

# Inkshed

Newsletter of the Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning  
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*About Inkshed*

## **From the Editors' Desktops**

### ***Articles***

*Inkshed: History as Context*  
**Miriam Horne**

*Wrapping it all up*  
**Russ Hunt**

*So, Just How Old are Writing Centres in Canada?*  
**Wendy Kraglund-Gauthier**

*Selected citations from Writing Centres, Writing Seminars, Writing Culture: Essays on Writing Instruction in Canadian Universities*  
**Roger Graves**

*Inkshed 23: A Photo Essay*  
**Roger Graves**



Contents

This issue was edited by Heather Graves and Roger Graves (University of Western Ontario). It is accessible through the Inkshed Web site, at <http://www.inkshed.ca>

## *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:

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Subscribers are invited to submit items of interest related to the theory and practice of reading and writing. CASLL also has a website—[www.stu.ca/inkshed](http://www.stu.ca/inkshed)—maintained by Russ Hunt.

## *Submissions*

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Please submit newsletter contributions (preferably via email in APA format) to the editors c/o the following address:

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*Burkean Parlour*

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## *From the Editors' Desktops*

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At the Annual General Meeting last year at White Point Beach, NS, issues about the organization's board and general governance came up. To refresh the memories of those of you who were there and for those of you who weren't, here is a list of the three most compelling points:

- Do we need a more active and clearly defined board?
- Is there a reason to have a president, or some other executive officer who would take responsibility for planning AGMS and conducting discussions of issues that might arise between conferences?
- Can we (should we) leave that with the treasurer?

At Gimli, we acted to constitute the board and have included the names of the board members at the front of this newsletter. By keeping that list up-to-date, we hope to avoid confusion about just who is on the board. We've included email addresses for them in the event you want to email one of them directly.

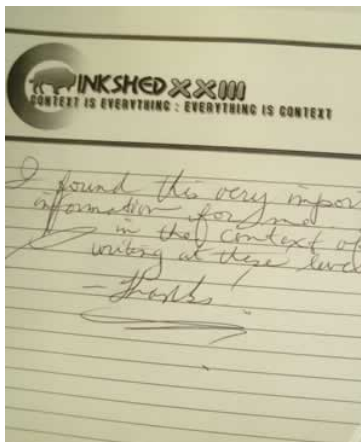
Several motions were passed at the meeting:

- to investigate an alliance with three other groups of academics: The Canadian Association of Teachers of Technical Writing, The Canadian Society for the Study of Rhetoric, and the new Canadian Writing Centres Association
- to create a new journal tentatively called *Inkshed: The Journal of the Canadian Association for the Study of Language and Learning*
- to call for two more book manuscripts to be published by Inkshed Publications
- to hold the next conference in London, ON in May 2007

As you can see, we've got lots to discuss. If you have a position or comment on any of these issues, we'd love to print it.

*Roger Graves*

*Heather Graves*



## *Inkshed: History as Context*

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Miriam Horne ✍

Thank you, Stan, for the introduction, but more especially for this generous time allotment and opportunity to go first so that I can enjoy the rest of the conference. Because I am talking about history as context, I want to be a little self-indulgent and give a little of my own historical context for what has brought me here to discuss the historical context of inkshedding.

About five years ago two significant things happened in my life. First, I returned to full-time teaching ESL after my third maternity leave. I found that I was bored with the rigid pedagogy of the institution I was teaching in, and I was frustrated with the lack of engagement I was seeing in student writing. Let me digress for a moment and mention that when I first began teaching it was in a writing course that met for four hours once a week. I was using inkshedding in the course but was told that it was an inappropriate use of time for a writing course. New and easily intimidated, I quickly gave it up. Fast forward to five years ago and my state of boredom and frustration. Well, all I can say is once you have survived giving birth to three children and survived your husband walking out on you, who cares what the administration might say! I was desperate and determined to inkshed.

I have, of course, no way of quantifying the success of the inkshedding activity in the classroom that session, but from my perspective it worked—students were engaged with writing; writing became more than a linguistic activity; and it *seemed* to help the class bond.

The second experience happened at about the same time. I ran into an acquaintance I hadn't seen for some time who said, "I'm so glad to see you, I've been thinking about you. Have you considered doing a Ph.D.?" Apparently being a single mother of three small children and working full time wasn't keeping me busy enough, so that conversation opened the door to several conversations with a variety of people. The result was starting a Ph.D. program at McGill under the supervision of Anthony Paré, studying inkshedding.

