are flying direct to Charlottetown, we need arrival times so we can organize a shuttle service. And, obviously, we need to know if you will need help getting off Prince Edward Island, too. You should provide this information as soon as you can: contact Linda Meggs at meggs@pei.sympatico.ca as soon as you know what you need.