This brings me back to the present and this conference this morning in which I have promised to share some of my preliminary findings that look at the historical context for the inkshedding community and activity.

My findings come from data using non-positivist qualitative methods (ethnomethodology and narrative inquiry among others). I have drawn from as many sources as I could in order to get a rich breadth and depth of material. I have used old Inkshed newsletters, inkshedding texts, interviews (electronic and otherwise), "The Wall" (the collaborative retrospective pulled together by Nan Johnson and Sharron Wall a few years ago), field notes, journals, interim writings, and anything I could get my hands on. I have been collecting this data throughout my coursework. So last summer when I officially finished my comprehensive exams, I was suddenly free to go and "research." I sat down with my mounds of data and was stuck at, "What do I do next?" My problem was that although qualitative methodologies resonate with me, they neglect to give me a convenient "how to" manual so I'm left to my own devices. When I discussed my frustration with the methodologist on my committee, he told me again and again, "listen to the voices, really listen to the voices."

You have a lot to say!

In my proposal for this presentation I promised to talk about the historical contexts for inkshedding. For my presentation today I would like to give you the opportunity to hear some of the voices that I have been hearing talking about the past in inkshedding, and how we have ended up where we are as a community of writers. I am uncomfortable trying to summarize or restate what you have already said, so I will be using your words—but this carries an uncomfortable weight of responsibility, so my apologies in advance if I have used your voice inappropriately. I've recruited most of you to represent the voices that I've been hearing. For the sake of the ethics of privacy, but also in the interests of creating a new discussion, the majority of the names have been changed—although I suspect you will recognize each other easily enough—but I'm hoping that changing the names will help you focus on what is being said rather than who is saying it. I will, of course, prompt you as we go along if I need to, but when I practiced this on my own, everything went smoothly, so I am sure it will now as well. I have tried to pull some of the voices that reflect the themes that I've seen emerging together into a kind of narrative collage. In other words, I have tried to create a new conversation between voices coming from different places times and contexts. My hope is to open the door to a new dialogic interaction.

**Miriam:** So I start today with a voice that has been central in informing this study and that has come to be constantly in my head because he always has something to say ... I start you where I started in my research process, by trying to understand why we engage in this social writing process called inkshedding. As you'll see, this is just a starting point, and many other themes emerge. The first voice I hear is Russ's and his explanation of inkshedding.

**Russ:** "Inkshedding" began as a practice in the early eighties, when Jim Reither and I began trying to make "freewriting" (which we had learned about from writers like Peter Elbow) into something dialogically transactional. Actually, we didn't articulate what we wanted in quite that way, at the time. The way we said it was that what we wanted was to give writing a social role in a classroom, and thus to create a situation in which the writing was read by real readers, in order to understand and respond to *what* was said rather than to evaluate and "help" with the writing.

**Miriam:** Russ's voice, as always, sounds authoritative and clear. It explains where the inkshedding activity came from and how we use it ... oops, except it doesn't because (I found surprisingly in an informal survey at last years conference) most of us don't actually use inkshedding as a classroom activity. So why do we do it here? Interestingly, most of us only inkshed once a year—here at this conference, but it's so powerful an activity that we actually identify ourselves by the name of the activity. We call ourselves inksheddors. So I hear more voices trying to explain this phenomenon to me—to explain why we inkshed—to explain how important it is.

**Naomi:** Inkshedding, by its very nature, implies community.

**Claude:** It seems to me that we have agreed in many ways that we're all equal here. I mean that we all have an equal contribution to make. I mean, I think one thing that's nice about inkshedding, ... is that it gives people voice. And so we can kind of democratize activity because everybody has a chance to speak. Whereas in table or even large group sessions, people, I mean those of us who are, you know, vocal, and the most aggressive, have tendency to take over those conversations.

**Miriam:** I've actually been hearing a lot about how inkshedding democratizes. I find myself wondering, how important is this democratization? How important is it that everyone has a voice? Some of the older voices in the community reflect on the past and speak to these questions.

**Gerry:** When [inkshedding] came to the conference, its purpose was to use writing as a tool to capture and to shape, to discover and clarify (for oneself), with the drive being the immediacy of the stimulus (the talks), the time pressure to write and the need to make sense of the developing argument that was emerging in light of the conference theme.

**Terry:** I am just so glad... that we have a chance to respond to ideas not orally because I find that's sometimes more difficult to do than doing it on a blank page. Standing up or speaking up or getting my words in—some people have no trouble, that's to me, why inkshedding is so valuable.

**Miriam:** Wonderful! Isn't this great? We all have something to say, and we all have equal opportunity to say it ... Or maybe not... I hear dissension on this.

**Claude:** You know, I've resisted inkshedding from the very beginning. And usually, my first inkshed at every conference is a diatribe about why we shouldn't do inkshedding.

**Voice a:** I don't like it—I feel pressure to say something intelligent. I also feel pressure to write, whether or not I have the urge to.

**Voice b:** Sometimes I feel the need to respond to an Inkshed out of politeness.

**Voice c:** I comply with this experience that is forced on me, but it is certainly uncomfortable.

**Voice d:** I don't find the act of inkshedding especially powerful either way. I recognize its value and do it dutifully, and have never been intimidated by sharing my writing. But the published inksheds seem stale by the time I see them and I find the whole exercise takes away time that I personally would rather use for discussion.

**Miriam:** You can perhaps begin to understand some of my confusion and my challenge in making sense of my data. Every new voice raises new questions. In this case, why do we all come? Why are we all here? Why do we participate? What is it besides the inkshedding activity that brings us here and compels us to inkshed even when we don't like it? If it really is about community (as some voices tell me it is), then it seems to me then it's about a community that has been twenty plus years in the making. So, maybe I need to go back not to the beginning of the activity, but to the beginning of the community. The voices tell me:

**Voice a:** Inkshed started with the assumption that there is a Canadian context for writing instruction.

**Gerry:** Inkshed was clearly going to be the instrument through which new developments would enter the thinking of people who taught Composition/Writing in Canada, and help shed some of the notions that were counter-productive in helping students develop as writers.

**Miriam:** What some voices have explained to me was that there was an excitement about writing and reading that really fueled the birth of this community.

**Gerry:** I see the excitement you refer to as having arisen from the first ever international conference that focused entirely on writing, held in Canada at Carleton University in May (I think) 1979. But to go back a few years earlier, we must note developments coming out of Britain largely directed by the interest of James Britton. There were other exciting studies [also] going on

in England at that time. At the same time, of course, there was an exciting shift in the study of literature with our growing awareness of the work of Louise Rosenblatt on response to literature. Thus, when the learning to write conference got together in 1979, we were all familiar with some of the central developments in writing theory and research. There was a refreshingly growing interest in writing as a process.

**Jim:** 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 a minimum, a print forum—a newsletter—in which to exchange such information, through which to come together.

**Miriam:** So what came from this interest and enthusiasm in reading and writing was the need for a Canadian discussion. According to Jim Reither, this interest is what motivated a discussion in July of 1982 in Wyoming between Chris Bullock, Anne Greenwood, Russ Hunt, David Reiter, Susan Stevenson and Kay Stewart—a discussion from which *Inkshed*, the newsletter was born.

**Jim:** *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 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.

**Miriam:** The voice of Jim Reither continues to explain his vision for the newsletter that brought the community together. (He has a lot to say about this, but bear with me because I think he provides some important historical context.)

**Jim:** One function of a newsletter would simply be to exchange information .... Obviously, however, exchanging information would not be enough. Not only would we announce meetings and publications; 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.

... 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. [from *Inkshed* 4.1 (1985), p. 3.]

**Miriam:** So the purpose of the newsletter, its reason for being was to create a community in which to discuss, or facilitate dialogic interaction—the same purpose, it seems, as the inkshedding writing activity. So let's take a critical look—does the community do what it

originally set out to do? Do we, all these years later form a community of learning and support in which dialogic interaction is the rubric?

**Voice b:** I taught writing for 10 years in total isolation and blundered along on my own. *Inkshed* gave me my community.

**Voice c:** I feel the support of a national community.

**Russ:** The way this community has become a community, has really been based on the notion that this is not about competing and savaging each other, but about responding to each other in dialogic ways.

**Miriam:** From what I have seen and from the things that I hear some voices saying, in keeping with the vision of the original newsletters, I think it's fair to say that a strong sense of community has evolved. The feeling of commitment I get from people today in 2006 is passionate and devoted. That's not to say that everyone feels so positively about the organization. I would guess that those who don't feel the passion for the community have self selected out after all these years. But I can't help but wonder if it has always been this great supportive community in which everyone has equal opportunities. It seems almost to good to be true.

**Russ:** It's not [and never has been] an ideal community

**Terry:** Anytime you say it's a community and people are equal, that sounds like an ideal to me because one of the things that I think happens in that community is that what people have in common is caring strongly about what they do. Strongly enough to be vulnerable in this kind of interchange. And when they're vulnerable, that's when the trashing comes in.

**Miriam:** The trashing? What trashing?

**Naomi:** I can remember people being totally trashed with these anonymous inksheds.

**Terry:** Oh, they were horrible!

**Brian:** There was a really big problem with that, wasn't it the first Inkshed?

**Claude:** I'm sorry, the first 6 or 7 Inksheds there was somebody trashed. There was somebody in their room crying.

**Naomi:** And it continued! People trashing people. And they were nasty.

**Brian:** Mr. Anonymous trashbag himself.

**Miriam:** Whoa. This isn't the conference I know. What happened to dialogic interaction? To learning from each other?

**Naomi:** It's the very nature of the upside that allows for the downside.

**Gerry:** Trashing came when an idea that questioned some solid assumptions was advanced.

**Russ:** It has to do with the nature of inkshedding. My view now is that it was a proto-example of “flaming” via email. Inkshedding was email before there was email. People who inkshedded after sessions sometimes didn’t actually understand (a la email) that this was dialogic discourse—and people who read negative comments about presentations sometimes over reacted to the negativity. There was no slot in anybody’s rhetorical world for writing in that functional social situation. The genre was undergoing invention.

**Terry:** My sense is that it took some time for people to adjust to the new kind of community. Inkshed was from the prevailing model of competition and point scoring. The shift provoked anxiety in some people and the trashing was a manifestation of that anxiety.

**Miriam:** Well how rampant was this trashing?

**Gerry:** Not much from my perspective. My feeling is that you feel confident about your own position, you read confrontation as misunderstanding, questioning as interest, and welcome it as a means of clarifying your own position. Spectators may see it as trashing and express a proper degree of shock and dismay.

**Terry:** Another aspect that comes into play a little bit has to do with the various tensions of sexual attraction in a community. Inkshed has not been exempt from various currents of such attraction. These currents were tricky to manage not only at Inkshed, but in many academic environments.

**Russ:** I think that in the discussions someone suggested that there were sexism issues, but I’m not at all sure that wasn’t quite a lot later. Whether there actually were, well, I didn’t think so. The respect transcended gender.

**Paul:** I don’t know if it was a gender issue, but of course, an event is gendered in part by one’s own gender.

**Gerry:** Trashing for me comes largely from the eye of the beholder.

**Miriam:** So there was trashing. Given the fact that I’m still hearing about it 20 years later, there’s clearly some rawness still there. Interestingly, some of the voices that I hoped to join into this discussion were not comfortable joining in—although they had a lot to say on the subject when it was just me they were talking to. But I certainly don’t see any kind of trashing now—I especially don’t see an environment where it would be considered appropriate. Maybe I’m just naïve, but since it’s no longer so public, it obviously changed. I wonder how that happened.

**Russ:** There have been discussions about the proper place and role of inkshedding at pretty nearly every conference, and various ways of configuring it. Most alternatives have had something to do with trying to avoid ill feelings.

**Gerry:** I guess you’ll see that as the Inkshed meeting got more formalized and the presentations became more scholarly—presentations to justify funding [and so forth]—and as increasingly the presenters were students or budding writing teachers, the conventions that took over were those from academic conferences. The trashers, whoever they were, were subdued by changed contexts.

**Miriam:** That’s all fine and warm and fuzzy—and apparently successful, but it doesn’t account for the inherent vulnerability—the writing activity and to some extent the conference itself

engenders a sensitivity—a vulnerability. Talk about vulnerability! The nontraditional format of this presentation is scaring me to death! And the writing ... I was horrified the first time I Inkshed and realized someone would read what I wrote. I know that not all of you feel this way, but a significant number of you have felt strongly about this. Listen to these voices speaking up because they were able to do so anonymously and because I specifically asked for their feelings after sharing my own.

**Voice a:** I remember being nervous about having others read my work.

**Voice b:** The presence of my identity—value, perhaps—was key in my [inkshedding] process ... ethos was out there ... this was triage writing—I was out there, vulnerable, naked ...

**Voice c:** There is something intimidating about the first time being asked to Inkshed, not because we don't have responses to share, but because of our feelings of inadequacy when it comes to our own writing. That seems ludicrous to be coming from a teacher of writing, but writing for peers differs with regard to social context—are we “good enough” to be involved in this inkshedding community? Will people think we have nothing to contribute? Will our credibility stand up to scrutiny? All of these questions reflect our (my?) sense of inadequacy when it comes to my own writing.

**Miriam:** The change of rubric may have gotten rid of public trashing, but the activity itself is still inherently vulnerable to anyone other than perhaps Russ, a few confident writers, a few old timers, and (ahem!) men. Brock came up with a metaphor that really resonated with me and speaks to the balance between individuals and collectives as new comers try to fit in.

**Brock:** Writing my responses on the spot and sharing them made me feel naked, essentially defenseless, vulnerable. The metaphor of nakedness is actually important here—on, say, Wreck beach in Vancouver, one quickly finds that same sense of liberation. Everybody's naked—big deal. Everyone's writing—big deal.

**Miriam:** So in some sense, the vulnerability inherent in inkshedding helps to develop the community. In order to become part of the community, you have to take risks, to be vulnerable. Maybe it's in the inkshedding activity—but maybe it's in some other way—the talent show perhaps, an evening swimming, or in a hot tub .... But a shared risk seems to form a bond. And participation in the community comes once the trust is there. As one of you explained,

**Claude:** You've got to have the face to face to build the trust, to build the personality of the person.

**Miriam:** As we've continued to meet and write together over the years it seems like that trust and those personalities have developed. Doing so has created (in my opinion) the kind of dialogic atmosphere that was the motivation for the community and activity.

So the focus for who we are and what we do seems to be this desire for dialogic interactions—a desire to connect with other people and explore ideas. There's not always a lot of opportunity for this kind of connection. Maybe that's for me, why when I find a setting like this where I can connect in so many different ways that I become passionate about the kinds of things this community is trying to do. But maybe, what it really comes down to is that this is a community that cares. Because in your own words ...

**Russ:** We care about language

**Naomi:** We care about teaching

**Terry:** We care about students.

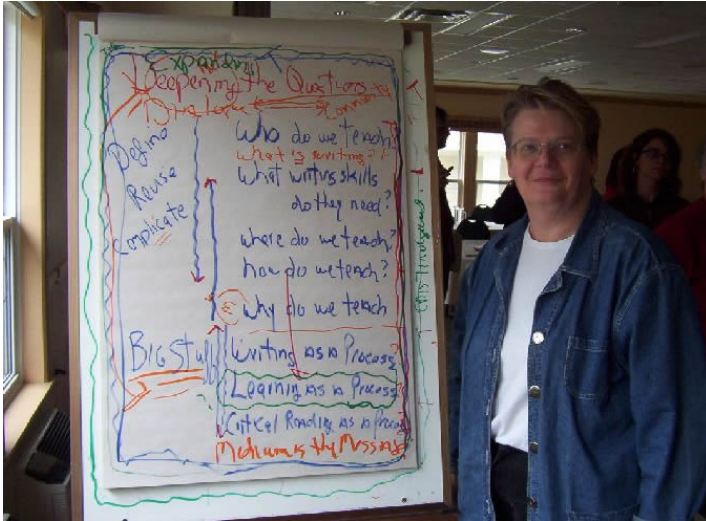
And, as I was reminded quite vehemently after this presentation, we care about each other.

## Wrapping it all up

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Russ Hunt 

Here's what I'd have liked to be able to do this morning [final session at Gimli conference]:



Unfortunately, I'm not her [Nan Johnson at last year's conference].

So, on the formal principle that you should return to your keynote to end, that you should come back to the beginning in some way, I want to try to repeat something Miriam did at the first session of this conference way back on Thursday night, and for the same reasons: when I sat down to try to put this into my own words, they didn't seem sufficient or honest enough.

So what I've done is to try to find words from Inkshedders that would help me get through this. I've found them, as you might expect, in inksheds, the ones people wrote after each of the sessions. I've tried to find ones that have some resonance for the conference theme, and which strike me as worth thinking about. As many people know, one of the things that I feel most strongly about is that text be dialogic, that it not only be written, and imagined to be read, but that it really be read, and really responded to. Here's my gesture at putting my money where my mouth is. Taking a cue from Miriam, I've distributed all the texts randomly around the room: when your number comes up you're invited to read your passage aloud to the rest of us.

Miriam's presentation, Friday morning, of some of the issues around the evolution and development of inkshedding – and some of her findings, I know, surprised many old hands who thought they knew all about Inkshedding, including me. It produced some sobering reflections.

[#1] I was wondering about the Inkshed community and its viability -- if the practice of inkshedding serves the purpose of developing and sustaining this community of Inkshedders, is it perhaps on the wane? If Inkshedders themselves do not use it in their own classrooms, and if the number of Inkshed members is dwindling, is it perhaps time for Inkshedding to give way to other types of community-building practices?

[#2] First, you mentioned that few, if any, of us use inkshedding in our classrooms, with our students: how do you know this? Is this something that has been tried but discarded? How much is related to the pressures that we face in classroom teaching? This is truly a weird and astounding thing: that we engage in this process yearly as a kind of ritual (welcomed or not), and have some kind of passionate commitment to it, but do not promote it to students. I think what they experienced was a pleasure in revealing various vulnerability or uncertainties about their process, and then finding out they were not alone and that others were experiencing similar vulnerabilities.

Michael, in describing about his bringing the concept of inkshedding to ESL teachers in Costa Rica, provoked some similarly skeptical responses about the larger social context in which we teach and act.

[#3] This presentation made me feel sad. It was partly the idea of earnest students around the world but specifically in Central America, learning English and learning about teaching English in a context in which they are perpetually at a power disadvantage. Presenting "Inkshedding" as a technique to "improve critical writing skills" seems to be an imposition. I wasn't comfortable about it.

And later in that session Chris narrated an occasion when a similar sort of context put a student in a position where the expectations of the local context of instruction conflicted in an apparently irreconcilable way with that larger context.

[#4] For how long and at what cost (to ourselves and our students) do we continue to uphold institutional expectations we don't value. How do we recognize when such expectations are destroying our students. Or maybe such destruction has gone on a long time, years, and only every now and then are we "lucky" enough to see the results soon enough to intervene.

After lunch, Donna asked us to think about some strategies for helping readers read better, and produced some responses asking us to connect such strategies to the institutional context.

[#5] I'm inclined to think they use need to be thinking about a literacy process which brings monitoring strategic reasoning, transfer together as a single literacy process that plays out in somewhat different reading and writing circumstances. Isn't the division of reading and writing really artificial? This issue of transfer is interesting. English departments at universities assume teaching students how to write about literature will teach them how to write everywhere. We know learning in reading and writing is more localized than that. We must learn to read in English, Engineering, Health, Science. We need to learn to write in English, Engineering, etc.

Someone else invited us to put that reading back into the context of individual readers.

[#6] Who is having difficulty? Who says they are? What is being read? Whose text is it? Are these kids struggling readers or are they readers struggling with inappropriate reading materials? What are these kids reading? What strategies are already in place that allow them to read the texts they do read successfully?

And then Karen Krasny invited us to consider the complex relationship between reader, text, and author, and generated some fairly passionate response, including this one.

[#7] The entire notion of empathetic identification is dangerous as a classroom activity. Asking students to identify with characters and circumstances can place them in an untenable circumstance vis-à-vis their own lines. Examples include asking women to read phalocentric novels or gay men to read canonical literature where, if they identify with the main hero they are reading against their own sexuality, but if they identify with the heroine they are reading against their own masculinity.

Yesterday morning, we began considering professional contexts, and contexts in which professional writing is learned. Natasha told us about a longitudinal study of some students learning to write like engineers, and raised, for the first time, the question about the way in which various contexts for learning afford certain kinds of learning. Some of us responded by thinking about where learners are in the process.

[#8] Your use of genre theory, the way you tease it out into sets of interacting, accessible elements, and your suggestion, through the studies, about how these ingredients may coalesce after they've been "cooked" are all compelling. (Question: what do you think about "engaged learning" theory? Does this come into play for motivating students?) We need to give students more flexibility about course configurations and learning contexts; as teachers, we need support in handling those options. And finally, as academics, we need to lose our vestigial prejudices about universities being "better than" workplaces.

[#9] So much of Natasha's exploration resonates with my own observations of transitional writing students. What her work affirms for me is the critical but limited role that genre instruction plays in genre acquisition -- we can ready our students to varying degrees, and then they must have the rhetorical maturity to recognize those kairotic moments when engaged in work place writing tasks -- this proactive, strategic resourcefulness is not always very predictable. One important skill in this regard is identifying and mining the knowledge of mentors in the workplace.

Cathy walked us through some ways to help students understand what academic writing actually is.

[#10] Demystification of the academic essay is what Cathy Schreyer's approach does. It's incredible how "taken for granted" this genre is: it is supposed to somehow magically imbibe the strategies. Yet the academic essay is never (or very seldom) contextualized in a rhetorical sense to students in any academic discipline. Cathy's pointing out the strangeness of certain conventions of the genre (inclusion at the beginning, etc.) is an excellent teaching moment (especially for students from different cultural/linguistic contexts!).

And there was some discussion about the role here, again, of explicit instruction.

[#11] The point that a thesis is a conclusion placed at the essay's beginning is one I always make myself (and yes, students always respond to it). Another good one is, "There's nothing magical about the number 3" -- when trying to get students past the 5 paragraph essay, when the need to take off that particular set of training wheels.

(Response: I've seen this too. But I've not seen evidence that it made a long term difference outside an actual context of use.)

And then Patricia asked us to think about the role of writing in the profession of nursing – especially the contrast (perhaps conflict) between expressive and objective, expository uses of writing, which raised for some of us larger questions about professional contexts such as nursing, social work, medicine, etc.

[#12] The one thing I didn't clearly get from your paper is -- what can we do as writing teachers, or what can trained writing tutors do, to help nurses deal with all these contradictions and demands? Are there any practical strategies we can employ? I also find it fascinating that nurses are expected to focus on caring and empathy (I've read a lot of the literature on a feminist "ethic of care," and indeed, much of it focuses on nursing), but doctors are expected to remain "objective." That speaks to an enormous ideological, cultural, systemic divide that goes far deeper and has much broader implications that writing teachers could hope to deal with.

Brock then didn't tell us about learning to write in criminology, but asked us to think with him about the issues raised by students' resistance to the invitation to think about things that are important to them (and reminded us of the issues Geoff had raised the previous evening, but which we didn't inkshed on, about more general student resistance and incomprehension). Many of us responded similarly to this presentation, thinking about the way in which the students' engagement with the ideas fostered both resistance and growth.

[#13] They *do* feel they belong to "My Space", popular music, and other communities of discourse that they're familiar with, and may resent (without even being aware of it) having to cede that territory to academics, even though they themselves aspire to become their own conquerors. I'm rambling big-time here but am wondering if this is at all a factor to consider in student resistance. I couldn't agree more that thoughtful use of on-line interaction/discussion . . . plays a significant role in effective peer-based teaching. It's also a means of mutual enculturation. Effectively, they persuade each other into understanding what genre membership means -- and of course, they share and build upon knowledge, which is a significant motivator for learning.

And finally, at the end of that long morning, Diana, Josie, and Kathleen offered us a powerful model of the way in which working in real contexts can bring to the fore an awareness of choices being made and a growth in the ability to make them.

[#14] This is a brilliantly presented case study which certainly illustrates how students can negotiate the convention and demands of very different organizational cultures. But it's important to note that Josie and Kathleen were doing something more rhetorically complex than simply moving from the academy to the workplace.

[#15] Dwelling in the situations, and making those powerfully rhetorical decisions about what got included (or when), and even trying to infer what cryptic or veiled responses really meant -- obviously helped them think clearly about issues like audience and purpose and their embodiment in text. A question I have (rhetorical, I guess), is what can those of us who teach in a-professional programs with no access to this area between planets, do to make this sort of experience available to our students.

In the afternoon, Phyllis gave us yet another context to think about -- the institutional bureaucracy of the education system -- and provoked some fairly personal responses.

[#16] I want to write about another context of assessment and assessment policies. As the parent of two children who have gone through the public school system in the 1990s and early 2000s in Ontario, I have lived through and experienced the strange twists and turns of new ways to assess, outcome-based assessment, etc., etc. I always felt that a lot of these policy initiatives (on the part of the Ontario Ministry and government) in terms of assessment were creating/reflecting parental fear about children's vulnerability in the new globalizing economy. I have witnessed parental anxiety growing and also seen what appears to be an increasing divide between classroom teachers and parents. Government attempts to "reform", "standardize" assessment seems to widen this divide.

[#17] I'm having a hard time responding to this talk on any level except as a parent of a middle years child. The assessments he has done throughout elementary school in Manitoba seemed a senseless waste of time; results were never given to parents -- what were they used for? Parents are no longer involved in curriculum or instruction in middle years -- will we learn anything from this "new" assessment. The students suffer, but as Phyllis pointed out, so do the teachers. I really hope (in vain, most likely) that standardized assessment soon goes the way of the dodo bird.

And last of all Roger invited us to help him think about ways of categorizing the assignments university teacher so casually hand out to students, and help all of us think about the way in which ignoring the real contexts produces unfortunate consequences.

[#18] These assignment descriptions are pretty typical of those I used to see in the Tutoring Centre. I had many conversations with tutors while they were working with students because the tutors couldn't figure out the assignment requirements. Sometimes, neither could I, and when I attempted to talk to profs about the problems they were defensive (and often couldn't clarify anything.). Somehow, writing assignments are considered too obvious to elaborate on -- as if we somehow know on our pulses what we want of our students, so they should too.

To end, I'll really go back to the beginning, and to my own response to Miriam's history, in which I said, in part,

[#19] I'm wondering (as I write, in fact) whether and to what extent this is a function of the radical transformation in our assumptions about text that has come with email, internet, disk, blogs, etc. This is not the world in which writing with immediate social intent and impact was unheard of. Inkshedding has been totally transformed by its context. Context is indeed everything.

## *So, Just How Old are Writing Centres in Canada?*

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Wendy Kraglund-Gauthier ✉

In 2005-2006, the St. Francis Xavier University Writing Centre celebrated its 10th anniversary. In its first year of operation, one staff member worked 15 hours per week and shared a room and a closet in the campus meal hall. Throughout the years, much like many other Canadian writing centres, the Writing Centre at St. Francis Xavier University (StFX) in Antigonish, Nova Scotia has survived growing pains, space issues, Senate debates, and budget cutbacks and has launched new programs and has reached as many students as they could. Now, during the regular academic year, six contracted professionals and one secretary join the full-time coordinator and writing centre instructor. Over each of the past few years, instructors have worked with approximately 10% of the student body at least once, and have conducted over 3500 appointments per year, plus in-class information sessions, workshops open to the entire student body, and three programs: eXcel, the voluntary transition program for first-year students; APEX, the mandatory program for students on academic probation; and LEAP, the voluntary program for students whose first language is not English.

Despite the activity in the Centre, many faculty and students seemed surprised when we hosted our 10th birthday bash during International Writing Centre Week in February 2006. We were asked how old we were in relation to the other writing centres in Canada. For the answer, I posted the question to the CASLL listserv. The reaction from other writing centres was immediate. The following is a compilation of the responses received from 23 centres. Special thanks are sent to Betsy Sargent for her work in this as well! If there are errors or omissions, please contact me.

According to Henry David Thoreau, “None are so old as those who have outlived enthusiasm.” Based on the activity on the CASLL listserv, on the scholarship that is emerging from writing centres across Canada, and on the creation of the Canadian Writing Centre Association, we’re all still very young!

[see next page for the table]

<b>Writing Centre</b>	<b>Year Established</b>
1. York University	1970s
2. University of Toronto ( Innis & Woodworth College, now 14 sites)	1972 "ish"
3. Dalhousie University	1974
4. University of Calgary	1978
5. University of New Brunswick ( Fredericton)	1978
6. University of Toronto SC Writing Lab	1978
7. McGill University	1978-1980
8. Carleton University	1980s
9. Atkinson's ( York)	1983
10. University of New Brunswick ( Saint John)	1983
11. Simon Fraser University	1987 (dismantled 1999), restructuring now!
12. Memorial University	1984
13. University of Winnipeg	1988
14. University of British Columbia	1992
15. St. Francis Xavier University	1995
16. University of Toronto Engineering Communication Program	1995
17. University of Saskatchewan	1995 "ish"
18. Thompson Rivers (formerly University College of the Caribou)	1996
19. University of Western Ontario	1996
20. Sir Wilfred Laurier	1997
21. Huron University College's Writing Centre ( University of Western Ontario)	1999
22. University of Ottawa	1999
23. St. Mary's University	2002

*Selected citations from Writing Centres, Writing Seminars,  
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Roger Graves ✍

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*Inkshed 24: A Photo Essay*

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Roger Graves ✍

Downtown  
Gimli has its  
charms--



and warrior  
heritage--



and upscale  
accommodation  
s-



but Inkshed  
draws us  
together to  
listen,



to think,



to read,



and to talk.



Most of all,  
perhaps,

it joins us  
together



in friendships



and farces.



You had to be  
there--hope to  
see you next  
year!



To London  
follow the right  
arrow.

